

The Apple:  
An Autoethnography of  
Experiences in Education  
By  
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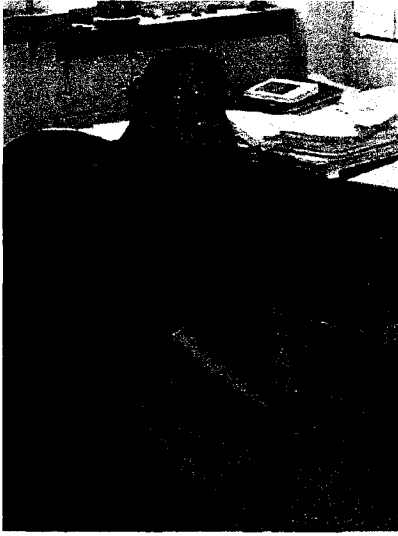
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## **Abstract**

This autoethnography focuses on my educational experiences from kindergarten through post-secondary. I look at what was and continues to be my journey. I conclude with an examination of the meaning I attribute to being called an Apple and at times being considered an outsider. What I have attempted to accomplish through autoethnography is to bring these experiences to light. I have revealed both the positive and negative experiences in my educational journey, but most importantly, I have discovered the joy of knowing who I am today. Enjoy.

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## Table of Contents

ABSTRACT.....	I
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	II
CHAPTER 1.....	1
INTRODUCTION.....	1
RESEARCH QUESTION.....	5
THE BIG PICTURE.....	7
WHAT THE SMART PEOPLE SAY.....	11
<i>AUTOETHNOGRAPHY</i> .....	11
<i>SOCIAL IDENTITY</i> .....	19
<i>TRADITIONAL VALUES</i> .....	21
DELIMITATIONS/LIMITATIONS.....	23
ETHICAL ISSUES.....	23
CHAPTER 2.....	24
WHAT DO YOU MEAN I'M A SAVAGE? THE EXPERIENCES OF A PRIMARY/JUNIOR STUDENT WHO HAPPENS TO BE, OH FORGET IT, JUST LOOK AT THE TITLE.....	24
HEY, WE'RE MOVING TO CANADA. PARLEZ VOUS FRANÇAIS?.....	35
WELCOME TO UNIVERSITY: DON'T QUIT BECAUSE I AIN'T COMING BACK TO GET YOU! THE EARLY YEARS AT LAKEHEAD WHEN I STILL DIDN'T KNOW ANYTHING.....	45
UNCLE JOHNNIE, COME AND GET ME CAUSE I'M QUITTIN!.....	49
GUESS WHAT? I BECAME A BORN-AGAIN CHRISTIAN, AN INDIAN BORN-AGAIN CHRISTIAN!.....	50
HOLD THAT TRIP TO T. BAY, JOHNNIE, I AIN'T READY TO GO BACK TO THE REZ YET!.....	52
WELCOME BACK TO THUNDER BAY AND DON'T QUIT CAUSE I STILL AIN'T COMING BACK TO PICK YOU UP. HEY, WE BROUGHT A THIRD PERSON WITH US.....	57
CHAPTER 3.....	61
CONCLUDING THOUGHTS: GOODBYE OR IS IT THE BEGINNING OF SOMETHING BEAUTIFUL?.....	61
MY VOICE.....	64
WHAT THE DO YOU MEAN I'M AN APPLE? OH YEAH, WHAT THE HELL IS AN APPLE?.....	66
REFERENCES.....	73

# Chapter 1

## Introduction

What is a voice? For weeks I was looking for my voice when writing my proposal. In writing this proposal I was frustrated, and often felt that what I was trying to say had not been said. Then I had the opportunity to read Peter Cole's (2000; 2002) work. It was helpful in the sense that I could see that it was okay to put on paper something that is both academic and personal. I could remain true to my vision of what an autoethnography stands for, a story of my experiences in education. Now I believe my voice has come back.

Today, people are what now has been labelled "politically correct." My Jojo called herself a North American Indian. I remember being in my Indigenous Learning class once and identifying myself as a North American Indian. Well, let me tell you, most of the class went nuts. How dare you call yourself an Indian? Didn't you know Columbus made a mistake and the Federal government is wrong?

*All I said was, "Look at my status card and tell me if it says that I am an Aboriginal, First Nation, Native or Status Indian?" One of my classmates grabbed it. I made her read it out loud for the whole class. She did in a voice I recall was full of anger because I said I was an Indian, not Aboriginal. She read out loud, "Joseph Robert Archie Jerome was a Status Indian under the Status Indian Act Status Number 1243." As I said, I am an Indian! Not an*

*Aboriginal, not Native and surely not First Nation! I love  
being right sometimes.*

At this point some people might be offended by my use of the words Indian(s) and White people. Well, I'm not very politically correct when identifying races of people. I was taught that there are four colours of peoples in the world: red, yellow, black and white. These colours can be seen in the medicine wheel that so many Indians have around. So if you don't like what I say, then take it up with those who taught me that there are four colours of people in the world.

*"Jesus loves the children of the world. All the little children  
of the world. Red, and yellow, black and white, they are  
precious in his sight. Yes, Jesus loves the little children of  
the world." I was taught this hymn by my dad who is an  
evangelical preacher. To be exact, he is a Pentecostal  
preacher. Now you the reader (you can be Red, Yellow,  
Black or White) may get your knickers in an uproar and  
say that the Church was the problem with Indians. I mean  
they stole the Indian children, put them in schools, cut their  
hair and changed their names to good Christian names.  
Let's remember that. Can you spell Pakinawatik? He was  
our first chief back in Maniwaki. John, Robert, Sara or  
Elizabeth are easy names to spell and write. I remember  
an anthropology student asking me what my Indian name  
was. Without thinking I said Pinewawaki (i.e., I had no clue*

*what it meant but it sounded Indian, she was pleased with this bit of knowledge and went back to her university lab). Back to my dad, the preacher. He tells me God doesn't care about the colour of your skin. God cares about the relationship between you and Him. It's humans who have a problem with skin colour.*

So there you are on how I came to calling people by their skin colour.

So I am a Status Indian. In other words I am a legal non-entity. What does that mean to the reader?

*I am not assuming people know what this means. So I'm gonna tell you. The Indian Act tells people that we (Status Indians) are not citizens of Canada but wards of the Queen. The monarch, apparently when all those treaties were signed way back when this country was young, is our mother or father. It is in the wording and its interpretation that this takes effect. I am not a citizen of Canada, even though I hold dual citizenship (U.S. & Canada) and both my parents and grandparents and great-grandparents were born here. Now how is that for a shock to the system? Jojo told me that long ago my aunts and uncles as children were made to eat outside during school. In the fall it was not so bad, winter was hard. Eating lunch was cold. Jojo got mad*



*and took her kids out of school and moved to the States. So that's how I got American citizenship.*

How do I identify myself as an Indian, more specifically, a Status Indian? Well my Jojo always said she was a Status Indian with pride in her voice. So, I say the same thing: I am a Status Indian. My daughter Elizabeth is a Status Indian, so she has no rights either. But she gets free education, only the best that Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) can give her!

*Let's come back to the present for a moment now. I wrote that the Queen and King of England are our parents. Within the treaties they are referred to by the titles of our Great Father and Mother. There was a clause in the treaties that if we, the King's children, were ever in trouble, we were to fly the Union Jack upside down and they would send troops to rescue us. In today's world, INAC is today's equivalent (for Status Indians) of the Great White Father. So what does this mean to you the reader? If you get mad at me, you can tell INAC and INAC can put me back on the reserve. How is this possible? Once again the wording and interpretation in The Indian Act gives non-natives more rights and privileges than their red skin brethren. Piss you off yet?*

So why do I like to identify myself this way? I like having Status, pardon the pun. (As you can tell, I am starting to find my voice again.) As I tell people, "I think in Indian

and write in English.” What’s so hard about that? I don’t think European. But, while here at Lakehead University I have had to think in this manner. In the beginning it was hard.

*My style of writing was horrendous. I would ask my friend Christine to help me write my papers. She would joke with me and tell me to stop thinking like an Indian and start thinking like a university student. How do I stop thinking like an Indian?*

My dad tells me I walk in two worlds. I walk in the Indian world meaning I think, talk and act like an Indian when I am around other Indians. Put me in a room full of White people, however, and all of a sudden I talk and act White. Funny, isn’t it? Well, some would say that is just survival kicking in, but I think it’s because I live and walk in two worlds. White and Red. What are the Red and White worlds? Here is where my thesis begins.

### **Research Question**

What were my experiences in education? This thesis will answer that question, and I will talk about my experiences in primary, junior and high school, and post-secondary education.

*I remember going to kindergarten in a bus garage. I was 5, I didn’t want to go but Jojo told me I had to. My first experience with a thing called racism in education began at the age of seven in grade 2. I was having trouble spelling the word “indain.” I would put the letter a before i. I recall being made to stay in for afternoon recess to improve*

*my spelling in regards to the word "indain." My Grade 2 teacher said I should know how to spell "indain" because I was an Indian. I went home and asked my grandmother who possessed at least a Grade 6 education what an Indian was. She told me that I was an Indian. More specifically, I was a North American Indian. I was an Algonquin Indian. I recall the children's rhyme "sticks and stones will break my bones but names will never hurt me." It's amazing what we tell our children. Names hurt! I know names hurt. Growing up and going to a public school where I and three other cousins were visible Indians, brown skin, black hair and brown eyes in a sea of blonde fair-skinned children, names did hurt. Playing cowboys and Indians usually meant four of us fought against thirty or more White grade school kids. Custer had better odds. We were called the itchybums, savages, and my personal favourite was wagon burners. I asked my Jojo what a wagon burner was and she told me to watch John Wayne.*

I will conclude my thesis with an exploration of the question, "what is an Apple?" The term "Apple" is used by certain members in Indian country to suggest that some individuals are Red on the outside and White on the inside. Apple was first applied to me early in my post-secondary education by another Indian studying in the post-secondary setting. I did not know the full implications of the term and at the time felt it did not

warrant further research. In my second year of university, once again my Indian identity was questioned due to my lack of Traditional spiritual beliefs and my identification as an Evangelical Christian. Further, references have been made to me with comments such as, “He thinks he is too good to be hanging around us because he went to university.”

These experiences have led to my desire to delve into issues that arise out of being labelled an Apple. I will do this through autoethnography. What I would like to accomplish through this research project is to investigate how this labelling has affected my identity as an Indian. I will discuss autoethnography later on in my thesis.

For now, let’s take a figurative step back and look at the big picture. My academic side is surfacing now.

### **The Big Picture**

My research “problem” is the implication of being called an Apple by other Indians. Problems, what are they? Well, some might say colonialism, internalized oppression, and Indian education. But what is the big problem? Colonialism, some would say. Cashmore writes, “colonialism involved the domination of one group over the other” (1994, p. 64). Colonialism happened in North America and was bad for Indians in North America. Or was it?

So let’s look at colonialism and its effect on Indians in North America. What happened?

*Well, to be honest, I kind of like this notion of colonialism  
and what it has done for me. It got me this fine education.*

*I’ve finally learned to spell Indian correctly. Mrs.*

*WhateverHerNameWas should be proud. Wait one second,*

*I wonder if she was Cherokee? The Cherokee are a tribe of Indians who may or may not exist in today's world. The running joke in Indian country is celebrities such as Cher and Val Kilmer claiming they are Cherokee. When you look at the history of Indians of North America, why would you want to claim you are one? Colonialism has given me something that I wish it didn't, though, and that is sexism. Someone once called me sexist for referring to my wife as "My Old Lady." Now I have always loved my wife, from the moment I set my eyes on her I knew I was gonna marry her. So when this person called me sexist all I said was, "you have no one to blame but yourself." This particular student was of the European persuasion and her boyfriend, who also was of this persuasion, got really mad at me. I then stated that prior to contact with our White brethren from across the pond, we as traditional Indians, loved and respected our women. But Europeans treated women like cattle and like property so I learned from colonialism and Europeans to treat women like second-class citizens. So technically it was their fault. Guilty, by association.*

Let's make sure all our partridge are counted now. After all, Indians never really had chickens. Colonialism, if I interpret it correctly, has taught me to spell Indian and treat women as second-class citizens. Do you see anything wrong with this picture?

