

INDIGENOUS STORYTELLING AND LITERARY PRACTICES

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Abstract

Indigenous writers today are the living legacy of our elders and ancestors who survived Indian residential schools and colonization and share stories about collective anguish—yet our continual retelling of our most shattered selves is a form of narrative violence that validates erroneous truths. This research initiates a conversation that moves beyond a deficit model and identifies how Indigenous writers and scholars are employing creative and cultural practices to re-imagine our past and present.

The research considers Indigenous literary nationalism and Indigenous poetics, looking at the functions of narratives and orality in produced, performance and text-based works. It explores ethical approaches and cultural practices undertaken by storytellers—and informed by the writings of scholars—steeped in protocols and ancestral teachings. I consider works of Canadian Indigenous writers with a significant debt to writers from British Columbia, especially Interior Salish narratives as shared by Mourning Dove Christine Quintasket, Jeannette Armstrong, Bill Cohen, Helen Haig-Brown and Kevin Loring.

The research establishes that stories create dynamic maps to the past, present, and the inter-relations between. It finds that, as Indigenous storytellers, we are responsible for strategically sharing stories because of the medicine they carry. Close engagement with Nl̓éʔkepmx and Syíl̓x traditional and contemporary narratives leads to recognition that our nations, languages, and ancestors play roles in telling our stories, as does the processing of grief and its movement into renewal.

The outcome of this research is to spotlight creative and critical storytelling practices among contemporary Indigenous writers and scholars who are actively re-imaging our Indigeneity and re-claiming our cultural pedagogies and epistemologies. The paper weaves a web of principles for ethical Indigenous storytelling steeped in methods and protocols that strategically position a literature that creates an empowered version of Indigenous people and

tells stories that, firstly, inspire healing and transformation, and secondly, share a more balanced narrative of Indigenous persistence and renewal in response to past and ongoing colonialism. The dissertation brings a new understanding about the Indigenizing imagination and respective positioning of Indigenous writers in creative narrative. Into the future, it points to opportunities for Indigenous writers to employ courageous acts of decolonization through creative and critical practice.

Lay Summary

Many Indigenous writers today tell stories about the ongoing collective anguish stemming from Indian residential schools and colonization. This research maintains that the continual retelling of stories of despair perpetuates negative stereotypes about Indigenous people. This dissertation makes the argument that stories are medicine and it is time to focus more on sharing stories about the endurance, strengths, and achievements of Indigenous people and communities. The research identifies how Indigenous writers and scholars in Canada—with a focus on British Columbia and especially Interior Salish territory—are using creative and cultural practices to re-imagine our past and present. The paper weaves together principles for ethical Indigenous storytelling that create an empowered version of Indigenous people and tell stories that inspire healing while also sharing a more balanced narrative of Indigenous persistence and renewal. Into the future, the research points to opportunities for Indigenous writers to courageously decolonize our literary endeavors.

Preface

This dissertation is the original intellectual work of the author, Nicola Campbell.

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Dedication

With love, for my children, my family and loved ones.

Chapter 1: Introduction:

Cultural Location—Scwéxmx

Self-Locating in a Web of Interconnected Storytelling

The overarching question I ask in this research project is: Are there ethical and creative ways of doing Indigenous storywork that resist colonialism and advocate cultural resurgence? And how can we begin to see these elements as a framework for current and future Indigenous storytelling practices? My dissertation offers examples of this via extensive research and review of contemporary Indigenous literature and storytelling practices. This learning journey began because I came to a point in my life where I felt deeply frustrated by published, produced and performed present-day stories that too often depicted Indigenous peoples as trapped within collective anguish and stereotypes of despair. At that time, I realized that as an Indigenous woman, as a mother and contemporary storyteller, I and my entire family and community have been deeply impacted by intergenerational trauma and violence resulting from colonization, the theft of children and genocide. As a result, I felt stuck, depressed and suicidal for many years and I did not know how to recover. Furthermore, healing and recovery became my lifelong goal. Through this narrative and storytelling research project, I realized that recounting narratives that demonstrate a journey of recovery is a sacred practice for cultural resurgence on behalf of our ancestors, our present day loved ones and our future generations.

The theoretical approach of this research is grounded within my cultural location. Through the exploration of published texts and Indigenous storytelling methodology, I have been seeking guidance from the work of Indigenous knowledge carriers and storytellers in order to gain understanding about the healing power of Indigenous narratives and storytelling practices. Central to my learning outcomes is the core understanding that I have gained through Elders' teachings that *stories are spirits, they are alive*. My aunt Maria Campbell, after the release of my first book when I explained that I did not know I could write, stated that,

“sometimes the stories choose us, we do not choose the stories.” I have learned that, as storytellers, we are a conduit, a messenger. As hands and feet to the voices and stories of our ancestors, often times we won’t fully understanding the work we are doing or why we are doing it until years down the road.

In this process of exploring the intellectual and creative work of Indigenous knowledge carriers, scholars and storytellers, I acknowledge that many, if not all of us, carry deeply embedded trauma that, when unhealed, can manifest over and over in different ways until we hold ourselves accountable and do the ongoing work to heal. As a people, we carry a collective hurt that has grown deep roots that have to be untangled and rewoven. Within my familial and life history, there are layers of suffering and violence that I have witnessed and experienced and continue to hurt, grieve and recover from. I acknowledge trust that our ancestral stories embody the collective voices of our ancestors and represent original instructions as tasks from our ancestors to survive, to heal and to truly experience joy and resurgence once again. Once released to the world, the stories no longer belong to us because, truly, they belong to the spirit of our ancestors. I acknowledge this here because, in the most respectful way possible, I have been asked by my committee and doctoral defense panel representatives to comment on the human vessels for work that has been significant to this scholarly journey. The scholarly work, cultural knowledge, and teachings embedded within the body of work itself embody the voices and represent the knowledge of many storytellers, some who are still here and some who are gone. I do not know details in order to have an opinion, I only know my own personal history that is situated in recovering from generations of colonial trauma. I have chosen to trust in the teachings I have been given and focus on the content and its relationship with the sacred power of ancestral narratives.

In many ways, this dissertation has also become a story about the work of stories. The term *tmíxw*, as provided by Dr. Jeannette Armstrong, translates as the intertwining of all life forces representing all living animate and inanimate elements. My interpretation of the translation continues this visualization as a web of interconnected narratives and storytelling

traditions like a weaving of all the life forces of the land. Recounting, reweaving, recreating, reconnecting and representing the voices of all our loved ones who have gone before and who continue to speak through us as damaged, hurt, as healed and courageous as we are and can be. Indigenous stories continue to recount collective truths of colonization and genocidal events that have taken place since before contact until today. We must reach deep within ourselves and find the determination and endurance and continue the work for healing and recovery. Our future is yet to unfold and through the power of stories we have the tremendous power and capacity to transform.

The following poem, taken from my multidisciplinary memoir, *Spiləxm*, published in September 2021 by Portage and Main's Highwater Press, echoes and deepens this account of my cultural and intergenerational location in the strengths of our ancestors and the pain of colonization (Campbell, *Spiləxm* 103).

the same as trees

i remember the elders

talking to us as youth:
at youth conferences, youth groups,
at the sweatlodge.

they said:

remember
we human beings
are the same as trees.

*cedar, douglas fir, pine, cottonwood:
tree medicine. tree spirits.
if you listen carefully in the high mountains
you can hear the ancients sing.*

today, our youth live in two worlds:
our traditional way and that of white society.
at times this will be confusing.
at times you may experience despair.
you will have to learn a new kind of strength.

when i finally found my way there. to the sweatlodge.

*i was confused. i did not understand.
two worlds: yes.*

*i didn't understand this, "new kind of strength."
how would i find it? from whom?*

they said:

if you choose to go away to learn, then do that
but always return.
if you are scared to take risks, then be scared
and do it anyway. be stubborn. be persistent.
have faith, have reverence, have compassion.

*i went away to learn. and i was afraid
to fail. and i did fail: math. history. english.
their history. their language.
i wanted to quit.*

remember:

the blood flowing through you is the blood of our ancestors.
sacred grandmothers and grandfathers never gave up—
even when our loved ones were buried in mass graves,
even when the children were stolen. they persevered.
this resilience exists within you.

*i didn't know our ancestors were buried in mass graves.
our beautiful pithouses collapsed with entire families buried within.
i often wondered how the blanket of despair came to us.
i only knew the blanket was old,
older than me. older than our family.
i didn't know until i read the stories in books.*

they said:

as you go forward be that tree
rooted deeply within our traditional homelands,
grounded within our culture, nurtured by our elders'
teachings, ceremonies, and languages,
twined within the skills and education of today's society.

raise your arms like branches, in strength and humility,
season to season weathering storms and heavy winds:
praying, cultivating knowledge,
ever growing, ever producing,

ever healing, ever dropping seeds and fertilizing.
in honor of our elders, our culture,
our past and future generations.

for all things, there is a life cycle.
death in autumn and winter,
rebirth in spring, growth through summer.

*standing among trees on a mountain trail
searching for the string that tied my spirit to an earth
i no longer wanted to walk.
the year following my younger brother's death
i remembered the words of my elders.*

*shoes off, toes immersed in creek, soil, sand & stones
hands uplifted to the sky i emulated
the patience of a tree, an ancient one rooted,
needle tips or leaves, branches dancing with the breeze.
perhaps their greatest pleasure is savoring raindrops,
their greatest joy lifting sorrow, sickness.*

what generation are we?

we are the transforming generation.
we watched our parents and grandparents
at war with themselves.
empty bottles broken on the floor, scars
too often on bloodied faces:
our mothers and our grandmothers,
our fathers and our grandfathers.

as children, we learned church prayers.
late at night when our parents didn't know
we could hear our mothers weeping
we prayed for their safety.
we prayed to fix their broken hearts.

*i never understood her silence, followed her room to room.
i felt unloved. unwanted.
invisible.*

*later i realized, as a survivor, the hurt she carried
was so much deeper than i could understand.
my elders and my godmother:*

always lit up, took care of me when she was broken.

*i remember her courage when she changed her life.
as her oldest child, everyday i pray
that we could be friends,
learn how to be a mother and daughter.*

as child witnesses, we watched a return to the old ways.
we watched as they put shame aside, remembering, relearning,
reawakening ancient traditional practices. we listened
as they taught us to talk to the spirit of our ancestors.

as they, now we, gain contemporary education, training.
we master ourselves. we gain control of our future.

*it is time to lift those blankets of despair,
put it all away. generations of
suffering. grief. rage. suicide. violence.
stop recreating and reliving genocide.
it is time to put their shame away.*

what generation are we?

we are the transforming generation.
hands joined with our elders we help them heal and
transform their sorrow into strength,
in so doing, we heal and transform ourselves.

hands joined we gift weavings of sacred memories,
traditional practices, knowledge, and education,
forward to future generations:
our children and our children's children.

*pray, sing, dance
in ceremony, in celebration
resurgence is our right.
resurgence is our destiny.*

Overview

This research considers the question of whether there are ethical and creative ways of doing Indigenous storywork that resist colonialism and advocate cultural resurgence. I look at the functions of traditional and contemporary Indigenous storytelling practices as part of a scholarly search for ethical and creative ways to draw on Indigenous storytelling traditions. Cultural identity and cultural location are vital to this present-day storywork and story-development project. This research focuses on the work of present-day Indigenous storytellers and particularly those with roots here in British Columbia. Indigenous narrative traditions and orality studied will include produced, performed and text-based works of storytelling within Indigenous knowledge systems that resist colonialism while furthering the projects of resurgence, resistance, healing and transformation.

The research outcomes for this project include methodology and framework concepts that facilitate the development of Indigenous stories. The intention of this doctoral thesis is to find ways to creatively acknowledge and nourish Indigenous narrative teachings that root us to our lands, waterways, to all living things and to our natural environment and resources. Stories that illustrate the significance of Indigenous cultural location. Cultural location is the appearance of characters and settings that are rooted within nation-based Indigenous voice, identity, landscapes and knowledges which are infused by ancestral narrative memory, languages, cultural epistemologies and Indigenous ways of being. This form of Indigenous narrative storytelling practice, used by Indigenous writers, is often referred to as Indigenous Literary Nationalism. The purpose of this project is to initiate a conversation about present-day storytelling practices, with a focus on the function and creation of Indigenous narratives in the context of community healing and resurgence while also studying contemporary and traditional storytelling ethics, protocols and responsibilities.

Chapter 1 opens this doctoral research as part one of a story, beginning with establishing a cultural foundation set within cultural identity, linguistic and ancestral relationships to landscape through Indigenous narrative practices. Through this chapter, the reader learns of my cultural location and how this is embodied and why cultural location is important for this creative and critical process, specifically. Establishing that landscape and ancestral connectedness to my homelands and the Indigenous community where I am culturally located creates a foundation for every element of who I am as an Indigenous person. The chapter illustrates the landscape of my childhood, my ancestry, and my geographic and linguistic identity within the homelands of the Scwéxmx Nléʔkepmxcín and Nsyílxcn speaking peoples. It also acknowledges my long-term residence as an Interior Salish woman, adopted daughter, sister and auntie living within Stó:lō and Coast Salish territory. In closing, it shares the creative works that I have published to date, and reflects on the ways cultural identity, ancestral teachings and cultural location are important to my body of creative work.

The Landscape of My Childhood

Everything in the world is suddenly awake and growing and the fields are peppered with green. The brilliant green shoots remain discreet at first, until silent and tiny they emerge, bursting through the grey, black and brown shades of soil, sand and clay. White and fragrant purple Saskatoon berry bushes and lilac blossoms awaken the land with their beauty. If we listen carefully, we can hear the land singing: wind songs that never end, roots emerging from mother earth songs, new buds bursting from the tree songs. They sing their blessings of beauty and strength throughout our entire valley. This is our sacred Nléʔkepmxuymx, Scwexmxuymxw. Every morning, through my bedroom walls I hear her musical voice speaking Nléʔkepmxcín on the telephone. If I listen closely, I can catch words that I understand. My Sk'wóz has been teaching me Nléʔkepmxcín every day. Through her kind, gentle love, the great lonely fissures in my heart are healing.

The horses raise clouds of dust as they run circles around Grandpa's corrals. On tip-toes I cross the rotting, wooden cattle guard. Among many dreams of travelling trails through the mountains, there is one I remember of a wagon and horses travelling along a gravel road. Mountains on either side, it rolled past where my grand-uncle's farm now sits, clouds of dust left a long trail behind. (Campbell, *Spíłəxm* 80)

My cultural identity is the centre from where I radiate. I would not be who I am without my Elders, ancestral intellectual traditions and practices. My ancestral lineage as a Nl̓éʔkepmx, Syíl̓x and Métis woman not only secures my identity and that of my children, it roots me to the land of my ancestors. I am an Indigenous author and mother of Nl̓éʔkepmx, Syíl̓x and Métis ancestry who lives within Stó:lō Coast Salish téméxw. My cultural location is inherently rooted within the land, language, intellectual knowledge of the Nl̓éʔkepmx, Syíl̓x and Salish peoples of British Columbia. My cultural location remains vital to the source and strength of my intellectual, creative and cultural work. This connectedness to the landscape of Nl̓éʔkepmx, Syíl̓x and Salish peoples has set the framework for the fundamental principles that are the foundation for my entire being and, therefore, shape this scholarly research and dissertation.

In my journey of untangling the elements and long-term impacts of colonization, continuing and returning to our traditional practices such as ceremony and food harvest has provided healing, courage, endurance, interconnectedness, ancestral knowledge, understanding, accountability and guidance. Cultural ancestral knowledge provides a methodology for living as an Indigenous person. I am rooted to my ancestors and to the traditional territories that has nourished and provided for my grandmothers and grandfathers for uncounted generations, and to the responsibilities that I have inherited. Cultural location intertwines the cultural teachings, ethics, protocols and intellectual knowledges of our ancestors. While I feel this deeply, I also struggle daily, with a deep sense of disconnectedness from family and day-to-day cultural lifestyle including traditional food harvest. As a result, and with my doctor's encouragement, I have a daily practice of land and water training which includes paddling, running and hiking. This is where I cleanse and regenerate mind, heart and spirit as well as monitor lifelong struggles with depression.

Cultural identity indicates established roots within the traditional territory where our ancestors lived for generations. As an Indigenous woman, my cultural location changes to reflect the nation in whose territory I am physically situated, whether visiting or living. When I

visit another traditional territory, in particular, when I introduce myself to Elders, I do so by explaining the territory and nation where my blood lineage originates, and who my family is: parents and grandparents.

Maternal Blood Ancestry

My mother's father was Nlé?kepmx and my mother's mother was Syíl. My birth mother and her eight siblings were born in the Nicola Valley, British Columbia (BC). She and her two older siblings attended St. George's Indian Residential School in Lytton, BC while their younger six siblings were all apprehended and placed in the foster care system.

My maternal grandmother was Syíl from what is referred to as Fish Lake. Fish Lake is located in the Syíl backcountry between Spaxomin (Douglas Lake) and Armstrong/Vernon BC. Both my maternal grandmother and my godmother, who was also Syíl and helped raise me, spent their childhood attending the Kamloops Indian Residential School. My maternal grandmother died in the early 1970s. As a youth, I met one grand-uncle and one grand-aunt. These two siblings were loved and respected by all who knew them. They lived in the area of Head of the Lake, near Vernon, BC.

My birth mother's father was Nlé?kepmx. The women in my mother's family spent many years tracing and updating our family tree. My grandpa and ten of his twelve siblings attended St. George's Indian Residential School. He understood Nlé?kepmxcín but he would not speak it. As a youth, he joined the Canadian Army and in 1942 went to World War II. Grandpa was a rancher/farmer and a bootlegger in our community for many years.

My favourite memories growing up particularly as a young woman when I struggled the hardest to find a peaceful place within myself, were spent on the land harvesting traditional foods and plants with family and Elders, listening to my Elders speak our languages and participating in ceremonial practices. It was tremendously comforting to hear my Elders talking either Nlé?kepmxcín or Nsyílxcn because it meant they were content and happy, telling stories. As a result of the consistent and unconditional love I experienced from my Elders, I became

more knowledgeable and passionate about my language and culture and I became kinder to myself.

Paternal Blood Ancestry

My late father was Métis and from what I have been told, he was known as a young activist and spokesperson in support of Indigenous and Métis rights. During a time when so many Indigenous people across the country were standing up and rising to the fight for Indigenous rights in Canada, so was he, for Métis rights. He lost his life at a young age in the Saskatchewan River in 1973 during the Batoche Days celebrations, after having saved two children from drowning. I weave together what I've learned about his childhood and what I imagine of his life through what I've read in the book, *Halfbreed*, written by my aunt, Maria Campbell, as well as the stories my aunts and uncles have each shared about their family life and my dad as a child and young man. This memory that my aunt shares in her book is one of my favorite stories from their childhood.

I remember another elk we raised practically from birth. He would come into the house until his horns grew so big that Mom refused to let him inside anymore. We called him Bannock because he loved Bannock so much. Poor Bannock would go mad when he knew we were eating and he couldn't come in and join us anymore, so Daddy made the window bigger and he would hang his head inside and be with us. Then one day he left and we didn't see him for over two years.

Daddy was out in the barn one afternoon when he heard Mom screaming, so he raced to the house. A huge elk was trying to get inside. We were all crying from fright as there were two more directly behind it. Daddy saw us all and started to laugh. When he finally recovered himself, he opened the window and the elk put his head through. Sure enough it was Bannock. (57)

Although it is an obvious ending with so many adult male elks hanging around a community, the three did not last long and ended up on someone's dinner table. I love this memory for the joy and laughter it brings. I knew that as I grew older, I would begin to forget the childhood memories and stories my uncles had shared about my dad. One way that I chose to work through my lack of knowledge about my family history and the stories my Métis family

shared was through journaling and poetry. I began writing things down as I could piece them together, moments, colours, sounds in order to maintain a long-term retention of these stories, and in order to be able to share these with my children. I wrote word for word stories that family members had shared, for example the poem in the collection titled, “Beginnings” is word for word, verbatim what my aunt had shared with me about who I descend from as a young Métis woman. During my graduate studies, my aunt had given me a stack of letters written by my mother. The letters were date between January and July 1973 when I was still an infant and prior to my dad’s drowning at Batoche. They helped facilitate my continued work on my memoir.

On the following pages, I share two examples from the opening section of my multidisciplinary memoir, *Spiləxm*, published in September 2021 by Portage and Main’s Highwater Press. The first is one of several letters my mom had handwritten to my aunt (5-6). The second piece immediately follows the letter. It is a poem about the day my dad passed away at the 1973 Batoche Days Celebration and takes place twenty-five days after the letter was written (7-8).

July 1, 1973
Box 818
Querel Gravel & Lumber
Hudson Bay, Sask

Dear Sis,

Thanks for the dress for Nikki. The little brat is sure getting around. She can crawl from one end of the trailer to the other and stand up by grabbing on and walk holding onto the couch. Little fart isn't even 8 mo yet.

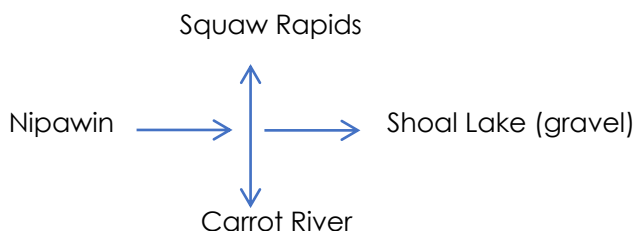
John shot his first moose about a week and a half ago. He sure was surprised. When he first seen it he thought it was a horse. We were on our last package of meat and if we wanted any we had 60 miles to the store. He shot it with a single shot 22. Must of shot it about 17 times after the first hit before it died. He got it right on the spine.

Our trailer has 2 bedrooms, a bathroom, kitchen and a living room. Right now we have no running water or sewer. We have to get a pressure pump and John has to dig a sewer.

For the first time John brought me some flowers yesterday. Some wild tiger lilies. Real pretty. Do you suppose its love?

I'm putting money away for a sewing machine. So far I've got \$25. Last weekend we went to P.A. and looked at sewing machines. Whew! I was hoping for one like Moms but they are about \$250 - \$500. So I have to settle for one that just does straight and zigzag. Which is about \$100.

When you come out if you go to P.A. first, from there you go east towards Nipawin. On the same road you go towards Carrot River, 18 miles until you get to a junction. Keep going on the Shoal Lake road.



It's gravel. You go 68 miles up the road. You see a sign about 50(?) miles up the road Shoal Lake 2. We are 15 miles past. There's a sign outside camp, Querel Gravel & Lumber. From the road you can't see the camp. But we're only a 100yds or so in. We're the green and white trailer, beside a small silver one. If my flowers grow we've got flowers on the outside. After all these instructions you better come.

All my love, your sis,

Hi to Don and Suzie. Give little Suzie a kiss for me.

July 26, 1973

They are on a hillside.
baby on a blanket,
nine months old.

A thousand people,
Saskatchewan River.
This is Batoche,
July 26, 1973.

She calls when she sees two children
bobbing like buoys,
swift currents unyielding.

“John, those children are drowning!”

Daddy brought the children to shore
but he did not bring himself.
The river would not set him free.

Activist
Revolutionary
Woodland Cree
Scottish
French
Michif
Fiddles
Red River Jig

The Saskatchewan River
flowed through his veins.

Johnny Campbell was my daddy.
he was Métis.

I note that I very minimally write about my Cree-Métis heritage or languages. Aside from my lived experiences and memories shared with my dad's family, I did not grow up as a Métis person, and for this reason, I will not claim space as a Métis person or author. This is for many reasons, including the fact that I carry distinctly Indigenous features. In a sense, I face an odd conundrum of feeling somewhat like I was raised with the “privilege” of having a visually Indigenous identity. My mom lost her status when she married my dad, as a result through my entire childhood, we were non-status, however, we also regained Indian status through Bill C-31. As a young, single, Indigenous mother, a widow, and as a survivor of Indian residential school she faced a lot of hardship. As a child, I witnessed and experienced significant violence against women, including my mother, that went uncharged. We also experienced some mixed animosity for not having Indian status and being off-reserve Indians, and me as a “half breed” child. While I definitely did experience racism from the white community, it was not entirely combined with the heartbreaking experience of also being completely rejected by the Indigenous community. At one point, I was asked to speak at a public event as a woman of Métis ancestry and I declined. I was raised by Nléʔkepmxcín and Nsyílxcn speaking Elders in the Nicola Valley. While my ancestral lineage descends from what I feel is deep Métis ancestral lineage, I will not claim a cultural location within any elements requiring sharing of cultural knowledges and languages signifying an inherently Cree-Métis cultural childhood and way of life. I was not raised by my Métis family, nor did I grow up with the Cree or Michif languages, therefore I cannot comfortably speak from or reference a lived body of memory situated within the language, culture or ceremonial practice.

Geographic and Linguistic Cultural Location: Scwéxmxuymx—Homelands of the Scwéxmx Nléʔkepmxcín Speaking Peoples

The Nléʔkepmx of the Nicola Valley are also known as Scwéxmx: People of the Creeks. Geographically, they were referred to as Nlakaʔpamux or Thompson River Salish. The Nléʔkepmx speak Nléʔkepmxcín and are part of what is often referred to as the Interior

Salishan language group. Nl̓éʔkepmxcín is one of five Interior Salish linguistic groups in the southern interior.

In British Columbia, there are 34 Indigenous languages with over 90 dialects spoken. As a result of colonization and Indian residential school policies, many of our Indigenous languages in British Columbia and Canada are now considered critically endangered, and such is the case with Nl̓éʔkepmxcín.

Nl̓éʔkepmxuymx—the traditional territory of the Nl̓éʔkepmx—encompasses the southern interior of BC (including the Fraser Canyon, Lytton, Spences Bridge and the Nicola Valley) and branches down to include parts of the North Cascades region of Washington. Spuzzum, located in the narrowest part of the Fraser Canyon ”is the lower Nl̓éʔkepmx “southernmost village” (Laforet 3). The upper Nl̓éʔkepmx includes four subgroups. It starts between Lytton and Lillooet, includes the Thompson River drainage system at Lytton upriver to Ashcroft and the Nicola Valley (Thompson et al. 2).

My Elders have jokingly stated that we are referred to as “People of the Creeks” because our Nicola and Coldwater Rivers are so much smaller than the Thompson and Fraser Rivers that join in Lytton, BC. There are stories of an Athapaskan people who came to the Nicola Valley and resided among the Nl̓éʔkepmx and Syíl̓x people of this valley, but not much is known about them and why they came or how long they stayed. As a writer, there is a part of me who truly wants to follow the path of this creative journey as a people who travelled the land, visit and follow the harvest. I imagine this travel to be a natural process. Reflecting on the history and impact of European contact and colonial dis-ease, it would be understandable if the people travelled while trying to escape the disease that may have impacted their villages. It is understood within my nation in the Nicola Valley that the Athapaskan loved ones whom survived the epidemics were absorbed into the community. The introductory notes to *Mourning Dove: A Salishan Autobiography*, edited by Jay Miller, explains that, Christine Quintasket who

used the pen name of Mourning Dove was the daughter of Joseph who “was an orphan whose mother was a Nicola, an Athapaskan-speaking tribe living among the Okanagans” (xvi).

The Nicola Valley Indigenous community is inhabited primarily by speakers of Nl̓éʔkepmxcín and then Nsyílxcn. The following is quoted from my memoir. While much of the original creative writing poetry and prose was written for my Master’s thesis, much of this was researched and written simultaneous to the writing of this doctoral dissertation.

According to the Indian Act, there are five “Indian Bands” in the Nicola Valley, and each of these “Indian Bands” is made up of many Indian Reserves, which are numbered (e.g., “I.R #”). Four of the Indian Bands are Nl̓éʔkepmx. The Coldwater Indian Band has their main reserve below the Coquihalla Highway. The Coldwater River, č̓əletkʷu, flows through the Coquihalla Mountains from the west into the town of Merritt and joins the Nicola River; together they travel through the length of the valley to the Fraser River. Joeyaska, Springs or Sptétkʷ, and Shulus Sw̓elus, are part of the Lower Nicola Indian Band. “Further downriver is Nwéyc, which is the Nooaitch Indian Band. Sxéxeíx, a place name meaning “little rocks falling,” is the traditional name of the Shackan Indian Band. The place where the Nicola River joins the much larger Thompson River is Cook’s Ferry Indian Band, which is no longer part of the Nicola Tribal Association.

Quilchena and Spaxomin, or also known as the Upper Nicola Indian Band, is made of Syílxcn people. It starts along the eastern shores of the Nicola Lake and goes up to Douglas Lake, through what is referred to as Fish Lake or Salmon Lake. (138)

Syilxcn nation maps include the Nicola Valley as Syilxcn territory. This is much like the Similkameen Valley which is included in all maps of Nl̓éʔkepmx territory; however within the limitations of my childhood memories the Similkameen Valley has always been actively inhabited by Nsyílxcn speaking people. In my earliest childhood memories, many Elders spoke multiple Salish languages. Salish people continue to travel great distances across Salish tmíxw, téméxw, temxulaxw for many reasons, especially following the seasons of harvest and ceremonial gatherings. Reading the work of Mourning Dove was incredibly reaffirming, as she listed families and ancestral lineages including that of Chief Nk’wala, and stories of the distance travelled on foot by the original people, our Salish ancestors from far down in what is known as the United States into the Nicola Valley.

Mourning Dove shares many stories of travels on foot back and forth from Colville, Kettle Falls, all through the Okanagan, the Kootenay region and the Nicola Valley, including travels on a trail she refers to as the “Nicola Trail.” “Father’s mother’s mother was Pah-tah-heet-sa, a famous Nicola medicine woman. Quite frequently this old woman would make up a pack of dried venison and salmon and go to visit her two daughters, both of whom married among the Okanagan. One day, the people at her village were getting ready to go over the Nicola Trail, which was infested with mean cougars and grizzly bears” (4-6). I find this interesting, as growing up many people have said there are no grizzly bears in our regions, including my uncle. However, in my earliest childhood memories of listening from under the kitchen table to my Elders, Syílxcn grandpas who were experienced, lifelong working cowboys, I remember hearing stories about grizzly bears. The end notes to the first chapter of Mourning Dove’s book includes a comment regarding the family and community connections between what Quintasket refers to as the “Nicola Tribe, the Athabaskan speakers who resided in the Nicola Valley with the Okanagan and Thompson people. Kelowna itself is farther north and derives its name from the Okanagan word for grizzly bear” (195).

Quilchena and Spaxomin, or the area also known as the Upper Nicola Indian Band, is primarily inhabited by Nsyílxcn speaking people. This includes the eastern shores of the Nicola Lake, Glimpse Lake into Douglas Lake, through to what is referred to as Fish Lake or Salmon Lake. The weather is usually colder up Spaxomin because it is at a higher elevation. My maternal grandmother and maternal great-grandparents are Syílxcn from up Spaxomin. Our Syílxcn family extends all the way through Armstrong, BC to the Syílxcn at the Head of the Lake and Vernon, BC.

At one time it was common to have orators throughout the Interior who spoke five or more languages: Nlákʷemxín, Nsyílxcn, Secwépemc, Stl’atl’imx, Lil’wat, and other Salish languages as well as english. As our Elders who are fluent speakers leave us, there are less and less people who speak even one language. Across these language groups, many families

are interconnected through marriage. For instance, within my family's ancestral lineage, one of our great-great-grandfathers was Chief Nk'wala. He had five wives. Each of those wives had many children and those families and descendants are to this day extensive.

Physical Cultural Location: Stó:lō and Coast Salish Territory

The purpose of this research project is to root the cultural location of my creative and critical work within the landscape, culture, language, intellectual property and territories of Nl̓éʔkepmxcín and Nsyílxcn and within Salishan cultural linguistic groups, including Coastal Salish Halq'eméylem. Rooting Indigenous creative work within a cultural and linguistic landscape is also referred to by many Indigenous scholars as Indigenous literary nationalism. Louise Erdrich asserts that, "when we read, we read from where we are and who we are. If we are from Anishinaabe people and places, we read from there" (Doerfler et al. 13). For the past twenty-five years, the majority of my personal healing and scholarly studies, I have resided in Stó:lō and Coast Salish territory. Traditional practices regarding training on cedar canoes and Stó:lō ceremonial and cultural practices have helped shape who I am today. My creative and critical scholarly work embraces cultural learnings that have taken place in Stó:lō Temexw as well as my home traditional territory. My affirmation to Erdrich's statement is that my entire interpretive matrix is like a spindle whorl, cyclically revolving, exploring other nations and cultures, then reflecting on what I have learned from other nations, and returning to my cultural axis as the centre of my being. Forever leaving and returning, resetting, realigning, reflecting, aging, growing, learning. Like a tide, moving inward and outward cyclically with the cycles of the moon, sun and seasons. I venture outward, reading, exploring and learning from the work of other nations, and then return to my interpretive centre and as a creative writer, the work I create emerges from my cultural location. Ethically, I am answerable to cultural protocols of each of these nations due to my cultural location and cultural and familial linkages.

At the centre of my being as a Salish woman of Nl̓éʔkepmx and Syílxcn ancestry, living within Stó:lō Téméxcw. Nl̓éʔkepmxuymx, Scwexmxuymx is my homelands, the places where I was raised. I feel the energy of my home anytime I travel through. I breathe deeper. My heart

feels a deep sense of comfort. I experience a deep, embodied state of peace when I gather plants and foods that have been harvested for thousands of years by family and by my ancestors. In the novel, *Tracks*, written by Louise Erdrich, Nanapush said, “The earth is limitless and so is luck and so were our people once” (1). The knowledge that my footsteps or the wake left by my canoe exists within places our ancestors may have travelled, as I breathe air our grandmothers and grandfathers may have exhaled, is deeply soothing. Our traditional homelands are unconditional, reciprocal and endless. The energy of the land and water is dynamic; I exist as part of and not separate. The birds and all living things moving around, whether it’s a beaver or a mother doe and her fawn on the side of the lake, or the water moving beneath me. With mountains covered in cedar and hemlock trees, lifting their branches up to the sky; in any season of the year, our world is profoundly beautiful and profoundly powerful. Our responsibility is to take care of it. I strive to translate this synergistic feeling of reverence, interrelatedness, true peace and healing through my written work.

In the introduction to this thesis, I wrote about a speaker at the Seattle Intergenerational Indigenous Languages Conference, which I attended with my great-aunt. He was fluidly speaking and navigating while in active translation. His voice interpreted from a place centred within his birth languages as well as english, and because of this, his forms of expression were deeply dynamic and powerful. He was an existing embodiment of his stories and his homelands in a way that is indescribable. He said, “The land is alive within us because we are not separate.” When we are walking, we exist amongst the shadows of our ancestors. When we breathe, we are breathing the breath of our ancestors. Their bones, their dust, their shadows exist all across our sacred tmíx^w and no matter where we go, we are told to always remember this.

I am far from being even a rudimentary speaker of either of my languages. I speak and understand only broken pieces and my interpretations remain less than a child’s speech. I grew up learning how to listen with not just my ears, but also to listen and observe nuances in

speech, hand gestures and facial expressions going back and forth between multiple speakers, in order to understand the gist of the conversation. I became familiar with the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) through my earlier studies as a youth at NVIT and employment as a youth culture and language assistant with Mandy Jimmie at the Nicola Tribal Council. Living with grandpa's sister, my late Sk'wóz, Delia Shuter, and quality time with our Elders and cultural employment with the elder's language group helped a lot. Through this stage, I was able to learn how to associate the letters to the specific pronunciations. With my Elders' detail-specific mentorship, I was able to establish an ability to enunciate complex sound combinations and sentences. This, to me, is an important ability as a lot of people cannot and do not properly enunciate our words and badly mispronounce words while simultaneously anglicizing our languages. My Elders did not allow me to mispronounce my enunciations of words, and also made me repeatedly rehearse multiple complex sound combinations. In my heart memories, my Elders and aunties remain alive and to this day, I can still hear them talking.