In Canada, another legacy of colonialism is residential schools. Stevens (2003) records the abuse Indian children endured during this period. Residential schools were institutions that the Canadian Federal government created in order to educate Indian children. This action of residential schools had created a different Indian. These students were subjected to a different culture. These included the acts of internalized oppression as well as being deprived of one's culture and beliefs. Students would now learn that their former way of life was not adequate. Students would then view their parents' lives, beliefs and culture as less than what they were learning in school. Weaver (2001) writes that internalized oppression is a by-product of colonialism. A result of this action is that we as Indian people will accuse others of not being Indian enough (Weaver, 2001). Poupart (2003) describes internalized oppression:

like colonized groups throughout the world, American Indian people learned and internalized the discursive practices of the west...viewing ourselves within and through the constructs that defined us as racially and culturally subhuman, deficient, and vile...we not only apply them to our individual selves but also to those within our own marginalized group(s) our loved ones and community members. (pp 87-88)

So what does internalized oppression mean to me? It means that somebody or some people from my cultural group, i.e. Indian, believes I'm more White than Indian. These people think I am an Apple.

*Can you believe that crap? Me, White on the inside and Red on the outside, I think not. I can be as much of a lazy and ignorant redneck as the next Indian, I'm just better*

*educated that's all. I can, if I choose, drink myself silly, sniff glue until I'm brain-dead, and have as many kids as I want from different women and then complain that the Great White Father owes me something. But I don't, so that makes me an Apple.*

What is the problem? We as Indians have learned to oppress ourselves.

*It's stupid to think and act dumb. We as Indian people kick and scream racism when things don't go our way or we get followed by a security guard in a mall. But when an Indian goes to college, university or is not a practicing traditional Indian they are then labelled an Apple. That's some seriously warped thinking. That's where the notion of internalized oppression comes into the picture. These same Indians want us educated but don't want us home.*

What are the implications for those Indian students who go onto higher education? Are they to experience being called an Apple? Will they even consider going onto post-secondary education?

*Uncle Johnnie (he's the first Jerome to get a university degree) went to Mc Gill University and got himself a Bachelors degree and became a teacher back home on the reserve. We drove twenty-two hours to get to Thunder Bay so I could go to university. All he said when we moved my*

*stuff into my new home was, "Don't quit cause I ain't coming back to pick you up." How's that for motivation?*

I entered Lakehead University in 1991 after being out of school, and then being encouraged to go back by family and community members. Upon completing an undergraduate degree in Philosophy and re-entering the work force, I realized that my desire to continue on with education had increased. After being out of school for 6 years, I applied to the Indigenous Learning Department to complete an Honours degree with the intent of eventually completing a Masters and a Doctorate. I now have almost completed the Master of Education.

### **What the Smart People Say**

To provide context for the autoethnographic research study, a literature review is required. The literature review will provide background for what I am proposing to accomplish as a research project. This review of the literature is divided into three areas of importance. These sections are autoethnography, social identity and traditional values.

#### *Autoethnography*

What is autoethnography? Ellis and Bochner (2000) identify it as "an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural" (p. 739). Autoethnography provides an avenue for doing something personally meaningful.

*I was 13 and had a dog named Buster. Buster was a mutt and back on the rez, mutts were a dime a dozen. In every yard you could count at least three or four dogs that belonged to each family. A student asked me why First*



*Nations people (her words, not mine) had so many dogs. I said in my best Indian voice that when times were tough and people had no food, dogs like Buster or Poochie started looking real good. As well, if a bear wandered into the yard with a bunch of kids playing, all you had to do was set the dog(s) on the bear and get the kids inside and wait. There were two ways it could go down, the dog(s) would run the bear off or the bear would get hold of a dog and there was supper. The kids were safe and the bear got a meal. Well, I got an earful on how I treated animals and that animal welfare would be coming to see me. So, here is a difference in how Indians and White people think. Indians think of dogs as tools you use in order to survive. White people think of dogs as pets. I had a good laugh about that for weeks. As a side note, she asked what dogs tasted like, and I said like, "chicken."*

Ellis and Bochner write that the demands of autoethnography are extremely difficult because the process requires the author to look deeply within themselves for understanding. It requires one to become vulnerable, honest and open to personal matters that could quite possibly shed light on undesirable traits of the personal self. However, in the same vein, autoethnography research provides an avenue for doing something meaningful for one's self and the world.

*What is meaningful? My interpretation of meaningful is*

*that this research is helping me identify my experiences in education and how it has shaped my identity as an Indian. Meaningful to the world around me is that it tells a story that others may be able to identify experiences that are or were similar. What it allows me as an author is the ability to create, and not just complete my thesis for the sake of completing a thesis.*

Ellis (1997) writes that “a good autoethnography always speaks beyond itself... Follow the autoethnographic mantra show instead of tell. Understand self to understand others” (p. 2).

*I could tell you stories about growing up on a rez, but would you be able to understand? What is it like to know that people don't like you because of your skin colour? Living on a reserve in Quebec is unique; not only do the English-speaking White people not like you, but the French speaking White people really don't like you. I went to the Protestant school and then I went to the town's high school. The Protestant School was a four-room school with a basement for a gymnasium and cafeteria. The high school was this huge building that had two sections, the French section and English section. Depending on your mother tongue, you did not cross sections. The students from the rez didn't fit in either section because we weren't French*

*or English. Tensions usually ran pretty high between the French and English students. Throw the Indians into the mix and it became our own powder keg. The school decided to let us play broomball for the Winter Carnival. Mistake number one was to give us sticks to play a game. The second mistake was to let both the French and English section students play broomball against the Indians. It took about ten seconds for the Indian students to knock out all the other players on the ice. What was supposed to stay on the ice never did. This little broomball fight between the three sections made going to school even worse. The teachers in both sections didn't like us, maybe they were scared. The students definitely did not like us. Why? I learned that the sins of our fathers had been passed on to us. Our fathers, uncles and cousins went through the same crap as we were going through. I recall laughing when my uncles Johnny and Dennis, and cousins Sanso and JJ would tell of the fights they had with the townspeople. Or the time a racist organization came to town to recruit the townspeople and how they lured them onto the rez, made them strip, covered them in honey, finally making them walk out of the rez at night in the summertime. I now realize that I was caught up in something bigger and older*

*than me. The kids my age did not start the commotion in town nor in the schools. The town kids my age didn't start it; we just picked up where the older people left off. I still see the same problems now at home between the rez and town. Funny how the more the things change they still stay the same.*

I think that autoethnography could have profound impacts for Indian people who have been researched by the dominant White culture. Examples of this are Indians, who, in the past, have been studied by cultural anthropologists, who may not have gotten a true picture concerning Aboriginal peoples and their culture (Tuhiwai Smith, 2004).

*I remember two graduate anthropology students who came to me and wanted to know about Algonquin culture and growing up on a reserve. They bought me lunch so I felt kind of obligated to talk to them. They asked questions such as what is Algonquin culture, Algonquin history and what is it like growing up on a reserve. Since I was old enough to know that lying is bad, what did I do? I told them that Algonquin people fought with the Salish Indians over buffalo at the Plains of Abraham. We would take children from other tribes and make them slaves. In other words I laid it on thick and heavy. I realized that no matter what I said these two would believe me. Why? I was the expert "me Indian," I know what it is to be Indian. I was an expert*

*at bullshit. It was when I entered the Indigenous Learning Program at Lakehead that I realized that research on First Nation people was and still continues to be weak. I could tell people anything about Indians and they would believe me. Why? I am the expert because I am an Indian.*

Alsop (2002) states that “studying the unknown involves leaving the familiar” (p. 1). With this thesis, I am attempting something that is not what I understand a traditional thesis to be in the academic sense. Nor is it part of an indigenous tradition. I am leaving familiar modes of doing a research project and attempting something very new and unfamiliar to me.

Both Alsop (2002) and Ellis and Bochner (2000) come back to the notion of *self-reflexivity* in which the “researcher’s personal experience becomes important primarily in how it illuminates the culture under study” (p. 740). Ellis (2001) argues that “expressing my feelings vulnerably on the page invites others to express how they feel, comparing their experiences to mine and to each other’s. Good autoethnography works towards a *communitas*, where we might speak together of our experiences, find commonality of spirit, companionship in our sorrow, balm for our wounds, and solace in reaching out to those in need as well” (p. 401).

*Feelings. I was told that Indians are stoic, a fancy word for not showing our emotions. That we are stone-faced. I learned that in public school. Nowadays, we talk about feelings and how important they are to the development of the child in school. It took me almost thirty-four years to*

*learn about feelings. This discovery of my feelings happened around the time I met my future wife and with the birth of Elizabeth. I often wonder why in school we were told that we Indians were stone-faced, never smiled and could not show expression. Someone told me we romanticize things we don't understand, so I guess when I went to school we didn't understand Indians. So I guess expressing my feelings is important both to me as well as others.*

Berger (2001) expresses that “narrative autoethnography is a natural extension of elements already ingrained in the ethnographic tradition” (p. 506). Throughout North America, native people have used narratives to create reality, teachings and life long experiences for future generations. An old-timer told me once that we Indians didn't write anything down. We just told “you” whatever “you” needed to hear and that was it (Old Indian Man, personal communication, n.d.).

*An example of this for me would be when I was growing up I was told by my grandparents of our family lineage. My family tree was never written down but passed on through stories about our past family members. At a young age I knew all of my relations on my fathers' side, who married into which family, and how many children were born or died. The end result of this teaching was that I knew my family. We would be told stories about how to behave,*

*what would happen if we did not, or stories about how we came to live in Maniwaki.*

Rylko-Bauer (2005) used autoethnography to reconstruct her mothers' lived experience of the Holocaust. In her research she faced the ethical dilemma of how much pain she was causing her mother by having her recollect memories of that time period. Rylko-Bauer weaves personal narratives from her mother's memories with photographs and academic writing.

*So I'm doing my literature search for my topic. I always tell my wife that it's our (i.e. Indian) lot in life to suffer. We were born into suffering. I know its stupid but I'll say it anyways. Well, anyways, Rylko-Bauer's paper provided insight that writing to ease the suffering is a good thing. Therapeutic, if you ask me. It's not like I suffer greatly, I just like to complain that's all. But Indians have suffered; my mom and her brothers and sisters went through the residential school system. This explains why they were the way they were. Mom started to write things down. Helped her, I guess, with a lot of things. Now I write things down, especially with this thesis project.*

Thorpe's (2004) Masters thesis used autoethnography to focus on the lived experiences of a single mother who had her first child before the completion of high school. She eventually went on to higher education. What I found so interesting is that she did not get stuck on a negative issue like teenage pregnancy resulting in being on

social assistance, but pointed to a hopeful future and pursuing a post secondary education. I too would like to look at something that at times was negative and produce something that, in the end, feels positive.

### *Social Identity*

The concept of social identity needs to be discussed and reviewed. What is social identity? Social identity, in my opinion, can be thought of in terms of categories, for example, class, culture, First Nations, European, male, female or religion. I believe as well that social identity can be negative and positive. In my own experiences negative social identity could be racial profiling of certain visible minorities or religious beliefs.

*Racial profiling whether you agree it exists or not is hazardous to the Indian male. Case in point, while driving through the province of Quebec, if you look like an Indian male, i.e., long hair such as mine (I have really long hair and I look like an Indian by the way), you can expect to be pulled over by the Surete-du Quebec. Why? Well, apparently the provincial police force didn't like getting shot at, having their patrol cars used as barricades and having one of their own killed in the line of duty by a bunch of Mohawk Indians. They haven't forgotten this nor have they forgiven Indians. I remember being pulled over, searched, harassed and threatened by the police because I looked Indian. We as Indians are just as guilty of utilizing negative social identity on our own people. In my*



*experiences Indians who do not practice traditional beliefs but are born again Christians face difficulties. We are often targets of criticism, threats of violence and not given opportunities for jobs within our own communities. As well, in my own experiences, family name is given preference. If you have the right family name then opportunities are often given to you. If you do not have the right family name, you are often provided with nothing or very little.*

Wong (2002) states “that social or group identities, categories by which individuals are classed and described, undergo change is obvious” (p. 451). Wong theorizes that social identity is not a static entity but one that changes and evolves. Why is social identity important? My dad once told me, “Robert, we are Indians and that’s how we identify ourselves. If people don’t like it then it’s their fault not ours. Identify yourself as you see yourself and not what others see you as.” For me, that is why recognition of identity is central to having a meaningful life for each person.

When looking at what research has been conducted on First Nations People in North America both in Canada and the United States, one would find that Native people are in peril (Assembly of First Nations, 2005; Lindsay, 2002; McCullum, 1975; Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996; Shkilnyk, 1985). They live in appalling conditions, at times third- world conditions, they have high drop-out rates, and, most disturbingly, they have higher than average suicide rates (Hookimaw-Witt, 1998; Kirkmayer, Simpson & Cargo, 2003).

Buckley (2004) addresses the concern that North American Indians who continue

onto higher education relinquish their Indian identity. This is a concern that many Native students face. In some cases “attachment to family and community was a factor in their resistance to professional socialization. They had strong family/community identity and did not want to be pulled away” (p. 25).

A study conducted by Bergin and Cooks (2002) describe students of colour who become successful in academia and struggle with “Acting White/fear of acting white” (p. 113). The fear of losing one’s social identity and culture are a barrier to many. Native people who continue onto higher education face the same struggles. It has been my experience that I am often accused of thinking and acting White. In short, I have become, for many, an Apple. Many who use the term Apple did not have a positive education experience in the Residential School era or in public schools where learning about Native culture and contributions were non-existent.

#### *Traditional Values*

What are traditional values? Pepper and White (1996) state “the life-style of each First Nations society was and is directed and controlled by commonly held values. While outward cultural expression may vary from tribe to tribe all may be similar by virtue of the application of a specific set of values. More often than not these values are clearly different than those held by members of the dominant society” (p. 3).

*What is tradition? Back home on the rez people laugh about tradition. It is said that the only time we get traditional is during the pow-wow. That’s when we get the eagle feather staffs and moose hide moccasins out and dance. A whole three days out of the year we become*

*traditional Indians. The other three-hundred sixty-two days we are just plain rez Indians. What does it mean to be traditional? Does it mean I smudge, sweat and go off on some vision quest? First, the Algonquin people never used sweat lodges, but had shaking tents, and the only smudging we did was to make sure the mosquitoes stopped biting us. It's not that I have a problem with traditional Indians. My problem is that some, but not all, are so traditional you can't tell where the bullshit begins or ends. I've met and have close friends who are traditional who do not treat me as a second-class Indian once removed because I do not practice traditional ways. But they have respect for my beliefs as I have respect for theirs. Jojo told me that I was born an Indian, I didn't become one when I learned the language, killed my first animal or knew what plant helped stop diarrhoea. I was born an Indian, more specifically a Status Indian, thank you very much. What is a traditional Indian? Well if you want to get specific about it? No one is. A traditional Indian has no use for garbage dumps nor do they use a graveyard. Being traditional is someone who respects all forms of beliefs, people and customs. That means if you practice the traditional ways, you don't make those who do not feel like second-class Indians. We get that*

*enough from other people. I was told that you don't have to practice traditional ways to be Indian. You're born into it and you will always be one.*

So tradition is not something you say but something that you practice. It's like being in kindergarten; be respectful, polite, say please and thank you.

### **Delimitations/Limitations**

The obvious delimitations of this study are that it will be confined to introspection and writings about my perspectives of education. A limitation, then, is that this study is only about me, and I will need to try to be aware of my own biases.

### **Ethical Issues**

This autoethnography was conducted in accordance with what Lakehead University has outlined in their Ethics Procedures and Guidelines for Research Involving Humans. Since I conducted research on myself and I wished not to harm myself in any way, I did not face any risks in this research.

## Chapter 2

### **What Do You Mean I'm a Savage? The Experiences of a Primary/Junior Student Who Happens To Be, Oh Forget It, Just Look at the Title.**

*I'm going to start at the beginning of this wonderful tale of life, love, and education of the young savage named Joseph Robert Archie Jerome. I was named after my grandfather Archie, Joseph was because every good Catholic Indian names their son Joseph, and I have no clue where Robert came from. Why start at the beginning? In order to understand this story, you have to start at the beginning and that begins with me. My mom is from a reserve in northern Quebec called Amos Indian Reserve. It is now known as Pikogan. My dad is from the River Desert Band, now called the Kitigan Zibi Anishinabeg First Nations located in Maniwaki, Quebec. My grandparents on my dad's side are from two different reserves. My grandfather Tada is from Barriere Lake and Jojo is from the River Desert Band. My grandfather on my mom's side, John Jacob-Rupertthouse-Minister is Cree from northern Quebec. I really don't know where he's from other than I was told he's from the north. You can try to guess where he's from. My grandmother Marianne Kistabish was from Pikogan. Mom died when I was a baby. I've only seen two pictures of her in my thirty-eight years on this rock. My Jojo and Tata raised me as one of their own till I was twenty four. Tada died when I went to college and Jojo died in my third year of university. Who said education wasn't tough?*

*So now you know something about my family. As I said, my mom died when I was very young so I don't remember too much about her. We never really talked about my mom. I don't know why. It just happened to be that way.*

*My Jojo moved her family to New York State in the sixties so that her children could get a better education because they weren't getting it back in Maniwaki.*

*So now my own story begins. I was born in a town called Canandaigua, Ontario County, New York on August 20<sup>th</sup>, 1967. Mom, as I said, died not too long after that. I often wondered what my life would have been like had she been around. But it doesn't help to wonder about the past too much because I might miss what's going on around me now. My mom's name was Josephine Jacob and dad's name is George Jerome. I saw her grave once a long time ago. I asked why she wasn't buried back in Amos like every other member of the family who died. Grandpa John said it didn't matter where she was buried because she was gone, but it was her body that they were putting in the ground. So it didn't matter where she was buried because you were taking the memory of her everywhere. For a man who didn't have much formal education, he is pretty smart. (He is still alive and breathing).*

*At this time we lived in a village called Ionia on Route 64. Tada worked for Bennett's Fur Farm. He was a truck driver. Bennett's was a migrant farm. It employed mostly Indians in the fall during pelting season. The Indians from Barriere Lake, Lac Simon and Pikogan would come to this farm that harvested mink and fox furs. This process was pretty labour intensive. The way it started was by grabbing a live mink and holding it by the neck and back legs so that the grader could look at the fur. The hard part was making sure you or the grader didn't get bitten on the face or elsewhere. When the grading was done, we would*

*then start to harvest the mink. I'll leave the details out unless you really want to know (it's kind of gross). The farm also harvested fox furs. So the Indians would come and work for about five months on the farm and then go home. Whole families would come to the farm to work and live. Kids might go to school and the grown-ups would drink lots of beer. As I said, the farm was a migrant farm; there were mostly Indians, Puerto Ricans and Mexicans, and White people were the bosses. We had our little United Nations of poor people working there. Jojo worked for Saxby's egg farm, where she collected eggs. Jojo and Tada pretty much worked seven days a week.*

*That's enough about my family life. Let's get to my years in school while living in the United States. When I turned five years old, Jojo and Tada told me I had to go to school. It was the law. So in September I went to kindergarten. It was in a garage at the Bloomfield Public High school. It was fun; we pretty much ran around playing duck-duck-goose and pulling the pigtails of little girls. Mrs. Dixon drove the school bus and the rule was that a student from high school would watch over you so nothing bad happened to you on the bus. At Christmas time she would give you a gift, usually a pencil, candy cane and a note pad. She and her husband were both bus drivers and sold bicycles as a side business.*

*Now if you recall part of my thesis is about my experiences in education. Here is something I remember singing in my early years at school: "One little, two little, three little Indians, four little, five little, six little Indians, seven little, eight little, nine little Indians dancing around the Tepee." Come on, everybody start singing. Sound familiar? I remember singing this in school. I thought it*

*was cute and it did help me learn my numbers. I wonder what would have happened if I changed the words. “One little, two little, three little Whiteys, four little, five little, six little...” What, me racist in public school? Never!*

*In Grade One, I went to Bloomfield Elementary School. There was a man, Mr. Crowley, who was in charge of the migrant kids. All the migrant kids who were Indians, Puerto Ricans and Mexicans would get help in school. Even though I was born in Canandaigua, an American by birth, red white and blue, I was still a migrant. I went to Bloomfield Elementary School for five years. During this time, I went through five years of Columbus Days and Thanksgivings. Don't get me wrong. I loved getting these days off and eating turkey was a highlight of my young life. I was told by my teachers that Columbus discovered the Americas and Thanksgiving was when the Pilgrims and Indians got together and ate at the table to celebrate a harvest. When I was in school, Jojo told me to listen to my teachers and don't misbehave. So I believed what the teachers told me about Columbus. I believed that he sailed all the way across the ocean and discovered the Americas. Took one look at us and called us Indians. It was in grade three that I learned about the “Founder” of the*



Figure 1: Columbus and the soon-to-be Christian Indians. Source: unknown.

*Americas, not about the Indians who lived here first. During the Columbus Day celebration we watched a movie about Christopher Columbus.*

*Do you like my caption? If you enlarge the picture you'll notice how pale my Native brethren look. What happened to the Redskins? The Indians look*



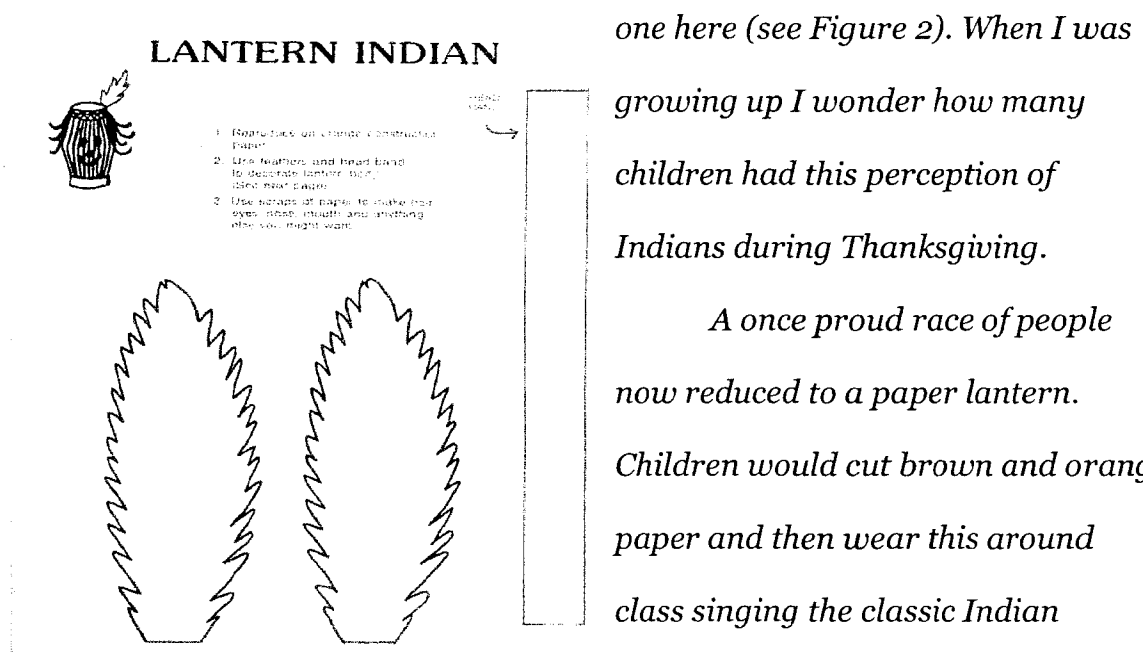
*scared of Columbus and his buddies. If you look closely, you can see the Europeans placing a cross on the beach and the Indians offering fish. Why fish? The artist I suppose wanted a kinder and gentler savage. Capable of being converted to Christianity, given the symbol of a fish in early Christianity was used to denote that you were a Christian. Gives me the warm willies.*