In the twenty-five years since moving away from home, I have taken courses in both Halq'eméylem through my work in Chilliwack and Hənq'əmiñəm at Musqueam through my undergraduate studies. Through that process, I have a small amount of experience with the many interconnecting grammatical structures and elements such as root words within our Salish language systems, both Interior and Coastal. This not only adds to the complexity of translation, these roots somehow also make the languages interconnect deep inside of me, in the place where languages live. Our words tell stories—stories that are deeply interconnected to our cultural knowledges and epistemologies. Because of my familiarity and time spent with my Elders, I found out that I was able to lightly grasp these root words while taking courses in other Salish languages. For this reason, through my work with the Stó:lō Nation Traditional Use Study and my move to Stó:lō téméxw, and due to the Stó:lō use of the IPA spelling system, I was easily able to grasp rhythms of pronunciation and basic rudimentary elements of words in the Halq'eméylem language.

Creative Contributions as an Indigenous Author

I am the author of five illustrated children's books and one multi-disciplinary adult memoir. The use of my Indigenous languages, Nl̓éʔkepmxcín and Syíl̓x, within the text signifies the physical locality of each book's setting within Interior or Stó:lō Coastal Salish traditional territory. The first two, titled *Shi-shi-etko* (2006) and *Shin-chi's Canoe* (2009), have a premise that addresses Indian residential schools and they are used extensively across Canada as an entry-level curriculum resource for Indian residential school education and related educational programming for grades one to twelve. These books are also used as a post-secondary curriculum resource for many teacher education programs. The reason I refer to it as entry-level is because I have been informed many times by many teachers of their appreciation for the ability the book offers to learn, introduce and teach about the policy, impact and the role of Indian residential schools and genocide in Canada. They speak about how the books work for their stage of understanding and comfort for speaking about what has occurred. There is a genuine emotional struggle and effort to relay information, with respect and reverence, about the genocidal-level trauma and violence that Indian residential schools encompassed. While my first two kids' books are focused on the impact of Indian residential schools, the remaining three children's books explore family, culture, harvest and relationships with the land. *Grandpa's Girls* (2012) and *A Day with Yayah* (2017) are inspired by my childhood memories. *A Day with Yayah* is a teaching story that is inspired by my childhood experiences. My aunt and family used to bring all of us children out on the land to teach us how to properly identify, harvest, preserve and prepare our traditional foods and medicines. I consider my children's books as examples of nation-based stories, set within the landscape of my traditional homelands. *Stand Like a Cedar*, is a weaving of land and waterscape conveying the importance reverence, respect and reciprocity between humans and all living things.

Shi-shi-etko

Shi-shi-etko is my first children's picture book. *Shi-shi-etko* tells the story of a six-year-old Nlɛʔkepmx girl as her family prepares for her departure to Indian residential school. When the name, Shi-shi-etko, came to me, it was in the middle of the night in a dream. I had already presented the first draft of the story to my classmates in my Creative Writing for Children 200-level elective course at UBC. The earlier UBC Creative Writing Program was geared towards a smaller group in a workshop situation with twelve students. In this classroom, I was one of, I believe, two Indigenous students. To my non-native classmates' utter perplexity, I awkwardly left my main character unnamed in my very first rough draft. I clearly remember explaining to my classmates that while my character's English name was 'Mary,' however, Mary was not my main character's real name, and this was due to her experience on her first day at Indian residential school. Assignment submission requirements stated that the main character of the story had to have a name as well as a working title. For this reason the very first working title was, Mary Goes to School. This information was followed by an awkward silence. I then explained that my main character would be forced to take an English name on her first day at Indian residential school, even though the story did not show that part of the character's experience. I suppose it must have seemed strange to already know my character's back story. There were numerous suggestions around the table including to "just make up an Indigenous name." At the time, I explained that it simply was not possible to make up a name in my language.

I am not certain how much time passed when I had the dream. I had pondered many times what the name of my main character would be and had even prayed about finding a name. I decided that I would find a name "if it was meant to be." In my dream, I distinctly remember vividly hearing the name spoken out loud and then waking up in the middle of the night, completely dumbfounded by the experience. I immediately found a piece of paper and wrote it down as I heard it. In the morning, I called my Sk'wóz, my grandpa's sister. I first asked her if she recognized it as a name, and if she had ever heard of someone who carried that specific name, and then I asked her what it meant. She repeated my awkward anglicized

pronunciation several times responding with, “Hmmm. I need to think.” Then, after a few moments of silence as she processed, she carefully explained that the literal translation for, “séy’si?” is “to play” and reminded me that “q^wu?” translates as water. Then she reiterated conversations shared in the language classes on previous occasions, speaking about a common element found within Nl̓éʔkepmx female names. In the past it was stated that it is common for female Nl̓éʔkepmx names to end with the root, “q^wu?” anglicized as “ko.” This signifies the sacred feminine relationship with water, as life-givers. So, in her explanation she said the name would mean, “She loves to play” or “she plays” in the water. Interpreting Nl̓éʔkepmxcín or Nsyílxcn or any Salish language is not a simple task as the words are very dynamic and multi-faceted. One example is the words Nl̓éʔkepmx and Nl̓éʔkepmxcín: *mx* meaning “the people,” *cín* meaning “the language.” The name, Shi-shi-etko, or, “séy’si? et q^wu?” therefore roots the main character to the love and joy she feels within her sacred homelands, the water and to the teachings of her Elders.

Shi-shi-etko, the story as published, is about cultural location and why cultural location is so important for Indigenous people. It exhibits the values of respect, reverence, reciprocity and interconnectedness as shared between the land and Nl̓éʔkepmx multigenerational families. Beginning with Shi-shi-etko as she wakes in the morning with her mother, the two spend their first moments of the day praying and greeting the sunrise by a creek as a way of expressing reverence and respect for their hearts, mind, body and spirit and for tmíxw. As the story progresses, Shi-shi-etko spends time visiting sacred and special places in her family’s traditional territory, with Loved Ones including her dad and Yayah, grandmother. They each take time to explain to Shi-shi-etko sacred teachings about who she is, and how deeply connected she is to the territory of her ancestors. The time each of the characters takes to teach the main character about her identity, is an act of true love. It is an act of reminding and remembrance. The land takes care of us, so we take care of the land. We’re not separate, we’re the same. This is how my Elders taught me as a child growing up. *Shi-shi-etko* shows

Indigenous children the ways in which we are interconnected with our traditional territory's, cultural practices and Indigenous ancestors.

Although the children's story is fiction, through my research and communications with my Elders, particularly in the second book, *Shin-chi's Canoe*, I tried to ensure that the story would remain relevant to all Indigenous peoples who have experienced Indian residential school. The story of *Shi-shi-etko* came after my first years of post-secondary when I finally arrived at a deeper understanding about how Canadian government policy—and the awareness that Indian residential schools were created with the purpose of separating Indigenous children from their families, cultures, “to kill the Indian in the child”—had impacted my family, Indigenous people within my home community the Nicola Valley as well as across the province of British Columbia and Canada. Hence, the introduction, where I state, “Imagine a community without children.” I grew up with stories of Indian residential schools from my mother, her siblings, my maternal grandfather, and the Elders who raised me. Everyone who had a deep impact on my life spent their childhood in Indian residential school, yet it wasn't until adulthood that I learned the truth about the colonial and racist history of why Indian residential schools existed. This awareness helped me to identify and understand the issues, lifelong trauma and behaviors of my immediate family, community and myself. *Shi-shi-etko* rose out of deep reflection and the question, “Who were we, before Indian residential school?”

I've struggled to imagine ways in which to write about our landscape, prior to and at contact. Not because I can't imagine it, because I often dream of such stories. Reflecting on stories at the time of first contact triggers a deep grief for all that was lost. Loss of language, culture, all the generations of family, grandmothers, grandfathers, infants and children that did not survive due to the highly infectious disease and the epidemics brought by early European explorers. Centuries of stolen children taken to Indian residential schools. I experienced this process of grieving and writing when I was working on my second children's picture book, *Shin-chi's Canoe*. At the time I decided to write a sequel, I had received a negative review from an

online Indigenous book review, Goodminds. The original review stated that the story should not be categorized as a story about Indian residential school because you do not see a residential school in the context of the story. The review included other criticisms that at the time upset me enough to contact them via email. I informed them that the story is not about residential school, it is a story about who our loved ones, our parents and grandparents were, prior to Indian residential schools. They edited the review following my personal email, however the experience upset me enough to question the story, and whether that particular story was finished. I came to realize that the story as it was, was not complete. As a result, I decided to write the sequel which became *Shin-chi's Canoe*.

Shin-chi's Canoe

Shin-chi's Canoe is my second free-verse children's picture book. This book received the 2009 TD Canadian Children's literature award. The story starts at the family home of Shi-shi-etko and Shin-chi, with their parents, grandmother and baby sister, Shultetko. Like the story, *Shi-shi-etko*, while the text of the story *Shin-chi's Canoe*, itself does not specifically indicate a Nl̓éʔkepmx or Salish cultural location, the language and character names roots the main characters to their nation of origin. The story illustrates Shi-shi-etko and her Shin-chi, her younger brother, as they prepare to leave home to go to Indian residential school. In this story, Shi-shi-etko is the child embodiment of the voice of her Loved Ones, repeating to her brother things that their family have also said to her.

"My Shin-chi, we will not see our family until the sockeye salmon return. These are the things you must always remember," Shi-shi-etko said, gesturing to the trees, mountains and river below. "At night, when you go to sleep, remember the tug of the fish when you and Dad pulled the nets in and we made smoked and wind-dried salmon."

As the story continues, we witness the children leaving their Loved Ones and travelling to the Indian residential school in the back of a cattle truck, "with all the children from their Indian Reservation." Their homeland, family and baby sister are replaced with the unfamiliar cold, harsh environment of the Indian residential school, which provides the children with insufficient

food, tremendous loneliness and non-existent love and comfort. Shin-chi has been given a small piece of cedar carved to replicate a miniature cedar canoe. This miniature canoe symbolizes everything he holds dear and is trying to remember—his homeland, his family, the promises of his dad, his culture and language. Two times during the story, we see Shin-chi sneak away from the school and go to a nearby river. He sings his grandfather's prayer song and prays the way his grandfather taught him. When his sister finds him, they have a couple moments together by the water. Within these moments, the children are able to find the strength and resilience to carry on until they return home at the end of the story.

What is not immediately clear, without an author's explanation, is that the names used within the story represent names from my family: my grandpa and several of his siblings. Shin-chi, or sínci?, represents a tribute to my late younger brother. Shultetkwo, or Súltetk^wo is in honour of my grand-auntie, whom I often refer to as my Sk'wóz. She recently passed in February 2022 at the age of ninety-six. She is my maternal grandfather's last living sibling. Mary recognizes my grandpa's older sister, my grand aunt. David and John are in recognition of my grandfather and his younger brother, my grand-uncle. Each of these english names are also found in the Bible.

Grandpa's Girls

Grandpa's Girls emerges from a poem I wrote for my grandfather. I happened to send it as a free-verse prosaic poem to my editor at Groundwood Books and they asked if I would rework it and resubmit it as a full story for a third children's picture book. Grandfather's house still stands on the spétitkw reserve. Spétitkw the place name recognizes a freshwater spring that rises up from underground near my grandpa's house. It was one of many places where we played, among the frogs and tadpoles, waterlilies and watercress, toes squishing within the muck of our shoes. My grandfather was always working in his garden, hay fields, on his tractor or taking care of his animals. My grand-auntie lived across the highway, next door to our great-grandparents house. Two others, a grand-uncle and grand-aunt had large farms about two

kilometres down the road. Most of Grandpa's twelve siblings also had large families, which made for a tremendous amount of grandchildren. *Grandpa's Girls* depicts a time when our generation of grandchildren and cousins were children. Our grandparents and great-grandparents were all hardworking people, who spent their lives working on the land. We are all parents now; many of my cousins are now grandparents. Visiting and having playtime at Grandpa's house was the best playground because of all our cousins. We would run wild all over the place terrorizing the pigs, picking crab apples and of course eating grandpa's strawberries, raspberries, snap peas and carrots. When I read this story with my children I often feel a sad, as they do not have this connection to our family, community and especially my Grandpa's ranch. Through the years our families drifted apart and went their separate ways. This story has helped to root me within those beautiful childhood memories.

A Day with Yayah

A Day with Yayah, my fourth children's book, was published in 2017 in the third year of my doctoral studies. I hadn't published for a few years and so when the opportunity came up with Tradewind Books, I was quite excited. This story was inspired by a specific trip in my childhood, harvesting mushrooms at one of my aunt's favorite destinations along Highway 8, between Spences Bridge and Merritt, British Columbia. The original story documented the experience of harvesting with my aunt who I had spent a great deal of time with, growing up. What stood out, initially about this story is my mom's ex came mushroom picking with us and he was often violent towards my mom. As a result, this man brought a lot of fear into our home and our life. My aunt had specifically told him to stay away from a specific area, due to yellow jacket wasp nests. Of course, he did not listen to her guidance and he stepped on a yellow jacket nest and he was stung numerous times. Several adults, myself and my cousin were all travelling in my mom's silver rabbit. Several people got stung by the yellow jackets, some had multiple welts. I recall a single wasp desperately clinging to the rubber on the window along the exterior of the car window, alongside where I was sitting—as we drove home which was quite a distance. I recall staring at the wasp, trying to understand what had happened and why. Within

my mind, I acknowledged how much I hated that man for all the hardship and tears he caused my mom and how I was glad he got the most stings.

Writing about this experience was initially very healing for me. I felt as though the wasps were protecting us, and showing him that he needs to listen and be respectful of women. Like loved one's swarming to protect an injured loved one, in my child's mind, I understood that the wasps were protecting their matriarch, their food source and their home which he had disrespected. He had also disregarded my aunt's guidance. Through my editorial process, when I returned to this story with the concept of it being a picture book, the backstory with this person did not fit. He did not fit our lives. He brought no joy to our lives so I cut his entire presence from the story. As a result, what the reader experiences is an intact, safe, happy Indigenous family respecting the landscape while gathering to harvest traditional foods. I reflected on all my favourite memories of harvesting foods and brought together some of the happiest moments of seasonal harvest, time on the land and the traditional practice of Elders teaching the children.

Every moment is a teachable moment when with our Elders, as a result. *A Day with Yayah* shares elements of medicinal plant and toxic plant knowledge as well as elements of Nl̓éʔkepmxcín. I felt strongly that I could have included more of both. As a non-speaker, working within the balance of English language publishing, and being new to the concept of publishing in our traditional languages, I was uncertain how much Nl̓éʔkepmxcín I should use.

Stand Like a Cedar

Stand Like a Cedar, released in February 2021, is my most recent children's book. The intention with this story was to write a children's story purely focused on the uplifting and beautifully interconnected relationship that we, as the original people of British Columbia, have with our ancestors and with our tmíxw, our sacred landscape and waterscape. *Stand Like a Cedar* follows the seasonal travels for traditional harvest and how we live, not by the monthly calendar, but according to tmíxw and the seasons of harvest for all living things. The story incorporates a third person concept of Elders asking the children: Swet he qeʔnímnxw (Who did

you hear?), Swet he wíktxw (Who did you see?) and Ste? k ʔupinxw (What did you eat?). In my imagination, the Elders voices are the children to reflect on their learnings and activities for the day and why they are significant.

This children's book is illustrated by my friend and exceptionally gifted Coast Salish artist, Carrielynn Victor of Xwchíyò:m, Cheam First Nation. Her work connects us to the multidimensional elements of téméxw/tmíxw, in a beautifully intrinsic way. The image of the grandmother and granddaughter harvesting bitterroot shows the grandmother singing or praying to the plants. The geometric lines throughout this image, illustrate concepts that I experience as lines of dynamic energy, life forces woven into everything surrounding them, as described by Dr. Jeannette Armstrong in her doctoral dissertation. The energy of the land, the inter-relational and reciprocal relationship between human, plant and all living things. Another section that is meaningful for me is the section speaking about salmon. As the swimmers, wild pacific salmon have sustained Salish people, living up and down the Fraser River and all salmon bearing waterways, since time immemorial. Our ancestors always accepted the stewardship role of all living things, as integral to our continued existence as the original people. The prolific survival of the salmon has always been integral to the health and well-being of all generations of the original people in British Columbia. We took care of the salmon and in return, the salmon takes care of us. However, since that responsibility was taken away by colonial governments, the salmon stocks have been destroyed, leaving Indigenous people all along the Fraser River without sockeye for traditional food harvest. We are now entering our third year with zero harvest of wild pacific sockeye salmon as a traditional food source. Each of the five main species of Fraser River salmon are now significantly depleted. While the pacific chinook salmon is also considered an endangered species, it is now the main food fish used for canning and for some, wind drying. Spring or chinook salmon have always been considered too oily for wind dry.

In a children's book, it is difficult to have these discussions because of the minimal word count requirement. I have observed, particularly through my first two books, that while adult readers will avoid these conversations with their children on their own, if it is tactfully introduced through Indigenous children's stories, they are more likely to have these difficult conversations. Introducing hard conversations about historic events through specific word choices has proven to be a beneficial way for me as an Indigenous author to encourage all audiences, particularly educators and adults reading to children, to have these very important conversations with children.

Stand Like a Cedar follows the seasons of harvest, reciprocal responsibilities situated in the original teachings of our ancestors, that of all living things to take care of one another, transition from puberty into adulthood and acknowledging death. In a more cyclical style, and as an illustrated picture book with a 32-illustrated-page format, the page numbers are not provided. First the salmon, then the illustrated pages, demonstrate a shift to early fall when the four-legged ones are considered ready for harvest. As a people, we traditionally harvested based on need, and not according to a colonial calendar. Fall is considered an ideal time for multiple reasons: in particular the deer are fat after a full spring summer season of eating nutritious plants, infant deer have generally grown, developed and are now agile enough to move around—although they are not hunted. Most importantly, male deer have established visible antlers and their meat now enriched with all the fresh plants of spring and summer. Spring meat, as I have been told, can be wormy and the taste changes when the new plants begin to grow. Later in the fall, winter, rutting season is also known to change the taste and male deer can become more gamey, depending on the age of the deer.

The image in the book shows a young boy entering puberty. When the father-figure awakens him, he says, "Wake up my children. It's time for us to greet the day." The next page brings to mind the generations of deer and concepts of them as familial creatures, and again, reminds us that our relationship is reciprocal. When the deer gives its life, it helps with the

continuance of our way of life. When my son went hunting with my partner, the same deer stood and waited, when shots were fired by my son, who missed, it walked away over the crest of the hill. Within moments, the same deer returned to the same spot and waited again, until the last shot took the deer down.

In this image, the deer “explains that death is part of our life cycle. He said to honour our tears as though they were stars in the sky.” I felt this was important in many ways, to show children the importance of tears, that they’re to be valued and held with reverence and not fear. This is the same with death, for all living things including humans. I am relieved to see, with this specific publisher, Highwater Press, there are several children’s publications addressing death. Although I haven’t read these, I intend to. I feel that cultural teachings and conversations surrounding death are particularly important conversation to have, in order for children to learn and begin to understand the importance of honouring death and dying as well as grief and loss. Having healthy conversations about death is crucial, so that, beginning in childhood, we can relearn and teach healthy grieving practices. In the fight and recovery from suicide and generational trauma, this practice is one step towards healing and learning a healed mindset. The final illustrations in this book bring us back to the land, for the seasons of fall and winter. They speak of changing seasons, including the season of winter when the səx^wsúx^w grizzly bears are sleeping peacefully inside their dens.

Spíləxm: A Weaving of Recovery, Resilience and Resurgence

This collection of creative work is often referred to as a “story-basket of memories.” *Spíləxm: A Weaving of Recovery, Resilience and Resurgence* reflects a collection of life experiences starting in childhood as witness to the positive change and healing occurring in the world around me. *Spíləxm* was originally my graduate thesis for the Master of Fine Arts in creative writing program at the University of British Columbia. The earliest pieces to this collection date back over twenty-five years. It started taking the form of a memoir when my aunt gave me a stack of letters written by my mom in the few months after I was born and prior to my

dad's sudden death by drowning when I was nine months old. "July 26, 1973" is the first poem I wrote in response to the letters and takes place during the Batoche Days celebrations at Batoche, Saskatchewan on the day my father passed. The other pieces to this collection quickly fell into place.

Five years into my doctoral studies and dissertation research, I was struggling as a mother without any emotional support. I was going back and forth between the two exceptionally large works, the memoir *Spiləxm* and my doctoral studies which resulted in this dissertation. Over and over again, I questioned: Why am I doing this? Why would I publish a memoir? I put it away numerous times for numerous reasons. "It's too personal. I'm too afraid." "This story is not important." I repeatedly questioned if it was valid contribution to the conversations about the collective healing and recovery of Indigenous peoples.

The manuscript was turned down many times by publishers because of the multidisciplinary nature of this work. Feedback often included: "Publishers in the english literary tradition, in Canada, do not publish multi-disciplinary works." Critiques said that Canadian publishers would not take this work seriously and that it should be split into two separate books: one with strictly poetry and the other prose stories, as it would not be accepted in its current format. Non-Indigenous readers, who pride themselves in understanding and sponsoring the publication of Indigenous work, repeatedly pushed conformity to this english literary format. At one stage, despite misgivings, I did split it into two separate books and signed publication contracts to publish as such. This went against my inner voice and vision of how the collection functioned, as a result I eventually cancelled that contract.

At that time, Garry Thomas Morse of Kwakwaka'wakw ancestry and author of several award-winning books of poetry, contacted me. Along with many other Indigenous writers and editors from across Canada, we had met at the Indigenous Editors Association Roundtable which took place at Humber College in Ontario. Garry explained that he was working with Portage and Main and asked if I had any manuscripts ready for submission and would I be

interested in submitting to the publisher. I told him I had multiple works in progress which included an unfinished children's manuscript and a second manuscript that was my multidisciplinary memoir, now titled *Spíləxm: A Weaving of Recovery, Resilience and Resurgence*.

While it is important to me that my voice representing my Indigenous cultural identity always remains intact, I also feel very strongly that the editorial relationship has a tremendous impact on the quality of the manuscript. He asked to see the manuscript in its original form. Several months later, he contacted me again and said that Portage and Main would like to publish it, as one book, a memoir which included the entire collection.

The chapters of *Spíləxm* fall under the following headings:

her blood is from spetetkw
Métis
nleʔépmxcín lullaby
land teachings
coming to my senses
sorrow
yemít and merímstn
this body is a mountain / this body is the land
resurgence

Each chapter represents a stage in my life's journey, from infancy and childhood into adulthood, with observations about things that are taking place in the world around me.

As part of my steps towards following ethics and protocols, I had contacted mentors and Elders, via online and text due to Covid protocols. They represented my own family in the Nicola Valley, a couple of Syíl̓x people and mentors from the Stó:lō community. My hopes were that they would read and provide their critique. In particular, with regard to the cultural elements. Many simply did not have the time and, I think would prefer to enjoy the audio book version instead. I had tried to be very meticulous about abiding by protocols, however hoped I could find a reader who would provide critique before going to print. Thankfully, Chief Mark Point did and

met with me multiple times to discuss his experience of the manuscript. He asked me the same questions numerous times, “Why did you write this? Why are you publishing this?”

After the publisher completed their review of the manuscript and the contract had been signed, the publisher began the editorial process. This included a thorough review of the manuscript with editorial suggestions and critique. My publisher moved the publication date forward from Fall 2022 to Fall 2021, adding more pressure. One of the requests that came was to write a final section, situated within the present-day context. The editor’s request was that, because all previous chapters were written in the past and about the past, in order to balance it out he suggested writing a final piece from the perspective of here and now, together with narrative voice and approach changes to include sections that are informed by scholarly reflection regarding concepts of resurgence and why it is important. The last section titled, “resurgence,” was written in January and February 2021 when I was recovering from Covid 19.

Each time I resumed writing and editorial revisions on the manuscript, it was always with the knowledge that, if this collection of poetry and stories helps even one person understand and have compassion for themselves through the complexities of their healing from intergenerational trauma, then the collection has served its purpose. What pushed me to have courage and follow through was the loss of loved ones due to suicide, as I had struggled for many years with suicidal ideation. The losses pushed me to ask myself the hard questions. Why was I suicidal for so many years as a young person? Why did I think suicide was an option? Where and when did I first experience and learn about suicide as an option? Healing from the impact of colonial history, genocide, inter-generational trauma has been a hard journey. How do we put ourselves back together again? Can I write something that shows one story of healing and truthful awareness, not as a self-help book, but written in the way our Elders teach by storytelling and demonstration? If so, what format would I follow? My decision remained: if this very personal collection of multidisciplinary works helped even one person overcome their struggle with suicidal ideation, grief and on their journey of healing, then it did its job.

Indigenous Wellness

It is important to acknowledge the definition of wellbeing for Indigenous people. An Indigenous concept of wellbeing is more in line with cultural well-being, having a happy home and family life. Importantly, it is one that engages full access and abundance to the harvest of all traditional foods, including salmon, deer, moose and wild berries. As a Salish person of Nl̓éʔkepmx, Syíl̓x ancestry, to be rich is to have sc'wen salmon, canned salmon, smoked salmon, a freezer full of wild game and fish, as well as an abundant harvest of c'élcele black huckleberries specifically and sxúsm, soap berries as these berries are more challenging to harvest. It is having multiple family members who carry cultural knowledge as well as access to an abundance of cultural knowledge, languages, cultural and spiritual ways of being, also healthy multigenerational families including Elders, children, extended family and community. It is having a traditional sport or cultural practice and way of living. It is having a safe addiction free home with access to fresh and drinkable water, and an abundance of groceries, laughter, safe love, employment opportunities, transportation and finally, education. These elements together are what makes Indigenous families and communities, this is a communal and familial concept and not one situated in solitary independence. Growing up Nl̓éʔkepmx, Syíl̓x and Métis, the narrative traditions of sharing Spíl̓xm, stories/memories practiced by my Elders, along with the lived experience of harvesting traditional foods and ceremonial practices on our sacred tmíxw, particularly in my late teens and early adult years, became an important element of my cultural identity, learning, healing and decolonization. Now as a published author, following the teachings that Elders have shared about ethics and core responsibilities as a contemporary Indigenous writer have become a driving force in my continued studies and future creative work.

When I contacted Dr. Allison Hargreaves and scheduled an appointment to inquire about the UBCO doctoral degree program, there were multiple reasons I chose UBC Okanagan. Firstly, it was significantly challenging to find employment as an Indigenous author with both a bachelor and master's degree in Fine Arts in creative writing. While I have many significantly

employable qualifications and experiences, every position I applied for was just a filler and irrelevant to my areas of inspiration and areas of study. What remained with me for many years was a love for Indigenous literature. Furthermore, through my research of the doctoral programs available in British Columbia, I realized that UBC Okanagan had 1) an Interdisciplinary Indigenous PhD program; 2) an established relationship with the Enow'kin Centre in Penticton, British Columbia; 3) Indigenous faculty whom I had a very high level of respect for as a Syilx and Nl̓éʔkepmx writer, and were part of the national and international Indigenous creative writers scholarly community. It was an opportunity to mentor under Indigenous matriarchs and scholars, while I engaged in a program focused on traditional and contemporary Indigenous storytelling practices as a creative and critical process and not under the umbrella of english literary studies.

This research project is for a Doctor of Philosophy in the department of Creative and Critical Studies at the University of British Columbia Okanagan campus. Each individual who has participated on my advisory committee has been incredibly inspiring along every stage of this educational journey: Syilx scholar and matriarch, Dr. Jeannette Armstrong, the late Cree scholar Dr. Gregory Younging, Syilx and Nl̓éʔkepmx scholar Dr. Bill Cohen, and Dene N'de writer and scholar Dr. Margo Tamez. Dr. Allison Hargreaves as doctoral supervisor, has been integral to the navigation between voices and weavings of interpretation rooted within non-Indigenous, Indigenous and the scholarly setting.

The Intersection of Two Powerful Worlds: Educational Trauma

Through the years, I have gradually veered away and repeatedly stalled my doctoral research for multiple reasons, including:

1. working single mother with a significant lack of support;
2. self-criticism, shame, trauma in educational settings, recovery from impacts of colonial oppression in educational settings;

3. imposter syndrome and fear of failure;
4. fear of overstepping cultural ethics and protocols, and fear of offending other contemporary Indigenous storytellers;
5. having several other book projects on the go—this primarily includes the recently published *Stand Like a Cedar* (2021), and a multidisciplinary, 320-page memoir, originally my MFA Thesis, titled *Spíłəxm: A Weaving of Recovery, Resilience, and Resurgence* which was released by Portage and Main/Highwater Press also in 2021;
6. Covid-19 pandemic.

As an Indigenous author and scholar, I realized that I need to come to terms with expressing my voice with confidence, particularly in a scholarly setting. Expressing my voice, as an Indigenous woman and writer, with confidence, learning to move beyond lifelong intergenerational residential school and educational trauma resulting from attending the Shulus Indian Day School and recovering from experiences with racism within almost every stage of public education, has been a lifelong recovery process. Writing longer, decolonial works as a contemporary Indigenous storyteller and now scholar has become part of my storytelling and healing journey as an Nléʔkepmx, Syílʔx and Métis woman. Tuhiwai-Smith, in her revised foreword of *Decolonizing Methodologies*, states, “This book explores the intersection of two powerful worlds, the world of indigenous peoples and the world of research. They are two important worlds for me: I move within them; in one sense I was born into one and educated into the other. I negotiate the intersection of these worlds every day” (ix). Prior to beginning the journey of doctoral studies, I spent quite a few years pondering my direction. As an author of children’s books, with a BFA and MFA in creative writing, I struggled to find relevant and long-term employment. Short-term contracts and author contracts were not enough to live on. I spoke with my Uncle Grand Chief Kat Pennier and told him I had considered a PhD program. I then asked him, “What should I do?” And his response was, “Why wouldn’t you?”

Shortly after that, I travelled to Saskatchewan for a keynote event for the University of Saskatchewan. On that occasion, I had visited my late biological dad's older brother, my uncle, however, I did not reach out to my Aunt Maria Campbell. On the morning of my return, I was at the airport by 5 a.m. for my return flight, and while standing in line, I turned around and happened to be standing face-to-face with my aunt. In our mutual surprise, she did not have a greeting for me. Her first words were, "Oh you! I was just thinking about you. I want you to do your Ph.D." At that moment, not only was I dumbfounded, but I also had my answer. Through this process, I acknowledge the promises I have made and follow my purpose: to always follow the spirit no matter how hard the journey is, to take care of our Loved Ones, and carry on the tasks of our Elders and ancestors as one more person working towards sharing stories of healing and transformation, for our future generations.

Summing Up: Narrative as Medicine

Once released to the world, Indigenous narratives take a life of their own and become medicine that touches the lives of everyone along its path. These words have been repeated in so many contexts, by so many Indigenous Elders. It is a statement that is impossible to provide a single oral footnote or citation. "Be mindful of the words you speak because they come alive. Once they are released, you can't call them back." I also witnessed this with the many creative works of other Indigenous creators, writers, musicians and artists. Their stories come alive inside the hearts and minds of every person who it touches: reminding, awakening, inspiring courage and resilience within its audiences.

With my first two books, I had no awareness of what would occur once they were published. In one experience, my late, beloved elder from Quilchena, BC, caught up to me at Tim Hortons and asked me to sit down and read *Shi-shi-etko* out loud to her. After I finished reading the story, she sat there and cried. Truly, causing pain and suffering to our dearest ones is not my intention. When she finished, she spoke openly of her memories, and of counting down those last days while still at home with her parents before she went to Kamloops Indian

Residential School. I felt so bad for triggering her tears, but then she thanked me and told me it was important to tell these stories in a good way and that I had done my job well. I still cry every time I reflect on those precious moments with her and her words.

Today, I truly feel each of these stories now they have a life of their own that I pay witness to. They travel and do the work of bringing awareness and healing to audiences everywhere they go. I am grateful as a writer to have been able to contribute to their work. I am also grateful for the experience and learning they have provided me thus far.

My PhD studies comprehensive readings focused on the creative work of over two hundred contemporary and traditional publications by Indigenous artists, scholars, and storytellers. This process inspired deep reflection of my work as an Indigenous woman representing primarily Syíl̓x, Nléʔkepmx and Scwexmx tmíxw while situated within Stó:lō téméxw. Was it possible to empower my voice by going deeper into my cultural Indigeneity through the use of descriptions regarding my mental, emotional, spiritual and physical observations and experiences? This is part of the thought process that inspired my journey of writing *Stand Like a Cedar* and the poetic narratives and prose shared within *Spíl̓xm*.

The message I told myself was this, *Dig deeper into your memories and cultural awareness of the world around you, in order to hear those ancestral story echoes as an Nléʔkepmx, Syíl̓x and Métis Indigenous writer, as a human being, and as a mother*. This was for the purpose, as Leanne Betasamosake Simpson writes in *Dancing on our Turtle's Back*, of going “beyond resistance and survival, to flourishing and mino bimaadiziwin” (17). *Dancing on our Turtle's Back* is one source I reflect upon over and over again, especially Simpson's conversation about resurgence and her encouragement to live the good life. This means to no longer allow the history of shame and self-sabotage and self-destruction to limit and control the goals and achievements we set for ourselves. It means to live within a state of wellbeing, laughter, to set and achieve educational, career and artistic milestones and goals. It means to

be physically fit, strong and healthy. To allow ourselves and teach our children to be beautiful, empowered without guilt or shame, she made suggestions as to how we, as community members can show our Loved Ones that resurgence is real and achievable, and one step in demonstrating it is by living it.

I asked myself, if mino bimaadiziwin was normalized, what would it look like? Existing within the limitations of shame and trauma, carrying colonial rage is like that set of old pants we refuse to get rid of. The infested, old woven blanket given to us by the colonizers, that we cherish and continue to use despite its tattered condition. Despite the reoccurring nightmares that come every night as we sleep with that blanket, we continue to refuse to throw it away. Stuck within a state of survival yet not able to step outside of it in order to see the mechanics of how it functions and where it originated. How do we normalize the concepts we understand about mino bimaadiziwin for younger generations and those still stuck in their trauma? How do we show them the way through? Through intertwining poetic narratives of truth, memory, healing, the audience can experience the steps as the might take place, and also, in truth, witness how clumsy the journey can be. As a creative writer, I chose to literally write it step by step, through lived experiences and memories orated and embodied within Indigenous poetics conveyed through poetry and stories.

Chapter 2: Stories are Medicine

Overview

Chapter 2 breaks down the research project, reflecting on a core cultural teaching and ideology that Indigenous stories are medicine and sacred responsibilities. While many dissertations will choose just a few titles and focus their entire research on them, I have chosen to reflect on a wide array of Indigenous creative works, moving fluidly between genres that include fiction, non-fiction, young adult and collaborative works in film. This is in response to the dynamic ways these diverse work have impacted Indigenous narrative and storytelling practices and the way they continue to awaken and heal hearts, minds and spirits from the impact of colonization.

As imparted in the collaborative article, “Canadian Indian Literary Nationalism,” by Fagan, et al., Indigenous literary nationalism engages the dynamic, embedded intellectual histories of specific tribal or national contexts as articulated in creative forms of expression, including text-based stories and orature. Cultural resurgence, whether as story-plot or as theory describing the revival of Indigenous knowledges, is a vital strategy for liberation made imaginable through Indigenous cultural frameworks. Storytelling practices that actively engage cultural resurgence infuse Indigenous storytelling practices with culturally relevant knowledge rather than relying on english¹ critical traditions. Imposed english literary traditions enforced through colonization, together with racist educational practices and colonial ideologies reinforced through public mainstream educational institutions displaced the creation, reception, and interpretation of Indigenous stories and storytelling and narrative frameworks for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous audiences and storytellers.

¹ Throughout, I have made the decision not to capitalize “english” in order to prioritize Indigenous languages and, at the same time, acknowledge the history of english as an oppressive and silencing force.