*In the movie, I saw Columbus as a conquering hero (see Figure 1). He jumped onto shore and planted a flag. Columbus claimed the land for God and Spain. It looked pretty impressive to me. After this I asked Jojo, "Did Columbus really discover America and Indians?" She said to let the White people think they know what happened. Why? Because not is all as it seems, I was told. That's pretty deep for someone in grade three. Almost as deep as trying to think about how Santa Claus gets all those toys to children at Christmas time. Anyway, Jojo told me that Indians were here first and we didn't get "discovered," only that Columbus got lost and landed somewhere. He saw a bunch of strange-looking people and called them Indians. I asked my teacher that if we, as Indians, were here first, then how did North America get discovered? All I was told was that Columbus discovered America and the Indians. So the score: teacher 1, Indian kid 0.*

*Holidays. I loved them as a kid. Christmas, Thanksgiving, Labour Day, 4<sup>th</sup> of July; mostly I loved holidays that got me away from school. Thanksgiving was always a favourite of mine. I ate turkey and got to play the Indian in our class play about Thanksgiving. It was an honour to be the Indian. It sure beat the alternative which was playing a Pilgrim. That would be a misuse of Federal Government property. If you don't get the sarcasm, this, my good friend, is*

*what Indians call Indian humour. Fun times let me tell you. On a more serious note, I look back on it and wonder how many Thanksgiving plays in public schools around North America have a real live Indian? So being different had its benefits. At the very least my class had a real live Indian to be part of the festivities. Always look to the positive side of things my gentle reader.*

*Here is an activity I recall from my primary years in public school. I remember celebrating Thanksgiving at school and making such crafts as the*



*one here (see Figure 2). When I was growing up I wonder how many children had this perception of Indians during Thanksgiving.*

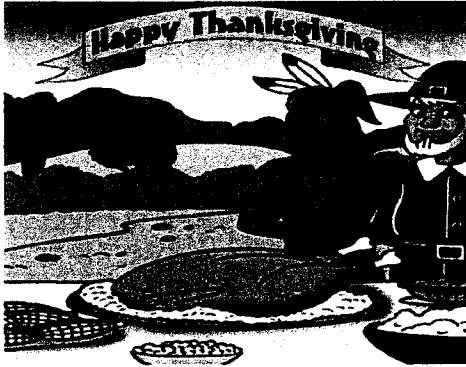
*A once proud race of people now reduced to a paper lantern. Children would cut brown and orange paper and then wear this around class singing the classic Indian*

Figure 2: Thanksgiving Craft. Source: Cracchiolo and Dupuy Smith, 1985, p. 13.

*Hollywood soundtrack, “Hooya, Hooya, Hooya.” Raise your hands if you did that. I have nothing against making a Lantern Indian. Would you? But I wanna also make a Lantern Whitey!*

*Thanksgiving traditionally has been held during October in Canada and November in the United States. As far as I can remember temperatures where I lived, and where my first Thanksgiving took place, should have been chilly.*

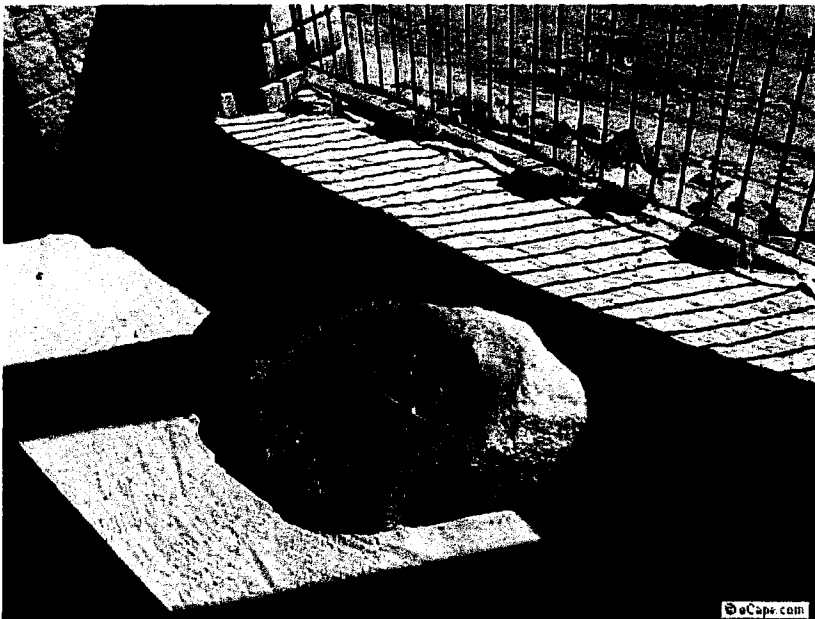
*I know that I am no expert on weather matters or history. I just know what I am told or see. I trust people and hope that they are at least honest with me.*



*I can recall colouring pictures like the following (see Figure 3). Did Indians really look that good and have a six pack for abs? He looks strong, proud, brave and stoic. The pilgrim looks scared to be by this savage.*

Figure 3: Happy Thanksgiving. Source: <http://www.lvdayschool.com/whats happen/Thanksgiving/thansgiving.html>

*What I was taught about Thanksgiving in school was that the Pilgrims*



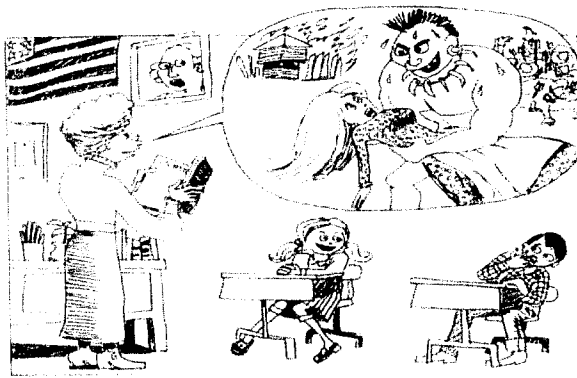
*were being persecuted in England so they set sail for the Brave New World. They landed at Plymouth Rock. I remember going to Cape Cod once and seeing this*

Figure 4: Plymouth Rock. Source: <http://capecodtravel.com/gallery/plmouth>.

*rock. When I was growing up, I was always taught that Plymouth Rock was this huge monument to the bravery of those early pioneers. I was pretty*

*disappointed to see this little rock with a date engraved into it (see Figure 4). Turns out the history I was taught wasn't always as it seems.*

*This brings me to other experiences about Indians in my journey of education.*



*“What did you learn to day in school, waboose?” Jojo called me waboose when I was growing up. Waboose is rabbit in Algonquin. I said, “What’s a savage? I learned that in school today.*

Figure 5: Savages. Source: Bibeau, Gawboy, and Lyons, 1971, p. 20.

*My teacher said Indians are savages and I saw it in a book.” Look really hard (see Figure 5) and you can see the six pack abs again. Jojo replied, “Savage is what some people call us. It’s not nice, but that’s what happens. Remember who you are always and no one can take that away from you.”*

*What’s a savage? The Oxford English Reference Dictionary (1996) defines a savage as “wild, primitive (savage tribes), and a member of a primitive tribe, a cruel or barbarous person” (p. 1288). Now I have to ask you, the reader, an important question. Be honest if you can. I value honesty over being nice. Does the photo below (see Figure 6) look like the face of a savage? Maybe he’s a little mischievous, maybe even cute. But to call him a savage is uncalled for. It could be a little rude as well.*



Figure 6: Me. Source: Personal Collection.

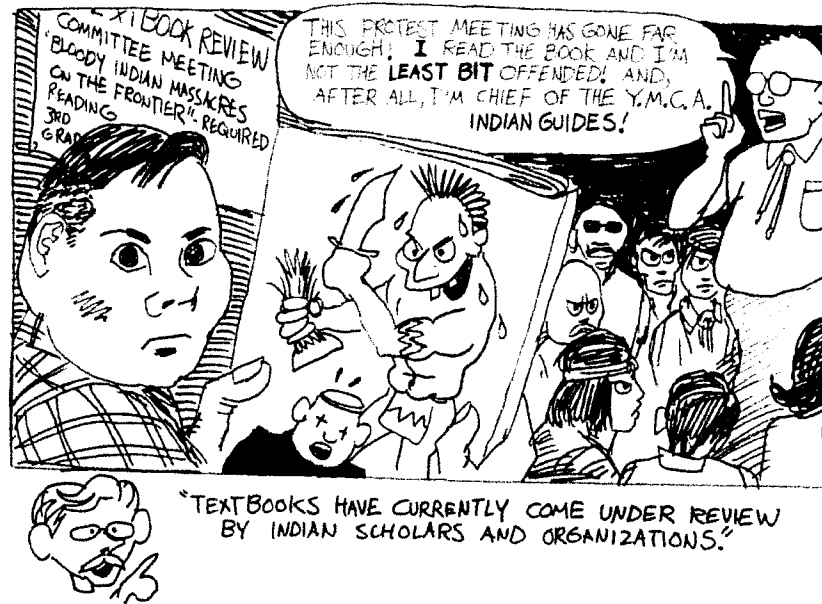
*At times hearing something like ‘Indians are savages’, “Robert didn’t you say you’re an Indian?” makes me want to hide under my desk. I would rather have somebody directly say I was a Savage and my people burned and pillaged the White settlers as Figure 5 implied.*

*I can’t really remember when this picture (Figure 6) was taken. Even then*

*I knew I was an Indian and would always be different.*

*Now, I make fun of a lot of things. I make fun of education, people who are ignorant (I do not discriminate; I include people who are red, yellow, black and white); and more importantly, I make fun of myself. My education from kindergarten through grade five was ok. I learned how to spell Indian, learned about history, and holidays. More importantly, I learned I was an Algonquin Indian. I am a member of a proud people who are an important part of the history and the development of North America.*

Now, gentle reader, I want you to stay with me for little while longer as I still have one more thing to say about going to school in the seventies. It was not



so much “we have to be sensitive to other cultures” or “remember we have Robert i.e. the Indian in class.” In my

Figure 7: Textbooks. Source: Bibeau, Gawboy, & Lyons, 1971, p. 21.

later years at Bloomfield Elementary School such as grades three-four I can recall some of my schoolbooks were kind of questionable (see Figure 7). Jojo would sometimes say it was a mistake to bring her children to the States. If this was what they were going to learn then she would rather have them taught back in Maniwaki.

What else did I learn from Kindergarten through Grade 5 at Bloomfield Public School? I learned that Indians kids like me were not the only kids to be avoided. There was a boy whose dad was a member of a motorcycle club. So we played together because no one else would play with us; people were scared of his dad and they just didn't like me. We were always the outsiders looking in.

Since I was growing up in the states, I played Vince Lombardi football. I liked playing football growing up, not because I was big and powerful, but

*because I could hit as hard as I wanted and people encouraged me to do so. When we won a game we were allowed to wear our game jersey to school. The Bloomfield Steelers was our team. In school, when we wore our game jerseys, teachers didn't see my skin colour but saw me as a Bloomfield Steeler's football player.*

*Growing up I did everything American. I joined the Boy Scouts of America. Like any good American school kid, I recited the Pledge of Allegiance: "I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all." I was an American. I was an Indian. I sang the Star Spangled Banner.*

*This is what I learned in school. If I give up my cultural identity as an Indian then I was going to be an American. This was every immigrant's dream. I, Robert Jerome 'was going to be an American citizen.' Was I to give up my identity as an Indian? **No, I was an American.** Wait a second. I am an American Indian whose family lineage is Canadian. I will always be Indian. Even if I was discovered by Columbus and past Indians ate bare-chested with Pilgrims.*

*My wife and I have a daughter, Elizabeth Nicole Dorothy Dandelion Jerome (see Figure 8). She is about to start Senior Kindergarten in September. Her name represents the strongest women influences in our lives: Elizabeth for my Jojo, Nicole for my wife, Dorothy for Nicole's grandmother, and Dandelion because the roots of this plant grow deep and if you pull the plant out, it will grow back. Does she look like a savage?*

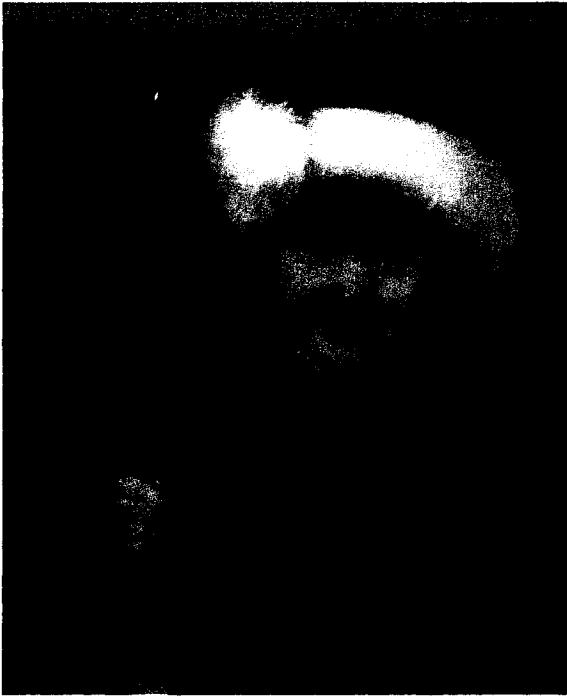


Figure 8: Elizabeth. Source: Personal collection.