English literary traditions value creative license in ways that do not abide by Indigenous ethics, protocols, responsibilities and structures. In this contemporary moment, as Indigenous storytellers, we are relearning, returning and creatively exploring the development of Indigenous narrative frameworks. In *Learn, Teach, Challenge*, Emma LaRocque contributes to the conversation with her statement that, “Native Literatures, both oral and written, have remained, until very recently, completely outside Canadian literary and academic canons” (Reder and Morra 55). In her early years teaching at a post-secondary level, she explains how she compensated for the lack, “I focused on three areas: oral literatures, literature about Native people, and non-fiction Native writing. Although the non-fiction writing (including poetry) consisted of a wide variety of styles re/mapping place, facts of biography, ethnographic explanations, legends, curriculum guides, historical sociological expositions, response (...) it was often lumped as social protest writing.” Further she explains that, “In various respects, we all needed to learn how to read Native material” (57). This insightful statement hit home for me. I feel strongly that, not only did I have to learn how to read Indigenous works, I also needed to learn how to dive deeper into my personal indigeneity, creatively on the page when I decided, ethically, that I wanted to focus on Indigenous resurgence, Indigenous poetics and Indigenous continuance from my perspective and cultural location, as a strategy to separate from the ways colonial ideologies and intergenerational trauma had manifested within my life and work. Meditation, prayer and learning through the work of other Indigenous artists and storytellers as a strategy focused on empowering narratives embedded within the land, cultural ideologies and the ancestral voices embodied by my Elders. The development of profound, multifaceted and multi-layered culturally embedded Indigenous literary nationalist approaches, by contrast, are rooted within Indigenous values, beliefs and, consciousness. Indigenous literary nationalism, as a theoretical movement, provides a platform where Indigenous scholars and storytellers can dialogue, examine, critique and validate knowledge structures and creative works by Indigenous storytellers.

This research focuses on the work of Indigenous storytellers, particularly those who have published, produced or performed creative work. This project does not incorporate in-person interview research and documentation. Instead, it focuses on the weaving of traditional and contemporary narrative threads, poetic narrative icons “as a tacit play between orality and written forms” (McLeod, *Indigenous Poetics* 8) and the importance of cultural continuance. My interest is in harvesting, processing, untangling, piecing together, braiding, intertwining and reweaving decolonial stories. Again in *Learn, Teach, Challenge*, in the article, “Responsible and Ethical Criticisms of Indigenous Literatures,” Niigaanwewidam Sinclair quotes Anishinaabe writer, Kateri Akiwenzie-Damm, “...after five hundred years of mainstream misrepresentation, bastardization, and ignorance, ‘We need to see images of ourselves as healthy, whole people.’” Indigenous narratives “reflect specific experiences, influences, interests, these are contextual and often promote a method of continuance somehow related to the interconnected nature of our communities, our families and the world around us” (302). This work represents a weaving of relearning and reflecting on forms and methodologies of remembrance, resurgence and continuance through Indigenous narratives, reflecting on the published, produced or performed creative work that “broke trail” and made a path through contact until today. These are words that touched me deeply; like a Yayah shaking her cane, reminding us through their collective reoccurrence to listen.

It is my intention as an Indigenous writer to advocate the creation of stories that reaffirm how beautiful, powerful and capable Indigenous peoples are and to actively advocate the process of transforming and moving forward a collective story that has for too long been situated within colonial despair and trauma. Fundamental to this search are the ethics, protocols and responsibilities provided by my Elders and the nations where I am culturally situated, whilst acknowledging the magnitude and implications of creative license. It is important to me that my written work illustrates a balance of the truths of who we are and how we live as an inspired people, collectively resurging and recovering from colonial and genocidal forces that have impacted Indigenous nations for generations. The desire to research and explore this

discussion was key to initiating my doctoral studies program, having witnessed disproportionate numbers of contemporary stories that presented Indigenous people within settings that, from beginning to end, depicted main characters trapped within poverty, violence, trauma and despair resulting from colonization, without alternatives or the ability to change their lives. While these stories sadly depict an important truth about the day-to-day life experiences of Indigenous peoples, there is a critical component that is absent and that is the stories of Indigenous joy, health and triumphs. As a storyteller, my concern is that the continual retelling of stories that depict the most shattered, colonized and fragmented version of ourselves as Indigenous people without showing a balanced depiction of our transformational opposite—our happiest selves: our journey to transformation and becoming our most culturally rooted, empowered selves, in both healing and achievements—is a form of narrative violence that validates erroneous and incomplete truths. Disconnection—from stories of wellbeing and resistance within our families and nations—is one factor that sustains generational shame and convinces us that we are a weak and defeated people: “Shame traps us individually and collectively into the victimry of the colonial assault, and travels through the generations, accumulating and manifesting itself in new and more insidious ways in each re-generation” (Simpson, *Dancing* 15).

Stories are Sacred Responsibilities

One of my earliest memories of witnessing a genuinely old-style traditional orator speak was in Seattle, Washington. I was eighteen and living with my Sk'wóz, my grandpa's younger sister, my grand-auntie. She was a member of the Nicola Valley Elders group, and together they were diligently working towards revitalizing our Nlél'kepmxcín (the Nlél'kepmx language). I was able to travel with them as a helper to several language conferences. Eighteen and surrounded by a group of Nlél'kepmx Yéye?'s, we had many adventures together. Our first trip was to Hilo, Hawaii. The world was humid in Hilo. Apparently, due to the proximity of the volcano Muana Lua, the Big Island of Hawaii has a dry side and a rainy side. It rained every night, and then come daylight the sun would shine brightly again. Our second trip was to Albuquerque, New

Mexico. The trip to Albuquerque was especially memorable for many reasons. I had never really eaten Mexican and that was one staple food I recall on every table we ate from. A language conference near Seattle, Washington was our third trip together. I shared a dorm room with my Sk'wóz in each destination and escorted her everywhere she went, or perhaps she escorted me.

It was a blessing to be a teenager, travelling with my Elders, assisting them and listening to them fluently speak our language. Everywhere we went they spoke our language. Their voices elevated with pride, excitement and laughter, almost like children. They were free-spirited, passionate and spoke amongst themselves, vibrantly. This was tremendous for them because in my short time working with them as a young teenager, I had also witnessed moments when they shared candidly of the lifelong hurt and trauma they carried. This was a result of the violent forms of discipline, racism and shaming they had experienced, as very young children, for speaking our languages while forced to attend Indian residential schools. The resurgence of their exuberant joy in speaking and listening to their heart language was absolutely healing. The cadence of their voices was pure bliss, particularly because it represented the reclamation of a sacred part of themselves that had so viciously been stolen.

These are some of my most beautiful memories of my Elders. I write about these moments as I recall, and as I understood them. Through my teen years, I still had not learned the full details of racist Canadian colonization policies. Nor did I understand the significance of the multi-generational impact of Indian residential schools and how it had manifested within my life, my family dynamics and within our community. As children, my cousins and I grew up asking questions, never completely understanding what racism was until we personally experienced how oppressing and painful it was. What I had witnessed and experienced was a lifetime of not understanding why my Elders weren't allowed to speak and why they didn't teach or speak to us or to our parents. My one auntie was a fluent speaker, of Nlé?kepmxcín, because she was raised by her grandmother and did not attend Indian residential school. However, she

rarely spoke Nl̓éʔkepmxcín and when she did, she often covered her mouth and looked down. It was while working with our Elders' language group and living with my Sk'wóz, that I began to understand why.

At the Seattle Indigenous languages conference, one of the keynote speakers, an elder who was attending the conference caught my eye. He was particularly striking and stood out everywhere he went. His vibe, his physical energy, his hat and attire were distinct. His body was wiry lean. When he stood up to speak, I was captivated by the richness of embodied ancestral memory evoked through his oratory. I believe, though I am not certain, that his origins were with the Lushootseed speaking people. Within moments of him standing at the podium, as young as I was, I already wished desperately for a pen and paper. I wished for photographic memory while telling my mind: *Remember this! You can't forget this moment. You have to hold onto his words!* There were many things that he spoke of. His knowledge of the land, his memories growing up as a fluent speaker and the reasons our traditional narrative practices and languages were critically important for the continuance of our traditional way of life and future generations. Movements, expressions, profound intonations of voice made his time on the floor, orating, absolutely captivating, so much so, that I can still hear his voice in my mind. He embodied the stories of his nation, his languages, teachings and his homelands in a way that was tremendous and indescribable. These were his words as best as I can recall them:

Our words are powerful! Our stories are elastic and our languages are music! When they are released to the world, they come alive. They are a spirit within themselves and we are only the channel that brings them to life. Like tiny beings, they dance, they move around and they enter us and that's when they do their work. They are medicine for our people. That's why, as artists, as storytellers, you have to be careful about the stories you tell, and the words you speak because once you release them to the world, that is when they do their work. (1990)

Embodying the voices of the old ones, he eloquently drifted between languages. He spoke about our tasks and responsibilities to the land and to our ancestors, to carry the teachings forward and breathe life into them. What was particularly captivating about the

moments when he was on stage, was the way he described stories as “elastic” and as spirits. His hands moved broadly demonstrating them growing, moving and stretching. So distinctly graphic to my overly active imagination, I clearly remember pondering and envisioning spiritual beings entering the room, through his orator’s voice, dancing across the stage, growing and stretching as they entered the hearts and minds of his audience. He explained that, because the stories are spirits and medicine, we are to be vigilant, even meticulous with our words. The concept of stories as medicine was important to me, because of teachings my Elders and auntie had shared about how food is medicine.

When we cook for the people, whether during times of sorrow or joy, we have to be careful with our thoughts and emotions. When the food enters our bodies, that is when it does its healing work for the minds, hearts and spirits of the people. That’s why in our traditional practices, immediate family members of the deceased loved one are often taught not to cook, particularly during times of grief. And that’s why certain people receive specific training to carry the responsibilities of feeding the people, particularly during times of sorrow. The responsibility of the cooks is to control their emotions and put their healing love and joy into the food because the food is medicine that has the power to heal hearts, minds and spirits as well as the body. That Elders’ words about how stories and words have the power to nourish and heal the spirit stayed with me, and I continue to reflect on them over twenty-five years later. Particularly when other Elders stand up and speak about linkages between our responsibilities: to the land, our languages and cultural practices, our stories and future generations.

They are reaffirmed again and again by Indigenous peoples around the world. Métis artist Christi Belcourt’s Facebook post, shared here with Christi’s permission, is about our responsibilities as storytellers:

Stories are sacred responsibilities. They come from Elders lips, into our hearts and lodge themselves to germinate in our bellies, until they make their way into the parts of us that tell us what our place is in this world. Stories carry spirit. If feasted they are kept alive within us. They work like magic in their ability to heal and transform the listener, the viewer, the reader and bring us to being a little more wise and a little less 'know-it-all.' Stories we are given are put into our bundles, they give us place and purpose in the chain

link of generations that makes up our families and communities. Stories can be a salve for trauma and help mend the broken parts of us damaged by a harsh world. It is with this in mind, that we share stories carefully with the full weight of the responsibility of the people who have entrusted us with them. (2020)

Christi, a renowned Métis artist, speaks about feasting the spirit of stories. If stories are also ancestors, responsibility and accountability is embedded within her words as a sacred reminder of our responsibilities to carry these elements of story as a bundle of sacred energy. Spirit, ancestral teachings, healing elements that we have the ability to feed, lovingly nourish, like children. They teach us and through the sacred responsibilities they provide, through the sacred offering of gifting their existence, implemented carefully, stories also teach us the ways we can heal ourselves and heal everyone around us. Her words, shared on social media, remind us, *of the full weight of the responsibility* that even though we are in a contemporary world, the teaching remains to be mindful of ancestral connectedness and power that stories have.

Contemporary Indigenous Narrative and Storytelling Practices

Imparting Indigenous narratives and storytelling is a completely different process and methodology than it would have been one-hundred or more years ago. Responsibilities and purpose have significantly changed from a time when orating and narrative practices were a way of life that was critical to intellectual knowledge transmission, sustaining cultural praxis and Indigenous existence. In the past, learning, mentoring and teaching were intertwined with a process of remembering, re-counting and re-telling. The orator in training was held accountable for the remembrance of detail specific information. For many nations, the act of recounting involved a testing process that engaged observation by those, primarily Elders, who carried the cultural knowledge and traditional narratives. The Elders were always watching the conduct and integrity of those who were trained to remember. In the past, time spent with Elders, traditional knowledge carriers and community had a direct or indirect impact on teaching and learning processes.

Story-creation and development is a process that now interweaves a generous amount of imagination, visualizing and engages a written process on paper or electronic device. Works are genre-driven. Indigenous creativity and determination is interwoven with cultural and contemporary lifestyles that are impacted by various factors. Today, the Elders and knowledge carriers represent optional “characters” within the story. As writers can make a conscious decision regarding how “colonized” we want our characters to be. We can choose the life struggle and current growth cycle we want our characters to move through. Writers have the option of shaping and contextualizing their characters to suit different circumstances. Writers can consciously ask themselves, who is my goal audience for this specific piece? Personal life experiences and reoccurring, unresolved trauma and life lessons are part of the context that we use to shape the story. Some storytellers might be driven to create stories situated in pop culture, politics, activism, or cultural practice. Cultural strength within a story can be determined by the presence or absence of Elders, culture, spirituality, trauma and addiction. If the story tends to follow a more Indigenous narrative framework, then we know the narrative will more strategically follow the ways our Elders have taught us. If the story follows a more colonial framework, then we know the story will be centred in expectations and demands that pop culture and non-Indigenous society has created for Indigenous peoples. The work will highlight stories of Indigenous sorrow and suffering. In this sense the writer can specifically make a decision to end with a focus on Indigenous resurgence, however healing is not always the goal intention of the narrative being told. Many times, Indigenous writers will take time to situate their writing practice in ceremony and prayer, and will consciously ask the Creator and good grandfathers and good grandmothers for help in the journey and completion of that specific work. Overall, the main method for transfer of knowledge is the colonizers language, english.

Cultural Location: Language and Caregivers

I was not solely raised by my biological mother. I was not raised with these cultural teachings of remembrance. My caregivers included my Elders, as well as maternal and

extended Syíl̓x family acquired through marriage in the Nicola Valley. Through my caregivers I was exposed to multiple Indigenous languages, mainly English, Nl̓éʔkepmxcín and Nsyilxcən. My caregivers from childhood included the following: My Syíl̓x godmother Patsy Boston. She understood spoken Nsyilxcən and Nl̓éʔkepmxcín and she was able to speak Nsyilxcən however she would not. She was a survivor of the Kamloops Indian Residential School. My auntie Ethel Isaac was a fluent speaker of Nl̓éʔkepmxcín. She did not attend Indian residential school and was raised by her grandmother. It is not entirely known if my maternal grandfather was her biological father, however I was raised to know her as my auntie. My Sk'wóz, who was my grandpa's last of twelve siblings my grand auntie Delia Shuter, who left this world in early spring 2022 at ninety-six years of age. Indeed, as much as I honour her journey to the spirit world, it is still difficult for me to speak of her. Her outlook and approach to life had a huge impact on me as I lived with her through my teen years. The challenge with COVID pandemic is, it took so many of our loved ones away, prior to them being gone. And, denied so many of our Elders the true love, joy and reverence they deserved in their last years on earth with us.

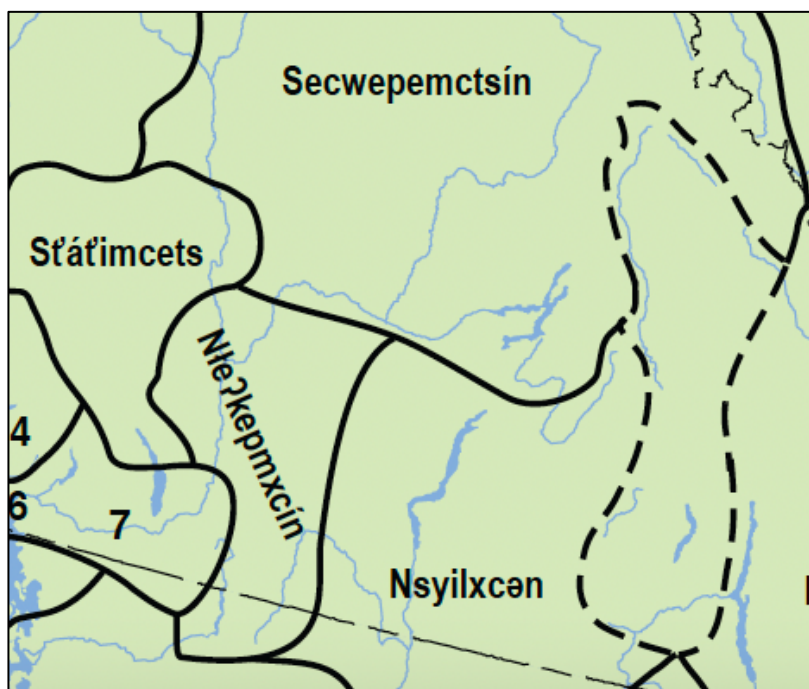
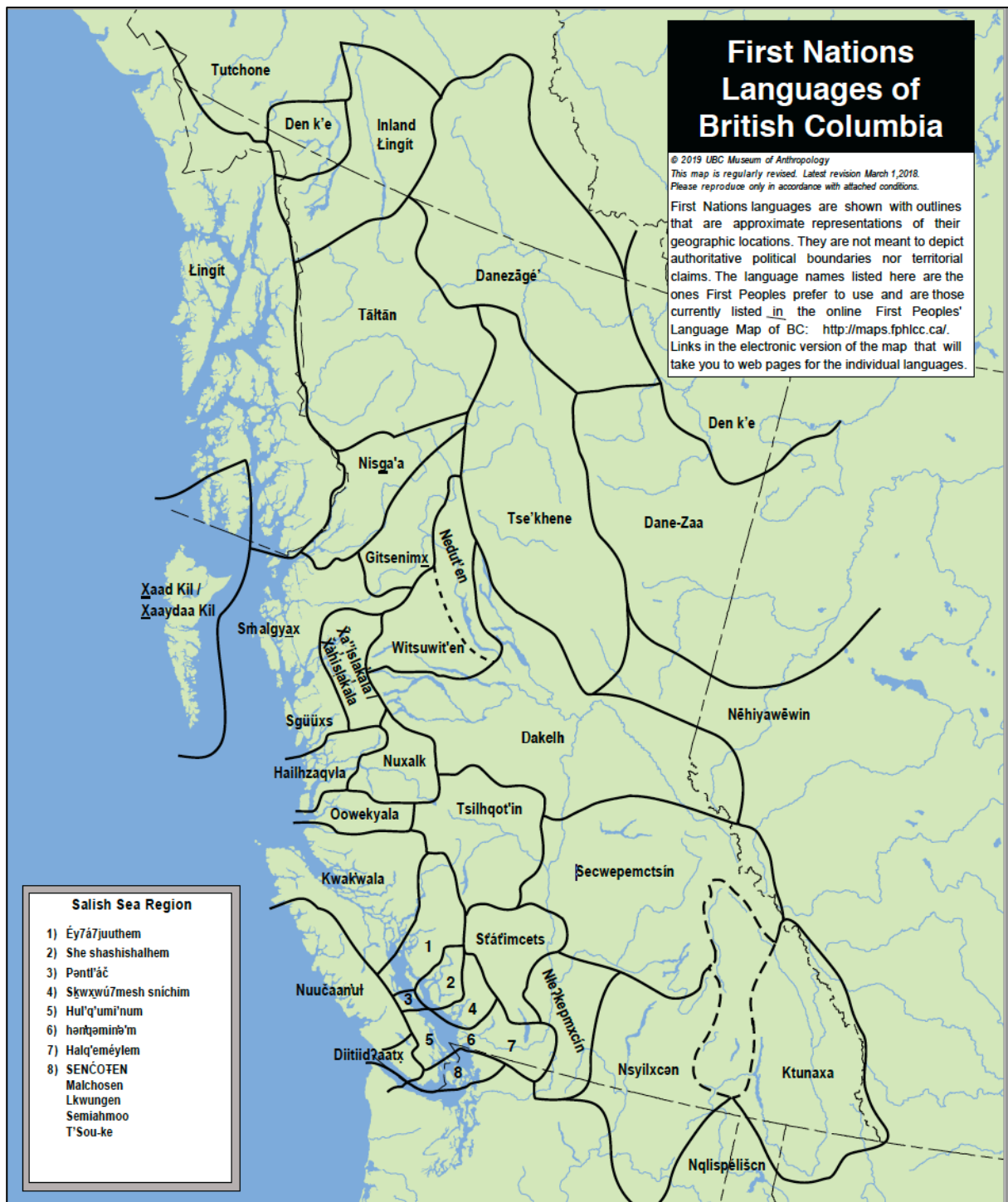


Figure 1 Interior Salish Languages, detail from *First Nations Languages of British Columbia* ©UBC Museum of Anthropology (2019), used with permission



My home and current cultural location is situated within Coast Salish territory that of Stó:lō téméxw and has been for over twenty-five years. I exist between Interior Salish, Nléʔkepmx and Syílx tmíxw and Stó:lō Coast Salish téméxw. I grew up in the Nicola Valley, which until colonization, nourished two primary Indigenous languages: Nléʔkepmxcín and Nsyilxcn. My

creative process encompasses travels between the cultures, traditional foods and languages, my worldview as an Interior Salish person raised in the Nicola Valley, with Cree-Métis ancestral lineage on my paternal side. It will also intertwine the cultural landscape of my location. While I am Nléʔkepmx and Syilx, I have also lived within the traditional homelands of the Stó:lō for over twenty-five years. My creative work often will often reflect a cultural and linguistic relationship to land and will intertwine poetry or prose, while also incorporating words that represent my connection, awareness and ability/inability to speak. Intertwining cultural existence with languages, has been normalized for me as an Indigenous person from the Nicola Valley, British Columbia because I was raised listening to my Elders' style of speech. As an Indigenous writer, I embrace the presence of Indigenous languages in all Indigenous creative work. While I grieve my lack of fluent comprehension, my heart and spirit is nourished by the presence of Indigenous linguistic rhythms and vocables on every level of intonation.

I note that many other Indigenous writers are intertwining more and more Indigenous languages into their creative work in short passages or entire texts in poetry and prose for children and adults. I currently have published five children's books and most recently my memoir *Spílexm*, progressively incorporating more and more of the languages that I am surrounded with. There have been moments during my own author presentations, particularly in schools and with publishers and editors, when I have observed this as confounding for those who rely on the English language in published literature and all creative work. Whether this is the audience, the editor or publisher, I am grateful for the ability of the reader and audience to stretch their mind and be respectful. While it can be a bit challenging for publishers to find creative ways to work within multiple Salish linguistic dialects, I am grateful that this is becoming a normalized practice. The development of glossary for translations, particularly, as a Salish person, that honours and incorporates multiple Salish languages, has been beneficial to this journey of publishing Indigenous writing. For example, the vision I had for *Stand Like a Cedar*, was to creatively incorporate both the languages of myself and the illustrator, Stó:lō artist Carrielynn Victor, on the illustrated page.

When writing and publishing Indigenous stories for and about Indigenous peoples, you become accountable not just to your own community and Elders from your home territory, but also, in a sense, to all Indigenous people across tmíxw-Turtle Island—nationally and internationally. It's just the way it is when you're Indigenous, because since childhood, being held accountable is one way our Elders demonstrate their love and guidance. For non-Indigenous people who believe in colonial and literary ideologies of creative license, this also can be confounding. We have seen this on a national and international level when it comes to situations where an individual claims an identity and dna that is not inherently theirs. As a Salish writer and storyteller culturally located within Stó:lō téméxw, I am culturally tied to family, community, Indigenous Elders and loved ones throughout British Columbia: Nl̓éʔkepmx, Syílx, Secwépemc, Stó:lō, and Coast Salish territories as well as to my biological father's Métis family in Central Canada. While visiting Humber College for the Indigenous Editors Association circle gathering for editors and writers, I had an Anishinaabe Elder approach me and express that he appreciated the words I shared through the session, especially as a young woman and as an Indigenous writer. He also said that knew he would see and hear me speak again, because of the important work that I was doing. Hearing this feedback from an elder on the other side of the country was incredibly affirming for me. Self-worth is such a huge struggle, for many of us on our decolonial healing journey. Unlearning the ways we have been damaged by the colonial voices of the past and remembering, relearning and revitalizing is the stage of this journey that we are on.

Why Am I Writing This?

I'm writing to remember. I'm writing to learn how to listen with my heart as well as to learn, teach and share our stories and our history in a good way, so that we can never forget who we are. I'm writing to listen and remember the story echoes that are the voices of our ancestors as they sing back to us when we sing to the mountains, when we sing to the water, when we sing to the land. Searching for the footpaths of our ancestors as they walked the land

and did all that they could in order to survive and continue nourishing our good grandmothers and good grandfathers—despite the despair they faced resulting from disease and genocide. Despite the mass graves of loved ones lost to smallpox and influenza pandemics and the theft of generations of Indigenous children. In his contribution to the collection of scholarly works about Indigenous writing, *Learn, Teach, Challenge*, Sinclair states,

By maintaining responsible, real-life connections with Indigenous peoples and their stories, we hold the potential to invoke positive change, inspire, and perhaps even contribute to the process of more creations. We can also add to the everlasting process of Indigenous continuance. By being mindful of our past legacies—some brutal, some beautiful—we can define trajectories, including real, living Indigenous peoples as a central part of the world” (308).

Edited by Morra and Reder, this is one of many collections that has provided windows of affirmation into the creative and critical literary works of minds and hearts of generations of Indigenous writers and storytellers. I often ask myself, where did our ancestors and our great grandparents find the strength in order to continue their fight? Despite all the hurt, they found the courage and persevered, and it was for all of us and our future generations. I’m writing to understand, to reflect and to recount a deep reverential relationship with Indigenous stories, so that our truths and our identity as Indigenous people can never again be wiped away by the colonizer.

Sometimes I struggle to understand why the words flow out of me the way they do. Sometimes the words flow like a prayer. Often, the story flows in a circle or cyclical way, where a story at its ending returns to where it began, however with a different layer of knowledge and understanding. I often worry whether this format of “narrative” makes any sense at all. It is cyclical, moving forward with the rotations of our world, our seasons, like the threads of a spider web, connecting to lessons imparted, revisited, yet the momentum of the spiral we are all a part of continues to move us forward. In the collection *Spider Woman’s Granddaughters*, Paula Gunn Allen explains that, “Traditional Native novels are identified as “cycles” by folklorists when they are referring to a number of stories that cluster around a more or less central theme and particular characters... “(4). She continues by explaining that, “Native writers write out of tribal

traditions, and into them. They, like oral storytellers, work within a literary tradition that is at base connected to ritual and beyond that to tribal metaphysics." Through the work of other Indigenous scholars and writers, I am learning to understand that this lens of harsh self-criticism that I carry is centred within my earliest public school and Indian day school memories of classrooms entirely focused on the phenomenon of oppressive colonial languages and english literally everything. Simon Ortiz, as quoted in the *American Indian Quarterly* reminds us, "we have become so articulate in the english language as speakers and writers that we are failing to examine the impact its use has upon us. We have to consciously remind ourselves that the english language was a central instrument and tool of our colonization. And we have to remember that english was not only a tool but a weapon used against us, causing the loss of land, culture, and community" (285). In truth, the english language was brought to Indigenous peoples and, in particular generations of Indigenous children by force, horrific forms of physical violence and at its worst, fear of death. The recovery of language and the reawakening and reopening of heart, mind, spirit and body of our Elders and survivors of Indian residential schools is truly a multifaceted journey of healing. Ortiz, a member of Acoma Pueblo of New Mexico, continues by explaining:

...the very continuance of our Existence is at stake. The ancestral grandmothers and grandfathers bequeathed us the responsibility of continuing the life of our land, culture, and community. Many, many, many generations ago, they spoke for the future, saying that they were to live in a way so future generations would be provided for, so those generations would be able to sustain them- selves. And those future generations the ancestral grandmothers and grandfathers spoke about are the present generations who are living today, meaning our present-day selves. We are the generations our ancestors spoke about. They thought about us; they planned for us; they provided for us. By their commitment to living a way of life that fostered and regenerated the lives they were living, they made it possible for us to have Existence in this present and immediate time. (288)

At the core and centre of our being, our central story as Indigenous people, our original instructions, the matrix to all cultural praxis and cultural ways of being are the ancestral voices, narrative bundles of embodied sound, story, songs, teachings, channeled from the landscapes we call home. Through the work of Neal McLeod, the words of Lee Maracle and the chapters

following the Introduction pages of *Indigenous Poetics of Canada*, I have come to learn what Indigenous poetics is and how Indigenous languages and poetics manifest within Indigenous narrative structures and narrative voice. The concept of “poetics” encourages its readers to “understand the connections to classical Indigenous narratives, and to move beyond the conceptions of the Anglo-moniya interpretive matrix” (3). This shift in focus towards an Indigenous interpretive centre is culturally and linguistically rooted, creating momentum, it functions like a spindle whorl. One that is centred within nation and land-based linguistic rhythms and cultural ideologies, articulated through the cultural and linguistic lens of Indigenous artists and storytellers.

In chapter one of her text, *Indigenous Storywork*, under the section titled, “Principles for Creating Story Meaning,” Dr. Jo-ann Archibald explains, “The communal principle of storytelling implies that a listener is or becomes a member of the community” (26). Further, words shared by the late Stó:lō Coast Salish author Lee Maracle, “Oratory: a place of prayer, to persuade. This is a word we can work with. We regard words as. Coming from original being – a sacred spiritual being...” “Words are not objects to be wasted,” she explains. “They represent the accumulated knowledge, cultural values, the vision of an entire people or peoples” (26). Furthermore, she states that use of english, “...to portray a story can be very problematic for Aboriginal storytellers because its framework (principles, values, format) may be very different from the Aboriginal framework” (26). She continues by sharing about the creative work of Maria Campbell, in her work with Métis stories and how the “english language and its writing structure overshadowed Métis ways of communicating a story” and Campbell’s process of learning to manipulate the english language and its structures, “in order to tell a Métis story in a Métis way” (26). My Aunt Maria’s first language was not english and she is also a speaker of multiple languages: Cree and Michif as well as english. As quoted in *Indigenous Storywork*, Campbell tells us:

For a long time I couldn’t write anything, because I didn’t know how to use English. I’m articulate in English. I know it well. But when I was writing, I always found that English

manipulated me. Once I understood my own rhythms, the language of my people, the history of storytelling, and the responsibility of storytelling, then I was able to manipulate the language. And once I started to be able to manipulate English, I felt that was personal liberation. (26-27)

Contemporary Indigenous narrative practice, the work of stories, is the embodiment of ancestral practice, voice and being. Contemporary stories require work to strategize and weave together poetic threads of ancestral teachings, also referred to as 'original instructions'. While Archibald explains her experience of my aunt's personal liberation as related communal responsibility, when I read these words, I experienced the liberation she speaks of somewhat differently. I experienced it in the way of when my aunties and grand-aunties overcame the fear, shame and oppressive memories that speaking our languages triggered within them. The years of speaking under covered mouths, in whispers and without joy. My experience of this moment of liberation is what I write about in my memoir of when I travelled to language conferences with my Elders and my first memories of them speaking joyfully, laughing like children, with pure joy in their hearts. The moments when the fear of oppression was gone and they arrived at the safe place where their language lived, inside their heart, and they were able to express with freedom once again. I experienced liberation, as when she found that place inside herself that was full of expression and she overcame the oppressive boundaries and confines of English literary ideologies. Archibald shares the following quote by Leslie Marmon Silko about the healing power of stories,

The old folks said the stories themselves had the power to protect us and even to heal us because the stories are alive: the stories are our ancestors. In the very telling of the stories, the spirits of our beloved ancestors and family become present with us. The ancestors love us and care for us though we may not know this. (27)

We can observe this practice of returning to the original intention of ancestral storytelling activated in many ways. For example, through Indigenous communities implementing governance practices. A quick search and review of any Indigenous nation's community website will show the ways a community has come together with their Elders and knowledge carriers to

weave together contemporary governance policies, mandates and vision statements representing their nation and their teachings into Indigenous educational praxis, governance, traditional stewardship practices entirely based on cultural teachings and the original instructions embodied within their traditional storywork practices. For example, on the Syilx Okanagan National Alliance webpage in the section titled, “About Us,” the first words state:

For thousands of years, we the Syilx Okanagan people were self-reliant and well provided for through their own ingenuity and use of the land and resources. We lived united as a nation with a whole economy, travelling the breadth and depth of our territory; hunting, fishing, growing, harvesting, and trading created a sustainable economy that met our needs.

A similar quick review of Musqueam’s “Our Story” webpage starts with, “We are traditional hə́ŋqə́mihəm speaking people.” It continues by explaining the inherent relationship with the Fraser River and then acknowledges the following, “We remain distinct and our cultural practices are strong, despite the devastating impacts of residential schools, colonial laws banning our ceremonies, and other attempts to assimilate our people. Our lands and waters continue to support our cultural and economic practices while serving as a source of knowledge and memory, encoded with our teachings and laws.” The Tk’emlúps website begins in similar context with their mandate: “To promote & ensure the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual well-being of our people and community.” The website further explains, “The Tk’emlúpsəmc, ‘the people of the confluence’, now known as the Tk’emlúps te Secwépəmc are members of the Interior-Salish Secwepəmc (Shuswap) speaking peoples of British Columbia.”

The recognition of language acknowledges a fundamental cultural belonging to traditional territories as an ancestral inheritance, as well as an inherent responsibility and belonging as a people to their traditional waterways and homelands. Furthermore, visitors are also informed that the cultural responsibilities of the nation are inherently towards the development of healthy and self-sustaining communities set in cultural and traditional governance strategies of traditional forms of accountability, stewardship and ancestral land management practices, which the nation is successfully adapting to a contemporary way of life. The practice is to

acknowledge the reweaving together of ancestral responsibilities in a contemporary world. The intention of the website is to make it abundantly clear to all visitors that the Indigenous nation is intact and actively recovering from colonial intervention and genocide through a return to cultural ways of being and taking control of and administering management of their resources and business development. Taking care of the people. Taking care of the waterways. Taking care of the land. Taking care of traditional food sources such as the annual harvest of berries, roots, salmon and deer. Nations of people are actively weaving together poetic strands of ancestral teachings on governance practices with true happiness, love and then stitching them into the hearts, minds and spirits of our children and nations. Harvest and prepare then feed the knowledge to the hearts, minds and spirits as dinner-time narrative teachings for future generations. This knowledge and inherent awareness is entirely sustained and encompassed through traditional narratives and storytelling practices.

Paula Gunn-Allen, in *Spider Woman's Granddaughters*, explains that, "The Native literary tradition is dynamic; it changes as our circumstances change. It pertains to the daily life of the people, as that life reflects, refracts the light of the spiritual traditions within which we have our collective life..." (7). Functioning as a truth-telling, recounting of events, of laws for governance, of ethics and conduct, shared seasonally and as generational teaching stories, Indigenous narratives remain central to the function of Indigenous societies. The introduction to *Learn, Teach, Challenge* states that the goal of the text is to acknowledge and "address core concepts and concerns... such as the relationships between story, land, language, identity, and community; the politics of genre and narrative form; the relationship between word and image... the continuities between oral and written forms of expression; and the role of nation-specific critical approaches" (2). Nation specific oratory, engaged and activated during ceremony, organizational strategies and through Indigenous governance practices indicate ways Indigenous peoples continue to embody, nurture and carry forward the poetic strands of ancestral voices, from year to year, season to season, strategically and thoughtfully in every area of day-to-day life.

Chapter 3: Literature Analysis

Chapter 3 functions as an exploration and analysis of contemporary Indigenous creative and critical narratives and narrative theory. While many dissertations will chose just a few titles and focus their entire research on them, I have chosen to reflect on a wide array of Indigenous creative works, moving fluidly between genres that include fiction, non-fiction, young adult and collaborative works in film. This is in response to the dynamic ways these diverse work have impacted Indigenous narrative and storytelling practices and the way they continue to awaken and heal hearts, minds and spirits from the impact of colonization.

Indigenous literature is intensely personal and this chapter continues the practice of grounding this research in my experiences both as a creative writer, reader, and literary scholar. The exploration starts with my early experiences with Indigenous literature, acknowledging the basis for interpretation and framework of my cultural location as an Indigenous author situated within Nl̓eʔkepmx, Syíl̓x and Salish storytelling practices.

The creative reflections begin with the work of Maria Campbell whose writing awakened my awareness of the history of Canada's genocidal government policies for Indigenous and Métis people coupled with a sense of the power of writing to recreate important times and places. The exploration continues chronologically, moving through early novels that I encountered and was influenced by: W.P. Kinsella and Anne Cameron, Sherman Alexie, and then the generational fiction stories by Anishinaabe author Louise Erdrich whose work awakened my visualization of the Nicola Valley, Fraser Canyon and the Coquihalla prior to and at contact. The creative overview and analysis concludes with more recent, precedent-setting work done by N. Scott Momaday, Richard Wagamese, Eden Robinson, Richard Van Camp and Witi Ihaemara, along with the young adult works of Art Coulson, Stella Calahasen and the non-fiction novel of Kwakwaka'wakw author, Diane Jacobson.

The scholarly reflections follow and they weave together the exploration of important work by Indigenous thinkers all across tmíx^w-Turtle Island who have been critically inspiring to this research: Jo-ann Archibald, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, Jo-Ann Episkenew, Deanna Reder, Neal McLeod, Linda Tuhiwai-Smith and Niigonwedom James Sinclair.

Indigenous Creative Contributions

Maria Campbell

The first truly Indigenous books I ever read as a child were written by my aunt, Maria Campbell. The vibrant, captivating images of her children's book, *Little Badger and the Fire Spirit*, had a huge impact on me. The main character, Ahsinee, and her Cree grandparents orating a Cree narrative of the courageous, blind Little Badger about his journey to the heart of the mountain, remain forever imprinted in my mind. My interpretation of Little Badger's story, as I am situated within Nléʔkepmx, Syílx and Salish storytelling practices, is that it is what I understand as a sptakweł, a narrative that takes place in the ancestral period, prior to contact, when animal beings and human beings talked and interacted. The humans were faced with a harsh winter and Coyote, through love, compassion, prayer and fortitude helped Little Badger successfully overcome the tests of heart, spirit and courage, despite physical disabilities, as was presented by each of the four protectors: Grizzly, Snake, Wolf and Mountain Goat. Upon finally meeting the Fire Spirit, Little Badger is gifted with a burning ember. Thus, it becomes Little Badger's responsibility to courageously transport the ember back to his loved ones. As Little Badger leaves the mountain, the Fire Spirit blesses Little Badger with the gift of vision and the flame warms the hearts of everyone across the land. Little Badger sees all the beauty in the world when prior to that, the world was covered in darkness.

Growing up, I had so many questions: Who am I? Who was my dad? What was he like? Why did he die? Where did he grow up? I was impatient to be old enough to read my aunt's whole autobiography, *Halfbreed*, front to back. I walked past that book and looked at its cover

over and over, opened it and read the introduction. When I read through the first chapter, I visualized the land, and, specifically wondered, which of her siblings was my dad.

The house where I grew up is tumbled down and overgrown with brush. The pine tree beside the east window is dried and withered. Only the poplar trees and the slough behind the house are unchanged. There is a family of beavers still there, busy working and chattering just as on that morning, seventeen years ago when I said goodbye to my father and left home. (7)

She told the stories that I, as a fatherless daughter, needed to hear at a time when the traumatic and violent events that I had witnessed, inflicted upon many of the women who raised me, including my birth mother, were becoming normalized within me. Stories, words, descriptions of the land and people, illustrated moments and memories that I had no access to. Even though I didn't grow up there, it brought me to the places and spaces where those memories lived. Stories embody connections to the energy of the land and that is what her story did for me. It shared with me the connections I needed to my dad's ancestral bloodlines.

Had I not read my aunt's book, I would not have known to differentiate the violence that I witnessed against women and children, as unacceptable. *Halfbreed* created a safe space for awareness, understanding and personal healing which allowed me, at a young age, to change the direction of my life. She also opened the door to creating a deeper understanding within me, about the history of Canada and Canada's genocidal government policies for Indigenous and Métis people. It is true, Indigenous storytelling methods and practices can assist in shifting the axis of the lives of Indigenous children and all audiences towards a healthier and empowered future. Indigenous storytelling practices, as conveyed through various methods including film, stage and spoken word performance, music and the publishing industry, have a tremendous impact on our lives as Indigenous people. If used strategically, Indigenous narratives can empower audiences of all ages and all cultural identities with the awareness and the ability to self-heal.

Representation: Creative works that Recreate and Sustain Negative and Racist Ideologies

As a child and youth, I was an avid reader. I read many, many young adult and adult fiction stories in a variety of genres including fantasy, fiction, poetry and prose. The books available at that time, aside from the Western fiction genre, incorporating leading Indigenous characters were very few. The ones I was familiar with included *The Indian in the Cupboard* by Lynne Banks; The “Frank Fencpost” series, including *Born Indian* and *The Fencpost Chronicles* by W.P. Kinsella and; Anne Cameron’s *Legend of Copper Woman*. As a young reader, I did not recognize the significance of stories written by non-Indigenous authors. Nor did I understand the significance of the word “appropriation.” I remember feeling incredibly inspired. I craved entertaining stories about Indigenous people although they were difficult to find. As a result, I read *Copper Woman* a few times and relied heavily on publications by W.P. Kinsella and Sherman Alexie.

My Aunt Maria visited me in Vancouver during my undergraduate studies. Her visits to Vancouver are few and this was the only time she has visited me in my home. Upon seeing the books written by Kinsella and Cameron on my bookshelf, she explained the concept of “cultural appropriation.” Cultural appropriation occurs when stories and creative works about Indigenous people, Indigenous lives, culture or practices, are acquired, produced or published without the permission, guidance or consultation of Indigenous communities or an Indigenous advisory, particularly when the said publications and creative works steal, recreate and sustain negative and racist ideologies about Indigenous people. These authors had no concern for nor accountability to Indigenous people. At the time, I felt embarrassed and saddened. Aside from my aunt’s publications the books that intrigued me by and about Indigenous people were few and far between. Those stories were the only reflection, the only mirror, that portrayed representations that correlated with my life experiences, and my community. A mirror that I now realized provided a distorted and misconstrued reflection back to me of Indigenous people and cultures in line with these words from *Reservation Blues* by Sherman Alexie.

Dancing all alone, feeling nothing good
It's been so long since someone understood
All I've seen is, is why I weep
And all I had for dinner was some sleep...(1)

Alexie's work filled my heart with inspiration at a time when there was little to zero entertaining and funny Indigenous stories available. His work touched on, normalized and helped bring laughter to old wounds of grief and trauma. His work made sense yet it didn't make sense, it brought joy, it made me rage as well as represented and misrepresented the world I grew up in. There was a point where I read every single one of his books, and waited anxiously for his new works to go through the publication process. The concept of stories, set on reserve, set in old government houses, with grandmothers and grandfathers, aunties and uncles, and dirty, hungry, neglected Indigenous children engaged in play, surrounded by empty bottles, while children, women and mothers were abandoned to their own survival devices, beaten or sexually assaulted—felt too familiar to me.

Indigenous stories were like food that I ate voraciously. Yet, I was never entirely fulfilled by the publications I found. It was never enough. Like an iron, vitamin B12 and magnesium deficiency, there was a deep embodied fatigue that affected every element of my being and I could not pinpoint the source. I needed contemporary stories engaging Indigenous people. Kinsella's stories had young characters that lived on reserve, as did Alexie.

The normalization and use of alcoholism and addiction is too often relied upon as a way to survive with depression, despair, utter hopelessness, verbal abuse and elder abuse and grief. In a sense, I should thank Alexie for the fire within me, and his short story, "A Train is an Order of Occurrence Designed to Lead to Some Result," from the collection titled, *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*. "Reservation" and "Blues" fit so well together, I understood this title intrinsically. Initially, I was impressed by the courage, integrity and wherewithal of the main character, a male who had chosen to never drink alcohol or use drugs through his entire life. However, the negative series of events that transpired on the day of his sixtieth birthday were

far from celebratory. He woke, travelled to work, got fired. From there he visited his children, something of a negative nature took place and his children turn their backs, shunning him. The main character became distraught and heartbroken, after an entire life alcohol free, the main character goes to a bar and gets drunk. The story that began with such a positive birthday vibe for the main character, with such hope for a courageous changemaker in a society so overwhelmed with despair, ends with tragedy in the main character's death by suicide. The single long-term sober character, who could have been a source of knowledge, guidance, and cultural support for his family, instead gave up on his life and chose to end his life rather than overcome.

As someone who spent a large part of my youth navigating depression, violence, grief and suicidal thoughts, I remember thinking, "If I believe what this story is telling me, then there is no hope for a better future. This, right here, is as good as it gets." And when I deliberated the potential impact of that thought process on another young person who could be struggling with suicidal thoughts, I felt tremendous frustration and anger at circumstance. This story and this collection of stories would not elevate them to a higher level of self-awareness, this story could potentially cause more harm, inspiring less hope for an empowered future. It has been over twenty years since I read *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* in full. Needless to say, it had a significant impact on me and my journey as a writer.

This story triggered within me a weaving of feelings which included grief, frustration, hopelessness intertwined with absolute rage. Enough rage to want to write and publish different stories—stories that tell of Indigenous joy, Indigenous success and Indigenous healing and transformation, except I did not know how to do it. I still could not differentiate what was missing in my stories. Through the scholarly work of contemporary Indigenous writers, I learned about resurgence as well as conversations on the importance of cultural location, within Indigenous writing. The concept of rooting contemporary stories within our homelands and ways of being. Indigenous people are an integral element of the "weaving" Dr Jeannette Armstrong describes

in her translation of tmíx^w, our traditional homelands. We are empowered and vibrant. We embody both the light and the darkness, we embody the traditional foods we eat, harvest and the voices of those that shaped us. My missing link was learning to consciously demonstrating this embodiment through vibrant descriptions intertwining voice, cadence as well as narratives and descriptions of the land and waterscape of our Indigenous traditional territories was.

As a woman who has experienced sexual assault, witnessed, since childhood, physical assault against women, experienced and witnessed verbal abuse and racism throughout my life, these stories are deeply personal and deeply painful. I can honestly say, while I try to not be triggered by them, they impact me deeply, every time. Because they are real. Because they are true stories of lived generational trauma shared by loved ones and Indigenous communities across tmíx^w-Turtle Island and beyond. It is so important to shift the narrative and write the next chapter of Indigenous joy, healing and transformation as Indigenous people. Let's make it real. The stories of trauma are not the only stories—we are currently in an important stage of transformation that needs to be documented through Indigenous narratives.

Do Contemporary Indigenous Storytellers Have Cultural Responsibilities?

Do contemporary Indigenous storytellers have responsibilities to their audiences? If so, what are those responsibilities? I thought about all other Indigenous storytellers and audiences, particularly youth and future generations, who have lived and inherited trauma, overwhelmed by rage, feelings of powerlessness, while struggling to decompress grief, depression as well as suicidal ideation as a result of the colonial dis-ease. Returning to the words of my Elders; when I think of all the teachings I have received through the years, the following thoughts come up within me.

We are repeatedly reminded that our words are powerful. Our stories are medicine. Our stories are spirits and they embody the power of our ancestors. As storytellers, we each have a task and that is to be the conduit. The task is to remember and to recount. The responsibility of sharing that medicine in a conscious and strategic way to help our loved ones find ways to

recover, heal and transform is a gift. Stories help those who are still suffering recover from what has occurred in our world as Indigenous people.

As an avid, young reader of Indigenous books I observed a trend in almost everything that I read or saw by and about Indigenous people. Stories, particularly those geared towards adult audiences, often intertwined and affirmed colonial stereotypes with unhealthy behaviors of intergenerational colonial trauma, Indian residential schools and foster care. Many stories ended without a hopeful or healthy resolution, leaving characters trapped in the cycle of unresolved despair. Stories often began and ended with unresolved grief and loss due to death resulting from addiction, violence or suicide. As one Indigenous reader, these stories are deeply triggering because they represented my saddest memories, my most painful experiences, my untold truths. I grew up witnessing violence and experiencing unsafe love and rejection. I grew up fearing for my mom's safety and crying with my godmother when she tried to commit suicide. I was a child, yet I worried for both my mother and godmother's safety and wellbeing. As a young adult, for once I wanted to read about Indigenous people who were safe and loved unconditionally, without physical and emotional abandonment. I wanted to read and see Indigenous characters who were actively untangling the hurt of the past and recreating a healthy existence so that I could experience and learn a new lifestyle.

Yet too often it was as my Aunt Maria had told me: "In my community you walk into a classroom and when you look at the bookshelves, which is something that I always do when I go into communities, in the bookshelves are stories that are written not by our people, but by Anne Cameron, Kinsella, and a whole number of white people. And that is how our children learn about themselves."

While stories by Kinsella and Alexie engaged Indigenous characters, they did so in ways that sustained negative ideologies about Indigenous people. While one was appropriating stories about Indigenous people, the other was an Indigenous person and they were both telling and re-telling stories focusing entirely on violence, poverty and despair as the key driving force

within their stories. As a young woman overcoming intergenerational trauma and suicidal behaviors, I wanted to see Indigenous people living healthy lifestyles, achieving dreams.

Following Alexie, the novel *Tracks* was a great introduction to a new collective body of intertwined narratives, situated in Anishinaabe culture and depicting many generations of intertwined landscapes and relations. I became a lifelong fan of Louise Erdrich's creative work. At the beginning of *Tracks*, we "experience" the grandfather "Nanapush" as the orator. He sets the tone and cultural landscape with an orative voice sharing Anishinaabe ancestral narratives: "We started dying before the snow and like the snow, we continued to fall" (2). Then Nanapush explains how deeply rooted they are, as Anishinaabe people to their traditional territory, even as the colonial disease causes the death of their entire family and decimates the Anishinaabe people. They were of the few who survived the ravage of disease. These Indigenous characters have an intimate familiarity with death and sorrow; poverty, hunger and malnourishment; isolation and disconnect to family: parents, grandparents, nation and loved ones. The trauma, unresolved grief and post-traumatic stress they experience is inter-generational and deeply embodied.

There is a consistent progression of colonization and colonial dis-ease resulting from the loss of land and family members to violent non-Indigenous sources: epidemics brought by colonizers such as smallpox and influenza; substance addictions; physical violence and Indian residential schools. Many of Erdrich's adult novels are set within an Anishinaabe cultural landscape; this includes: *Love Medicine*, *The Beet Queen*, *Tracks*, and *The Antelope Wife*. One of the elements of Erdrich's style of storytelling that had an impact on me was how she intertwines and roots Anishinaabe ancestral memories and multigenerational "family" lineage within a Anishinabek experience of the landscape. As a young woman reading these novels, these contributed immensely to my heightened understanding and awareness of impacts within Indigenous communities across Canada. They contributed to my visualization of the Nicola Valley, Fraser Canyon and the Coquihalla prior to contact. While reading these stories, I felt

myself weaving in and out of images of pit houses and ancestors living healthy and abundant lives and then struck by the epidemics, at a point when they may have only heard whispers of white colonizers across tmix^w.

The opening to part one of the first version of Erdrich's novel, *The Antelope Wife*, explains that since the beginning the world has been a weaving of darkness and light.

BAYZHIG: Ever since the beginning, these twins are sewing. One sews with light and one with dark. The first twin's beads are cut-glass whites and pales, and the other twin's beads are glittering deep red and blue-black indigo. One twin uses an awl made of an otter's sharpened penis bone, the other uses that of a bear. They sew with a single sinew. Thread, in, out, fast and furious, each trying to set one more bead into the pattern than her sister, each trying to upset the balance of the world (1).

Storytelling and the act of beading, both represent a physical process of weaving—gathering, washing spinning, twining, warping, vital strands of land, life force, existence and story—the weaving of our collective existence as Indigenous people. Life, growing, loving and surviving has, in a sense, been a process of intertwining hunger and abundance, weaving joy, despair and transformation, side-by-side with all living things that co-exist with the land: the four-legged, the ones that swim, the ones that fly and the ones that crawl.

NEEJ: The pattern glitters with cruelty. The blue beads are colored with fish blood, the reds with powdered heart. The beads collect in borders of mercy. The yellows are dyed with the ocher of silence. There is no telling which twin will fall asleep first, allowing the other's colors to dominate, for how long. The design grows, the overlay deepens. The beaders have no other order at the heart of their being. Do you know that the beads are sewn onto the fabric of the earth... (73)

The story of *The Antelope Wife* unfolded like a weaving of darkness and light. Each facet having sharp edges, woven deep within elements of ancestral memory and teachings as well as a struggle with adapting to colonial changes within the community. She has since written a revised version now titled, *Antelope Woman*, which I have not yet read.

Through the eyes and voices of children, we experience early European contact, progression and we witness, through Louise Erdrich's overall lifetime collection, the impact of

colonization. Erdrich's Birchbark series is my favourite collection of youth fiction. It is a five book series starting with *The Birchbark House*, *The Game of Silence*, *The Porcupine Year*, *Chickadee* and then *Makoons*.

Bekaa! Bekaa! Omakayas froze and held tight to her paddle with one hand. She was trying to keep the canoe absolutely still while her younger brother, Pinch, balanced with his bow and arrow. With the other hand she held a torch of flaming pine pitch. (*Porcupine Year* 1).

According to Wikipedia, this collection was Erdrich's counter-narrative response to the racist narratives sustained by the made for television series, *Little House on the Prairie*. There are many elements addressed in this collection as it takes place at the time of contact. Life on their traditional homelands, the displacement of people, the impact of the small pox epidemic. As the last book from the Birchbark Series ends, I find myself grieving at this point, as the changes in the world around becomes unimaginable for Omakayas and her descendants. We witness Erdrich's transition to the devastation, confusion, despair and raw grief that we, as readers, witness and experience in her adult novels. "Erdrich researched for *The Birchbark House* through past stories from oral history and texts. She also read through trappers' journals which had accounted for the epidemic and the moving of her people. Some parts of the book were inspired from her own life" (*Birchbark* Wikipedia). This youth fiction series specifically, as well as her narrative voice in describing the relationships between intergenerational family members and the ways she weaves in land, traditional foods, white colonists and displacement of her people, has been tremendously inspirational in my journey as a writer and the visions I have for future work centred within Salish territory.

My mind processes the knowledge of Anishinaabe landscape and the impact of dispossession and colonization while also reading the work of other Anishinaabe writers, such as Richard Wagamese. *Indian Horse* is one of my absolute favourite sections for demonstrating Anishinaabe cultural location within a cultural landscape and how, as a people, they are innately connected with the land.

They say that our cheekbones are cut from those granite ridges that rise from above our homeland. They say that the deep brown of our eyes seeped out of the fecund earth that surrounds the lakes and marshes. The Old Ones say that our long straight hair comes from the waving grasses that thatch the edges of the bays. Our feet and hands are broad and flat and strong, like the paws of a bear. Our ancestors learned to travel easily through territories that the Zhaunagush, the white man, later feared and sought our help to navigate. Our talk rolls and tumbles like the rivers that served as our roads (1).

Wagamese explains how the last name “Indian Horse,” came to exist through colonization, as well as orating his main character’s traditional blood lineage and nation. The cultural introduction illustrates a fluid and ancestral bond that is difficult to discern beginnings and endings—borders or boundaries, because the sense of being is deeply intertwined and woven with the land. I have read several but not all of, Richard Wagamese’s publications. Like Erdrich, Wagamese was a very prolific writer and has numerous publications in multiple genres. He conveys an embodied, dynamic and transformative love-based relationship to the land and water, through a culturally situated Anishinaabe lens and narrative voice. The use of ancestral place names in the Anishinaabe language and specific details from Anishinaabe oral histories is another way of centering the story within an Anishinaabe landscape.

After Wagamese passed, I read his novel titled *Starlight*. I found this story interesting. While the main character is of native ancestry, he was not raised by his mother or with Indigenous loved ones. The main character grew up completely detached from an Indigenous way of life. Throughout the story, we observe subtle descriptions of the main character’s trauma, a man who finds solace in navigating the land alone. He runs, walks and spends his days on the land. His sense of peace, strength, confidence and security reaches its highest state of empowerment while on the land. The wolves dynamically rise out of the land, they are part of the land, fierce in protecting their isolation from humanity and loyal to their pack. The main characters bond with the wolves, in a way, grows to represent his character and personality, his recovery from alcoholism and his healing. In a sense, they seem to teach him of the importance of family interconnectedness and how to care for his pack. This main character did not grow up with his human family. He came to be human, he came to find himself with the

creatures of the land as his greatest mentors and teachers. When he takes the mother and daughter into his den and under his wing as they escape the horrific violence of their abuser, they become part of his pack. All the living things in the regions that he travels seem to have a familiarity with him because they recognize that he belongs to the land. In the end, he teaches this to the young mother and her child, and this is how they recover from the post-traumatic stress and ongoing fear of retribution from their abuser.

Which leads into the written work of one of my favorite Indigenous authors, N. Scott Momaday. Although his characters are not my ideal, he has become one of my favorite writers because of the moments when, through story, he demonstrates a Kiowa spiritual centre on the land of the Kiowa. The opening to his novel *House Made of Dawn* is exceptionally beautiful. I am sad that depictions and descriptions such as this do not continue throughout the novel. As the story progresses, we become deeper and deeper intertwined with the main character's trauma. We see the main character remain powerless and sink further into his despair. The opening page to the story, for me, is the most beautiful and most empowering section of the novel.

Dypaloh. There was a house made of dawn. It was made of pollen and of rain, and the land was very old and everlasting. There were many colors on the hills, and the plain was bright with different-coloured clays and sands. Red and blue and spotted horses grazed in the plain, and there was a dark wilderness on the mountains beyond. The land was still and strong. It was beautiful all around. Abel was running. He was alone and running, hard at first, heavily, but then easily and well. (1)

When we turn the pages of his book *The Way to Rainy Mountain*, we experience something significantly different. Written with a “prose style narrative voice,” this collection of “spilaxem” type narratives—remembered events, life narratives and experiences—meticulously illustrates a deeply embodied and rooted ancestral connectedness and narrative voice. Through his use of visual descriptions and narrative voice, my experience of this creative work, is one of coming home to my ancestral homelands. Momaday fluidly embodies teachings, landscape and memories of his Kiowa ancestors. “You know, everything had to begin, and this is how it was:

the Kiowas came one by into the world through a hollow log. There were more than now, but not all of them got out" (16). The centre axis of this cycle of narratives is rooted within the landscape and ancestral memories about how the Kiowa came to be.

When he was a boy, my father went with this grandmother, Keahdinekeah, to the shrine of the talyi-da-i. The old woman made an offering of bright cloth, and she prayed. The shrine was small, specially-made tipi; inside, suspended from the lashing of the poles, was the medicine itself. My father knew that it was very powerful, and the very sight of it filled him with wonder and regard. The holiness of such a thing can be imparted to the human spirit, I believe, for once that shone in the sightless eyes of Keahdinekeah. Once I was taken to see her at the old house on the other side of Rainy Mountain Creek. The room was dark, and her old age filled it like substance. She was white-haired and blind, and in the strange reversion that comes upon the very old, her skin was soft as the skin of a baby. I remember the sound of her glad weeping and the water-like touch of her hand. (35)

From the origin stories, rooted within landscape, ancestral memory and spiritual teachings, he moves into a weaving of interlinked narratives about tremendous loss equivalent to the same genocide that has occurred in Canada. Language, Elders, knowledge carriers, tremendous loss of land and traditional practices and the grief is immeasurable. Although many of these narratives are deeply painful, because they embody the voice of his ancestors, we move through each piece, also feeling the peace from the healing journey Momaday must have been on as he wrote this important work. As his audience, we are transported to the secret sacred places that inspire healing.

When my father was a boy, an old man used to come to Mammedaty's house and pay his respects. He was a lean old man in braids and was impressive in his age and bearing. His name was Cheney, and he was an arrowmaker. Every morning, my father tells me, Cheney would paint his wrinkled face, go out, and pray aloud to the rising sun. In my mind I can see that man as if he were there now. I like to watch him as he makes his prayer. I know where he stands and where his voice goes on the rolling grasses and where the sun comes up on the land. There, at dawn, you can feel the silence. It is cold and clear and deep like water. It takes hold of you and will not let you go. (47)

One of the elements I find particularly beautiful about this work is how Momaday takes thoughts, moments, observations and makes them powerful, such as his reflection on the rain barrel

outside his grandmother's house, "with the tips of your fingers you could feel the black metal sing" (81). Places that exist in his ancestral memories, places that exist on the land, and, despite the sorrow, he illustrates how the land and the people endure, timeless and everlasting. The land carries on, with the dust, the dirt, the changing of seasons, and all the living creatures, growing, living, dying, healing with the seasons—the same as we, Indigenous audiences, have also done. For example, *House Made of Dawn*, begins with oratory, beginning with cultural remembrance and traditional teachings about the practice of running as ceremony. Momaday acknowledges how human beings, are woven with the land and not separate. In this context running is more than more than a way to greet the day, it is a ceremonial practice that inspires physical embodiment of the healing vibration of the land as an ancestral being. The experience peace, acceptance and dynamic endurance are one element of this. This book is not a book of poetry, it is a collection of short non-fiction but it is also a multi-disciplinary representation of oral narratives, reflections, and deeply connected embodied moments on the land. It is Indigenous poetics.

Traplines, a collection of short fiction stories, is Eden Robinson's first publication. Like so many publications by Indigenous authors, on my first read I was enthralled by the fact that Robinson is an Indigenous, female author. However, on a second opportunity to revisit it for a class reading at UBC, I resisted. As an Indigenous reader, the intense level of violence and addictions portrayed within the text is very triggering and brought me back to a painful time in my own life that I have been working hard to move beyond. This is in complete contrast to her non-fiction published creative work. Regardless, for the purpose of this paper I revisited the several pieces from her collection. Some of the stories included: "Traplines," "Dogs in Winter," "Contact Sports" and, "Queen of the North."

The depiction of her characters indicates that any human-being is capable of perpetrating violence and embodying the colonial dis-ease. I observed that there is an equal number of stories about violent, abusive and abused male characters, as violent, abusive and abused

female characters. However, “Queen of the North” depicts sexual conduct and sexual violence by male characters towards less powerful females and children. There are characters that are female prostitutes within several stories but none about male prostitutes and, in this specific collection, there are no stories of sexual violence against males.

Because of the fact that Eden Robinson is a Haisla author, I assumed she would be writing about Indigenous characters. In actuality, there are very few indicators of cultural significance that specific Indigenous identify within the stories published within *Traplines*. The first three stories appear to be entirely about non-Indigenous characters and communities. While two female main characters in “Dogs in Winter” hunt and run a trap line, and the mother engages in repeated extremely violent acts, there are really no specific details that indicate that these characters are in fact, Indigenous. There are specific distinguishing features that would normally have a very pertinent role within the story were these characters Indigenous; however, none of these are present.

Here I have included a random list of certain specific distinguishing features and details that indicate Indigeneity as well as ancestral blood and cultural lineage: character or author self-identification of having Indigenous descent or blood lineage. The acknowledgement of a specific cultural location that engages a nation, this also may include cultural teachings, the recounting of very specific ethics, protocols, cultural responsibilities and family crests according to family lineage. Familial linkages, roles between generations situated in love and protection of the children, for the future generations and with a consistent reflection and remembrance of the ancestors that is situated in cultural accountability and love. A visual presence of ancestors, a spoken reference to the ancestors in ceremony or in the general thread of events within the storyline. Cultural events and the presence of characters who are described as visibly or non-visibly Indigenous such as Elders, knowledge carriers, and storytellers. Another element that can assist in clarifying identity is family stories documenting intermarriage, arranged marriages, Indigenous child apprehension via Indian residential schools or forced child apprehension into

the foster care system, and the overall theft of Indigenous children. Indigenous food: hunting, fishing, trapping and other food harvest provision practices specific to certain groups. The recounting of memories that share specific Indigenous lifestyle practices such as harvest and preservation of traditional food sources. Imagery can include ceremonial items, symbolism of specific animals linking to prayers and ancestral connection, however the presence of items that are distinctly Indigenous does not determine Indigeneity unless it intertwines specific presence of cultural practice and people. Artistic, woven, beaded and embroidered designs inherent to specific Indigenous cultural groups including specific designs, form lines such as the use of the ovoid and crests within Northwest Coast and Coastal Salish groups. The use of narrative voice “Indigenous poetics” as oratory woven and the recounting of events in the style of speech inherent to Indigenous language and linguistic origins. This can include slang, story and word structure, landscape connections to ancestral memories. Also reference to Bill C-31, on-reserve or off-reserve, status, non-status, Métis family ancestral lineage—these are all examples of the ways Indigeneity can be demonstrated within a story. I note that few of these are demonstrated within *Traplines* Robinson’s collection of short stories. I believe this to be very strategic on her part as the author. And, truly had me questioning why I would believe that the presence of violence and traumatic events alone, would make this collection inherently Indigenous, when obviously, it is not.

While it is common for Indigenous people to have an established intimate relationship with landscape, water and animals, this does not determine Indigenous identity, unless the character is specifically identified as Indigenous. All of these elements related to cultural identity and location are absent. I found it interesting, that until I went back and re-read the collection, specifically looking for cultural elements, cultural location, acknowledgement of blood lineage, or anything at all that signified Indigeneity, I fully assumed that all of the characters in this collection were Indigenous. When I began searching for specific elements that would make me come to this conclusion, I could not find anything within the story, aside from depictions of addictions and violence. Repeatedly, we see characters that are completely incapacitated by

the hurt, trauma and violence that is disempowering their lives, resulting in characters that are completely dislocated from either landscape or waterscape. Child theft by illegal government and non-Indigenous activities also results in complete dislocation of identity and characters will often demonstrate a multi-layer trauma, hurt, abandonment, absent and unresolved mother/father wound, and consistent feelings of being lost and searching for their identity. However, sadly, it is important to acknowledge that this state of hurt and trauma does not make them Indigenous.

“Queen of the North,” one of the short stories in the collection, is about a young girl named Karaoke. This is the only story in this collection that specifically refers to Indigenous concepts. Karaoke’s story could easily be my own or any Indigenous girl who grew up on or off reserve. Karaoke has observed, witnessed, participated and has been victim to alcoholism, addictions, physical, verbal and lateral violence, rape and child sexual abuse all to such an extent that these events, experiences and the survival skills associated with growing up in such an environment are completely normalized. Karaoke refers to, “me and my chug buddies” (4). Twenty-two pages later, she leaves her community and goes to Vancouver to abort a pregnancy conceived by her sexual abuser—her uncle. In the city, she makes fry bread, when asked if she is “Indian,” she indicates that she is Haisla. This is the only mention of a specific nation in the entire book. While considering Robinson’s, *Traplines*, I observed several reviews including:

Remarkable... The stories she tells are undeniably powerful, and...eerie in their raw portrayal of extremely disturbed human beings... A Riveting spectacle. (*Toronto Star*)

Robinson’s skill attracts and holds our attention [with]... prose that is commendable and riveting. And while the landscape she has established *Traplines* on are bleak and spare, the same cannot be said of the fertile ground of her talent. Hers is a powerful Canadian voice and we need to hear more of it. (*Star Phoenix*)

Canadian Literature online review provided this comment:

A danger with this approach is that it can backfire. By describing these First Nations experiences without critiquing the colonial relationship, Robinson may well fuel colonial

stereotypes. She depicts the violence and abuse that exists in the village as families face poverty, alcoholism, unemployment, drug addiction and suicide.

During a meeting with supervisory committee member, the late Dr. Gregory Younging, regarding traditional and contemporary storytelling practices, he responded to me with the following statement, “You need to understand, that is not an example of Indigeneity, it is an example of the colonial dis-ease.” This was an awakening moment for me as it was in response to one of my diatribes about toxic, trauma-based storytelling narratives that end in trauma without any options for a way out for the entrapped character. I had never heard it described in this way prior to this discussion with him. A definition for colonial dis-ease, based within my interpretation, is individuals and or multi-generations of family and nations living in what could be described as living in a state of poverty, trauma and post-traumatic shock due to the multi-generational impact and catastrophic devastation caused by genocide, generations of colonial violence, exploitation and child “apprehension”—the theft of Indigenous children by the Canadian government through residential schooling and the foster care system.

It is difficult to find portrayals of Indigenous joy and success. Far too often Indigenous stories about the people who are transforming themselves and the world around them through their inspirational and tireless work are not represented and remain unseen. Particularly the courageous stories of youth, women and LGBTQ. Portrayals of Indigenous people lobbying for Indigenous rights, land, resources and environmental protection and reclamation is portrayed as illegal, shameful and criminal, when truly, it is a form of Indigenous resurgence and expressions of true, selfless love for our Indigenous way of life. The movie, *Beans*, by Mohawk writer Traclely Deer is an example of such a movie. A very painfully true movie, set in 1990, about the historical and violent protests in Kahnawake, against Mohawk rights to protect their traditional land. The protests displayed horrific violence set in racism of French versus Mohawk people. It was a hard, incredibly important but inspiring movie to watch.

Far too often when Indigenous characters are actively working hard towards embodying the roles of healing, leadership and transformation, viewing opportunities are non-existent. I have also observed that when a story follows a more Indigenous and creatively woven storytelling format, the reviews are less than satisfactory. The stories of people who are actively doing their self-healing work in order to contribute to resurgence and positive change within their families and communities need to be told.

Witi Ihimaera's remarkable story, *The Whale Rider*, was originally a young adult novel published in Aotearoa, New Zealand and then adapted into a screen play and produced into a feature film by non-Indigenous filmmaker Nikki Caro in 2002. This fiction story is embedded with cultural elements significant to Māori culture and inspired by Māori traditional storytelling practices. The rhythms and narrative structure including intimate attention to minute details include the weaving of an embodied relationship with natural surroundings including the ocean, land and sacred songs, including the whale songs. The story centres the audience within a Māori cultural location at the onset, beginning with the sacred oral narrative of Paikea, the Whale Rider. Songs associated with the practice of calling on the ancestors, particularly the Whale Rider, to help the people are woven repeatedly throughout the story. Embedded resistance to colonial ideologies and patriarchal oppression is exemplified when the newborn baby girl is named after the ancient Paikea, moments before the mother and the newborn twin brother die at birth. Koro expresses rage and spite at the life and birth of a girl, particularly one that carries the name, Paikea. He does not value nor respect the female. Pai, his granddaughter eventually masters sacred Maori songs, skills and teachings and is so gifted that she quickly supersedes all other youth and children. She eventually wins the approval of Koro and her nation when she proves she embodies the reborn Whale Rider, Paikea, returned to the Maori people. Witi Ihimaera's writing of the novel is a truly powerful display of embodiment of ancestral voice on the page. The novel is slightly different from the movie, and has several terms of reference for some characters, including, "Kahu" for Paikea the girl. Descriptions are a

lot longer and more drawn out with the language and culturally inherent styles of oratory and speak.

If you ask me the name of this house, I shall tell you. It is Te Kani.

And the carved figure at the apex? It is Paikea, it is Paikea. Paikea swam. The sea god swam. The sea monster swam. And Paikea, you landed at Ahuhu. You changed into Kahutia Te Rangi. You gave your embrace to the daughter of Te Whironui, who sat in the stern of the canoe. And now you are a carved figurehead, old man. (57)

Paikea, the girl much like her ancestor, does not give up. With her grandmother's support, Nanny Flowers, she exhibits only grace and calmness in outright resistance against the colonized and abusive character, her grandfather. Koro Apirana. The "old paka" begins a strict training regime for the young boys in the village and specifically leaves Paikea out. However she continues learning without Koro's awareness. She resists violence, while determinedly seeking and on a resolute journey towards an unknown state of empowerment. She develops ancient skills, ceremonial practices and a powerful and unexplainable connectedness with all living things in the water. At one point, Koro develops several tests of stamina and ability for the boys, and one of those tests is to throw a sacred item, the novel refers to it as a "stone" and the movie, refers to the item as a "raipata," into the ocean. The boys are told they must retrieve it. The boy who successfully achieved this task, would show unsurmountable leadership skills. However, none of the boys are able to retrieve it, and he comes home empty handed. Koro is devastated, angry and bitter. where several of them, including Rawiri, a son of Nanny Flowers. Paikea asks, "Does Koro really want it back?" She is informed that yes, he does need it. "Kahu said simply, "I'll get it," then before anyone can stop her, she dives in. Note that in the movie Nanny is not present in this scene at all. However the novel depicts both Rawiri and Nanny floundering in the water. Again, the novel is different and shows dolphins come to Paikea, aiding in her successful underwater search. The end of this scene, of course, is powerful, Paikea finds the raipata as well as a very large crayfish for dinner. Nanny decides not to show Koro right away because he has demonstrated that he is not ready to accept Paikea's true gift.

Regardless, Paikea does not give up hope, she moves forward with love, a sense of belonging even though her grandfather tries to ostracize her. She innately knows her identity, and spirit. Paikea's courageous act of riding the whales back, results in her near drowning, then community healing, transformation and acceptance by her grandfather.