*I pray and hope that she does not receive the same education her father received. I pray she will learn in school that she is Algonquin, Irish, Scottish, English and French, a child who will grow up to be an beautiful, intelligent and strong woman.*

### **Hey, We're Moving to Canada. Parlez Vous Français?**

*In 1979, my changed. I was no longer going to be an American, and now was moving to Canada. After my mom died, Jojo and Tada raised me as their own. They were retiring and were moving back to Maniwaki, back to the reserve. Since we were moving to Quebec, I spent some of my last year of school in Bloomfield learning French. Since Jojo and Tada were my parents, I had to move to Maniwaki. I did not want to move but we moved, in the summer.*

*Growing up in the States is totally different than growing up on a reserve. It's something you need to experience first hand; describing it doesn't do it justice.*

*There we were in Maniwaki, living on the reserve. This was during the time of Bill 101. The government of Quebec made French its main language. Some English feared that all English-speaking students would be enrolled in*



*French-speaking schools. No more English in la belle province. That September, I enrolled in the Protestant School. No Catholic school for this savage. This school was about as different from Bloomfield Elementary as night is to day. It was a four-room school with approximately 60 kids attending from town and the reserve. The public school's gymnasium back in Bloomfield was larger than the whole school in Maniwaki.*

*Every morning we sang "O' Canada." My biggest fear was that I would be called to lead the singing because Mrs. White (pardon the name but that's what it was) did that to students. I didn't know the words so I would mumble incoherently and hope no one heard me. Well, that worked. The school environment was so different. It was like taking a step back in time. Our work sheets smelled like rubbing alcohol and there were at least two grades in every class. I had never experienced that before.*

*Even then, going to school with other kids from the reserve, we still did not learn much about Indian culture. We learned whatever Mrs. White would teach us and, to be honest, she scared the living daylights out of me. I quickly learned to make myself as invisible as possible whenever she came around.*

*The four-room school was so small our French lessons were held in the basement which doubled as our cafeteria and gym, complete with support beams. You had to be careful when running; many students ended up looking at the ceiling because they ran into a beam. Whoever said knowledge is powerful should also mention very painful.*

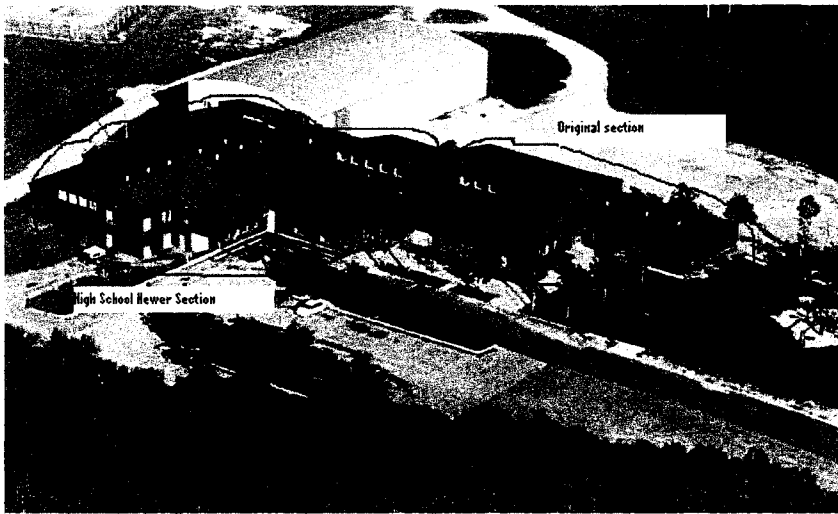
*I completed Grade 6 at the Protestant school and then moved to the High School in town, what people from the reserve called the "Polyvalant." I called it,*

*“let’s make me as invisible as possible because I like my body the way it is.” The population was roughly 700 students. Its breakdown I would say was about 400 French-speaking students, 200 English students and 100 Indians. This was an eye opener.*

*I don’t think I could have been more scared than I was at that school. Do you remember the movie Reservoir Dogs (1992)? The beginning sequence had the main actors in a Mexican standoff, each one pointing their guns at each other. This pretty much summed up the relationship between all three sections; the French students didn’t like you and there was no love lost between the English students and Indians. There was no trust between any of the three groups. The Indians would often fight against both sections and at times ally with the English. It was like the early wars that the history teacher would tell us about. The English and Algonquians would ally against the French and fight. We didn’t know that this was something that had gone on for years, the reserve kids fighting against the town kids.*

*I went to the town high school for two years. During this time the reserve was building its own school. The reserve for many years had just a kindergarten and in 1981, started offering grades 1 through 6. Now they were building their own school. It is called the Kitigan Zibi (KZ) Kikinamadin. Figure 9 is a recent picture. The original section included a library, offices and class rooms. There was a small gymnasium which doubled as a cafeteria. When the community added the extension to include a high school it included a carpentry shop, home economics room and science lab.*

*Eventually the addition that looks like a hanger was built-it is a full sized gymnasium.*



*It was in Grade 8 that I started going to the reserve school. I had failed Secondary 2 and had to repeat it.*

Figure 9: Kitigan Zibi Kikinamadin. Source: [www.kza.qc.ca](http://www.kza.qc.ca).

*Jojo suggested I go to KZ. So I went. The school had this strict “no smoking” policy. My friend Bear, a.k.a. Steve, and I would walk to school every morning. Along the way we’d smoke right up to the school boundaries, put out our smokes, and go learn something. Next smoke break was at lunch. Since the school was practically in our backyard, we’d just walk home for lunch. Eat and then walk back with another smoke. The “no smoking” problem was solved.*

*In Secondary 2 something strange started occurring. Puberty was hitting the class pretty hard. We boys started seeing girls in a different way. Now some might ask, did all the boys feel this way? In my home community being male, the unwritten rule was you were straight. (If you as a boy were perceived as different, you had two options available. Option 1 was to ignore your different side and pretend to be straight, Option 2 was to leave the community.) So, girls were no longer bothersome creatures. Something was starting to catch us. We all had the standard sex education course. We talked about hormones, puberty*

*and these things called “urges.” I think most of the boys were afraid to get called up to do blackboard work. You never knew when you would spring into action. When you do silly stuff on a reserve, it takes forever for people to forget. Having a boner in front of your classmates was signing your own lonely single warrant. Elephants have a long memory, people say, but let me tell you, Indians never forget stupid stuff.*

*I remember that in order to be cool you had to have a girlfriend or boyfriend. My girlfriend at the time was from another reserve. We were together for the school year. Hickies were something everyone wanted but no one wanted to show them off. It was like having a tattoo at twelve and you didn’t want your mom to find out. Well, I got one. It looked like a vacuum cleaner tube gave it to me. About as good as a circle could be, mine was. I heard it from everybody especially Jojo. You could hear the yelling I got for miles. (Sorry, kilometres. What is interesting is that I’ve lived in Canada since 1979 and I still cannot get used to this metric system.) Hold your horses, I’ve got to tell you a story. My Jojo told me when I was small. One of the families went home for Christmas. It was when Canada first converted to the metric system.*

*Those speed limits in the US read see:*



Figure 10: Miles Per Hour Speed Sign. Source: Unknown.

*In Canada they read:*



Figure 11: Kilometer Per Hour Speed Sign. Source: Unknown.

*What used to take you 5 hours to get home from the US-Canada border now took you 3 hours. People though it was mph not kph. When I remember that story I still laugh. The police pulled the family over and ticketed them for speeding. Why? I guess driving 100 miles per hour is frowned upon. Their argument was that the sign showed 100, and they still were getting passed on the highway.*

*There, are you happy now that my driving story is over? Anyway, back to the hickie story. Well Jojo found out and yelled at me something fierce. Since I was now interested in girls, it was time for “the talk.” It was the dreaded sex talk. So she made a fire outside and told me to sit down. All she said was, “be careful” because you didn’t want kids when you still were a kid yourself. More importantly, she told me that each woman you met could potentially be the mother of your daughter. She meant treat all women with respect, and honour them with love and kindness. More importantly, give thanks to God for allowing you the privilege of having a woman to share your life with.*

*Are you happy my story is over about driving in Canada? Yes I know my transitions need work. Now I'm going to school with Indians. I'm going to learn about Indians. So let's back to me and my story of going to school.*

*Reminds me of this Buck Owens (1963) song my Tada used to sing:*

They're gonna put me in the movies  
They're gonna make a big star out of me  
They'll make a film about a girl who's sad and lonely  
And all I gotta do is act naturally

Well I'll bet you I'm gonna be a big star  
Might win an Oscar you can never tell  
The movies are gonna make me a big star  
Cause I can play the part so well

I hope you'll come to see me in the movies  
Then I know that you will plainly see  
The biggest fool that's ever hit the big time  
And all I gotta do is act naturally

We'll make a scene about a girl that's sad and lonely  
And begging down upon her bended knee  
I'll play the part that I won't need rehearsing  
All I gotta do is act naturally  
Well I'll bet you...  
And all I gotta do is act naturally, and all I gotta do is act naturally.

*Why does this song remind me of school? It's because when I'm with Indians, I act Indian. I walk in two worlds. My moccasins have both red and white dust on them. The white dust is chalk from education and the red dust reminds me of who I am as an Algonquin Indian.*

*I have some fond memories of KZ School. In my opinion, the teachers were great. Well, most of them anyways. Like anywhere, some were just, well, let's say someone had to have loved them at one point.*

*Mr. Jim Harris was vice-principal and all round caring teacher (See*



*circled man in Figure 12). A definite product of that whole sixties love thing. He had this big curly head of hair and facial hair that rivalled Jerry Garcia*

Figure 12: KZ Staff photo: Source: Personal Collection.