While elements of Paikea's suffering are a result of the colonial disease, one element of Indigenous teachings is that there is empowering strength found in overcoming adversity. Paikea's relationship with her grandfather depicts a situation where her grandfather is enacting his colonial beliefs that, regardless of age, a girl is inferior and is not deserving of true unconditional love or respect. The grandmother, despite her cultural teachings, does not stand up to him. She remains silent until the very end of the story when the girl, Paikea, is on the whales back disappearing into the distant ocean waterscape. As an intergenerational survivor of residential school and as someone who has observed significant violent physical and verbal assaults on my mother on repeated occasions, it was easy for me to go to a place where my interpretation of the grandmother for not defending Paikea was her fear of retribution and physical assault. Although this story did not show physical assault from the grandfather towards the grandmother, in my life experience, there is a kind of silence that I am familiar with and that is one triggered by fear of retribution.

Concept of Generational Healing

The following summary of texts provides a brief overview of various creative works from my comprehensive readings and how they engage concepts of Indigenous resurgence. Weaving a contemporary story within an ancestral narrative. We all start from somewhere—physical, mental and emotional weakness at one stage of life does not signify a state of permanence. Everyone has to find their path in learning to be strong in mind, heart, body and spirit, through gradually developing endurance and fortitude.

The Creator's Game: A Story of Baaga'adowe Lacrosse is a young adult fiction novella written by Art Coulson and published by the Minnesota Historical Society Press. The main

characters learn to play the traditional sport, lacrosse, together as a team. Lacrosse has significant traditional teachings and history in Eastern Canada and the United States for the Haudenosaunee. The original name for lacrosse is Baaga'adowe translated as, "The Creators Game." In this story, the main character, Travis, has bad dreams, is having difficulty at school and is also struggling with his low self-esteem. The engagement of mental, emotional, physical strength is a way of developing community. The spirit of his deceased grandfather visits Travis during his dream time each night. Through the engagement of healthy, loving relationships and problem solving, the spirit of the grandfather provides cultural teachings and valuable self-discipline that empowers and mobilizes Travis. "The hummingbird, one of the smallest members of his team, had won the game for the animals of the sky. You don't have to be the biggest or strongest or bravest player to win the game. You just need to know your strengths..." (27). This story is reminiscent of the full feature movie, *Crooked Arrows* due to the weaving in of teachings and origin stories of how Baaga'adowe Lacrosse as "The Creators Game" came to be. Indigenous sports and teamwork as a strategy for relearning and returning to Indigenous ceremonial practices, between generations is a powerful coming of age experience for all the characters. The combination of traditional sports endurance training with learned (self) discipline, cultural teachings and physical training on land and water is uplifting and empowering for Indigenous youth. Learning not to fear sacred ceremonial practices and messages as provided by the spirit and ancestors is one part of the Indigenous learning journey. Not only does this story highlight healthy life habits and physical fitness, it incorporates the self-discipline and motivation it requires to achieve physical fitness with regular physical activity and practice.

Dream Catcher is another young adult fiction novella, written by Stella Calahasen and published by Theytus Books in 2009. The main character, Marin has insomnia as a result of reoccurring bad dreams of being hunted by a monster sized spider. Makwa is the grandfather and he is spiritually gifted. He spends time with them at the sweat lodge. After the sweat lodge ceremony, Makwa orates the story of spider woman for Marin, her mother and Grandmother.

Marin is then able to interpret her dreams and through that process, she gains valuable teachings, respect, strategy and endurance in the face of her fear. This story shows a family that is actively moving their lifestyle outside of colonial paradigms and affirms a healthy, loving, cultural relationship with multigenerational family members, the land and the Cree language. There is no presence of active addictions, or despair in the story. When Marin stands her ground and finally converses with the spider, despite her fear of its enormous and frightening appearance in her dreamtime, the lesson is complete and the story ends. These stories resist the disempowering and immobilizing effects of colonization, trauma and shame while also engaging empowering visions of indigeneity and of healthy intergenerational relationships between youth and Elders.

My Life in a Kwagu'l Bighouse is a non-fiction novel published by Theytus Books and written by Kwakwaka'wakw author, Diane Jacobson. Honey tells her story of growing up "Mamalilakala of Village Island" off of Vancouver Island, BC. The Bighouse houses multiple generations of family under the same roof. These children engage in various adventures around the Bighouse from the attic to the rafters, doing household chores, racing across the reserve and the swimming in the ocean. The main character experiences healthy forms of multi-generational discipline, indulges in sneaky mouthfuls of treats while also witnessing her mother freaking out over a snake. While the story touches difficult topics such as grief, loss and fear from witnessing events out of a child's control, such as house fires, the story remains balanced and depicts characters processing their grief and struggles in healthy ways. They participate in the annual harvest, preserve and prepare traditional foods including berries. Each season they are canning, freezing, drying, and preparing various types of ocean fare such as eulachons. Although the families that live in the Bighouse are living in poverty and there is a presence of alcohol, the story progresses through difficult emotions in a healthy manner and does not focus on despair. This book is a beautiful work of resurgence.

First Wives Club: Coast Salish Style was published by Theytus Books in 2010 and written by Coast Salish author, Lee Maracle. This collection of short fiction contemporary stories exposes the lives and thoughts of Coast Salish women. The stories touch on sexuality, displacement, mothering and living. "Goodbye Snauq" illustrates a story of multigenerational processing and grieving due to the aggressive city development in Vancouver (13-28). In a contemporary timeframe, the City of Vancouver provides a payout for the destruction and theft of the historical village site called, "Snauq" by white settlers in Vancouver. "Swanamia faces Burrard Inlet, she cannot bear to look back. Her son winces. Khahtsahlano sits straight up. Several of the women suppress a gasp as they look back to see Snauq's Longhouses on fire." The story continues, "Some private part of her knows they want to grieve, but there is no ceremony to grieve the loss of a village. She has no reference post for this new world where the interests of the immigrants precede the interests of Indigenous residents" (17). These stories illustrate the internal impact of colonialism and the process of healing and returning to a contemporary version of indigeneity. "I am not through with Canada. I am not a partner in its construction, but neither am I its enemy" (27). These stories are echoes of the past and today.

Each of these texts brings to light various forms of resurgence, intertwining contemporary events and memories with traditional teachings and understanding, ways of being and narrative creation stories. I found it interesting that two of these young adult stories, *Dream Catcher* and *The Creator's Game*, both depict youth learning valuable life lessons about personal growth while also having powerful spiritual experiences during their dreamtime. The dreamtime is a time of complete vulnerability. And with youth at this stage of their learning, as a single mother I know, it is utterly difficult to communicate with them. Through the state of dreamtime, the youth were able to have independent interaction with first, the spirit of their loved one and second, their greatest fears. Dreamtime allowed them to be open to hearing, mentally and emotional process and then absorb what takes place as they sleep. This learning process, the journey they undergo with their Elders who have passed, is what is used to help the youth transition to

an empowered mindset. The stories embrace courageous intergenerational healing, including with loved ones who have passed on.

“Dogrib Midnight Runners” is a story that was first published in *The Moon of Letting Go*, a collection of short-stories by renowned Dogrib author Richard Van Camp. This re-imagined story has been produced as a wildly entertaining short film that has now been shown in film festivals around the world. The 2013 short film is titled, *Mohawk Midnight Runners*, written and produced by my dear friend, Zoe Karakwenhawi Hopkins. A short description of this story tells about a young man dealing with his grief for a friend who committed suicide. That friend also enjoyed a pass time of frequently streaking through the community and going for long midnight runs. After some introspection the main character realized he has become tired of feeling emotionally bankrupt. He begins to go on late night runs with his neighbor’s dog, Brutus, in the nude. His compadres soon catch him:

Highbeams! Then I heard laughter. I froze and covered up, having an immediate heart attack. Snoopy bolted home.

“Grant!” Brutus called out. “What in the hell are you doing?”

Clarence was laughing so hard he fell out of the passenger door. “You...” he kept saying, “You shoulda see...your face...”

I got so mad I gave them the finger with free hand and stormed inside my house. (24)

After this incident, his two friends join him on these late-night runs. Each night they prayed, “Monday night was run-for your-ex night; Tuesdays we ran for our parents; Wednesdays we ran for everyone in town; Thursdays we ran for our ancestors; Fridays was happy hour—you could run for whoever you wanted” (28). These fellows break free from their drinking and begin to feel healthier and happier as they also deal with their grief. It is a hilarious story. Through the entire story, the characters are uplifted, they experience true peace and heart felt, laughter. It is a time of sorrow for these three young men, but through this process, they are creatively engaging healthy coping methods to deal with their struggles.

Another story in the collection that, quite frankly, the opening imagery and use of oral tradition blew me out of the water, is “Wolf Medicine: A Ceremony of You.” I am not certain if the wolf ceremony spoken of in this story is an actual example of Northern oral tradition, a dream or imagination, however the story of the four-day wolf ceremony and of the child who communicates with wolves comes across as a traditional oral narrative blended within a contemporary story. It is about angst: love lost and love regained. This is the first time I’ve encountered a story by Richard Van Camp that incorporates the oral tradition in such a powerful way and it is truly inspiring. What I found even more exciting about this story, is it brought us into an urban setting, into a coffee shop. The story setting is localized and fluid in its movement through ceremony, spirit, life on the rez and life in the city. It shows the main character dealing with his heartache and passion through his traditional practices. It depicts the main character moving forward with his cultural and contemporary lifestyle in a healthy way.

Indigenous Scholars: Literature Overview

Daniel Heath Justice says, “Native literature is an expression of intellectual agency as well as aesthetic accomplishment and that it has a role to play in the struggle for sovereignty, decolonization, and the reestablishment of Indigenous values to the healing of this wounded world” (336-7). Our ancestors passed down teachings of the power of our stories and for good reason. Our children and future generations need to see our nations living healthy, joy filled lives. Cree poet and Scholar, Neal McLeod says that, “the process of storytelling within Cree traditions requires storytellers to remember ancient stories that made their ancestors “the people they were,” (Simpson 33).

Despite [our] differences, what all [Indigenous] writers share is our connection to our homelands, our histories of colonization, genocide and displacement, our will to survive and pass the treasures of our cultures to future generations. Most of us believe our creative work has a function well beyond self expression. It expresses the values and aesthetics of our people and connects us to them and to our ancestors and future generations. It is a form of activism that both maintains and affirms who we are and

protests against colonization and assimilation. It is a form of sharing, of giving back, of reaffirming kinship, of connecting with the sacredness of creation. (Akiwenzie-Damm vi)

Integral to this search is the scholarship and methodologies as developed and practiced by Indigenous thinkers all across tmíx^w-Turtle Island. Some of those who have been critically inspiring to this research process are from British Columbia, they include Salish scholars: Dr. Jeannette Armstrong, Dr. Bill Cohen, Dr. Dorothy Christian and the storywork research of Dr. Jo-ann Archibald. Other Indigenous scholars and thinkers from across Turtle Island and beyond include: Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, Deanna Reder, Neal McLeod, Linda Tuhiwai-Smith. As Taiaiake Alfred states in his opening words to Simpson's *Lighting the Eighth Fire*, "when we reflect on the words of our ancestors...liberation is all just a matter of getting back in touch with a way of life that has respect, sacrifice, love, honesty, and the quest for balance at its core" (11).

Indigenous Literary Nationalism

to Niigonwedom James Sinclair's "Opening Thoughts" in the collaborative article, "Canadian Indian Literary Nationalism?: Critical Approaches in Canadian Indigenous Contexts," explains that literary nationalism "examines stories, poetry, songs, nonfiction works and autobiographies as processes deeply invested in the continuance of a People" (2). Storytelling practices that infuse Indigenous literature with dynamic, culturally embedded intellectual histories and knowledge of specific tribal contexts actively articulate vital elements of cultural resurgence in creative forms of expression, including text-based stories and orature. In his text, *Our Fire Survives the Storm*, Daniel Heath Justice explains:

Indigenous nationhood is more than simple political independence or the exercise of distinctive cultural identity; it is also an understanding of common social interdependence within the community, the tribal web of kinship rights and responsibilities that link the people, the land, and the cosmos together in an ongoing and dynamic system of mutually affecting relationships. (24)

Understanding the concepts, ideologies and frameworks associated with Indigenous literary nationalism, and recognizing the ways that my work demonstrates it, has been important

to my work as an Indigenous writer and as a PhD scholar. For the last few years, since the concept, “Indigenous literary nationalism” was introduced, I struggled to comprehend what the concept actually meant. What I realized is the term provides an opportunity for non-Indigenous readers to better interpret an innately Indigenous way of engaging in narrative storytelling practice that is inherently culturally rooted within the dynamic ancestral cultural practices of each distinct and dynamic Indigenous group that we, as Indigenous people represent. Once I understood what the label meant, I was finally able to bridge the gap within myself as to what the term actually signifies.

If I consider Indigenous literary nationalism as a home of stories, I reflect on the structure of facial bones, the way body shape and musculature represents our Indigenous homelands and how our land and waterscape shapes us. When an elder takes a weighted moment to pause and look deeply into a young person, their eyes follow the structure and line of bones along the faces of youth and children, and they seek the ancestral narratives of where we originate. They observe the way our spine, hips, legs and feet root us and move us across the land and water of tmíx^w-Turtle Island. They observe the way we use our hands and ears to do the work we have been directed to do with the harvest of traditional materials such as natural fabrics, food, medicines, tools. They listen for traditional names, traditional slang, linguistic representation, the way we enunciate, order and place words together. Each of which link Indigenous people to embodied ancestral memories and cultural practices. The explaining of Indigeneity would not necessarily be done with words, but through listening, observation and cultural practice.

Resurgence

Resurgence represents the act of waking up and taking on the challenge of storytelling from an Indigenous center embodying, in the ways we know how, traditional homelands and cultural ways of being in a contemporary timeframe. Resurgence requires reclaiming, relearning, returning to the heightened awareness brought on by spirit, culture, ceremony and

time spent 'with' the spirits on our land, water and traditional territories. According to Simpson, "Our inherent theories of resurgence are transformative and revolutionary. They are meant to propel and maintain social, cultural and political transformative movement through the worst forms of political genocide" (*Lighting* 24). Cultural resurgence, whether as story-plot or as theory describing the revival of Indigenous knowledges, is a vital strategy for liberation. Storytelling practices that actively engage cultural resurgence infuse Indigenous stories with culturally relevant and embodied traditional knowledge, language and spirit rather than relying on english critical traditions and values. Stories of resistance and resurgence break trail through the barriers of colonial violence, suicide, poverty and despair and they create conduits towards the healing red road of spiritual, emotional, physical and mental prosperity and transformation. Stories of resurgence overcomes colonial paradigms. Stories of resurgence challenge the hegemony of mainstream narratives. Stories of resurgence are rooted within Indigenous liberation, they mobilize our collective consciousness and they affirm empowering visions of indigeneity with the conscious goal of stimulating momentum towards intergenerational healing and transformation for Indigenous nations.

Dr. Jo-ann Archibald

Indigenous Storywork: Educating the Heart, Mind, Body and Spirit by Jo-ann Archibald shares a testimony of the powerful healing capabilities of Indigenous stories towards inspiring resurgence, decolonization and community transformation. *Indigenous Storywork* is a key inspirational text that investigates "storywork as an Indigenous methodology" (38). The research within this book focuses on Indigenous oral narratives for the purpose of creating tools for educational contexts and curriculum development for use in classroom learning environments. Concepts of "respect, responsibility, reciprocity, reverence, holism, interrelatedness, and synergy" (33) and cyclical teachings shared by Archibald as demonstrated within this text are key to my study. As a result, these concepts will also be reflected upon further in Chapters 4 and 5. Archibald starts her first paragraph with the explanation, "I have learned from First Nations Elders that beginning with a humble prayer creates a cultural learning process, which

promotes the teachings of respect, reverence, responsibility, and reciprocity. I use the term “teachings” to mean cultural values, beliefs, lessons, and understandings that are passed on from generation to generation” (1). She then continues by expressing gratitude for the work of Verna Kirkness and Ray Barhardt (1991) for their work in Indigenous postsecondary education and their article titled, “First Nations and higher education: The four R’s – respect, relevance, reciprocity, responsibility.” Critical to her research journey are the quality moments and significant conversations she has with knowledge carriers from her home community and the mentor/mentee relationship that she has with the Stó:lō Coqualeetza Elders group as well as beloved Elders Simon Baker, Vincent Stogan and Ellen White.

An excerpt from Laura Cranmer’s review explains, “we learn that storywork, as defined by Archibald, signifies multiple layers of meanings that interweave her cultural signifiers as reference points for an Indigenous methodology foregrounded and highlighted as a valid and valued mode of inquiry.” She continues by acknowledging that “Archibald’s style of prose is free of jargon, direct, and accessible to the general reader, yet she offers theoretical and programmatic discussion” (160). I am noting here that this style of prose is important to my scholarly writing because, first and foremost, it is for mixed Indigenous audiences including Elders, community storytellers, and creative writers as well as the Indigenous scholarly community.

Archibald notes the words of the late, beloved elder Dr. Simon Baker, “We have gone too long in the wrong direction. We were a spiritual people. We paid great homage to our Creator and we must get back to that way of thinking” (22). Through her important work with Elders, Archibald links her “hands back, hands forward” teaching that I remember so clearly from my undergraduate studies on campus at the First Nations House of Learning at UBC. Past to present reciprocal Salish teachings and empowering stories that effectively acknowledge her “journey of learning” and ‘how to listen with your heart, mind, body and spirit, in order to hear the teaching shared by the Elders, the ancestors and the spirit. This teaching is situated in

loving respect and reverence and exhibits a profound gentleness that contributes to reweaving the fabric of our nation. While this pertains to her dream of travelling by canoe to the spiritual world inhabited by her ancestors, I also felt the discussion of “learning how to understand their teachings” is integral to this process (3). Like Simpson, Archibald describes the ways the Elders continue to teach younger generations, through storytelling practices, to be good human beings, to work together, to find balance and live a good life. Some stories, she says, “remind us about being whole and healthy and remind us of traditional teachings that have relevance to our lives. Stories have the power to make our hearts, minds, bodies and spirits work together. When we lose a part of ourselves, we lose balance and harmony” (12).

One observation is that the early part of the text engages primarily oral narratives that are non-Stó:lō and non-Coast Salish, while the middle section provides analysis of Stó:lō and Coast Salish stories. The section titled “Finding Coyote” provides a summary of coyote and trickster teachings: “Other well-known Trickster characters include Raven, Wesakejac, Nanabozo, and Glooscap” (5). While she speaks of Coyote trickster teachings from many nations, Archibald does not refer to trickster stories that are representative of either Stó:lō, Coast Salish or Salish narratives. Terry Tafoya shares the compelling story of “Coyotes Eyes” in the section titled, Finding Coyote (8-10), however, the author does not state the nation from which the narrative originates. As a result of my uncertainty about his identity, due to the cultural protocol of acknowledging the nation of origin for this specific narrative, I did a quick Google search for Terry Tafoya in order to understand who his people were and the landscape from which his stories were emerging. What I unfortunately found was numerous newspaper stories and websites indicating that for many years through the US and Canada, this individual was falsely claiming an identity as a pre-eminent American Indian psychologist from Seattle as well as claiming to have received a PhD from the University of Washington in order to access employment within the Indigenous scholarly community (Teichroeb 2006). This conversation is very uncomfortable for me, as this specific research is important. However, I am uncertain how to approach the discussion regarding this specific piece in the section on Coyote.

As a contemporary Indigenous creative writer and author of children's books, the creative practice of storywork is important to me. Therefore, the conversation that I continue to search for is the conversation on the artistic creation of Indigenous published and performed narratives, "stories" in a contemporary time-frame. The conversation on ethics, protocols, methodology and the creation of contemporary Indigenous stories that utilize Indigenous knowledge and culture is important. The journey of decolonization is complex, there are so many interconnected, intersecting and tangled strands. So many of those strands are rotten and failing to hold together the core that had become situated in colonialism and genocide. This process of returning to our original narratives centered in the strength of our homelands requires us to remove and reinforce those narrative strands with stories centred in truth and Indigenous resurgence.

Jo-Anne Episkenew

In *Taking Back Our Spirits*, author Joanne Episkenew, similar to Archibald, reminds us of the capabilities of Indigenous literature, as an inclusive, holistic and relationship-oriented healing implement that has decolonizing, healing abilities for minds, bodies, spirits, and hearts. She further explains that this healing ability touches all nations Indigenous and non-Indigenous, it also can advance social justice; heal oppression, and inspire reconciliation within Indigenous communities (194). Simpson, in *Dancing on our Turtle's Back* explains that, "...storytellers have a responsibility to the future..." she continues, "Storytelling is at its core decolonizing, because it is a process of remembering, visioning and creating a just reality where Nishnaabeg live as both *Nishnaabeg* and *peoples*. Storytelling then becomes a lens through which we can envision our way out of cognitive imperialism" (33).

Policy was legislated to govern and destroy Indigenous identities, to control access and use of our natural environment, to control Indigenous education. "Indigenous literature acknowledges and validates Indigenous peoples experiences by filling gaps and correcting falsehoods created by racist and oppressive settler narratives. Indigenous literature resists

these oppressive ideologies assigned by the oppressive colonial regime” (Episkenew 2). For example, the sole purpose of Indian residential schools was to eradicate Indigenous knowledges and beliefs through severing Indigenous ties to family and land through the legislated eradication of the following: healthy Indigenous families, the relationship Indigenous children had to their traditional homelands and Indigenous languages. Severing the relationship to language. Through violence, torture, suffering and starvation, Indigenous children were forced to learn to speak english at Indian residential schools, therefore severing knowledge and practice of ancestral cultural and spiritual knowledges. These violent colonial actions, situated in a legacy of genocide, worked to destroy Indigenous storytelling practices through the loss of foundational narratives and replaced those stories with Eurocentric ideologies and oppressive myths that contributed to the systematic de-education of Indigenous children (7).

Indigenous stories challenge the “master narrative.” The master narrative, she explains is the myth sustained by the Canadian and colonizer/settler nation-state that valorizes settler narratives and misrepresents and excludes Indigenous people and Indigenous narratives. Indigenous literature functions as a counter story, acknowledging and validating the lives and colonial oppression as experienced by Indigenous people. It fills gaps and corrects falsehoods sustained by settler narratives. Indigenous literature functions as a “counter story that resists the oppressive identity [that the settler myth has assigned to Indigenous people].” Indigenous narratives claim intellectual and cultural space, they demand truth and they demand respect (2).

Episkenew explains that reconstructing our “personal myths” or narratives is an important element of putting our trauma behind us and living according to our life’s purpose. The experience of Indigenous writers turning their personal story into Indigenous literature transforms the audience into “a larger community of shared stories.” As an author, I have done author presentations and workshops regarding my children’s books across Canada. More than once, I’ve had vulnerable Indigenous individuals in my audiences.

The header of the article titled, *Currents of Trans/National Criticism*, written by Daniel Heath Justice provides a quote by Warren Cariou:

So much of the literature by Canada's Aboriginal writers is written against forgetting, against the obliterating narratives of conquest and progress and profit that have made the nation possible. These writers give us stories of dispossession, of the loss of land and language and identity, but they also, crucially, give us narratives of persistence and survival and even celebration. (334)

As a young person growing up, I was always told to be careful with my words because words are powerful. We are accountable to not just our parents, children and future generations, we are accountable to our ancestors. When my first children's book was published, I had a conversation with my aunt, Maria Campbell about stories. I told her that my children's book, *Shi-shi-etko* started out as an assignment for my creative writing for children class. When I wrote the first draft for classroom critique the words fell so neatly into place I felt as though the story wrote itself. My aunt Maria's response was that some stories are more powerful than others: "This story obviously chose you and was ready to be told." Episkenew relates a similar teaching by a Cree elder of Sturgeon Lake, "âtayôkêwin (sacred stories) are not only spiritual stories but are themselves spirit. The elder explains that stories enter into the listener and transform that person. Episkenew states that, "Contemporary Indigenous Literature serves two transformative functions—healing Indigenous people and advancing social justice in settler society—both components in the process of decolonization." She strongly advocates the importance of "implicating the audience." For Indigenous readers, this means "talking about the historical trauma and the postcolonial trauma that abounds in our communities" (15). "Whether the stories are told in the form of narrative, poetry, or performance, they "implicate" Indigenous readers/audiences, by giving voice and validation to their collective experience" (16). Episkenew encourages her audiences to write stories for the betterment of the people, as a strategy to reinforce foundations for the process of decolonization. She notes the power of language as medicine in the process of crafting stories, we recraft ourselves and therefore understand the power of stories. "...manipulate the contemporary english language to tell our stories, our way"

(12). As medicine, stories can heal, regenerate, create new life and therefore create empowerment.

Leanne Betasamosake Simpson

The written work of scholar, activist, educator and storyteller, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson is an incredible weaving of transcendent interpretations embedded within Anishinaabe ideologies and ways of being. One of the comments that I have expressed to my students in the classroom numerous times as a new faculty member at UFV is that there is a tremendous amount of insightful scholarly and creative work that emerges out of Eastern Turtle Island, specifically the Anishinaabe and the nations in the prairies. I have told them that:

As a result, in this classroom, I will do my best to have our discussions function somewhat like a spiral, venturing out to explore the work of other nations in order to see what they are a doing, and always returning to our tmíx^w, our homelands as Salish people. Noting that, we are culturally located in Stó:lō téméxw, but acknowledging my identity as an instructor, author, and woman of Nl̓e7kepmx, Syíl̓x ancestry, my strategy will always be to reflect on how the concepts and knowledge shared by other Indigenous scholars elsewhere can be reflected on and brought home.

Simpson's work establishes a foundation to observe, understand, reclaim and rebuild embodied, ancient knowledges and "philosophical contexts." *Dancing On Our Turtle's Back* was my first experience with her published work. It challenged me to dig deeper into my roots and cultural understandings as an Nl̓e7kepmx and Syíl̓x writer, as a human being and as an Indigenous mother. With a deeply intellectual, embodied creative and critical analysis of Anishinaabe oral narratives, Simpson embraces ancestral knowledge utilizing the "theoretical frameworks" presented within the context of Creation Stories in order to "interpret other stories, teachings and experiences" (32). Her active practice of strategically reclaiming and engaging Anishinaabe teachings and ancestral storytelling practices through performance, poetry, creatively developing and then applying cultural teaching methods has been incredibly inspiring. The deep integrity and true love of her culture, embedded within her published words have functioned like the words of grandmothers, reminding us of our sacred responsibilities. At one

point after completion of my MFA, my Aunt Maria said, (with regard to an incomplete manuscript), “Leaving a story unfinished like that is like inviting the grandmothers to tea. You invite them to your home, welcome them inside but you have left them sitting there for a very long time.” I interpreted everything that she said as follows: *You have to set the table for them. You have to sit and listen to them. You have to willingly complete the tasks that they have set before you. They will only wait for so long and then they will leave.*” I am a very visual person and ever since that moment, when I am stuck, or when I leave something incomplete for too long, in my minds’ eye, I can see those grandmothers sitting there. The ones that I knew personally, the ones I remember and the ancestors from long before.

Simpson describes many tasks that we must undertake as a people in order to achieve resurgence. “We must move ourselves beyond resistance and survival, to flourishing and *mino bimaadiziwin*” (17). *Mino bimaadiziwin* is the action of “living a good life” and Simpson cites Winona LaDuke as translating the term as “continuous rebirth” (27). Simpson encourages readers to define what resurgence means to them and to apply those concepts and strategies within their own work. The online version of the *Oxford English Dictionary* explains resurgence as “[t]he action or an act of rising again (chiefly in *fig.* senses); an increase or revival after a period of little activity, popularity, or occurrence.” This can involve a continuous decolonization praxis through cultural reawakening and revitalization. Moreover, Simpson says that “transforming ourselves, our communities and our nations is ultimately the first step in transforming our relationship with the state” (17).

The purpose of chapter three, Simpson explains, is to deepen our understanding of decolonization. To look back, “Biskaabiiyang,” the context is to return to ourselves, as in decolonizing to strip away the toxic blankets that colonization has placed upon us. We pick up the pieces of who we once were and gradually put ourselves back together because, “Resurgence is our original instruction” (66). She also notes to not give in to the non-indigenous

academics love for criticism. She asks how our ancestors lived, what stands out? Profound gentleness, profound kindness.

In chapter four, Simpson asks: What can we learn from the Seven Fires Prophecy about modern day resurgence? My experience of the Seven Fires Prophecy was especially impactful because Dr. Lee Brown shared similar prophetic teachings with a women's group that I was part of in the early stage of my personal healing journey over twenty-five years ago at Round Lake Treatment Centre, located in Syilx territory, Vernon, BC. The teachings of Indigenous prophecies from various nations—which began prior to European contact—shared insight about our collective journey and recovery from colonization. As a young woman, the learnings I had while at Round Lake signified a huge turning point for me in understanding how the trauma I carried was directly related to colonization. The prophecies taught me how each of us has critical responsibilities related to inspiring positive change, collectively, in order to transform the future for future generations. During my first year of doctoral coursework, the late Dr. Gregory Younging shared another account of the Seven Fires Prophecies. With reference to Waynabozho and the flood, the earth-diver, Simpson writes that, “re-creating ourselves is resurgence and resurgence cannot occur in isolation.” “We each must think of ourselves as this muskrat diving” (69).

The Nishnaabeg Seven Fires Prophecy, “original instruction(s),” have served the vital function of sustaining sacred Nishnaabeg history, culture and spiritual practices. And when you look at it, the structure of the prophecies and the stories they tell the people, also demonstrates the cycle of narratives regarding the impact of colonization, shared around the world by Indigenous people. Each fire and each cycle of narratives brings to light the different stages of impact and change for The People, including migration and their eventual settlement within. This epic mobilization was triggered by the foretelling of great despair brought on by the arrival of the Europeans and colonization. The prophecies, and collective narratives as told by Indigenous people around the world, reflect the work and responsibilities carried by those called

witness in ceremonial practice. The recounting of events that have taken place is a sacred practice and if the colonizing governments had it their way, these memories and knowledges would have been permanently wiped from our collective memory and from our minds. "The Fifth and Sixth Fires were periods of immense destruction. European conquest and occupation permeated" every element of Indigenous existence not just in Anishinaabe territory across tmíxw-Turtle Island. "The prophecy of the Seventh Fire foretold of a time when the most oppressive parts of the colonial regime would loosen and Nishnaabeg people would be able to pick up the pieces of their language, culture and thought-ways and begin to pick up the pieces of their language." Simpson explains that it is the responsibility of today's generations to "pick up the pieces of our lifeways" (66). She also describes the importance of strategic mobilization and how endurance, grit, committed action and spiritual visioning has been critical over such a slow and painful journey, "mobilization, resistance, and resurgence involves sacrifice, persistence, patience" of Indigenous people and a return to the "teachings of the shell," meaning a return to a sacred way of life (67). Our collective and strategic healing journey as Indigenous people and the resurgence of empowerment is absolutely key to this journey. Indigenous artists are knowingly and unknowingly working towards answering this call of documenting the transformations as they unfold, and feeding the fire of resurgence within ourselves, in order to feed the inspirational fire of collective transformation for Indigenous peoples all across tmíxw-Turtle Island.

Neal McLeod

Cree scholar Neal McLeod edits the important collection, *Indigenous Poetics in Canada*, which includes his article "Cree Poetic Discourse," in which McLeod makes a critical statement: "As contemporary Indigenous scholars, we need to ground our discourses in cultural-specific metaphors and ground ourselves in the languages and ancient pathways of Indigenous thinking. In essence, we need to build the 'positive space' of Indigenous knowledge" (90). Such stories have the capability to link collective memory of past generations to the now and into the minds and hearts of future generations. "Collective memory is the echo of old stories" (16).

Through their teachings, these stories link generations past to generations future, like a never-ending echo, they transfer knowledge from one generation to the next. “Old voices echo the ancient poetic memory of our ancestors.” These echoes manifest within our lives and then assist in shaping our future generations. This teaching is why, over and over again, we hear our Elders and Indigenous scholars verify with oral footnotes, referencing where they originally heard the oral narratives, in order to demonstrate that we do not have ownership or power over ancestral narratives. Rather, they teach us that we are conduits, channels, instruments “the hands and feet of the creator” and our ancestors. And, our responsibility is to do the work in transferring teachings and traditions forward to future generations.

Indigenous Poetics in Canada has four sections: Poetics of Memory, Poetics of Place, Poetics of Performance and Poetics of Medicine. McLeod explains that how we tell our stories roots us to the land by invigorating the narratives of our ancestors. It reminds us that despite colonial oppression and racism, we remain rooted by the resistance and resurgence of our grandmothers and grandfathers. He further explains that Lee Maracle suggested use of the term “poetics” rather than simply the conventional term of “poetry.” By framing this book as poetics, it allows one to understand the connections to classical Indigenous narratives and to move beyond the conceptions of what poetry is from the Anglo-môniyâw,” english literary perspective. Shifting the nomenclature means that this concept now embraces and is rooted within Indigenous oratory, theory, epistemology, pedagogy, and culture, land and place based narrative traditions (3).

The concept explained within *Indigenous Poetics* inspired me, as an Indigenous writer, because I realized everything I write creatively embraces the concepts explained by Indigenous Poetics because of the way my mind works. I am not a storyteller trained in remembering the spték^wł, the way the old ones were. The way the oral traditions have shown us. I have friends and acquaintances who are gifted in remembering. Their gifts shined through as they arrived into adulthood and their Elders took time to further train them to be orators whose specific

responsibility is to speak on behalf of the people. Many of them are learning to speak their languages now, but have also become skilled at interpreting the words of their Elders and Loved Ones. Fluidly moving back and forth between languages, weaving linguistic translations and cultural concepts while speaking on the floor to hundreds and sometimes thousands of people. Their embodiment of cultural knowledge and responsibility is specifically rooted within narratives that were shared with them by their grandfathers and grandmothers. “How you remember the story and how you tell it has consequences that could last a lifetime—remember that” (19).

Narrative poetic strands, McLeod explains, are relatively stable over time, and then “reanimated through performance and through the weaving of the narrative elements...” Poetic narrative icons “tacitly acknowledges the constant interplay between orality and written forms, and goes against the notion of a progressive understanding of the orality-written continuum” (8). He further explains that dissonance and interplay between poetic narrative cores allows awareness and connectedness. “There is a constant play between orality (performative elements) and narrative poetic icons, which could include a vast array of things, including the land itself, dreams, petroglyphs, classical narratives, hide paintings, and so on” (8). Minute details: historical events, traditional names, the unfolding of cultural ceremonies, cultural practices, and ideally fluency with language, as well as an eloquence for word choices in english, is crucially important.

Summing Up: Poetics of Place, Poetics of Land

As a young woman, I recall attending various events, observing and listening to orators standing on the floor speaking to the people. Their backs so straight standing tall, rooted like an interceptor between earth and sky. Their voices, taking on a rhythm, as though an echo of ancestors unseen, yet all around them. The most amazing moments that I recall is when there were multiple orators on the floor, speaking multiple Salish languages. On one end of the floor, one orating in Nsyílxcn, on the other end of the floor, one orating in Nl̓éʔkepmxcín and then a

third, weaving translations into english for those of us who understand only elements of our languages. Each speaker rooted between earth and sky, hands raised, gesturing as they spoke. They bless the people with the medicine of their words. Transmitting energy between them as though conduits from past to present to future, the dynamic energy vibrating through the whole room, lifting hearts, awakening minds, healing spirits with the resonance of their voices. Occasionally it was at a pelec or wake of a dear Loved One who was transitioning to the spirit world, or at winter ceremonies. One of my most clear memories of specific words shared was at a wake, a speaker stood up, the family standing close by, and he began to orate teachings about grief and loss.

Starting from birth, when our mothers bring us into the world, they carry us everywhere. When she puts our feet on the ground and we learn to walk, we continue to follow her. From room to room, if she goes out of sight into the kitchen, we see the babies cry, "Mommy take me with you." Or follow to the bedroom, to the bathroom, cry outside the bathroom door or barge right in. The little ones follow mommy outside and around the yard. As children and young adults we spread our wings, and venture farther and farther away, always returning to mom. And our moms, aunties, are always close by waiting to catch us when we fall. As adults, starting our own careers, doing work in the community we venture even further away, still always returning to check on our mothers.

The speaker paused as he looked at each of the family members.