*of the Grateful Dead. His wife Ms. Hanny Panik was another teacher at KZ.*

*They had both previously taught in Papua New Guinea. Ms. Panik is the lady at the end of the picture wearing a white sweater.*

*With Ms. Panik, one thing I'll always cherish was her teaching me a love of books, theatre and, dare I say it, the ballet! She taught me to always look around the next corner and never to give up when things got too tough to handle.*

*I once heard Mr. Harris swear and then realized that teachers were human too. He has Multiple Sclerosis now. He shakes a bit. I saw him at my Uncle Johnnie's funeral. He looks like he's aged, but I guess that's what all these years do to you.*

*I enjoyed talking to Mr. Harris. He always treated me with respect and wanted me to try my best. He taught us to always try no matter how hard it was. Failure only occurred when you quit trying. Both Ms. Panik and Mr. Harris taught me how education could be positive and fun. They weaved into*

*their lessons life skills, what life was like outside the reserve, and the importance of to enjoying life. At the time, I was too thick-headed to notice this.*

*Mr. Richard Johnston was a runner. He's the other teacher with a moustache. He and another teacher, Mr. Marvin Assiniwie, an Indian teacher from Manitoulin Island, started a cross-country team. They got a bunch of Indian kids to actually run for a sport. They weren't being chased by cops, other kids trying to beat them up, or dogs. They ran. I, being a smoker, couldn't run to save my pathetic skin. I figure there's no point trying to run from something; they're going to catch you anyways.*

*Mr. Michael Potvin was my gym teacher. He got me interested in playing badminton and I eventually travelled to some of the area high schools for tournaments. That was fun. He also organized a boy's volleyball team. We traveled to Gatineau for tournaments and played at a high level of competition.*

*Mr. Potvin also drove a classic Jaguar. He was very proud of his car until he took it to a garage and the garage went bankrupt. They took his car away. He was very sad about losing that car. He took us skiing once.*

*Now, most of my teachers at KZ were good. Some even had good intentions to teach and have a lasting effect on these Indians. Now I remember this one French teacher, she used to wear these one piece jumpers and sit on the desk. Well, let's just say I learned my Français and my impressions of her lasted pretty long. What more can I say? Now that's enough of that.*

*Our compulsory classes at KZ consisted of English, Math, History, Computer Sciences, Gym, and Shop. Native Studies and language were the only electives we had. So even at school on the reserve I was still learning how **not** to*



*be Indian. I didn't learn much about Indians and culture at the school. What I did learn was to not quit even though I felt ready to do so many times. It was easier then to just quit school and work. You would look at it and ask, was school that important? People were making good money in the bush or living on welfare.*

*Teachers would challenge you to expand your horizons and try new things. My gym teacher Mr. Potvin would get our class to try skiing, curling and golf. One teacher Mr. Bennett had my secondary five class become exchange students with his former school in Casselman, Ontario. That exchange was fun because we not only got to go on a field trip, we had the opportunity to travel outside the reserve. Once again teachers would get us to see life outside the reserve. I don't believe they thought life on the reserve was bad but it was not the only life we could lead.*

*Ms. Panik, in particular, would always get you to look around the next corner and get you to try new things. All the teachers would always tell you that education was important. Well, why is it important? I was not learning anything about Indian people in this school. It was as if the school was an extension of schools off reserve. Put the Indians in schools on the reserve. They still don't have to learn about Indians because they need to know history and math.*

*What I wanted to know was, how was I going to survive off the reserve with the education I was getting? See, even then I knew I didn't really want to stay on the reserve all my life. I wanted to see what was around the next corner in life. Thank you, Ms. Panik.*

*KZ School was different. The other schools I went to in Maniwaki did not have extensive field trips like KZ. The school allowed the students to travel. I think the teachers wanted us to see that there was a world outside the reserve. I remember going to the National Arts Centre in Ottawa to watch The Nutcracker and A Midsummer Night's Dream, and going to a World's Food Expo. We went to Daytona Beach, Cape Cod and one year a group of students went to Vancouver. We did get a chance to experience life outside the reserve. Some students, when they graduated, chose to remain on the reserve. Others like myself, left.*

*I never actually graduated from high school. I'm still missing one credit. Imagine that, a potential Masters of Education graduate doesn't have a high school diploma.*

**Welcome to University: Don't Quit Because I Ain't Coming Back to Get You! The Early Years at Lakehead When I Still Didn't Know Anything.**

*When I was in high school I always wondered what a university was. I used to get many of my ideas from movies. I still do sometimes. I always thought, or had a mental image, that university was like the movie Animal House (1978). It was where people went to school and partied like no tomorrow. The Oxford dictionary defines university as "an educational institution designed for instruction, examination, or both, of students in many branches of advanced learning, conferring degrees in various faculties and often embodying colleges and similar institutions" (p. 1577).*

*So here I was starting my university education journey in 1991 at the age of 24. I started in the Honours Bachelors in Outdoor Recreation Parks and*

*Tourism (ORPT) program with a Bachelor in Science and ended up with a Bachelor in Philosophy. Why did I go back to school? A family member who shall remain nameless (George Allen) suggested I go back. Lakehead was not my first choice. I wanted to go to Michigan State University to study Fisheries and Wildlife. But I ended up at Lakehead. I don't have any regrets that I ended up here. So about to my question of why I wanted to go to university. I could say it was to meet chicks or learn something. What would you believe it to be? I wanted to see what was around the next corner of my life and university seemed like a good idea at the time.*

*There were a lot of firsts at Lakehead. I found out I could learn. More importantly, I quit smoking and drinking. Learning, for me, happened on many levels. I learned how to use a computer for the very first time. In the first semester of school, I wrote my papers by hand. My friend Christine would then look at my handwriting, shake her head and try to decipher my chicken scratch. She would tell me to stop writing like an Indian and write like I was in university. I laugh now because I can't stop thinking like an Indian. Imagine that, I had to go to university, in my opinion one of the most colonizing institutions an Indian can find themselves in, to learn how to think like one.*

*Christine was great. She would look at me and go, "Oh my goodness, what have you done?" She'd take my work and type it out for me. It worked great, but like any good thing, it had to end. She was graduating and was going to be an adult. Like any mature student, I had to accept my limitations and embrace this thing called technology. I took a deep breath and learned how to mess up my own paper on a computer. I remember that in second year there*

*was always a group of students from my year who would wait to the very last moment to write their research papers, much like I am doing now with this master's thesis.*

*The early years, mainly first through fifth year at Lakehead, were great. It was as if no one really expected much out of you. People would ask you what you did for a living. If you are a teacher, doctor, truck driver or plumber, people have a general understanding of who you are and what to expect of you in our social order. Now, admit it, we all do it. We look at someone and generate our opinion based on their social "value." If you don't want to admit it, then fine, be dishonest with yourself. Enough of the social rant, let's get back to me! While in university, I found people really don't expect much from you. All people (namely parents) really want us to do is pass, get out of school, and start earning money in a career you really didn't want but do because that's what is expected from you. At least that's my observation.*

*When I first started at Lakehead in the ORPT program, a professor asked me how the department could attract more Native people to the program. I couldn't answer his question because I didn't know the answer. I was the only Indian in the program. Shortly after this conversation, I realized that I was going to be an expert on Indians. The only reason was because Joseph Robert Archie Jerome 0730124301 was a Status Indian. In other words I could make it up and people would believe me. How screwed up is that?*

*In my early years of university, however, I still was ashamed to be Indian. It was as if I was being pulled in two directions. I did everything I could to not be identified as an Indian. This included having short hair (look, I know it*

*is a stereotype to say that Indians have long black hair, but I held to that ideal. Sue me!) and not hanging around other Indian students. There were times when I did not even go into the Lakehead University Native Student Lounge or I would just plain outright tell people I ain't an Indian. Why, you might ask? I guess my years of public school did that. What, me Indian? You got the wrong person, try down the hall. Things are different now.*

*While in university, I learned that you can be anything you want to be. It just has to be politically correct. If you are going to an Indian, make sure you call yourself an Aboriginal, First Nation or Anishinabe; older names such as Native Canadian, Amerindian and Native fell out of fashion many moons ago. If you were to ever refer to yourself as an Indian, status or non-status, the wrath of the hoollee (Indian way of saying Holy - you have to draw it out - hence **hoollee**) red man fell on you faster than a bullet from the OPP. I don't see what the big deal is. I have a card that tells me what I am and that is Status Indian under the Indian Act. If people do not like it, tough, I live with it. Why can't they?*

*This brings me to my experiences in coming to respond to people asking me what I am, and saying that I am an Indian. I am an Algonquin Indian. I am a status Indian from the River Desert Indian Band. Why the change? Well, I started university in 1991, graduated in 1995 and came back again almost four years ago. I've done a bit of growing up, some might say maturing, but I just got older. Now at the age of thirty-eight, I am old enough to call myself whatever I choose.*

## **Uncle Johnnie, come and get me cause I'm quittin!**

*If you recall, my dad is a Pentecostal preacher, my mom and dad are born-again Christians. Hey, wait a minute, didn't I say my mom died? Yes she did pass away. My dad remarried and, no, I don't call her my step mom she's my **mom**. Towards the end of my first year, I lapsed into my old habits. I started to drink again. It scared the living daylights out of me. I was not a very nice drunk. I was a belligerent drunk. I could be very combative and liked to drive when loaded. Not a good combination. At this point I was ready to quit university despite what Ms. Panik taught me, to never quit and always look around the next corner. It was as if I felt I was letting people down or that their expectations of me were not being met. Simply put, I was living up to the stereotypical image of what a drunk Indian should be. There is this t-shirt that reads "instant asshole, just add alcohol" and that was me. As it turns out, this would be a wake up call for my life. I would now understand the term, "like father, like son. You see, I didn't want my life to end up like my dad." Growing up, the few times I saw him was early in the morning when he was still drunk and he would come to see me. Jojo would wake me up and I'd have to go sit at the kitchen table and listen to him talk about my mom Josephine, and he would cry, get mad and then take off. I used to stagger around and say I was my dad. In other words, I played "me drunken Indian."*

*I swore I'd never end up like my dad. I remember him as a drunk, as an invisible father and then as this Holy Roller Pentecostal preacher who was telling me I had to be saved. Saved from what? But the acorn doesn't fall far from the tree. I ended up like my dad in more ways than one. I ended up a*

*drunken Indian before I went to university and during my first two years of university. I was not always drinking, but when I went on a bender it was usually a pretty good one.*

**Guess what? I became a Born-Again Christian, An Indian Born-Again Christian!**

*Then something happened. I had a warped view of Christianity. All I knew about it was Jimmy Swaggart and Jim Baker telling me I was a sinner and here they were with their dirty laundry swinging in the breeze. Now, I remembered my dad telling me he was a Pentecostal preacher and down the road from me here in Thunder Bay was this Pentecostal church. So one Sunday morning I walked into this church. Here was a preacher describing how somebody's life could be empty and hollow. He was talking about what this person's life was like and told about how life could be full, not happy, but content, knowing all is well in their soul. Why not happy? Do you need to be happy to be content? I like to think of being content as having eaten enough turkey or moose to be full but not stuffed. Ever have that feeling? I later learned preacher man had a name: Pastor Roy Kemp.*

*During the sermon, Preacher man (I didn't know his name yet) was talking about this Jesus character and how he could make your life content. I wondered if my previous view of Jesus was warped. Pastor Kemp (I looked at the church bulletin and saw his name) asked if there was anybody in the congregation who felt like the person he was describing and wanted a life that was content. I raised my hand and asked Jesus to forgive me for my sins, the sins of my past, present and future. I was becoming more like my dad than I*

*ever imagined. I told my dad and mom a few years later about my decision. Mom and dad were real happy about this and said they were praying for me. The reason I told them years later was I was finally starting to heal from my past, from my own drinking and my dad's drinking. I am not perfect - ask my lovely wife and darling daughter - just forgiven.*

*Before anyone gets their knickers in an uproar about me talking about God, Jesus and forgiveness, let's remember what we were taught in kindergarten. Play nicely. As well, this is my autoethnography and not yours. So if you don't like it, stop reading it. But if you want to know more about God, Jesus and forgiveness and you're an Indian or not an Indian, check out <http://www.brokenwalls.com/>. As I said, God's not interested in the colour of your skin, but the condition of your life.*

*So while in university I became a born-again Christian. I'm not a freak, well no, I am a freak, but that's not the point. I am what I am, an Algonquin Indian who is an evangelical Christian. Now, some people might say that as a born-again Christian, I would view sweats, smudging and pow-wows as evil or the work of the devil. It is not my right to judge the actions of Indians who participate in traditional ceremonies. Nor would I want them to judge me as someone who attends a Christian church. We as a family attend pow-wows and both my daughter and I dance at these gatherings. We cannot hide from who we are. People look at me and go, but you're Indian, don't you know what the church has done to you and your people? Yes, as a matter of fact I know what the church has done to Indian people. I have lived through some of it, hello! So there you are, I am starting to be like my dad more than ever.*



**Hold that trip to T. Bay, Johnnie, I ain't ready to go back to the rez**

**YET!**

*I was still ready to quit school but then something happened that made me want to complete university. It was during the end of my third year, Jojo had a heart attack and left this rock we call earth. After we buried her beside Tada, I resolved that no matter what was happening to me I was going to finish university and be the second Jerome after Uncle Johnnie to graduate. That resolution came to be in 1995 when I got a BA in philosophy. Go figure, I would end with a degree in something I did not even start out liking or even enrolling in. You see I got the boot from ORPT. The reason was that I failed my electives, specifically philosophy and psychology. So what do I do? Take a bunch of psychology and philosophy classes. Turns out I did better in psych and philosophy than in ORPT. As far as I know I'm only one credit shy of a BA in psychology.*