As a grown man, when my mom is around, I still follow her from room to room. I still tell her stories about my day. But there is one place that we cannot ever follow our mothers. And this is the hardest lesson, for each of us. We can't follow our mothers when they leave us and return to the spirit world. She earned her rest. It's not an easy journey to leave and return to the spirit world, but now she rests. She needs to know that you are okay. You can't follow her there. You have to remind yourselves and help one another. (1997)

His voice, rising, deep, resonating throughout the whole house emitted a communal experience of healing through shared understanding. The people seated by the fire, normally everyone would be talking softly, then men sharing funny stories to inspire laughter, yet everyone was silently listening to the speaker share teachings with the people. The vocalizing of orators in this context is not an offensive act; it is an enunciation with the specific purpose of

reaching the hearts minds and spirits of the people. It embodies a deep connection to articulating the teachings of spirit and of cultural practice. There is a gift in the style of articulation embodied by the orator, that even if our minds don't grasp it conceptually when they say the words, it reaches deep within our hearts to wake our spirits with ancestral memory.

Poetics of place, poetics of land. Our languages and our teachings come from the land. They are nurtured within the rise and fall of mountains and valleys, the outspread of the prairies and rocky outcrops. The weaving of waterways create the rhythms of our ancestral languages. Simpson explains, in her essay in *Indigenous Poetics*, "Bubbling Like a Beating Heart," that the words, Tulibee and Otonabee, are the name of a river that runs through Kina Kitchi Nishnaabeg-gamin, otherwise known as Mississauga, Ontario. She further explains the translation, "Odoonabii-ziibi" odo means heart, and odemgat translates as boiling water, when boiling water bubbles it is like the beating of a heart. The root word, "odena" translates as "place where the hearts gather." And so the words, Otonabee-Odoonabi-ziibi is read and experienced differently by Anishinaabe people than it is by non-Indigenous people who know it only as a word for a place and nothing more (107). Yet, for the Anishinaabe, the words themselves demonstrate an even deeper connection to the land and waterscape.

Indigenous poetics represents a recounting, a remembrance. Indigenous poetics represents a relationship to narratives through songs, language, deep spiritual and embodied connectedness to land and therefore to our ancestors because our sacred tmíx^w, this earth represents the cradle of soil, dust and clay that is our ancestors. "Indigenous poetics involves embodiment, not only in the land around us, including urban landscapes, but also in our understanding." Mohawk spoken word artist Janet Rogers writes of this powerful embodiment practice, "Our words are like stars that helped navigate our ancestors. These stars are like a map and are a manifestation of iconic memory" (McLeod 9). Indigenous poetics represents the ways, that we as second, third, fourth, fifth, seventh generation survivors of colonization, reconnect and weave ancestral narratives intertwined and expressed through the english

language, back into our being and into the minds, hearts and spirits of our loved ones. Weave into our identity, the spoken and unspoken words and teachings of our ancestors. Indigenous poetics represents the songs, the narratives, the intertwining of Indigenous languages. It represents the sacred ways we share through oratory, as Indigenous writers, our spiritual connectedness without telling details such as the secrets and events within ceremonial practices.

Chapter 4: Teachings of the Spiral: Spinning Ethics, Protocols and Methodologies

Overview

As discussed previously, Indigenous literary nationalism engages the dynamic, embedded intellectual histories of specific tribal or national contexts as articulated in creative forms of expression, including text-based stories and orature. Storytelling practices that infuse Indigenous literature with culturally rooted, relevant knowledge actively contribute vital elements of cultural resurgence. Chapter 4 embraces an Indigenous literary nationalist approach that is nation-based and rooted within specific Indigenous territories, values, beliefs and consciousness in order to bring powerful Interior Salish perspectives on storytelling, ethics and protocols to the development of a narrative framework.

This chapter continues the exploration of Indigenous storytelling begun in Chapter 3 with a shift in focus to the cultural location of the Interior Salish world, drawing attention to the work of Salish storytellers and scholars in order to acknowledge and incorporate culturally located ideologies and paradigms into the larger project of developing a narrative framework and methodology that supports the creation of stories of Indigenous resurgence. Specifically, the chapter looks at the writings of Mourning Dove Christine Quintasket, Jeannette Armstrong, Bill Cohen, and Kevin Loring. Each of these storytellers and scholars, with their specific context and time, strategically and creatively engage nation-based intellectual narrative traditions, cultural praxis, and cultural pedagogies.

As part of this work, Chapter 4 initiates a conversation concerning the function of Interior Salish oral narratives in the context of community resurgence. In *(Ad)dressing Our Words*, Armand Garnet Ruffo notes that “[t]he Oral Tradition continues to influence contemporary Aboriginal literature profoundly...” resulting in “stylistic and thematic hybrid of the oral and written, the past and present, the Aboriginal and the Western” (6). It has also been previously

noted that *Indigenous Storywork* focuses on Indigenous oral narratives from the perspective of creating tools for “educational contexts.” In contrast to the educational project of *Indigenous Storyworks*, my interest in this chapter is the function of traditional and contemporary Indigenous orality in the context of creating stories. Accordingly, Chapter 4 begins with a discussion of oral storytelling and explores ways to ethically incorporate these as part of a storytelling methodology that is specifically geared towards nurturing the creation of present-day stories as a strategy to uplift and inspire healing and transformation.

To sum up, the work of Chapter 4 is to contribute to creating methodology and framework concepts that facilitate Indigenous stories that are rooted within nation-based cultural landscape and intellectual knowledges, infused by our ancestral narrative memory and cultural practices.

Traditional Stories, Ethics, Protocol and Creative Practice

Simon Ortiz, in his opening for *Speaking for the Generations*, explains that, “Traditional oral stories depict, assert, and confirm the natural evolvment—or the origin and emergence—of Native people from the boundless creative energy of the universe” (xiii). Indigenous ways of being, particularly in British Columbia, are dynamic, beautiful, spiritual and definitely not identical. They significantly reflect the way we live in relation to the environment including the wide range of climates, landscapes, plateau regions, valleys, mountain ranges, as well as ocean and rivers. In the Nicola Valley alone, there are over 10,000 waterways. Each territory embodies cultural and spiritual ways of being. Linguistic variation is significant yet interconnected on the deepest ancestral levels. Functioning much like the rivers and water systems interlinking ancestral travel from one nation to the next.

The book *Aboriginal Oral Traditions: Theory, Practice and Ethics* aligned with my search to gain a deeper understanding of where and how I fit as a contemporary Indigenous author and storyteller from the Nicola Valley and from British Columbia. This doctoral project was a way to

research how we, as Indigenous writers, portray ourselves and others within our literary works and how we work with—and within—both our past and present oral traditions.

The introduction to *Aboriginal Oral Traditions: Theory, Practice, Ethics*, by Renée Hulan and Renate Eigenbrod states that, “Oral traditions are distinct ways of knowing and the means by which knowledge is reproduced, preserved and conveyed from generation to generation” (7). This is a cultural and generational ancestral knowledge that is sustained through the experience and active practice of sharing traditional and contemporary forms of oratory, storytelling traditions and Indigenous cultural ways of being. Through traditional practices, this continues to be the way Salish people throughout Coast Salish and Interior Salish territories live, breathe and exist all across our tmíxʷ. “To understand oral tradition as a form of knowledge shaping the work of Aboriginal artists and authors, for example, one listens to the oral narratives in order to know how their voices might be heard within the communities they come from as well as the communities in which they are received” (7). Kimberly Blaeser explains that the oral tradition *informs* literary works by Aboriginal people as writers translate “not only oral language but form, culture and perspective” (7).

Indigenous poetics, as explained by Lee Maracle, is the embodiment of Indigenous consciousness. A presence of contextual poetic narrative play, like a weaving echoes of ancestral voices within memory, weighted silence, reflecting, listening with Indigenous ways of understanding. What Blaeser describes in *Aboriginal Oral Traditions* as a “dedication to an oral esthetic in the rhetoric,” results in a “stylistic and thematic hybrid between oral, written, past and present” (7). Further, a “textualized orality,” a term coined by Susan Gingell, explains creative work written by Indigenous storytellers as a hybrid and stylistic infusion with deep influence of the oral tradition expressed in the English language (7).

Self-Locating Within Oral Traditions

Since reading the introduction to *Aboriginal Oral Traditions: Theory, Practice, Ethics*, I’ve been considering how oral traditions inform our ways of knowing when we are from a society

that has been deeply impacted by colonialism and so many of our traditional oral narratives have changed due to interpretation and use of the English language. In the historical past, from the time of birth Indigenous people were trained to be knowledge carriers, this was a practice that was entirely sustained through intricate memory systems which entailed the relaying of very specific practices through hands-on learning, personal experience and oratory. Individuals who mastered the retention and implementation of that traditional knowledge or skill were held in the highest respect and their skills were, 'broadcast' far and wide throughout Indigenous territories. Traditional knowledge carried with it responsibility, detail specific protocols, values, beliefs, spirituality and culture, often specific to gender and social ranking and was carefully protected by traditional forms of regulation based on communication.

Among some nations here in British Columbia, there are families who have managed to hold onto detailed traditional stories regarding sacred, cultural, ceremonial and spiritual practices, songs, names, stories and teachings that are distinctly from their nation, and more specifically their bloodline dating back multiple generations to their ancestors. These traditions include the work of specific ancestors and cultural practices. Many succeeded at this by not only going underground but also because specific family members took on the responsibilities of consciously abiding by the ancient practices of remembering and by keeping the teachings secret. As a result, they have now been able to pass these sacred teachings and practices on to their descendants within today's generation.

In my experience residential schooling impacted three generations of my family resulting in a disconnect from traditional practices that involved the passing on of oral narratives in a traditional and family/community context. I did experience the benefit of growing up with Elders as my main caregivers. My Auntie Ethel (Auntie EI), who was one of my main caregivers, was probably the main person who contributed to my experience of traditional forms of oratory and storytelling practices and traditional food harvesting. She was also the key person that provided opportunities to observe and learn about working with traditional textiles.

My childhood memories of our traditional Nl̓éʔkepmx stories are limited to primarily three stories: “Nisteʔ Skeʔlulaʔ” and “How Chipmunk Got his Stripes.” Although the third story, “How Loon Got her Necklace,” was commonly told while I was growing up, I now understand, it is not an Nl̓éʔkepmx narrative. “How Chipmunk Got his Stripes” as shared in *Our Tellings: Interior Salish Stories of the Nl̓haʔkapamx People* is one I remember my aunt telling me. It is a short and fun childhood favourite.

They say long ago, there was a chipmunk living under a big rock. One time he was sitting outside and Bear was going by. He started teasing Bear, “Oh you big clumsy old thing!” and “You can’t even get around good as I can!” Bear got mad and went after Chipmunk. Chipmunk went in his hole and Bear couldn’t catch him. Chipmunk came out again and started teasing Bear again. Bear went after him, but couldn’t catch him and missed Chipmunk again. But the third time, Bear got Chipmunk on his back and kind of scratched him. They say that’s how chipmunk got the little stripes on his back. (81)

The way my Auntie El told this story was far more entertaining because when she spoke the language came alive through her enunciation of english words and through her body language. She was an exceptionally humble, loving, kind-hearted, fun and dramatic in how she told stories and did her work. She laughed loudly and, despite her hardships, she found ways to joyously cook for The People. She was the first person to teach me to cook for The People with love and generosity in my heart.

My Elders and the book, *Our Tellings: Interior Salish Stories of the Nl̓haʔkapamx People*, have taught me that there are two main types of Nl̓éʔkepmx stories, sptákwelh’ and spílaxem, these are also the two key sections in the book. Sptákwelh’ are creation stories, “which tell of events that occurred when the world was populated by animals in human form;” and, spílaxem are “non-creation stories, which tell of events that occurred during historical time” (12). Spílaxem, as I understand, are stories that occurred during remembered time, for example the news or “moccasin telegraph” kitchen table conversations, past and present events and gossip. These stories provide opportunities to learn about many things, including various landscape formations known as transformation sites and the sptákwelh’, or story of how they came to be.

While researching and reviewing Nl̓éʔkepmx coyote stories in several sources, including *Our Tellings: Interior Salish Stories of the Nl̓haʔkapamx People*, I noticed a couple of very sexual stories about coyote, specifically resulting in violent rape perpetrated by coyote on a young, very sick girl within the sweatlodge. What stood out to me about this particular story was when coyote had impregnated another character in other stories, he had transformed himself into something so small, such as a leaf or small stick that he was swallowed whole and that resulted in impregnation. In the section titled, Sptákweh' (Creation Stories), there are two versions of a story of Coyote physically raping the girl with witnesses. One told by Walter Isaac titled, "Coyote and His Son."

The people got together and made a small sweathouse inside the pithouse. There Coyote began to perform his act, blowing and singing, becoming stranger and stranger. The sweathouse was bobbing up and down—Coyote was singing to his heart's content.

"What's going on here?" the people wondered. They opened the flap and there was Coyote—on top of the young girl.

The people attacked Coyote with shotguns and other weapons. Coyote leapt away from them, leaving his belongings still hanging there. His coat, his hat, and his shoes all turned to ashes, moss and fir branches.

'Oh, those Coyotes! You people ought to kill them off – get rid of all of them!" said the old folks. They never have pity on us. But anyway, the sick girl is better. She is well again (36-37).

The second is titled, "Coyote and the Three Sisters" told by Louie Philips. It states, "Of course Coyote's tool is in her..." The people take the covers off and witness his rape. After that, as written in "Coyote and His Son," the people attack Coyote with shotguns and other weapons (43). The presence of guns and contemporary clothing always had me questioning the time frame and period in which this story took place. When elder C'éleʔmncút was still with us, we talked about this story. It is listed as a sptékʷl̓, a creation story. However, the question we shared was, "If this was a creation story, why would the people have shotguns?" These coyote stories were recorded by Boaz and Teit around the year 1900. Disease, colonialism, residential

schools and the gold rush had hit the Fraser Canyon in a ferocious, relentless wave that resulted in the decimation and genocide of the Indigenous people in British Columbia including the Nl̓éʔkepmx population, culture and language. What this sexual violation of a child may actually indicate is the actions of gold miners, and/or the priests in either a church or St. George's Residential School and that somehow in the retelling and eventual publication, Coyote became the perpetrator and the rape took place within the sweatlodge. In this story, the sweatlodge is no longer a sacred place of safety, but a place of exploitation and violent sexual assault. I know there are many interpretations to Coyote stories, however, as a rape and sexual abuse survivor, the stories of "Synkyep" as lacking self-control have contributed to my understanding that Coyote was a despicable character of the male gender. He was not to be trusted or left alone with children because of his sexual conduct. There are many stories about Coyote shared by all of the linguistic groups among Interior Salish peoples. I do not apologize for my interpretation of Coyote. There are so many incidents where he was a rapist. I know there are people who are defensive of Coyote and his role, just as there are defenders of the person who raped me when I was a young teen. It is difficult to make a careful observation about the intent of Coyote's character without deeper research. Without having had the opportunities to hear about how these actions are unpacked and interpreted by knowledgeable Syilx and Salish people, women and cultural knowledge carriers from all Interior Salish peoples, my response is entirely from that of someone who has sexual trauma due to rape. In order to develop a thorough knowledge base for understanding and interpretation of Nl̓éʔkepmx and Interior Salish traditional narratives, and move through trauma-based interpretations, more years of study is definitely required.

Interior Salish Storytelling

Landscape, culture and nation root us within specific Indigenous territories, values, beliefs and consciousness. The remainder of Chapter 4 engages the works of four Interior Salish writers whose creative and scholarly works share culturally located ideologies and paradigms

that important insights to the Indigenous narrative framework that is developed more fully in Chapter 5. Each of these storytellers and scholars have engaged nation-based intellectual narrative traditions, cultural praxis, and cultural pedagogies within their work.

Mourning Dove: The Courage to Write it Down

Syílx storyteller Christine Quintasket, also known as Mourning Dove, was born in 1888 to Okanagan-Colville parents. Mourning Dove is the first Indigenous author of the Okanagan Nation and one of the first Indigenous authors in North America. Her novel *Cogewea: The Half Blood* was published in 1927. Her masterful intertwining of captikwł within present-day life experience of that time-period is inspiring for multiple reasons, including the barriers she faced as an Indigenous woman and writer striving to get published at the time of colonization as she shared in the introduction to *Cogewea* (vii, xi, xxv). Despite all the struggles and backlash she experienced from her community for working with traditional stories, as Jeanette Armstrong notes in her PhD thesis, Quintasket persevered. “[W]ith the use of devices parallel to Western literary traditions” the novel draws on both the structural framework and overall concepts “of a well-known captikwł, the story of qwəqwćwiya?—chipmunk and snina?—owl monster” (199).

The story is set in the territory of Montana, Washington and the lower Okanagan. Mourning Dove is also the author of *Coyote Stories*, a collection of narratives which she gathered from her Elders. According to the introduction to *Cogewea*, Mourning Dove wanted to write novels and not what she called “folklores.” Her use of the captikwł of Chipmunk and Owl Monster as a framework for the novel *Cogewea*—and further, her descriptions of landmarks, waterways, specific historical references and the little discussed Athapaskan people that travelled and settled in the Nicola Valley, and most importantly, her courage to allow the stories to transform and come to life through her written work—makes the work of Christine Quintasket and her collection of published works critical to this research project.

As I read Mourning Dove’s written work, I reflect on my home, the Nicola Valley, and the landscape as it once existed at the time of European contact and settlement. In his text *Cree*

Narrative Memory, McLeod explains: “Our stories give us voice, hope, and a place in the world. To tell stories is to remember. We owe it to those still unborn to remember, so that they will have a home in the face of diaspora” (70). This process of learning and reflection is important to both my critical process as a scholar, and to my creative work as a contemporary author and storyteller.

The knowledge I carry about our intellectual narrative traditions is minimal, learned mainly through publications by or with beloved Elders from our Nl̓éʔkepmx and Syíl̓x communities, many of whom are now resting in the spirit world. There is minimal contemporary published Nl̓éʔkepmx scholarly and creative work, and minimal published work about narrative practices regarding methodologies. I do not feel entitled to Nl̓éʔkepmx, Syíl̓x or any Salish cultural knowledge and believe it is important to tread very carefully when considering ways to creatively work with it. As I read the vast body of published work coming out of Eastern Canada, it is difficult not to feel like we are falling behind in recounting our stories and developing an established knowledge base of published scholarly and creative work that is embedded with Indigenous knowledge and methodologies representing Western Canada, specifically British Columbia and even more specifically, Salish peoples. I am truly grateful for the many doctoral dissertations that I have been able to turn to by Salish peoples, including Nl̓éʔkepmx scholar, the late Dr. Shirley Sterling Seepeetza and Secwépemc scholars, Dr. Dorothy Christian and Dr. Ron Ignace, just to name a few whose work has been inspiring along my dissertation journey.

Quality time with many of my Elders generally engaged traditional practices that kept us physically busy, such as harvesting and preserving plants, etc. for food and medicine. With my memoir, which was released in 2021, *Sp̓il̓əxm: A Weaving of Recovery, Resilience and Resurgence*, I felt incredibly nervous about community feedback. However, I have received minimal comments from community. I was not able to have a proper book launch for it, as it was released during Covid and I am not one to shamelessly promote my own work, perhaps to a

fault. For the most part, what has been said has been positive, more so focused on the collective body of children's work that I have published so far, with little to zero response to my memoir. There has been only one point when there was unspoken questions about the title of my first book, *Shi-shi-etko*. At that time, I went to visit with the late elder from back home the loved and respected, Laura Manuel. What she had told me was there was someone she descends from who carried a similar name to that of *Shi-shi-etko*, and so she wondered how I came to find that specific name. I explained to her how someone in a dream had spoken the name to me, loudly enough that this voice had woke me straight out of a heavy sleep. At that moment when I woke up, I wrote the name down as I heard it enunciated. She had explained that one of her great-great-grandmother's had carried that name. I found this interesting, as in my maternal grandmother's family lineage, Lily "Mem" Bent-Shuter (my great-grandmother), was a sister to Laura's mother, Susan Bent-Manuel. They shared the same father, George Bent. I have no idea which family member carried the name, so I am uncertain if I also am a descendent of that person. At the time, she did not clarify.

Lineage and ethical rights to stories and knowledge and lack of detailed history are a couple reasons why I am uncertain about working with our traditional knowledge and stories. However, I am encouraged and inspired by the incredible work of Nl̓éʔkepmx playwright, Kevin Loring. Regardless of ethical and protocol concerns about overstepping boundaries, he has continued to move forward with his creative work that engages traditional songs and cultural knowledge. He has engaged the Nl̓éʔkepmx community and Elders in Lytton, BC, through many of his productions that actively incorporate historical, archival and cultural ancestral knowledge. I will provide an exploration of his published work and the memories of his productions that I have seen later in this chapter.

During the 1980s, the Nl̓éʔkepmx and Scwéxmx within the Nicola Valley implemented various strategies in an effort to restore our narrative traditions. At that time, Wendy Wickwire, a

non-Indigenous ethnographer, was visiting Interior Salish communities with the purpose of recording Interior Salish oral narratives.

Many Elders recall, when they were children, being told stories at night (these stories, told repeatedly, taught them about nature, respect, morality, and proper behavior; they also served as a form of entertainment). The Elders also recall hearing stories at gatherings, funerals, potlatches, hunting and fishing camps, root- and berry-gathering camps, and so on—but many have forgotten them. (Hanna and Henry 11)

Since that time, the vast majority of our Nléʔkepmx and Scwéxmx Elders that spoke Nléʔkepmxcín fluently and carried detailed knowledge and authentic accounts of our original storytelling methods, language, intellectual knowledge and cultural practices have passed on. *Our Tellings*, collected and edited by Darwin Hanna and Mamie Henry, has been one of few important contributions recording the collective ancestral knowledge of our Elders. “Ask by the graveyard, for when the Elders die, they take with them an encyclopedia of knowledge” (11). There remains an intergenerational disconnect in the transmission of our cultural and intellectual property, stories and practices.

Jeannette Armstrong: Tmíxʷ Teachings

Renowned Syílʷ scholar, author and Canada Research Chair Jeannette Armstrong’s dissertation, *Constructing Indigeneity: Syílʷ Okanagan Oraliture and tmíxʷcentrism*, functions as an important access point for analysis and methodology when working with Interior Salish narrative traditions. The sheer magnitude of this work is a beacon for our people. It is alive and truly has its own spirit that Armstrong has channeled onto the written page. “This consciousness,” says Armstrong, “is highly personal and highly contextual” (111). This doctoral work provides an in-depth analysis of Mourning Dove’s publications, in particular *Cogewea*. Armstrong’s analysis provided in Chapter Five of her dissertation, “Syílʷ Literature in English,” is particularly noteworthy because of her fluency in the Nsyílʷxcn language. The magnitude of research that her doctoral dissertation comprises with regard to the Syílʷ narrative traditions, specifically the captikwł and the Syílʷ language overall, is incredibly vast. Explaining the multi-

faceted translations of words can be a complex process, such as the important interpretation that she provides for “tmíx^w.” The analysis she provides of dynamic Syílx narratives is complex and analytical, and in her process provides a deeply intellectual and spiritual learning process. Due to colonial languages, it is easy to resort to a very simplistic interpretation for translations, such as for “tmíx^w” as meaning “land” or “the land.” However, the translation profoundly intertwines concepts of spirit, creation, evolution and life force, and then goes beyond that into the “conceptualization of tmíx^w [as] a systems view of nature.” She further explains that “the tmíx^w are chiefs in the Syílx meaning of the word—that they represent a role—in being duty bound to twining/coiling the many strands” (158-161). Reconciling the vast insurmountable body of knowledge that is her dissertation feels impossible. In Nlé?kepmxcín, we have a word, “q^wənq^wént,” that in my broken-Indian comprehension I know as meaning “pitiful.” That is how I feel trying to navigate the work with our narrative traditions because of my inability to speak our languages and being what feels like a “book knowledge Indian,” unable to provide a basic analysis or interpretation of our languages.

Armstrong’s creative work, her embodiment of Syílx land, language, and cultural teachings through present-day narratives and published stories, is tremendously inspirational to the creative elements and outcomes of this research project, including “Land Speaking,” *Slash*, and *This is a Story*, as well as the method of interpretation and application of Syílx captikwł oral narratives incorporated within the children’s picture books she wrote. Armstrong’s creative and critical work has been tremendously inspiring for me through the process of writing the final section of my most recent publication, *Spiləxm: A Weaving of Recovery, Resilience and Resurgence*, in particular the elements of healing and connecting with understanding our interconnected relationship with the land. Her work, with deep reflection on the courage and determination exhibited by Christine Quintasket with the turmoil she must have overcome when writing and publishing while faced with such despair in the early 1900s. These conceptual frameworks for interpretation and analysis helped me become more courageous and better

skilled at employing and embodying land, water, spirit and cultural teachings within my present-day storytelling practices.

In her article, “Land Speaking,” which is included in *Read, Listen, Tell*, Jeanette Armstrong explains, “I experience the land as fluent speaker of Okanagan. N’silxchn, the Okanagan land language is my first language, my Earth Mother language. When I close my eyes and my thoughts travel, N’silxchn recreates the sounds, the smells, the colours, the taste and texture precisely. N’silxchn emulates the land and the sky in its unique flow around me” (145).

For myself, as the first generation since the closing of Indian residential schools, and as a kindergarten and grade one student of Indian day schools, I experience the land as a non-fluent speaker—someone who feels the rhythms of words yet has always stood outside our languages looking in. Words, like ever so tiny, crystal-like multifaceted lights, are ancestral spirits winking and dancing in the world surrounding us. My Elders have often described a deep loneliness and sadness of spirit for their spoken language, as so many of their fluent speaking loved ones leave this world. Then, after a long wait, upon their leaving us to cross over to the spirit world, what I imagine is a joyous reunification not just of presence, but of spoken heart languages. Their rhythmic voices raised in sing-song, calling out to one another in joy as we express our grief for our loved one as their spirits leave their bodies and enter the spirit world. I visualize this, as one-by-one, our loved ones leave and are reunited with our great-grandparents and all our grandmothers and grandfathers. The way the land hums and songs dance around us in the highest mountains while we berry pick, joyous ancestral voices raised in song. A dynamic vibration, like a powerful, “humming spiritual energy building at a much higher frequency intertwined with linguistic fluency of the ancestors” as illustrated in the musical score for Helen Haig-Brown’s, *The Cave*. Fluent ancestral speakers just on the edges of our peripheral. Voices enunciating joy and peace lingering in the air as black huckleberries fall one by one into our baskets and buckets. One by one, as we bite the first berry and the taste bursts with exuberant flavour inside our mouths. I imagine this is the taste of our languages. When we

gorge on alpine huckleberries, this reflects the deep hunger and exuberant joy of feeling our languages and yet not carrying the understanding and ability to speak fluently.

Bill Cohen: Spider's Web and Cyclical Weaving Narratives

Bill Cohen's doctoral dissertation, *School Failed Coyote so Fox Made a New School: Indigenous Okanagan Knowledge Transforms Educational Pedagogy* creates intellectual and creative space for expression, development and interpretation rooted within Syilx ancestral knowledge practices and theory, story weaving and cultural expression. He describes a Syilx scholarly approach to interpreting and conveying the strands of story, knowledge and teachings woven within Syilx *captikwł* storytelling practices and uses this to reconnect old teachings for the benefit of new generations. Early on, he explains a diagram that he developed that weaves teachings of the spiral, the spider's web and the circle of life (see Figures 3 to 5 in this chapter). "Sqilxwlcawł model explains how knowledge, influence from the world, and collective responsibility resonate inward and outward through generational practice" (41). Cohen, through this research, shows how sqilx stories function as pedagogy and explains to us why this transfer of knowledge is vitally important and shared through the roles and responsibilities of gifted translators and storytellers. "The Okanagan and many Indigenous peoples are at a critical era because we are connected to strands of knowledge that have sustained our peoples for thousands of years yet we stand within an unstable transition zone" (58). As a Syilx storyteller, educator and scholar, he became aware of the impact that colonial trauma had on his life and began the work he had to do to heal as well as accept and carry forward his cultural responsibilities. The cultural teachings, ethics and responsibilities shared within the *captikwł*, Four Food Chiefs, seems influential in his specific intellectual and journey of cultural healing.

I have only had the opportunity to hear part of a *captikwł*, shared by an elder in Spaxomin, on one occasion. I do not share his name, as it was a rather spontaneous moment when he shared. He took time to explain that he doesn't remember *captikwł* and that he was not a fluent speaker. I asked him to share with me what part of it he could remember. It was later in

the evening and we were visiting. The moment he decided to share the story, his persona and the energy around him immediately shifted and I immediately noticed his innate orator's voice come through. In that moment, he spoke fluently, beautifully in our Nsyilxcn for about ten or so minutes, sharing the story while no one else aside from myself was present and listening. I am so grateful to have that moment of hearing him speak in such an empowered state. This moment is ingrained in my memories. Immediately afterwards, he once again expressed his self-doubt and that he was not a storyteller nor was he a fluent speaker of Nsyilxcn. In my mind, that is exactly what this elder is when he allows himself to visit that empowered place inside himself.

Captikwł are sacred “stories” or narratives that function as original instructions for the Syílxc. In their truest form they are shared orally by fluent speakers first. Colonial languages have a tendency to colonize Indigenous stories: through translation, they provide a watered-down version for the purpose of easier interpretation. This process of translation does not provide the same heightened level of deeply multifaceted awareness, teachings entrenched within cultural knowledges and Indigenous ways of being. With narratives functioning in different roles, often carrying spiritual vibration, many sacred stories are only to be shared at specific times of the year. As shared in his interview with Kelsie Kilawna on APTN National in December 2020, Elder Robert Edward explained, “It’s a doctrine for a transfer of knowledge for all of our laws and protocols, how we are to be with one another, ceremony, prayer, giving thanks and place names.” He continued, “All of that is really important. It’s really important to our people, it helps with our environmental ethic, our business ethic, all of the ethics we need to survive on this land.” Captikwł remind the people and teach the children how to live, to engage self-discipline and how to conduct oneself respectfully in the world and how to interact with the world. They explain our traditional roles and responsibilities as well as governance and land stewardship practices. He further explained that the winter season is an important time for sharing these narrative traditions “because it’s a time to rest after a year of preparing for the

winter through harvesting, hunting and ceremony.” The sharing of captikwł can “take weeks or even months to fully tell;” this is why the stillness of the winter season is important.

As a Salish person of Nléʔkepmx and Syílʷx ancestry, we are taught that we are one part of tmíxʷ. Tmíxʷ encompasses all the interwoven life forces which include the animate and inanimate things that are naturally a part of our world. Through my childhood, my education focused on english literary practices. The core axis of everything we learned was situated in eurocentric knowledges, epistemologies, religions, and stories within the bible, and the english literary cannon. This is not a topic that I have any intention of addressing, but when I began to understand the ways our Nléʔkepmx and Syílʷx traditional Indigenous narratives function within our communities as a young and very colonized person, this was my comparison.

The personal journey Cohen describes is powerful for multiple reasons. I could relate to the journey between families, Elders and caregivers, becoming aware of the impact of colonization on my family and particularly upon myself and my approach to the world. I continue to feel disconnected from the stories and my language. My education and spiritual life journey has resulted in me staying away from home for a longer period of time than I had ever expected.

A key question Cohen describes as spoken by the Old Ones asks, “What will you do for the People To Be?” This thought process became particularly emotional for me because this has been a core focal point for my journey as an Indigenous creative writer and now a scholar. In this dissertation, I have spoken about many different stages of my writing and publishing journey, including my memoir. Cohen notes that cultural confusion, distorted identities resulting from colonization and disconnection from sqilx cultural teachings have resulted in a generation of youth who “don’t know who they are or where they fit in” (90). In one sense, I am a grown adult now, and so grateful for the years of my childhood and youth when I had my godmother, grand-aunties and Elders to guide my path. My non-present birth mother left me to my own resources in finding my path and I am grateful for my Elders that stepped in and showed me the

way. However, now as a mother, I often feel at a loss for showing this way of being to my own children without the circle of Elders who guided me. The transmission of cultural knowledge engages the spinning and weaving of story threads as a way to gather loose strands and reweave cultural knowledge and cultural lives back together. Repetition reiterates importance, followed by dialogue and theorizing, reflection, utilizing oratory and cultural education practices,

Reflecting on Cohen's dissertation, I am choosing to situate my lens in that of cultural strength. I acknowledge this because every time I sit down to process, I am overwhelmed by all the ways I am deficient as a colonized reader, who is on the next level of healing and as a non-speaker of my Indigenous languages. Since I was 17, I consciously chose to embody a life of sobriety, healing and nurturing in my effort to recover from colonial impact of trauma and disengage from disempowering narrative strands that originated in trauma. In his dissertation, Cohen states, "This research is both a reconnection to strands of Okanagan knowledge disrupted by colonization and a continuation of Okanagan knowledge that has informed our cultural survival through the era of colonization and resistance" (34).

Cohen's discussion of cyclical and web storytelling practices is compelling because, while we often hear of how Indigenous stories are cyclical and that they incorporate teaching and learning processes that are reflective of interconnected weavings or webs that intertwine the teachings of our ancestors, it is challenging to find a compiled body of work that sits with storytelling practice and unpacks the complexities. In this current era, we are continuously remembering, reconnecting and reinforcing narrative strands of knowledge and teachings and then relearning, reweaving these strands into every element of our lives. Cohen further explains the translation for the Syílxlwaxw word, sqilxw as the Okanagan word for ourselves and translates as "the dream in a spiral" (35). In his section "Sqilxwawt: Okanagan Transforming Theory," he states that, "The vision I share is a weave or synthesis of story, history, poetry, epistemology, and creativity: a web of learning and knowing." He speaks of Coyote's nap as he is on a journey, "Oh, I must have closed my eyes for a minute." He says, "Carry on as if he'd only had a

brief nap. The brief nap has lasted 100 years, the time span from eras of cultural vitality and dominant cultural modes living” (35).

Concentric circles and the presence of the spiral teachings, like a spindle, inspires momentum and movement. Like a collection of story echoes, the generational and synergistic exchange of energy can move towards wholeness and ultimately wellbeing for all. The illustrated concentric circles, which includes layers, and in a sense, I think of the movement between worlds, oneself at the axis, family, community, nation with the four directions: intellectual, physical, emotional and spiritual. The synergistic influence of and our responsibility towards generations of the past, the generations today, and those yet to come. And, here yet again, I find myself reflecting on the momentum the circular cycle of the spiral brings. A concentric circle evolves in a circle. Reversing to untangle, put the old away and then always returning to where it began, rotating on its axis. In our ceremonial practice. I reflect on my elder’s words, which I reflected on in my memoir, *Spilexm*.

Reweave the Universe: I recall a moment in deep winter when snow was heavy on the ground, following a night of prayerful songs. As I sat with my Elder, I spoke in reflection about the cyclical direction in which many of our most sacred ceremonies proceed, all across tmíxʷ. A timeless moment passed, as my dear Elder paused in contemplation. “We go in one direction to untangle ourselves, and then afterwards, we return to our path and start again.” (300)

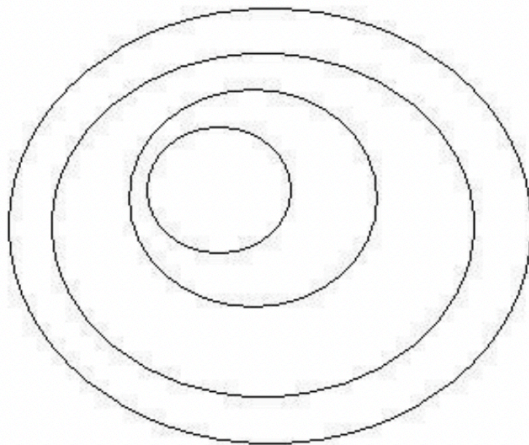


Figure 3 Kwulencuten Diagram ©B. Cohen (2010), used with permission

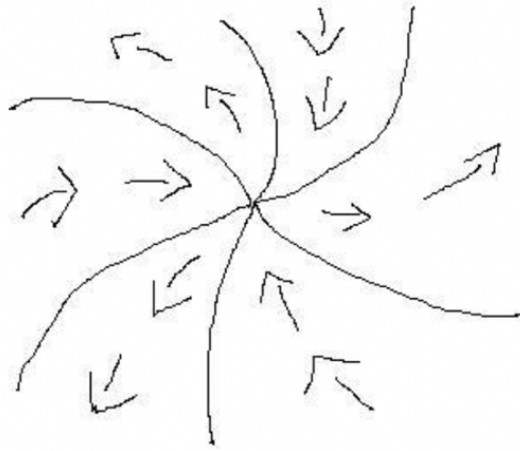


Figure 4 Sqilxw Diagram ©B. Cohen (2010), used with permission

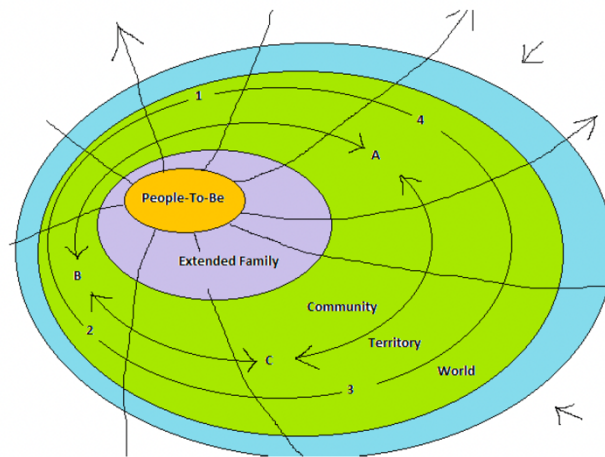


Figure 5 Sqilxwlcawł Model ©B. Cohen (2010), used with permission

A diagram used by Archibald titled “Holism: A Context for Indigenous Storywork,” illustrated an image similar to the four directions medicine wheel teachings. However, instead of a circle, she used an oval image with three concentric ovals listed as “nation,” “community” and “family,” with “mental” in the north, “spiritual” to the east, “emotional” to the south, and “physical” to the west. She states that each of the four directions:

...symbolize wholeness, completeness, and ultimately wellness. The never-ending circle also forms concentric circles to show both the synergistic influence of and our

responsibility toward the generations of ancestors, the generations of today, and the generations yet to come. The animal/human kingdoms, the elements of nature/land, and the Spirit World are an integral part of the concentric circles. (11)

With respect to medicine wheel teachings, it is important to recognize that some teachings and elements listed on medicine wheel diagrams vary for the direction under which they are listed. These variations are for many reasons as some are made in elementary school classrooms for projects, some are made to follow specific teachings pertinent to specific elders and nations. I note this because a quick search online for medicine wheel diagrams will quite literally show you hundreds of variations. I feel it is important to understand the contextual ideologies embedded within the medicine wheel as a cultural methodology for teaching and learning self-care for healing and wellness. I express this because the medicine wheel teachings I received from counsellors and mentors as a young person early on in my personal growth journey were tremendously helpful in breaking a trail and teaching me how to find a balanced path towards healing and well-being.

In another area of my healing journey, I recall teachings of the seven directions, which include above, below and within, as well as north (intellectual), south (emotional), east (physical) and west (spiritual), as taught within the medicine wheel teachings. Within my memoir, I acknowledge how the teachings of the four quadrants of the medicine wheel gave me a cyclical strategy for understanding and functioned as a “methodology, a map to follow to gain courage and skills to recover from the past,” for learning how to heal and transform my life (263).

A cyclical image, the turns of the seasons, annually, like the spiral rings of a tree, around and around and around with each generation, with each year and each season, the transfer of knowledge and ways of knowing is interlinked. Those rings of interpretation reflect on the ways that many of upcoming generations, including my own, have been trying to find creative ways in this new world to interpret and carry forward ancestral teachings and understandings. Our

struggle to stay connected to language and ways of being with each upcoming and new generation is absolutely real.

Armand Garnet Ruffo explains the intertwining of storytelling practice, of the past and present ways of being and cultural ideologies of Indigenous narrative and storytelling traditions as double nature work that “influences the way we think about stories because it is inscribed in the history of contact to understand the art forms created” (286). *Aboriginal Oral Traditions* explains to us that recording, transcribing, translating and editing oral stories adds layers of meaning and continues by noting the potential damage this can cause to the integrity of the oral traditions. My understanding of this specific perspective is largely in response to the work of early missionaries and non-Indigenous researchers, however as someone who grew up colonized and disconnected, I felt this warning very deeply. Concerns regarding potential damage that can be done through interpreting and uncovering layers within recorded oral stories is not lost on me, especially in reflection upon the two stories of Coyote and the rape of the very sick young girl. These fears of causing further damage have been a huge element in my hesitancy to work with our traditional stories.

Kevin Loring: Engaging Community

International award-winning Nl̓éʔkepmx playwright, Kevin Loring, is from Lytton, British Columbia. Loring’s body of creative work is significant, including published and unpublished, produced and performed on various levels of international, national stage and meaningful community collaboration and performances. Loring is the winner of the Governor General’s Award for English Language Drama for his powerful play, *Where the Blood Mixes*. Culturally located in T’kemcín, or as he spells it, TLK emchEEn. Lytton, is the colonial name for the town and the Fraser River is also a colonial name. The place where the rivers meet represents the conjunction of two of the biggest rivers in British Columbia, the Thompson and the Fraser River. This indicates the location recognized as the heart centre axis point of Nl̓éʔkepmx territory. The dry wind through the Fraser Canyon is a key resource as it is critical to curing wind dried, wild

sockeye salmon. The salmon is sacred and significant to the abundant survival of the Nl̓éʔkepmx and all Salish and salmon eating Indigenous people since time immemorial. The Fraser Canyon and the Stein Valley are key sacred locations for Nl̓éʔkepmx. The canyon was a place of abundance. Salish people from all four directions travel great distances when the salmon return and start travelling up the river. It has always been this way, until colonization and the blanket of death brought on by colonial diseases, annihilated the people. The St. George's Indian Residential School was built at a time when the people were going through devastation. The reality that we know and live with as Nl̓éʔkepmx is the long-term generational devastation brought on by colonial diseases, the gold rush, the destruction due to train track construction and the theft of generations of children through St. Georges Indian Residential School, which was located right at T'kemcín. This is rarely spoken of, but is the reality we face as Indigenous people. A few years back, a friend of mine said, "Lytton is the drunkest place on the river, everyone knows that." That broke my heart, and this generational hurt is what the play, *Where the Blood Mixes*, speaks of.

Christine:

*I was born in the heart.
I was born in the deepest part.
In the middle of it all, I was born.
In the place where the rhythm beats,
Deep inside my mother,
Where the rivers meet,
My father dreamt me there.
Where blood mixes with blood and the sturgeon waits,
And the wind sings the songs of the dead. (11)*

Loring is the Artistic Director of Savage Society. According to their website, the Savage Society was started in 2004 for the purpose of: "Telling our own stories, based on myth, tradition, and the contemporary Indigenous perspective." Their vision is to develop work that expresses worldview, sourcing traditional stories, cosmologies and contemporary Indigenous realities. The Songs of the Land project used wax cylinder recordings of traditional songs and

stories to inspire several productions. This included *Battle of the Birds*, and *The Boy Who Was Abandoned*, written and performed in collaboration and with the support of Nl̓éʔkepmx Elders, youth, community members and organizations and incorporating century-old audio recordings. I was very sad that I was unable to attend either production, as at the time, my daughter was a newborn. Many Elders and people from my home community in the Nicola Valley, also known as the Scwexmx branch of the Nl̓éʔkepmx people, travelled to Lytton for this performance. The 2017 *Georgia Straight* article titled, “Kevin Loring’s *Battle of the Birds* mines ancient legend at Talking Stick fest,” explains that this play actively engages problem solving and community-sourced discipline to stop violence against woman and is a re-enactment of an Nl̓éʔkepmx oral narrative. The videos I viewed on Youtube are very entertaining and uplifting, indicating that this was an amazing project. Community feedback that I primarily heard via my Elders, indicated that it was an inspiring project that brought cultural knowledge and awareness, traditional narrative practices, ethics and protocols together with Nl̓éʔkepmxcín and was enacted directly in the centre of our Nl̓éʔkepmx universe in T’kemcín, Lytton. Sadly, the town of Lytton, as well as several reserves, burned to the ground on June 30th, 2021 and is now in a gradual rebuild process.

In 2018, I had the opportunity to see another of his plays, *Thanks for Giving*, at the ArtsClub Theatre on Granville Island in Vancouver. *Thanks for Giving* engages significant ancestral narratives through the use of archival wax audio recordings of səx^wsúx^w (grizzly bear) and berry picking songs as well as cultural teachings surrounding the səx^wsúx^w, mother grizzly bear and her cubs. One observation that I have had, when attending Indigenous stage productions, is with regard to the use of drugs or violence in the story. During situations engaging emotional stress, or struggle from the family or community, the main character/s will indulge in prolific use of alcohol or drugs. Mental, emotional, physical violence and unresolved trauma is also often part of the storyline. This was very apparent in Loring’s play. Stories that engage oral narratives, and there seem to be only a few, tend to rely on addictions or violence to move the story forward. *Thanks for Giving*, weaves in cultural elements that help key

characters transform their lives. Loring's stage production, *Thanks for Giving*, much like, *Where the Blood Mixes*, shows almost every character in his cast engaging in alcoholism or drug use in almost every scene throughout the entire play. Weaving significant, beautifully empowering cultural teachings and connectedness contribute to the reawakening of ancestral memory, songs and practices. It inspires healing. As a person who has a tendency to avoid overwhelming triggers and trauma within the storytelling I witness and attend, it was a welcome reprieve to witness not just a resurgence, but a significant character transformation.

While Loring's stage plays remain very powerful, they are also very triggering for me as an Nlé?kepmx audience member for multiple reasons. As a Nlé?kepmx woman, I am completely happy to see the creation of powerful work that engages, affirms and represents Nlé?kepmx culture, knowledge, linguistic styles of speech, as well as Nlé?kepmx ancestral memories and cultural landscape. The deep-seated trauma triggers a very deep-unresolved hurt within me. Those drunk guys in the bar who are survivors of Indian residential school or the 60s scoop child apprehension literally ARE my uncles. The grieving and abandoned niece/daughter IS my cousin/niece//loved one. The mother who committed suicide could be any one of our loved ones who has chosen that path. At the time of seeing this play, my sister was actively engaging in a heroin addiction that began due to her unresolved grief and trauma following our younger brother's death. I have heard my mother acknowledge that she can't watch or read certain stories that are centered within Indigenous trauma because it is too triggering for her. Trauma is something she does not ever speak of. The hurt of abandonment and horrific memories of violence induced by alcoholism is deep-seated trauma. It is also my trauma. Each of those survivors in his plays represents my whole entire community. Those who are still suffering and those who have taken the path to do the work to courageously heal their lives. The loved ones who are suffering are the ones that we pray for. *May the spirit of our good grandmothers and grandfathers, our ancestors, four sacred directions enter the lives of our loved ones who are carrying the hurt from generations of genocide and child theft, may our prayers for healing and our work as artists help them onto their path. Creator, we pray, we beg for the courage and*

endurance to enter their minds, hearts, spirits and bodies to engage in the personal work towards healing and recovery. We pray that these stories will help them find peace, will guide them towards further healing and understanding.

This is what makes me wish for something more from Loring, something absolfuckingutely transformative. Put a glass of water on the table, from the most sacred source of spirit in our traditional homelands, from the Stein River. Let the water speak to the people. Let the water heal the hearts, minds and spirits of the people. I have no idea how to inspire transformative healing. Maybe I am praying for a miracle. Sometimes it feels so futile and I feel powerless. I am so, so sad that generations of our Indigenous loved ones across Canada and North America are still suffering.

Summing Up with Sn'klip

It feels appropriate to end this section, which has drawn from such powerful Interior Salish writers and thinkers, with a few reflections on Coyote. This story of Coyote's nap always makes me a bit emotional. My mind travels in so many directions. "This is a Story" is a story of sn'klip, or Kyoti, as told by respected knowledge carrier, Dr. Jeannette Armstrong and published in *All My Relations: An anthology of Canadian Native Fiction*, a collection edited by Thomas King. Here, sn'klip awakens from a very short nap and finds himself in a completely different time period. Armstrong describes herself sitting vigil by a ceremonial fire through the night. On the fourth night a friend asks her, "Tell me a story." Out of this comes this story of sn'klip's journey up the great Columbian River to the Okanagan Valley. He has great love for the Okanagan Valley because of the generosity of the people and his favourite food, sockeye salmon. However, on this visit, everything has changed. The People are gone. The People are hungry and the landscape has changed. Another type of people he refers to as swallows are there. Swallows, as we know, are not an Indigenous bird, they originate from Europe.

In this story, Armstrong repeatedly refers to, “The People,” capitalized. In our words for ourselves, “The People” is a term of reference commonly used by my Elders in ceremonial settings. We feed The People. We harvest and take care of The People. We do this because The People are loved ones, like The Ancestors are loved ones. The People, my interpretation of this on a deeper level, would be the original or the real human beings, Loved Ones. I reflect on many things, including the song by Halluci Nation, “We are the Human Beings.” “Our DNA is of earth and sky. Our DNA is of past and future.” Snk’lip was searching for his Loved Ones, the Original People of this beloved homeland, tmíx^w tmxulaxw. He searched everywhere and he could not find them. He followed the path of the salmon as they always had travelled. He followed the trails his ancestors had always followed to the places where The People, his loved ones, had always lived and harvested. The places where the land and water always provided in abundance and still, The People were gone. Instead, the Grand Coulee Dam blocked the entire salmon bearing river. Snk’lip was confused. Finally, snk’lip finds a couple of individuals, however they could not understand him. They look at him blankly. Once again, I envision the Nl’é?kepmxcín word, “q^wənq^wént,” pitiful. These two individuals that snk’lip encountered were pitiful because they were so lost from their selves and their true identity. Heart, mind and spirit had slipped off their axis. They spoke “swallow talk” and could not understand traditional ethics of respect and reverence and how to treat a respected guest. Eventually, snk’lip makes it to one of the reservations and meets two Elders. One elder recognizes him. She says, “Kyoti... I never thought you was ever going to come back.” Then she cries the deep grieving cry. As an Indigenous reader, I feel her lamenting the loss of connectedness to tmíx^w, loss of language, loss of children, family, culture and loss of key traditional foods, specifically the salmon. The words are spare but, as someone raised listening to the ways our Syilx Elders put english words together in their stories, my understanding is deep (129-135).

This story represents a powerful reflection of a time when the Syilx lived a good life within tmíx^w and the changes that have occurred. As descendants of The People, we are living, the best we can. In Bill Cohen’s earlier question in the first chapter of his dissertation, he speaks

of the teachings embedded within the captikwł and the question, “What will we do for the People-To-Be?” I found myself, reflecting on this question in the here and now. Pondering traditional storytelling practices and how do we, today, move forward in ethical ways. Striving to find our ways back to being culturally empowered and whole again. Through contemporary narratives, Cohen speaks of reconnecting, actively searching, finding the loops of knowledge repeatedly left for us by the ancestors and reweaving the narrative strands, echoes of The People of the past, back into our lives today (5). It is in the interest and wellbeing of our children that we reconnect and retwine those threads that were severed and deteriorated as “interconnected feedback loops.” Indigenous knowledges are shared and reshared, rewoven. Connecting and reconnecting narrative threads into our lives over a multitude of generations, they remain complex systems of evolving knowledge. Cohen explains:

The structure of this thesis merges the journey with the destination in its narrative style and it aligns with traditional story ways of knowledge transmission. The Okanagan are the people of stories. Our knowledge, survival, cultural practices, have been maintained through story. Themes and strands emerge through sections of this thesis through feedback loops, or as strands back into the larger composition, that reconnect stories to other stories, and contain stories within stories. Several strands are intentionally repeated in several contexts to convey, as in Okanagan storytelling, their importance and need for dialogue and reflection. (5)

The most interesting element about this, Cohen’s thesis statement, is how it reflects my view of Indigenous narratives and storytelling practices overall: the repetition, the knowledge transmission, the merging of journey with destination, as the way a spindle whorl spins.

Chapter 5: Towards a Contemporary Framework for Ethical Indigenous Storytelling

Overview

In the previous chapters, we considered Indigenous narratives and storytelling traditions and practices on a multitude of levels, including cultural location and the elements of Indigenous literary nationalism and its importance for many Indigenous writers. As a scholar and as a storyteller, my goal is simple: To demonstrate through stories the triumphs and achievements that Indigenous people and communities are accomplishing. Our stories tell us who we are as a people, as nations. They outline the relationships that we have to one another, to our place, to people, to our experiences and our ancestors' experiences too.

Building on this foundation, Chapter 5 seeks to daylight elements of a framework that activates responsible Indigenous storytelling and writing practice in the present moment. This chapter shares practices undertaken by Indigenous storytellers that, taken together, form a contemporary framework—or more accurately and culturally stated—a web of interrelated principles for ethical storytelling that are steeped in Indigenous methods and protocols. The chapter begins by discussing a couple of key insights that inform the evolving space and understandings by Indigenous peoples about power, place and responsibilities. The first insight is about stories as dynamic and fluid ancestral maps to the past, the present, their vision for the future and the interplay between them. The second insight is about stories as conduits of lands and ancestors that are transmitted outside the english, colonial modes of telling.

Chapter 5 then builds on these insights, with a focus on the works of Indigenous storytellers rooted in British Columbia, and uses their writings to explore ethical Indigenous storytelling practices that include:

- Nation-based telling grounded in place;

- A deep reverence, love and respect for ancestors;
- Language and oral traditions; and
- Cyclical patterns of narrative.

Stories as Maps

In *Cree Narrative Memory*, Neal McLeod states that stories, whether traditional, contemporary or hybrid become maps for their listeners resulting in a “dialectical play” between traditional and present day as well as individual and collective memory (18). Indigenous narratives function as interconnected, dynamic maps of the land and of cultural ways of being, linking ancestral memory to a contemporary time frame. In a very cultural context, it is as though the ancestors are communicating and interpreting directly to you, sharing the knowledge embodied within the stories (18).

Again, *Read, Listen, Tell* acknowledges this fluid movement in Indigenous narratives confounds the “conventions” of Western readers, who read from the expectations of conformity to the english literary cannon. *Read, Listen, Tell* describes a dynamic, dialectical and fluid play between the “personal, the historical, the supernatural, and the theoretical.” The introduction states that:

Indigenous stories resist categorization and highlight other ways of knowing. Our goal is to challenge the false duality that sometimes is assumed between “stories” and “literature,” particularly in the contest of university study, which confers greater prestige on “literature.” For this reason we prefer to use the more inclusive terms, “story” or “narrative,” over “literature.” While Indigenous writers often work within literary institutions, that include the academy, their creative production both enhances and obscures that institutional frame to assert that there are other systems of narratives that work differently. Our goal, then, is to make visible that colonial frame as a first step in moving to a decolonial understanding of Indigenous narrative forms. (2)

Indigenous narrative forms referred to as stories, as texts, as oratories, as a narrative tradition are situated within a body of protocols, values and ethics. We have seen a variety of

themes, many of which focus on stories of despair moving towards understandings of recovery. Indigenous stories recount, recite, orate and serve the purpose of remembrance of true events that took place as part of the process of unweaving of the impact of genocide and centuries of despair from the fabric of our lives. Narratives of truth, as a weaving, show us the ways to unweave and then reweave the impact of the colonial narrative, telling our truth our way and then taking ownership of our healing and recovery. The impact of Canadian genocide on Indigenous people can never be forgotten. The practice of digging into Indigenous DNA, finding and tapping into the roots of endurance, of deep connectedness to cultural practice, to land and waterscape in order to overcome times of hardship. As we move towards healing our lives from colonization and genocide, we also need to engage in a process of normalizing the experience and embodiment of “living the good life.”

In the collection, *Learn, Teach, Challenge*, Corntassel, Chaw-win-is and T’lakwadzi share powerful words and observations in the opening of their collaborative article, “Indigenous Storytelling, Truth-telling, and Community Approaches to Reconciliation,” which discusses and critiques the structure of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada and their reparations for residential school survivors. They speak of colonial stories as being embedded within “political discourses, our humour, poetry, music, storytelling, and other common sense ways of passing on both a narrative of history and an attitude about history to future generations.” Important to this statement that they share by Linda Tuhaiwai Smith is the comment, “attitude about history.” They further explain the words as linked to Nuu-chah-nulth teachings shared by Elder Cha-chin-sun-up as he explains that, “the basis for indigenous governance and regeneration” are embedded within lived values, experiential knowledge and lived history. “For example, when conveying community narratives of history to future generations, Nuu-chah-nulth peoples have relied on Haa-huu-pah as teaching stories or sacred living histories that solidify ancestral contemporary connections to place.” Canada, the article explains, “offers a very different version of history than those of Indigenous nations—one that glosses over the colonial legacies of removing Indigenous nations (373). We have a

monumental task ahead to “restory the settler version of history,” the article explains. “Settler violence against Indigenous peoples is woven into the fabric of Canada in an unbroken thread from past to present that we must now unravel” (374). “Restorying” means the creation of counter-narratives embedded in truths that overturn comfortable assumptions created by racist colonial cultures as a way to realign the core axis away from narratives of despair and oppression to explore celebrations, cultural recovery and overcoming.

Rewoven into our identity is the reconnection to the state of empowerment. Reweaving our narratives is one step in paving the way forward towards healing and recovery. In the coming cycle of Indigenous stories, I believe we will see more stories of resurgence which focus on continued strength and empowerment. Depictions of “living the good life” or *mino bimaadiziwin*, as described by Anishinaabe writer, Leanne Simpson, is important because as a people we are making the state of “well-being” and actively “being well” part of the Indigenous identity. An important stage in this process is having pride and not shame for accomplishments and then sharing that inspiration with our loved ones so that it feels normal and achievable.

Indigenous Poetics: Stories as Conduits

Indigenous Poetics of Canada, edited by Neal McLeod, is a collection of articles organized into sections on the poetics of medicine, performance, place and memory. As an Indigenous writer who is actively working towards decolonial practices within my personal creative work, the voices shared within this text have functioned as an important exploration of Indigenous narratives: the deep ancestral connection to land and water, cultural and spiritual practice, oratory and recounting as a process of remembering and as a strategy to stimulate and nurture healing and wellness. As a contribution to the body of Indigenous literature, *Indigenous Poetics* reinforces the ways Indigenous orators and storytellers allow stories to emerge from deep within our Indigeneity. It expresses the embodiment and enunciation of the orator as a narrative voice of our ancestors in a contemporary time frame. It establishes a foundation for creative ways Indigenous storytellers recount knowledge and teachings about

Indigenous ways of being, life, medicines, oral traditions, dynamic and multifaceted interconnectedness, performance as well as our ancestral state of belonging to the land and waterscape.

Indigenous orality and storytelling practice truly functions as a lifeway between the past into the present, grounding today's people in cultural practices and epistemologies that value communication and connection to our ancestral lineages, and reverential ways of being that are centred within Indigenous core spiritual beliefs. In the *Oxford Handbook of Indigenous Oral Literatures*, Christopher Teuton states in his essay, "Indigenous Orality and Oral Literature," that restorying orality is the practice of questioning the imposition of colonial histories on our communities. Restorying is the creation of decolonial space through Indigenous counternarratives, of recognizing how these concepts have shaped the perceptions of Indigenous knowledge. We have the ability to refocus Indigenous narrative practice on cultural resurgence. "The process of decolonization within Indigenous communication is underway, it remains crucially important for both Indigenous communities and Indigenous studies scholarship to restory Indigenous communication beyond the oral literate binary and colonial intellectual history from which it arises, grounding Indigenous knowledge in cultural specific communicative terms" (173). My interpretation of this statement is that if we centre our stories within the ancestral narratives of our Elders, and not rely on colonial intellectual history or english literary practice, then we can return to working from our traditional ways of interpreting and orating storytelling practice. This discussion is one reason why the conversation of Indigenous poetics was so inspiring for me as an Indigenous writer. It helped me to visualize a way to interpret and centre my narrative practice within my identity as a Nlɛʔkepmx, SyílɁ woman living in Salish traditional territory. Having a high calibre of writing without feeling as though my work has to measure up to english literary standards in such a way that disempowers or colonizes my Indigeneity and without concern for the criticism of non-Indigenous audiences is of ultimate importance to me. This in mind with the understanding that my audience is, and always has been, focused towards uplifting Indigenous peoples and

contributing to the narrative that cultivates healing and resurgence. This work, and all work I have done, is in honour of the selfless and courageous work of our Indigenous Elders, knowledge keepers, matriarchs and leadership as well as those loved ones who are gone and those yet unborn.

In the years since starting my doctoral dissertation, I have spent a lot of time in reflection on the narrative themes within the hundreds of Indigenous stories that I have read and reflected upon. Indigenous narratives as a collective voice, written and published work in the English language, recount and orate the day-to-day lives of Indigenous people. Since remembered time and in particular since colonization, Indigenous storytellers and remember-ers have been unpacking long-term, generational, post-traumatic stress and the resulting layers of generational despair.

The introduction of *Indigenous Poetics* embraces Indigenous thought, epistemologies and ways of being. When I consider what the concept of “Indigenous poetics” means, I think of the personal essays written within the pages of *Me Artsy*. Each of the artists express personal testimonials of where they began, the centre of their creative being as well as what inspires and drives their creative practice—the voice of their Elders as it dynamically flows through them as an embodiment of ancestral memory, as conceptions of the world. They express, describe and embody their traditional homelands and Elders with true love, reverence and with voices of purpose in honour of their ancestors. Everything in the world that inspires the work they do as artists embodies interconnectedness and cultural location with an axis centred within ancestral history and family, not just the human family but the family of their home territories and all things naturally existing within their traditional homelands and waterways.

This is important because in some works we experience very detached or fragmented and colonized experiences, often embedded in reliving colonial trauma and despair. We are informed that this depicts the experience of being Indigenous. Reading *Me Artsy*, with deep reflection on the work of Leanne Simpson and Neal McLeod, as an example of creative work

from a deeply Indigenized perspective had a huge impact on me and on my voice as an Indigenous creative writer and storyteller within a contemporary timeframe. In a sense, this creative work and scholarly work of Indigenous storytellers illustrated a route away from writing work that is centred within colonial-based trauma, and demonstrated how to write from the centre of my indigeneity.

The introduction to *Indigenous Poetics* explains a preference for the use of the term “narrative poetic icons,” as an alternative to the conceptual understanding of English literary texts. McLeod’s introduction further explains the concept of “poetic narrative icons,” as a “tacit play between orality and written forms” (8). This conceptual understanding creates a space for understanding, an interpretive centre where Indigenous voices remain true to the embodied flow and rhythms, especially for the generations raised by English-as-second-language speakers. The notion of continuum is embodied within the orality of ancestral voices channeled through the creative work of today’s generation. I express this because there can often exist an embodied understanding, an embodied interpretive core located within language, speech and forms of interpretation for those who were raised by fluent speakers of Indigenous languages. In her article, *Land Speaking*, Armstrong explains an embodied rhythmic interrelationship between land and language. “Over time the Okanagan language has acquired a music-based sensitivity in the creation of meaning. The sound of elements of tempo, beat, rhythm, volume, and pitch have a great significance for comprehension” (Armstrong 188). There is an embodied interconnectedness to land and sound that is difficult for some to understand, it is also for me. However, my heart, mind and spirit finds comfort in it, as someone raised surrounded with the embrace, the cradle of words, stories and songs of the land and the people who originated there. When I return home, there is no way to describe the heartfelt peace in spirit, until I hear my elders speaking. The landscape and language is embodied and shared by our fluent speaking Elders, in the sweatlodge, in ceremony, as orators for the people, over dinner, in the quiet early morning hours between Elders over coffee and tea. Armstrong continues with the explanation that, “This is what the Okanagan people mean when they say that everything is

singing” (Ortiz 188). The sounds of teacups and coffee mugs echo in rhythm with the voices of our Elders, speaking their heart languages. The remembered voices of our fluent speakers nurtures the deepest parts of us.

Tasha Beeds explains in her contribution to *Indigenous Poetics*, “Within a nêhiyaw understanding, stories and, by extension, poetry emerge out of and fall back into the land. The land gives birth to story and reclaims its people in the process” (61). The words of our Elders, the landscape and waterscapes of our homelands have shaped every essence of our being and in this sense, also shape the ways the stories move through contemporary channels. And because we are a colonized people, the colonized parts of ourselves—the parts of ourselves that are deeply impacted by colonial trauma—also shift the narrative voice, theme, structure and strategic intent of the stories we tell. Indigenous poetics is deeply interconnected and reconnects us to the embodied experience of ancestral Indigenous languages, oratories and narratives: flow, rhyme, rhythm and cadence. As a young person surrounded by speakers listening to the cadence of their voices, I imagined this exactly as Armstrong explains, “N’silchn recreates sounds of the land in its utterance, but it also draws on the natural human emotional response to sound and rhythm to contain and express...” (Ortiz 188). Armstrong describes an experience with her sister Delphine, for whom Nsyílxcn was her first language until the age of twelve. “She pointed out that the stars and the frogs in the Okanagan summer nights have the same rhythm and that in saying it to recall the sound and the night filled with stars, the rhythm filled her soul and became hers.” Her poem, “Frogs Singing,” describes this experience.

Frogs Singing

my sister did not dream this
she found this out when she walked
outside and looked up and star
rhythms sang to her pointing their spines of light
down into her and filled her body with star song
and all around her
frogs joined the star singing

they learned it
long ago
(Ortiz 189)

The English language has a deep, embedded history of oppression of Indigenous voices, Indigenous languages and cultural ways of being. The intent by colonizing governments was to strategically and methodically eradicate every element of our cultural identity and connectedness to our families and homelands. The destruction of Indigenous languages, as one core element of inherent cultural knowledge transmission, was key to their collective endeavor. Armstrong explains that English lacks musical coherence, which is demonstrated through the understanding that Indigenous languages emerge from land, as embodied within Armstrong's poem, "Frogs Speaking." "For the most part, the 'sounds' of the words and the rhythms created in their structure clearly are not constructed to draw a musical response. In fact, the language is deaf to music and only chances on it through the diligent work of writers" (Ortiz 189). When I read the Introduction to *Indigenous Poetics of Canada*, I understood why I connected so deeply to Jeannette Armstrong's article, "Land Speaking." I always felt so deficient as a non-speaker, yet also still connected somehow to the rhythms and cadences embodied by my Elders. I felt an immense sense of relief as well as a deeper connection to the way I piece words together on the written page. I recognized this flow of Indigenous poetics in the work of N. Scott Momaday in his book, *The Way to Rainy Mountain*. I was able to separate creatively and intellectually from the memories of oppression and inadequacy brought on by scholarly concepts of the English language and creative work written according to English literary biases and expectations.

Indigenous poetics is dynamic and multi-dimensional, and allows for fluid and deeply rooted connections within Indigenous ways of being and experiences of *tmíxʷ*-Turtle Island "the land" and all things that co-exist naturally on *tmíxʷ*. Rather than losing embodied Indigenous voice and interconnected capability, Indigenous narratives gain vibrance, elasticity, and become more dynamic and multi-functional. Rather than weaken, narrative voices strengthen

because they are rooted foundationally within languages, within Indigenous narratives, ancestral teachings and cultural ways of being.

Indigenous nationhood is a concept rooted in community values, histories and traditions” and is “more than simple political independence or the exercise of distinctive cultural identity [but rather a] tribal web of kinship rights and responsibilities. (Fagan et al. 21)

In his introduction to the article “Cree Poetics Discourse,” McLeod states, “In many Indigenous studies departments throughout Canada, the discipline has been put into the category of social science. Such an approach, while effective in some levels, does narrative violence to the integrity of Indigenous narrative knowing.” He further explains that by using the term, narrative violence, he means that “Indigenous narratives are sanitized and there is a conceptual shift that often takes the vitality away from Indigenous life-worlds.” He further states that, “Within the United States, writers such as Robert Warrior, Paula Gunn-Allen, and many others have encouraged the use of literary paradigms to examine Indigenous knowledge; they have also, in large part, resisted the narrative violence inflicted upon Indigenous knowing in the academic institutions within Canada.” He continues with this powerful statement that, “Thinking poetically involves moving away from the epistemological straitjacket and the colonial box that social sciences have placed on Indigenous narratives” (89). The focus on embodying the voices of my Elders and ancestors through oratory of Indigenous poetics and the natural flow of narratives helped me stop feeling accountable and disempowered by colonial languages and literary traditions, which always felt foreign with the voices of oppression and control being far to present within my storywork practice when, in fact, they needed to be neutral and unbiased.

The Empowerment of Indigenous Narratives

The empowerment of Indigenous narratives means a return to the understanding of the purposes they serve in a traditional context however within a contemporary timeframe. Returning, remembering, revitalizing, recreating, reawakening, resisting, reaffirming, reasserting, like a web, reweaving empowerment into the minds, hearts and spirits and

therefore the lives of audiences. Over and over again, we are reminded to always center our work within teachings shared by scholars such as Jo-ann Archibald centred in: respect, relevance, reverence, reciprocity (pg2). Learning to maintain healthy relationships and engage healthy forms of self-love and love for others is integral to this journey. Empowerment means doing the work to recenter ourselves: minds, hearts, bodies and spirits. Daniel Heath Justice writes, in "Currents of Trans/National Criticism in Indigenous Literary Studies:

Standing at the intersection, the centre of a web of ancestors and descendants, the intersections between past, present and future, between the spiritual realm and the physical realm, we develop our sense of personal and social identity. We come to understand our relationship to all aspects of creation. This is how we come to know ourselves and our meaning and purpose as human begins. We are supported and sustained within a web of relationships. Our orature and literature reinforce, reflect, and are an integral manifestation of that web. It is part of a long tradition stretching backwards to our creation and forwards into forever. In this way, Aboriginal literatures are unique. (339)

Acknowledging intersections, awakening to the voices of the ancestral past and responsibilities to the future on a dynamic and strategic level.

Nation-based: Indigenous Literary Nationalism

British Columbia has approximately 34 spoken Indigenous languages and over 90 dialects. This province is incredibly culturally diverse. We remain accountable to enormous families and communities, nation-based cultural ethics, protocols, traditional land stewardship practices, as well as past and future generations. Cultural responsibilities include always consistently recognizing and honouring traditional borders, culturally shared stewardship of traditional territories, in particular waterways and traditional food sources, and the associated ethics, dynamics, familial connectedness and history with subtle variations between nations that occur from nation to nation in British Columbia. Cultural location and writing from place, is not just a social responsibility. It is deeply embedded in every element of Indigenous identity, how we live and what has been taught about accountability, representation and inter-connectedness. It is also a way of acknowledging the teachings and languages shared by our Elders that

originate within that landscape. Nation-to-nation cultural variations are dynamic and so are the cultural protocols and cultural responsibilities woven into them. So, in one sense, while I do my best to write from a place centred within my cultural identity and cultural / physical location, I also do this while being mindful of the nations and families that I am representing, not-representing. Where I am tolerated, where I am accepted and where I am loved. Where I am speaking of and where I am and have existed.

Innovative and artistic fluidity, imagery, creativity, critique and accountability, all these emerge from our specific Indigenous matrix woven from a perspective and interpretive center, that is based within the nation or nations from which we originate. Stories emerge and guide the paths we follow, evolving from interactions with our traditional landscapes, languages, Elders, ancestors, cultural and spiritual practices. A woven reflection of today's positionality, that of creating and navigating decolonial practices set in contemporary society. Narratives, teachings, methodologies and frameworks shared orally, written, performed and/or interpreted by today's Indigenous knowledge carriers, storytellers and scholars all emerge from that matrix.

Story creators within a contemporary time frame, writing from a cultural position that potentially represent multiple nations, lineages. Learning to honour and represent nations of origin as Indigenous people, is a key element of our Indigeneity. We do not always solely represent one nation. We are often a hybrid of grandmothers and grandfathers, adopted families and their nations. Honouring that, in a respectful manner, is a key element in Indigenous identities, ways of being and creative practice. Through the community and healing work of survivors, the work of weaving love for family lineages and identity from childhood, in particular by where the maternal and /or the paternal connection is culturally strong.