*So my first degree was in philosophy, and I would be the second Jerome to graduate from university. I loaded up on ethics courses to hopefully learn right from wrong. There was the notion in philosophy that one could do the greatest good with the least amount of bad. I thought that was Vulcan philosophy. My philosophy professor was great; Dr. B. K. Kent was this slightly older lady professor who talked with her hands. I swear she was practicing Tai Chi or some martial arts in class. She was British, I believe, who had this awesome accent. Through her courses, Dr. Kent allowed me the freedom to say what I wanted to say, even if I couldn't say it properly. I learned that no matter what I thought about an issue there was always another side to the argument.*

*Thank you, Dr. Kent, for expanding my thinking and giving me an opportunity to think outside the box.*

*It was here that I was exposed to something called Indigenous Learning (IL). I was exposed to something called Native philosophy and here I started to learn about Indian culture, history, the ramifications of colonialism and relationships between Europeans and Indians. In my undergraduate courses I was now starting to learn a little bit about Indians, especially in the IL department here at Lakehead. In IL, I thought I would learn about Indians. At least that's what I hoped for. I was not disappointed. Here is the official blurb on IL:*

*The Department of Indigenous Learning at Lakehead University is committed to providing both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students with a fundamental understanding of Aboriginal history, culture and values. It subscribes to the concept that a well-rounded educational experience is acquired through a combination of traditional academic disciplines and culturally relevant/sensitive activities.*

*The Department encourages students to consider both the interdisciplinary opportunities offered by Lakehead University as well as the knowledge shared by the Aboriginal community as the optimum means of furthering their understanding of Aboriginal Peoples. (<http://indigenouslearning.lakeheadu.ca/>)*

*I took this IL course called Native Canadian World Views. It was with Dr. Rabb and Professor McPherson, and it was an Abbott and Costello show. Rabb*

*played the apologetic white guy and McPherson was the angry Indian. The very first class McPherson asked us to be honest and not nice. He then proceeded to ask the class what we thought when he said "Indian," what comes to mind? The class said "a rich culture, proud people, lost, culturally raped" and other very flowery responses. Such as "steeped in tradition, old and wise," and my favourite, "we Indians are connected to Mother Earth." Looking back on this comment of "being connected to Mother Earth," the statement implied that all Indians in North America should be connected to Mother Earth. Now personally I know many Indians who feel they are connected to Mother Earth, but I also know many Indians who see this rock as nothing but a resource to make money from. What I guess I am trying to say is, don't try to classify all Indians as alike. We're not. So the statements were very nice, but they seemed to be lacking in honesty: I think the class missed the canoe. McPherson wrote all the responses on the blackboard, took a dramatic pause, and then shouted out loud, "BULLSHIT! BULLSHIT!" He told us to be honest, not nice. The entire class did not see that one coming. McPherson wrote on the board, "drug abuser, welfare bum" and my favourite, "stinking drunk." Well, let me tell you, the class was shocked. No one ever swore in class, especially the teacher. After getting over the initial surprise, people started to get nervous. No one knew what to expect. There was this professor in the class who worked in the Native Nursing program who stood up to say something. In her words, not mine, she said, "I've been working with Native, Aboriginal and First Nations women for the past twenty years. I have learned so much from these women that I feel honoured to know them." McPherson replied, "So what have you learned?" She was silent*

and then said, "I learned ah..." McPherson replied, "You might want to quit your job because you haven't learned shit and you are probably doing more damage than anything else." Well, she was shocked to say the least. Here is this professor who has been helping Native women become nurses. She has been taught so many "wonderful and beautiful things" from her students, her words not mine, but cannot recall something as simple as what she has learned? I know what I learned from McPherson in that course: the more education I receive, the less I know.

Now when McPherson yelled **bullshit**, my first instinct was to get the hell out of there. Here is some teacher swearing at us. I got scared and did what I do best, make myself as invisible as possible. It worked. After a few classes it felt. The class itself made me think about relationships between White people and Indians, and they ain't that good. What I observed in that class was anybody and everybody has a bias. You can disagree with me, that's cool. But we all do. My bias is against people who think they know something when all they know is nothing. What I mean is, don't try to act and look smart when I'm holding a straight flush and you got crap. I'll put it another way, don't try to bullshit a bullshit artist. Now back to my experiences. The class was great, glad I didn't have to drop. So throughout the year we as a class were exposed to many interesting things. We got to watch movies that made people in the class cry, get mad and generally wanna throw up. Good times!

Sometimes I would be angry at some of the comments such as, "I don't do that sort of thing," "that happened in the past," or "get over it." How could I get over it if it was still happening to me? Yes, it happened in the past but that past

*is still haunting me. Most of the time I watched students squirm in their seats when confronted about past actions of Whites on Indians. I didn't say much in class because it was much more enjoyable watching people trying to defend their position with a professor who also holds a law degree. A tip to readers- never argue with a pregnant woman or people who studied law. They can make you look stupid babble and they will win the argument.*

*During my fourth year of my undergraduate program I met this lovely woman named Nicole Barter. For some reason, I knew I was going to marry her. She, of course, hated my guts on first sight, but I knew different. How did I know this? I would regularly email her a quick note to say hello and ask her how her weekend went, and she would email me this huge story. Eventually my charm won her over when I gave her a wet willie (lick your finger and stick it in someone's ear) at three in the morning at a retreat. Game over, that's all she wrote, she was in love with me. So we got married, moved to Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island, and did what newly married people do. We fought. Nicole went to the Culinary Institute of Canada, to become a Pastry chef. I went to a Business school and became a computer geek.*

*I learned a lot in business school. You would think I should know something about computers after my first round of university. Nope. Apparently there is more to a computer than pressing the power button and typing away. Robert Jerome (that's me by the way and sorry I'm not using my full name) could use a computer: create a spreadsheet, make a PowerPoint presentation and learn accounting. The instructors were great and made you*

want to learn and succeed. I met some really neat students as well. These were Islanders to the core, some with no thoughts of moving off the island.

We moved back to Thunder Bay one year later so Nicole could finish her BA and I went back to a different business school and eventually graduated and became a full-fledged computer geek. School didn't go as planned for Nicole and she moved to Kamloops, British Columbia to finish there. And that didn't pan out as expected either. But when life gets like that, you just take it and move on. After four years of being married, we had a surprise, namely a little bundle of hair and cuteness named Elizabeth Nicole Dorothy Dandelion Jerome. We were living in Ottawa and I was working at Health Canada. My job was in the Bioinformatics Division, a fancy word for the computer geeks section. Our department would create custom programs for Health Canada as well as maintain databases for internal clients.

**Welcome Back To Thunder Bay and Don't Quit Cause I Still Ain't Coming Back to Pick You Up. Hey, We Brought a Third Person with Us.**

I did not want to continue working in the high tech sector so we moved to the reserve for a short time (it was supposed to be for a year but it ended up being roughly four months) and in this time we talked about the possibility of going back to university. You see, after receiving my first undergraduate degree, I had the desire to complete a Masters and eventually a PhD. But where would we go? Lakehead University was the place, but what program? Looking back on my courses, I was a couple shy of a degree in Indigenous Learning, so I applied to finish that degree and was accepted. My only problem was that my acceptance letter stated school would start in September and there were five

*days left in August. So my lovely wife packed up everything, got us tickets and we found ourselves back in Thunder Bay. What was supposed to be a one-year stint now has been 4 years. I enrolled in the IL program and took most of the IL courses that were offered that I could fit in.*

*I registered for this one course; it was a combination IL and English course called "Literature of Canada's First Nations." Dr. Leggatt taught the course and a very fine professor she was. Her claim was, "I am not an expert in the area; I'm just interested in it." (I have developed a theory. Never trust experts because they really don't know anything. They just like hearing the sound of their own voice.) Well, back to my English class. There was this one guy, a fellow student, who would say the smartest things like, "All First Nations literature is easy to understand and I know all about it." The class did not let him get away with comments like that. They were on him like salt on a pistachio. I secretly appointed him to be the Minister of INAC. Why? Because he was an expert on all things Indian. Because I had come back to university a little older and hopefully wiser, I heard alarm bells when some white guy tells me it's all so easy to understand Indians. I'm an Indian and I don't even understand us.*

*I had thought about doing a Masters in Native Studies but I missed those all so important deadlines at Trent University, so I applied to do a Bachelor of Education instead and was accepted. In my Bachelor of Education I learned nothing about Indians except in a course called "Teaching Exceptional Children." So, now are we not only easy to understand but exceptional as well. You have to love education and the people in it. I believe the instructor's*

*intention was not to state that Native students are exceptional but to give some exposure to the notion we could have Indian students in our class. I was concerned, though, that a pre-service teacher candidate who may not have had much exposure to Indians, however, might leave their professional year with the notion that all Indian students are exceptional because they learned about it in Teaching Exceptional Children. I truly enjoyed my Professional Year at the Faculty of Education. It opened my eyes to the reality of teaching. I ask forgiveness of all my past teachers. I am truly sorry for putting you through a nightmare! But what opened my eyes even more were the attitudes, behaviours and beliefs of my fellow teacher candidates. Now I know for a fact I am not the most mature and responsible person out there, but I tried. Outside the classroom away from professors and instructors I recall hearing some of the most racist comments made by Bachelor of Education students. I was shocked and appalled. In my observations no one was called on it. These people were going to be teachers! After that, I told Nicole we were going to home school Elizabeth.*

*Examples outside the classroom were snide remarks about me being an Indian and having everything handed to me on a silver plate. One of my favourites was “why was your education paid for?” and “you’ll have a job right after school because you’re an Aboriginal and they always get hired first.” Remarks like “I wouldn’t move to reserve to teach those Indians. They look weird.” No shit, I heard that one and it made me laugh. Indians look weird? What, you’ve never seen a White person wearing a green mohawk with a nose ring? Weird indeed! I would hear “why do those people have a special room and*



*we don't"? I would try to invite people to the NTEP (Native Teachers Education Program) room to see what was going on. That rarely worked. It seems that the few times I saw students other than Indians in the NTEP room was when they wanted information on Indians and how to teach them. Once again an Indian student became an instant expert on Indian education.*

*Wanting to know more about education, I applied to the Masters program at Lakehead and was accepted, so here we are now. In my two years at the MEd level I've learned quite a bit more about me being an Indian. I learned more about being an Algonquin Indian by writing about myself rather than by reading any text, academic journal or listening to an expert speaking on Indians. I am Joseph Robert Archie Jerome, Algonquin Indian, whose father is George Jerome and mother is Josephine Jerome. My grandfather was Archie Jerome and grandmother was Elizabeth Jerome. I am Waboose, an Indian. Born as one, living as one and one day I will die as one. My daughter Elizabeth Nicole Dorothy Dandelion Jerome is Algonquin Indian as well as Irish, Scottish, English and Francais on her mother Nicole Laura Jerome's side. That is what I have learned thus far as an Indian in my journey in education.*

Hey Man, what happened to the APPLE? Relax, my little grasshopper, read Chapter 3.

## Chapter 3

### Concluding Thoughts: Goodbye or is it the Beginning of Something Beautiful?

*I came into this world with no experiences and when I leave this world I will go with my experiences, knowing that I experienced life to its fullest. I do not aim to change the course of the world but aim to better my understanding of my world. Life for me has not always been kind, fruitful or painless. But life for me has been lived up till now. My life experiences will continue to change, grow and be, in my eyes, beautiful. Why? It is my worldview that allows me to be who I am. I am an Algonquin Indian whose life is unique. Unique in the sense that I view this time on earth as temporary; this is not my permanent home. I will have a home that is more beautiful, wonderful and is everlasting.*

*I have experienced loss in my life, as have many other people in this world. I have experienced the sense of never knowing my birth-mother. I will never truly know the love she had for me, feel the loving touch of her fingers or hear her voice telling me she loved me. I will never hear her dreams for me. That is life and that can never be changed.*

*What I do know is the love that Jojo and Tada had for me. I will know and cherish the knowledge, wisdom and life experiences they shared with me. I have a handwritten note that Jojo gave me that read, "here is a pair a winter shoes I bought for you. If they do not fit sell them and keep the money. From Jojo who Loves you and is always thinking of you." I never told her that those shoes were two sizes too large, but I wore them until they fell apart. Even though they were too big, I could not part with them. They were bought and given with love to me, a gift to be cherished and remembered it till I leave this world.*

*I will never again feel Jojo's hands, or drink tea and play cards with her. But her legacy of caring, loving and helping me understand who I am will always be with me. I will never hear my Tada say, "don't worry about it" or hear his laugh, but I will remember the moment he smiled at me and said he loved me.*

*I will remember as a teenager the sense of embarrassment I had because I had two grandparents who raised me and who would come to find me at the high school in town. I will remember Jojo asking me if I was embarrassed to be seen with her and Tada. I felt the shame of saying "yes" and seeing the hurt in her eyes. I will*

*remember her telling me that they will always love me and they would never be ashamed of me. This is about as gentle a rebuke I could ever receive from her.*

*Yes, I have experienced loss in my short years, but just as importantly, I have experienced great joy as well. I have experienced the love of two people, Jojo and Tada. I have experienced and continue to experience the love of my wife Nicole. I have shared the joy of being in love with someone whose life experience has been about as opposite to mine as possible is. I have experienced the joy of being a father to Elizabeth, whom I love. I will share with her my wisdom, love and life experiences as Jojo and Tada shared with me.*

*I will teach Elizabeth what her great-grandmother passed onto to me, that is to remember who you are, always. To remember that no matter the distance or what she does in her life, I will always love her and will always be thinking of her.*

*I have come to know who my father and mother, George and Alice, are. They are parents to me, who worry about, pray for and most importantly, love me. To my parents, I love you and will forevermore be proud to be your son. Life is dynamic, and their lives have changed as*

*well. They are now experiencing roles as grandparents to Elizabeth. They love and cherish her as they love and cherish their two other granddaughters, Kate-lynn and Amy.*

*The title of my third chapter is **Goodbye or is it the Beginning of Something Beautiful?** Some old-timers told me that in the Algonquin language there is no word for goodbye. The reason is that we believe we will be united in the future with those we are leaving. Why do I bring this topic up now? Well, now is my conclusion, a chance to say goodbye to my thesis, to this revisiting of my experiences. Since there is no word for goodbye in Algonquin I have no doubt that I will visit these experiences again in the future.*

### **My Voice**

*What is my voice? Has it really been found? Is it something that has wisdom, experience, love, gentleness, patience? Or is my voice something merely to be heard and tolerated? Maybe even hated or made fun of? You the reader need to decide what my voice is, and what it can do. I apologize that I cannot do this for you. I can barely do this for myself! What makes this so hard to accomplish? Why is it so hard to finish, to write the bloody conclusion, I say to myself, I have found writing this conclusion really*

*difficult, nearly impossible. Why? Is it a problem of voice? A problem with saying goodbye? Or a problem with trying to make this thesis, “academic” to shift back to the White world.*

*I will attempt to finish this last chapter as painlessly as possible. Chapter 2 recounted some of my experiences in education, Kindergarten through post-secondary, including undergraduate and graduate experiences. I would hazard a guess that most of what I have learned over the years has been positive.*

*My education at the high school level was unique as I went to school on the reserve with other Indians. I still did not learn much about Indians, but definitely more than I would have at the town high school. What I did learn was to never quit, but to keep trying at everything. Thanks to Ms. Panik and Mr. Harris.*

*As for my post-secondary experiences, I have learned that I can be whatever I want to be as long as I say that I am an Aboriginal, Anishinabeg and First Nations person. These titles can be used to cover all the politically correct bases-be careful not to offend me by calling me an Indian. Ha Ha. Seriously folks, my time at Lakehead University has been very enjoyable. I have personally met*

*and have enjoyed the company of many university students  
from all walks of life, although I also have met students  
who were not so enjoyable and did not enjoy their  
company.*

### **What the Do You Mean I'm an Apple? Oh Yeah, What the Hell Is an Apple?**

The one question I ask in my thesis is: 'What is an Apple?' In my experience, the term 'Apple' refers to a First Nations person who is viewed as Red on the outside and White on the inside. This term I have heard being applied to myself and to other Indians. What is an Apple? Apple, in my view, is a term that has two meanings. The first meaning can be seen as a term of oppression, such as being called a racist name. The second I view as a badge of honour.

The first meaning I believe is self-explanatory. If you do not like someone or some other race of people, you label them with an oppressive name. Native people can be labelled as "savages," "wagon burners," and "you people" (Lindsay, 2002). And the racism and oppression inherent in these labels can lead to internalized oppression.

*5 years old, playing in the yard with his cousins.  
Hey dumb Indain, can't even spell who you are.  
Try spelling drunk cause that's what you is. Chief.  
Fucking Indian, go back to where you came from.  
Bush Nigger!*

*Same child, now 12 in school with his cousins.  
Joseph, can you tell the class something about Native  
people?  
You see Joseph is an Indian.  
My grandfather is Simon Little Beaver {snicker, snicker},  
My grandmother is Josephine Smith  
My father and mother are Simon and Sarah.*

*Same child now in high school, with his cousins.  
We are Anishinabeg.*

*We have been long here, since time immemorial.  
Our history includes the creation of Turtle Island.  
Our stories are about how we lived and how we  
experienced contact with Europeans.  
Columbus was not the great explorer that history claims  
him to be.*

*On the reserve people want Joe to go to university. Joe is  
smart and hard working. Joe's family is proud of him. He's  
graduated from high school and has been accepted to  
university.*

*Joe's cousins have been called every name you can think of  
and then some.  
Cousins have had it tough.  
Teacher calls them "lazy," "crack-heads," and "you  
people."  
They cry oppression and racism, but no one hears.  
These wounds never heal.*

*Cousins are looking at Joe, coming home from university.  
"Joe, what did you learn?" "Joe, wanna go party?"  
"What, Joe don't wanna talk to us or go drinking?"  
"What's he think, he's better than us?"  
"Fucking Indian goes to school, now thinks he's better than  
us?"  
Cousins start to think Joe is White. Joe is becoming an  
Apple.  
Joe thinks about this 'Apple.'  
Where does this 'Apple' come from?*

Poupart (2003) writes that "[l]ike colonized groups throughout the world, American Indian people learned and internalized the discursive practices of the West - the very codes that created, reflected, and reproduced our oppression" (p. 87). We have now learned to oppress ourselves. Poupart goes on to say that "we define ourselves through these constructions and subsequently participate in the reproduction of these codes" (pp. 87-88). These codes are opposite of what Pepper and White (1996) write about in defining what First Nations traditional values are, such as "of the importance of helping others, saying hello to older people and being respectful to elders" (p. 3). Pepper



and White go on to state that these “First Nations values offer strength, a sense of belonging, rules for proper behaviour and a fine sense of identity in their life” (p. 7). We are attempting to teach our daughter Elizabeth to respect others, as well to appreciate people’s identity. It is our hope that by teaching her to value others she will herself be valued by others. We hope to make clear that teaching and learning to oppress other Indians as an Indian is wrong and is against what traditional values teaches. One can expand on the writings of Pepper and White (1996) by not only being respectful to elders but to every person in the community.

I have a friend here at Lakehead University I told him I would put his name in my thesis Cameron Dokis and we have discussed many issues surrounding Native people in Canada. His words often ring true: “we don’t need white people to oppress us. We can do a better job at it. Why? Because we observed how oppression works and we changed it to make our own Indian oppression!” We’ve claimed the oppression as our own and now we can use it to make our own people feel subhuman. How do we as Indians make Indians feel subhuman? We attack their cultural identity as Indians and we make light of their spiritual walk (this includes those who are traditionalist and those who are Christians). We honour people in our speeches, telling others of their accomplishments but we then attack their credibility. As in my experiences with oppression, community members of ruling families can withhold opportunities for advancement as well as basic necessities of life such as housing.

When called Apples, Native students’ identities are being scrutinized. Wong (2002) asks, “But why are identities important? Why do you individuals struggle to establish and affirm their identities?” (p. 453). Perhaps you walk in the school doors

believing that you are equal in status to others, but without the acknowledgment of your social identity by those around you, you may end up recognizing that you are not equal after all (Wong, 2002). As Taylor (1992) suggests, “Imagine the damage done to the individuals of a group when they are considered not to be fully civilized, as the Native peoples of North America were by the European and other settlers (p. 26).

Questioning one’s identity because of colonialism and racism is one thing. Now ponder Buckley’s (2004) study on Native students in medical school, who “voiced their concern that becoming professional might mean relinquishing their American Indian identities” (p. 19). I’m damned if I am not White enough, which I’ll never be anyways, damned if I’m not Indian enough.

Should Native students whose goal is to complete post-secondary education fear accusations of “acting White”? A report from Bergin and Cooks (2002) found that students of colour who were accused of acting White did not relinquish their cultural identity, but did resent the accusations made by members of their own cultural group. They stated, “several students whom we interviewed seemed offended that people who appeared to know nothing about their own heritage would accuse more ethnically knowledgeable people of acting white” (Bergin & Cooks, 2002, p. 128).

No, I do not believe that being accused of being an Apple should be a hindrance to completing one’s studies. In fact, I have come to think that students who are labelled an Apple should consider it an honour. As with other pejoratives, it is time to reclaim the word.

So, why should someone consider being labelled an Apple an honour? Here’s my own personal take on things, more of my own story to wrap things up.

*I've been in a post-secondary student for nine years. As a post-secondary student, I've learned about who I am. I've learned that being called names is part of life. That it is ignorance at work. What people call me and think of me is not important. What is important is how I think of myself. Being a husband and father and soon to be a MEd graduate is important, that is my world at this moment.*

*As an Apple, I think of myself as a new creature. An Apple, to me, is a nutritious and delicious treat. If you were to cut an apple in half, yes, it is white on the inside, and in time, the whiteness turns to brown. There is no deep complex meaning behind this metaphor other than that no matter what I accomplish, I will always be an Indian. My social-identity is strong. And long as the federal government allows me to be a Status Indian, I will forever have status. Ha! Ha!*

*All kidding aside, I am honoured now that people might think of me as an Apple. Why? In a sense it provides me the knowledge that no matter what I accomplish, certain people will not like what I do. As a researcher and lifelong learner all I want to know is, 'What is going on? What do I need and want to find out?' Completing post-secondary school has allowed me to find some answers to these two*

*questions. I, as an Indian who has experienced post-secondary education, do not have answers to why other people call me Apple. I can only theorize that they are jealous, ignorant or just don't like me. That is their loss, not mine. I like myself, my wife likes me, and so does my daughter. In my world, that is what matters. As an Apple, I see myself as a new creature. I am no longer a reserve Indian nor am I an Urban Aboriginal. I am a new Indian, and my lived experiences will continue to broaden, change and be enjoyed.*

*Now some out there may think that this autoethnography is not **real** research that I did not create a traditional thesis where I asked a question, conducted a literature search, asked people a bunch of questions, analyzed my data and wrote a report. But wait a second, I did that! I asked a question, what is an Apple? I conducted a literature review on autoethnography, asked a subject, ME, a question, collected my data, analyzed it, and wrote a report which you've just read and ENJOYED, I hope.*

*And some of you may be wondering whether I have been lying to you? Now I know I mentioned in this thesis that I lied to some researchers in the past, so some of you*

*might think I'm trying to pull a fast one again. But, no, I'm not lying.*

*Before I end this thesis, I want to share one last story about my experiences. My grandmother cried the day I left for university. I remember that I tried to not look back at her when I left. She would cry when I left and cry when I came home. That's love. Jojo was proud of me no matter what I accomplished in life. Meegwetch Jojo and Tada, you raised a fine grandson who will remember all that you have taught him. Love Always.*



Figure 13: Jojo and Tada: Source: Personal Collection.

So, the time for final words is upon us. Meegwetch (Thank You) for sticking around till the end.

Hooraa! The end.

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