It is very difficult for children and parents for those families where the grandparents and parents do not take an active, loving and nurturing role in grandparenting. Relearning the roles of Elders and grandparents, returning to the concept of becoming matriarchs also engages the concept of decolonizing the ways the negative voices of oppression continue to manifest. It is

heartbreaking to acknowledge that the rhythms of speech, the conduct of nuns, priests and caregivers, still emerges through the voices and conduct of survivors who are now of the grandparent generations. Through the absence and denial of quality time, the denial of love, the denial of cultural and familial bonding, disconnectedness is sustained and so is generational hurt. Children are denied healthy mental, emotional, wellbeing, development, growth and cultural forms of connectedness to the ones who traditionally would have provided those essential teachings and thereby to the landscape and cultural ways of being because of the refusal to surrender trauma-based behaviors. Speaking openly about how difficult this process is becomes difficult where the grandparents are alive and have actively chosen to not be respectful of their responsibilities and participative with the nurturing of the grandchildren. We see this state of disconnection demonstrated within characters set in Indigenous stories. We 'live' and experience this emotional and cultural disconnection and this is something so difficult to fix without the active, courageous and accountable participation of grandparent generations who are survivors. In fact, it creates an even deeper disconnect to identity, to knowledge, to healthy cultural forms of love and loving that is so difficult to fix alone.

Languages

The relationship with the colonizers language is complex. Weaving our Indigenous languages into Indigenous stories can be challenging—english brings up old hurt. It brings up rage. It brings up frustration. It brings up feelings of deep powerlessness. It brings up waves of deep grief and inarticulate loss of language for the voices of our ancestors embodied through our children. It brings up resentment and bitterness towards colonial governments that refuse to make things right and properly fund language renewal and acknowledge the importance of Indigenous languages. It brings up memories of pain and humiliation due to the lifelong shame endured by our Elders who survived Indian residential schools. Every time we pick up the pen and bring it to paper, we are decompressing the words and translations, the dynamic intellectual and ancestral knowledge that has been lost to flatlined colonial concepts and ideologies. The language we don't know, the words in our hearts, minds, spirits. Every time we speak for the

people, we are overcoming the inadequacy that oppressive languages have channeled into our oratory. Every time we share in public contexts, as the hands and feet of ancestral narrative traditions, we are wishing to speak from the heart language of our ancestors, to properly share, hear, understand, enunciate, channel and orate the words that need to be said. We are trying to move through those thoughts and feelings and decompress them enough to fluently interpret ancestral ways through the English language while simultaneously working to manifest and embody the deep love and pride of our identity and belonging.

Many Indigenous writers were either raised by those whose first language was one or more Indigenous languages or by second generation speakers of English. Linguistic variations due to neighboring dialects, particularly within the Salish language groups, represents a fluent movement between the rhythms of multiple Indigenous languages including English because this style of speech represents the voices of those who shaped our existence. For me, as a writer, it meant coming to terms with the lack of knowing, that what I speak is broken pieces, with not even a child's comprehension. Yet feeling the presence of it, like ancestors who live inside me that cannot speak. The search for willing knowledge carriers who have the time to read and review hybrid creative work that moves fluidly between linguistic and cultural ways of being can be challenging. One of the biggest struggles and detriments to this creative journey is also providing honourable payment acknowledging appreciation for their vast body of knowledge and heartfelt appreciation for their assistance. Especially for Indigenous artists, orators and storytellers working with Elders and fluent speakers. Elders and fluent speakers deserve to be honoured and paid in a way that acknowledges their vast body of knowledge. As a mother of two, supporting my children, and as a student paying tuition fees and a published Indigenous author, it has been incredibly difficult to pay those who have provided me cultural and linguistic support with my children's books. This has been a huge burden on my heart and mind. I have the desire to go deeper, linguistically, with my creative work for the benefit of Indigenous children and families, yet there are financial barriers and linguistic barriers of being a non-speaker.

Learning correct speech navigating multiple spelling systems of Indigenous languages and linguistic rhythms is a huge part of the work as an Indigenous writer. Striving to weave Indigenous ways of being into the story involves learning and incorporating language. It is having access to correct spelling of Indigenous words. It is navigating a strategic process for determining translation and pronunciation guides for a narrative work that incorporates a weaving of languages.

I feel it is important to challenge the focus and reliance on english in Indigenous storytelling practices, including produced, performed and published work. It is important, through our narrative and storytelling practice to find ways to weave Indigenous languages into all texts, as much as possible. Despite word counts. Despite the criticism and anxiety of english reliant editors and publishers. It is important to stop following their rules in the telling of our stories, and develop strategic practices for incorporating our languages into our published works and therefore, normalizing them. For ourselves, for our children and for our loved ones. The challenging part is finding ways to do this that work within non-Indigenous publishers' guidelines, as well as finding publishers and editors who are willing to take risks and push their normal structural limits in order to normalize the making of new guidelines and publishing practices.

The elasticity of Indigenous languages, the rhythm, flow and cadence of enunciation pushes the boundaries of english. These inspire the constant interplay in narrative between spiritual practice and contemporary story that have become the “performative elements” of contemporary Indigenous voices. McLeod further states that, “Theory, then, is a conversation between these poetic-narrative cores, these points of understanding, and is embodied in our lives, our bodies, and our understandings” (Indigenous Poetics 9). Narratives, have a cadence in the telling. They come alive through the telling. Their original life was in the hearts-minds-spirits of traditional land and waterscapes and within the hearts of our Elders. They were transferred to those who carry the gift of story and voice. They come through the land, through

the drums, through our songs, through the roots as they sleep in winter and then the plants as they awaken in early spring. For Indigenous storytelling practice, for our epistemologies, for Indigenous pedagogies, at the heart of everything is spirit. Accountability remains, for sharing the teachings and finding ways and means through storytelling to remain true to answering to the voices of our ancestors. We may be silent in our homes, doing our work in different areas of the world yet we find ways to answer the spirit, answer our responsibilities to tmíx^w and to not respond is to be deeply lost. To not return to the land in different ways and means through song, prayer and pay our deep heartfelt reverence to existence with tmíx^w, is to be deeply disconnected. Spirit is in everything and this is what we learn as children.

Ancestors

Contemporary Indigenous writers and stories almost always include the interaction with the ancestors in their work, so much so, it is a rarity when the gifts, love, blessings, protection and suffering of the ancestors are not acknowledged, even once throughout an entire story, be it film, stage performance or publication. Dreams, verbal communication, reflection, prayer, offerings to the ancestors, or the ancestors will simply present themselves and walk straight into the story. In other elements, the entire structure of the work overall is presented or inspired with the spoken narratives of “the old ones.” There are people who refer to these experiences as being “ghosted.” I am one who refers to them as ancestors or spirits. The terms “ghost” or “ghosted” is not one that I ever remember my Elders using. A recent example of this that I observed was a Hawaiian movie on Netflix titled, *Finding Ohana*. In the final stages of this entertaining movie, at the climax of relationship and adventure-based hardship, the ancestors I refer to as, “loved ones,” simply walked in. In many events of non-Indigenous stories, the presence and manifestation of ancestor spirits are feared; yet in this Indigenous story, a deep connection was rekindled and significant emotional healing took place.

I believe this is true for all Indigenous creative forms of storytelling and narrative practice, including oratory, written, publication, film and performance as well as scholarly work. This can

be observed in many contemporary Indigenous stories across tmíx^w-Turtle Island and around the world. This presence of the ancestors is always easiest and most entertaining to observe in Indigenous movies. We also see this in the published work of many Indigenous scholars including Dr. Jo-Anne Archibald, Dr. Daniel Heath Justice, Elder Tom Porter, Dr. Bill Cohen and Dr. Jeannette Armstrong. A particularly powerful story is shared in the opening pages of two Indigenous works. Here is how it is shared in Elder Tom Porter's book, *And Grandma Said*.

And the reason why is because my grandmother came to see me a few years ago, in a dream. She's been passed away for twenty-eight years. And she said to me, "What I'd like you to do is try to sit down and remember everything that Grandma said, that all your grandma's said, and your Elders. What I want you to do is start writing it down. Write it down on the book or paper. (We call a book, "paper" in our language." And she said, "Whatever we told you over the years since you were born—our beliefs and our way of looking at the world, our way of walking in the world—write it down. And put it together. (3)

Also, in Dr. Jo-Anne Archibald's *Indigenous Storywork*, the dream Archibald shares about time spent with her Stó:lō Elders in her opening pages is powerful. I will not share the entire excerpt because it is a bit lengthy, however, in the context of this section, as is Mohawk elder, Tom Porter's experience, it is a valuable contribution to the ways the spirits of our Elders and ancestors find both subtle and not-so subtle ways to come back and haunt their younger generations into submission. I say this with wry humour, as I don't normally use the word, "haunt" but, many times I've heard my Elders speak of such powerful spiritual experiences, where their purpose is to have the individual follow the path that has been set before them. So, perhaps, it is a bit of a strategic form of haunting. This is the dream that Archibald shares:

I was alone in a canoe and approaching land. There was a longhouse close to the water. As the canoe reached shore, many of the Old People came out to greet me. The Old Ones were those who had "passed on," or as we say, travelled to the Spirit World. I recognized many.... As I walked closer to them, I started to cry. I cried because I realized at that moment how much I missed them. I told them it was so hard living in the city and working at the university—living and working in a place where it was a constant struggle to be First Nations, to think and feel in a cultural way, and to be understood by others, the outsiders. I told them I wanted to leave that cold place and stay with them. They put a woven blanket around me, like the one a Spokesperson would in our cultural gatherings, and brought me into the longhouse. Inside, each one started talking to me.

All I could see was each one talking; it was like watching a scene on a television, but with the volume turned off. In the dream, I could not hear what they were telling me. But the talk went on for a long, long time. When it was finished, they brought me outside and put me back in the canoe. They said I had to go back in the canoe. They said I had to go back, and that I wouldn't be lonely anymore, and that I had important work to do yet. (2-3)

Following this excerpt, Archibald explains the stage of pondering she experienced about the dream, and her interpretation of "journey of learning." I found myself reflecting on the spiritual visits experienced by my godmother who raised me and my grandfather and other Elders as well. The many times they spoke of their Elders accompanied by shared the statement, "Your work is not finished here yet. Your time is not done." This, accompanied by the conceptual understanding that there is work I /we want, are directing you to do.

We observe Indigenous characters through contemporary stories who carry spiritual gifts such as the ability to communicate with spirits. We observe a character who is 1) struggling with the impact of colonization, 2) carrying various forms of intergenerational trauma and grief, and 3) without many of the deeper spiritual teachings—yet they are exceptionally gifted at communicating with spirits. Despite this shortcoming, the spirits continue to gravitate to them in hopes of assistance and relief with their suffering. The act of deep meditation or prayer, expressing gratitude and reverence, ceremonial practices and food offerings for loved ones who are passed on is common. Ceremony and prayer takes place with hopes the loved ones are nourished, satisfied, complete. That they are at peace and find their way home to that sacred place of deep love within the arms of our ancestors. Following ethics and protocols to take care of our ancestors is a sacred practice and ethic of Indigenous people.

An Indigenized experience and interpretation of the concept "supernatural" is more in tune with the way we are taught as children. We are taught to honour the spirit of all living things and all elements of *tmíx^w*, because we are merely one strand in this complex web, weaving of all living, animate and inanimate life forces that exist in our world. We experience all living things as Loved Ones. To interact with *tmíx^w*-the world around us, as a Loved One, is a constant reminder to have reverence for the land and all interconnected life. *Tmíx^w* nourishes our hearts,

minds, bodies and spirits. Tmíx^w has taken care of the bodies of our loved ones and ancestors since time immemorial. Tmíx^w provides nourishing food: deer, moose, fish, berries, roots and tea. Tmíx^w as our loved one, functions as our home where we play, pray, have ceremony and takes loving care of the loved ones that grow such as plants, roots and trees, two-legged, four-legged, ones that crawl, fly and swim, harvest.

While grief and loss have a huge role in *Monkey Beach*, in my observation, the premise is set in a relationship with Loved Ones who have passed on, and navigating annoyingly present ancestral spirits. Understanding that all the spirits and sacred beings present in this production, do not necessarily represent human beings who have passed. This is true in both the full feature movie, produced by Loretta Todd, which is based on the fiction novel, *Monkey Beach*, written by internationally renowned Haisla author, Eden Robinson. The characters of those who are deceased are vibrant, tangible, loving, embody connection to the past and future and they each provide tremendous healing. The roles played by those who are dead are significant, even more so than the roles of those who are alive. Lisa, the main character, has foretelling dreams through her life that cause her great anxiety and fear. Her most empowering and loving teacher is her late grandmother, Mama-oo, who is also one of the significant characters in the novel. Over and over again, through the story, we observe and then return to events and situations addressing unresolved grief, loss, hurt and trauma. The ancestral spirits and deceased loved ones guide Lisa through her suffering and hurt. The movie ends in what appears to be a fictional ceremonial practice where Lisa is able to come to terms with her spiritual gifts, as well as the foretelling dreams resulting in the death of her brother. The original novel was a very powerful read for me, particularly as it was published very close to the timeframe when my own younger brother passed. The dynamic presence of the spirits and loved ones as significant characters in the movie was not just beautifully entertaining, it was rejuvenating and created a sense of internal understanding for those who struggle with unguided spiritual gifts.

This presence and awareness of ancestors is also powerfully demonstrated in the creative work written and directed by Tsilhqot'in storyteller film-maker Helen Haig-Brown in her 2009 short film, ʔEʔanx (*The Cave*). It is classified as dramatic sci-fi, short film set in the Tsilhqot'in landscape, engaging the presence of both Tsilhqot'in present-day elders and pre-contact ancestors. *The Cave*, is a sacred, secret and significant place. Places such as these are often referred as a spiritual "doorway." In a cyclical storytelling fashion, we see the main character, a cowboy, as a man with his horse. In his ride across the rolling hills of the Chilcotin landscape, he finds a sizeable hole amidst the tall grass and pine trees. He climbs inside the cave and accidentally travels from a somewhat contemporary time-frame into a pre-contact lakeside Tsilhqot'in village. This is a spiritually dynamic film that brings to life a powerful, humming spiritual energy that feels like the spirit world is operating at a much higher frequency. In a sense, the humming feels intertwined with the highest level of linguistic fluency embodied by the ancestors. The main character, upon his return to the pine tree and grassy hill, finds that in the few moments he had "crossed over," enough years passed that all that remained of his horse is a skeleton.

The presence of spirit and ancestors is a lot more subtle in the full-feature movie, *Indian Horse*. An adaptation from the novel by the late Richard Wagamese, it was filmed and produced by non-Indigenous filmmaker and script writer with an all-Indigenous cast and with cultural advisors. I was grateful to be able to attend the opening night screening where the majority of cast attended, including the Anishinaabe grandmother who had the role of the grandmother in the movie. Edna Manitowabi spoke powerfully and passionately to the audience prior to the screening relaying to the audience that, at no point was she acting in her role as the grandmother: "I lived this story. This is my story." I've read the novel multiple times, on my own and with my students. As it is with most adaptations, Wagamese's novel, is compact with information that always creates a powerful multi-layered learning, awakening and emotional experience, all the details within the novel are not in the film. As a story that is performed for the big screen, this work still intertwines and recounts historic truths that are brutally important and

awaken audiences to the horrific realities that were the lives of generations of Indigenous children across Canada.

As a cyclical learning process, it brings me back to the words of Nanapush on the first pages of *Tracks*, which is set in a timeframe that I believe to be one generation prior. “The earth is limitless and so were our people once” (1). Like the tip of a spindle, Wagamese centres his audience within his Anishinaabe homeland, the epicentre from which the main character’s healing journey begins. We know from this point, the beginning of the movie and the novel, the main character, Saul, has awakened from “a long sleep,” one that was set in trauma, unresolved grief and alcoholism. When he starts sharing his story, he tells us that this act of recounting what has taken place is an important part of his healing journey. From the beginning of both film and novel, we learn about his earliest memories of childhood and the sacred and powerful teachings shared by his grandmother. When his brother comes home very sick from Indian residential school, his grandmother transports his family to one of their most powerful and sacred places in an effort to save his brother as well as to harvest traditional foods. The novel explains that this beautiful and very sacred lake was renamed, God’s Lake because of its spiritual nature. The inter-relationship between the here and now and the spirit world is most powerfully portrayed by the grandmother, Naomi. Naomi takes time to introduce the family to the spirit of their ancestors through ceremony, she asks for the help of the ancestors to heal. His mother is damaged by the words and work of religious, eurocentric brainwashing, and opposes traditional Anishinaabe ceremonial practice. The tuberculosis sets in, resulting in his brother death. Distraught, his mother and father leave the sacred place. His parents do not return and in a last effort to survive the winter conditions, his grandmother passes away while trying to transport him downriver to their extended family. After that, his journey radiates outward, further and further away from his spiritual centre at God’s Lake. Saul spends his childhood in Indian residential school and that is where he learns to play hockey. Life is not easy for Saul, yet his grandmother established a very sacred link, a sacred narrative strand deeply embedded within his homelands. When he reaches adulthood, trauma and addictions

take over and he suffers. Thankfully, he is tied to the ancestors and the spirit brings him back to those sacred places where his grandmother originally did her sacred work, weaving his heart, mind and spirit to their homeland. As explained at the beginning of the novel, his healing involves a cyclical process of returning and self-reflection in order to make peace with event that have taken place and shaped his life's journey. Upon his return to the sacred lake, the ancestors are waiting for him. In this process, he finds those broken strands and weaves himself and his spirit back together again. The strands of who and what made him strong, he reconnects, re-awakens the empowered elements of his identity and spirit. He re-establishes himself as an empowered human being on his journey towards healing. Courageously, he fights and finds the endurance exactly the way his grandmother taught him to.

We are taught by our Elders from childhood to carry ourselves in a good way. That no matter where we go, no matter what we do someone always has their eyes on us, generally our aunties or uncles, or loved ones. But that the ones we can never hide from, is the spirit of our ancestors and the creator and/or "the spirit," aka "great spirit." We cannot lie or hide anything, as the spirit of all things, including the ancestors, observes how we conduct ourselves as human beings. This may appear somewhat similar to religious ideologies, however, the difference is unconditional love and ancestral connectedness. We grow up, with the understanding that all things are alive and have a life force. The land, the trees, for example lava rocks we are taught are ancestors that we call "grandfathers." We know that, across the land, there are sacred burial sites and sacred locations and so we are taught to be mindful and careful about how and where we walk. Also, that just because we can't see the ancestors with our human eyes, does not mean they are not present. The Elders teach us that our ancestors are always watching and most importantly, that we are never alone. No matter where we travel, our ancestors are always with us, providing love and protection. For this reason, we give offerings of gratitude, traditional foods, tobacco, gifts. All of which contributes to the sacred ways of being interconnected, of having respect and reverence for the ancestors and sacred beings all around us.

The work of the spirit and our ancestors is embodied within our creative work and Indigenous storytelling practice. “Through the lens of colonial thought and cognitive imperialism, we are often unable to see our Ancestors. We are unable to see their philosophies and strategies for mobilization and the complexities of their plan for resurgence” (Simpson, *Dancing* 15). However, the spirit of our ancestors continues to dynamically move. It is a completely natural process that is so embedded within us that many times, we do not even realize the ways they manifest until in hindsight, we are able to detach from work after it is already complete. The words we say to ourselves, “I do not know how or why I wrote this.” “I don’t know where these words came from.” “I don’t even remember writing this.” Indigenous stories are a manifestation of the fluid movement between the spirit and the presence of our ancestors. Like our dear Elders have said on many occasions: *As storytellers, we are their voice, like a conduit that carries the sacred responsibility to bring their messages to life.* “The Oral Tradition continues to influence contemporary Aboriginal literature profoundly... resulting in stylistic and thematic hybrid of the oral and written, the past and present, the Aboriginal and the Western” (Ruffo 6). These teachings and understandings are embedded within our conscious and unconscious existence. These teachings about the spirit and about our sacred responsibility to take care of tmíx^w because of our ancestral connectedness are what maintains the deep loving relationship and reverence for tmíx^w-Turtle Island and many Indigenous artists live and abide by them.

The following poem from my memoir *Spílæxm* speaks to the embodied experience of relationships across time and space with those who have gone before us.

tmíx^w

dedicated to Elders Mary & Ed Louie

after you left
the ancestors gathered

shadows woven into trees
along the fields,
beside the creek.

overcome

by the weight of
shattered stone,
heart spirit mind.

i snuck into the berry patch,
fingers and mouth greedy
for the roundness of berries.
the ancestors met me there.

the ancestors followed me
everywhere.

q^wnq^wént and heartbroken
all i could do was yemit.
leave the berries fat and hanging,
mouth dry from wishing.

pitiful
pray

it is good to suffer, sometimes.

on our knees,
forehead immersed within
a blanket of fir boughs,
sweltering.

from tmíxw we came,
to tmíxw we return,
grandfather stones hot red
within woman medicine lodge.

four rounds of yemít & merímstn
sage, fir, wild roses, cedar, buck brush,
praying, singing until the blanket lifts
and between each round:

prayers and medicine

"you girls g'wan, do your dunks.
surrender it, surrender all of it
sadness sickness sorrow
wash it away."

on tiptoe we cross ice and snow
water earth and sky pay witness

this body is a mountain
this body is the land

an echo of our grandmothers,
feet immersed, rooted within
pebbles and sand.

péye, séye, keles, mus.
creator ancestors witness.
this healing. this lifting,
this transformation.

one, two, three, four

awakened. activated.

complete.
(238)

Storytelling Practices as Narrative Cycles and Interlinking Webs

Beginning with the earliest pre-contact stories, there are many common themes within the earliest Indigenous narratives regardless of the nations. The stories embody a remembered state of reverence, a state of deep peacefulness within the lives of our ancestral loved ones. As story cycles, layer upon layer, like the of the annual rings on a tree, they follow the annual turns of each season: winter, spring, summer, fall in accordance with the seasons of harvest and abundance. Conflict is not based on introduced literary ideologies and devices originating within colonial languages and colonial storytelling frameworks. The earliest period of many Indigenous stories demonstrates Indigenous peoples as centred and rooted within the natural harmony of all things present in their world: waterscape, landscape, the spirit world, the four-legged, the two-legged, the ones that swim, fly, walk and crawl, the plants, berries, roots, stones and soil of tmíx^w that share their lives: co-existence.

Annie Zetko York, a reknowned Nl̓éʔkepmx elder and knowledge carrier shares stories of a time when narratives, dreams and original instructions on how to live, were written on stone with red ochre on the many cliff faces in the Stein Valley, British Columbia. Her narrative descriptions of sacred ancestral pictographs on the cliff walls in the Stein Valley are recorded in the book *They Write Their Dreams on the Rock Forever: Rock Writings in the Stein River Valley of British Columbia*. We do not read full text stories, we see images that depict a story for which Annie provides narratives explaining the story told by each pictograph about a time when The People lived upon the land in tune with the abundance of the season or lack thereof. Conflict is brought on by conditions in the environment, by rogue animals or by people who are not in line with the ethics for conduct within the village and family.

SGaagway K'uuna Edge of the Knife (2018) is a movie filmed entirely in the Haida language, directed by Gwaii Edenshaw (Haida) and Tsilhqo'tin Filmmaker, Helen Haig-Brown. According to Wikipedia, the screenplay was written as a collaboration by Gwaii and Jaalen Edenshaw and several others with the input of the Haida community, Elders and knowledge

carriers, as a language preservation project. *SGaagway K'uuna* the movie, provides an opportunity for audiences to observe multi-generational families living in traditional homes constructed solely from things harvested from the land. When two Haida family units who have travelled to an island following the time frame of their specific seasonal harvest. The People are blessed by a copious abundance of traditional foods harvested on the ocean and traditional homelands. Conflict within this story is brought on as a result of the conduct of humans as well as the seasons and ocean conditions not suitable for fishing with a child resulting in inconsolable grief. While we do see elements of early contemporary clothing, the clothing and tools are primarily made of traditional woven textiles and elements. Although the people lived in a state of reverence and harmony with the ocean and land, as a community, they are not free of their ailments: emotional, mental, physical and spiritual.

The cycle of narratives transition to the earliest signs of contact by European colonizers, which occurred before the physical arrival of Europeans colonizers and is indicated by the onslaught of colonial diseases and the ensuing wave of death. This is exhibited in various novels by Louise Erdrich including her Birchbark youth fiction series. The opening lines from *Tracks*, have been ingrained in my memory since my first reading, as told in the voice of Nanapush. "We started dying before the snow and like the snow we continued to fall. It was surprising there were so many of us left to die."

By then, we thought disaster must surely have spent its force, that disease must have claimed all of the Anishinaabe that the earth could hold and bury.

But the earth was limitless and so is luck and so were our people once. Granddaughter, you are a child of the invisible, the ones who disappeared when, along with the first bitter punishments of early winter, a new sickness swept down. (1-2)

The themes embedded in this storyline are common. A loved one, a travelling orator shows up with symptoms, and is welcomed into a village for doctoring. While he is with the community, he recounts events that have taken place, stories of suffering among The People, of other villages. Within days, the individual passes on and the disease has, yet again, been

transferred to another village. In other narratives, a hunting group stumbles across mass graves and loved ones from a neighboring village that has been ravaged. In my vaguest memories, live stories about mass graves. Stories recounted by which voices; I unfortunately don't recall. So long ago that Nléʔkepmx family groups and villages of people up and down the Fraser River were still living in traditional síʔistkns, winter homes, often referred to as pithouses. Síʔistkns were well known for their permanence through the seasons. They provided safe, insulated shelter from the elements, cool in the hot, desert temperatures and retained warmth through the coldest winter months. So many people died due to how quickly smallpox spread that they could not bury their loved ones fast enough. Instead, the entryways to their homes were sealed with all the loved ones inside in order to stop the spread of smallpox. My question has always been, who told me that story? Who shared those words? I reflect on the many, many nights and early mornings as a child when Elders were visiting at my Mom Patsy's, the many times I sat in the same room with my Elders from the Nléʔkepmx language group as they spoke and remembered, recounted stories of harvest, of residential schools, of the Coqualeetza hospital, after it transitioned from a residential school. I remember voices sharing memories, but I do not recall exactly who recounted which story.

In the years immediately following European contact, story cycles center around implemented strategies for colonization and genocide from one end of tmíx^w-Turtle Island to the other, the Indigenous perspective of the creation of Canada and North America is not one centred in conquest and building a nation. It is the recounting of unspeakable grief due to atrocities occasionally involving warfare, however primarily the outright slaughter, rape and theft of children, women and all Indigenous people. This story cycle exhibits in detail, the ways the colonial-based traumatic shock, unresolved grief, despair, malnutrition, poverty and shame has manifested within the lives of colonized Indigenous people. This recounting shares the origins of intergenerational trauma and is centered in the legacy of generations of stolen Indigenous children and stolen lives through church run Indian residential schools, the foster care system and the sexualization of Indigenous children by the employees of these organizations. It is a

narrative that is centred in stages of physical, mental, emotional and spiritual human suffering, and results in the earliest stories of the introduction to addictions and suicide. The arrival of disease and despair experienced by Indigenous peoples is told all across tmíx^w-Turtle Island and around the world.

Grief and Renewal

Muskrat Magazine describes Helen Haig-Brown (Tsilhqot'in) as "an award-winning filmmaker whose works require a level of courage and community-gift-giving that few filmmakers achieve" (np). In her film production titled, *My Legacy*, Haig-Brown demonstrates present-day orature through real-life testimonials that demonstrate courage, brutal truth-telling, tremendous love, and the embodiment of powerful Tsilhqot'in teachings in order to achieve the transformational healing process that is shown between mother and daughter and community. *The Cave*, another production by Haig-Brown, exhibits a powerful embodiment of Tsilhqot'in narrative traditions through the recreation of ancient cultural and spiritual teachings. In every one of Haig-Brown's productions, she elegantly and ethically interconnects land, water and spirit through weavings of language, culture, history and film. As an Indigenous woman of my generation from British Columbia, her work is important to my research because she is continuously introducing bold, transformative new ways of telling Indigenous stories.

The 2014 docu-drama film, *My Legacy*, is one of the most powerful depictions of Indigenous intergenerational healing from the intergenerational impacts of trauma resulting from colonization that I have ever seen. I truly do not understand why this film did not get more attention. This film is deeply multifaceted, it creatively intertwines voice, ceremony, interviews and graphic imagery with history. The very real, intimate moments of deep healing shared in open dialogue between mother and daughter touched me deeply, especially as an Intergenerational survivor with deep, unresolved trauma and abandonment wounds with my birth mother. I openly grieve every time I watch it. I personally know that this courageous form of honestly shared in the moments on film between Helen, her mother and aunt, is craved for by

many intergenerational survivors including myself. I cry every time I watch it because of how meaningful it is for me. There are many important elements to this powerful story of healing and resurgence. Where the story is shared about the impact of the smallpox epidemic in the Tsilhqo'tin where, similar to the entire Fraser River, entire villages were ravaged by the smallpox epidemic. An elder is recounting the story, speaking fluent in the Tsilhqo'tin language. As he speaks, the translated words are provided as subtitles. The music score is a woman singing in the Tsilhqo'tin language; as she sings, the translation to the words, over and over, is "Everything is gone."

"We lost the way we used to be, because our minds have been twisted. We get very angry today. We were never walking in that direction before. Now we exist there." He continues to recount, as the woman continues to sing. The words scrolling across the bottom of the page. The tone of the voice shifts, into a deeper storytelling mode, "A long time ago, when our people lived in underground homes, the whiteman's smallpox wiped out a lot of people."

"Everything is gone," she sings.

The bodies were piled on top of one another." He says, "So many people were dead. Some people were going from place to place. Searching for the dead people they knew."

"Everything is gone," she sings.

"Our village, Puntzi lake was hit really hard. They found only two girls alive. Everyone else died. They were small, probably not yet ten years old."

The voice that sings the musical score changes at that point. The visual image shifts and we see the two girls, sitting in a golden field, clinging to one another. Another Tsilhqo'tin woman's voice begins to sing in the language and my interpretation of the tone feels like a "grieving intertwined with a powerful prayer song." I believe the voice singing belongs to Helen, the filmmaker. The orator continues speaking in Tsilhqo'tin, "Looking at this, their heart hurt and made them mad. They must have been scared and angry." The film continues, speaking about anger and how it has manifested within us. His words are reaffirmed in the voice of her mother. As survivors, having witnessed this within my own family, I know this to be true. In the final

scenes ending the film, we are reintroduced to the bloodline carried by the two surviving girls. Two descents perform and stand in their strength, showing the audience that despite the hardships, through the strength, courage and endurance of these matriarchs the bloodline and village survived. Reaching back through the generations she shows us how deep the grief and suffering was, for the entire nation and then she shows us pathways the community and family continues to work towards healing through acknowledging hard truths, despite the hurt they carried for generations.

Chapter 6: Conclusion—Storytelling for Transformation

This dissertation has engaged in a present-day exploration of the functions of traditional and contemporary Indigenous storytelling practices as a scholarly investigation. Critical to this search has been learning and developing ethical, creative and culturally-based narrative strategies in which Indigenous storytellers can resist the continual retelling of the most shattered and colonized versions of ourselves. This form of narrative violence validates erroneous and incomplete truths. Acknowledging the importance of remembrance and recounting our truth has been of utmost importance to me as an Indigenous writer. This storywork and story-development research project has focused on identifying practices by which Indigenous storytellers are turning towards culturally-infused stories with elements of ancestral narrative traditions, spiritual protocols, cultural wellbeing and teachings. The weaving together of vital truths, explorations of identity, language and cultural location as storytelling practices are a vital contribution to reclaiming our Indigeneity.

My findings include a demonstrated movement away from stories rooted within “deficit model” theory and centred in colonization and colonial despair and towards a deeply activated reconnection to cultural knowledge and towards culturally-infused stories. Stories represent ancestral narrative strands, traditions, spiritual protocols, cultural wellbeing and teachings. These storytelling practices are contributing to reclaiming our Indigeneity. Research outcomes for this dissertation project include methodology and framework concepts that facilitate the development of Indigenous stories. The intention of this is to find ways to creatively acknowledge and nourish Indigenous narrative teachings rooted within our ancestral homelands, waterways, to all living things and to our natural environment and resources.

The following poem from my memoir evokes the interconnectedness of words and world.

Offering

berries
round like the belly
of our human mother and earth mother.
round like the lodge like the womb that carried and birthed us
round like the cycle of our existence
from spirit to birth and infancy into childhood,
puberty, adolescence, teenage, adulthood, Elderhood,
returning full circle back to the spirit.

on this dish I place
the ones who ground us to the land,
the rooted ones that nourish all beings
with lifeblood flowing in their veins.

sacred finned swimmers & winged ones
those who honour the water and those who honour the sky
with their existence. they each give their lives to nourish us all.

four-legged brothers and sisters: deer, moose, elk.
those that offer their bodies
to nourish the bellies of our ancestors and us.

water
that nourishes all things.
our revered children and Elders, us.
our beloved rooted ones, berries, plants, and mlamn,
those with four legs, those with two legs, the finned swimmers, and those with wings.
the water that has been our place to pray, our place to play and our place to bathe.

since the beginning of remembered time,
since before the time the first human came to be.
since the time the first human walked across his earth
speaking fluently as brothers and sisters. as friends.
with the animals and all living things.

spílexm
this humble offering to the ancestors,
the good grandmothers and good grandfathers.
it is a prayer for well-being, for sustenance, for endurance to carry on.
grateful to walk this earth.

on this page, I offer
simple words.

spílaxem.
placed together as lived memories.
reflections, meditations, shattered pieces,

too many puzzles,
trying to find a way back to being whole.
pieces of the original weavings
leading to a better tomorrow.
not trying to return to an idealized pre-colonial life,
finding balance, amidst the gifts and trials.

on this page I offer
prayers, fears, rage, courage, love
moments of joy and tears like the falling
of many faceted raindrops
striving to see every shimmering light.

on this page, I offer
remembered teachings
spoken not by me but my Elders
some when I was small, some when I was tall
some while healing from the most shattered stages of grief
some when I was confused about which path to follow, step by step.

she braids a story.
yes, she does, she weaves a story.
yes she does. pulls together strands,
woven words. some bring us round and round,
back to the beginning again.

she pulls out the rot. pulls out the breakage.
removes the decay
sorting. rearranging. composting
hunts, gathers for pieces to remind us, every day,
what it feels like to be whole.

we are the ones.
our children are the ones.
our grandchildren are the ones
our ancestors prayed for. persevered for.

pause now,
have patience
within the silence
the full, aching silence
with heart mind spirit
hear the words of our Elders.
patient, the way you were taught.
wait to hear their breath embodied
within the breath of our children as they play.
(308)

Overview of Insights

While Chapter 1 explains my research goals, purpose and approach, Chapter 2 illustrates the importance of cultural identity and linguistic and ancestral relationships to landscape through Indigenous narratives. This chapter provides an analysis and explanation of my personal, published, creative contributions as a Salish writer of Nl̓éʔkepmx, Syíl̓x and Métis ancestry. Cultural identity indicates established roots within the traditional territory where our ancestors lived for generations, this, as a narrative strand, has been important through all my creative work.

Chapter 3 functions as an exploration and critical analysis of contemporary Indigenous creative and scholarly writings and narrative theory. Exploring the dynamic ways these diverse works have impacted Indigenous narrative and storytelling practices and how they continue to awaken and heal hearts, minds and spirits from the impact of colonization. The scholarship, methodologies and resulting conversations as developed and practiced by Indigenous thinkers all across tmíxw-Turtle Island are critical to the development of this scholarly research. The knowledge and insights provided by Jo-Ann Archibald within the pages of her valuable scholarly text, *Indigenous Storywork* is woven throughout various chapters of this research project. Storytelling practices that infuse Indigenous literature with culturally rooted and relevant knowledge actively contribute and reinforce vital elements of cultural resurgence.

Chapter 4 embraces an Indigenous literary nationalist approach that is nation-based and rooted within specific Indigenous territories, values, beliefs and consciousness in order to bring powerful Interior Salish perspectives on storytelling, ethics and protocols to the development of a narrative framework. Specifically, the chapter looks at the writings of Mourning Dove Christine Quintasket, Jeannette Armstrong, Bill Cohen, Helen Haig-Brown and Kevin Loring. Each of these storytellers and scholars, with their specific context and time, strategically and creatively engage nation-based intellectual narrative traditions, cultural praxis, and cultural pedagogies.

Chapter 5 illuminates ethical approaches and practices undertaken by Indigenous storytellers—and informed by the writings of Indigenous scholars that, together, form a contemporary framework—or more accurately and culturally stated—weave together a web of interrelated principles for ethical storytelling that are steeped in Indigenous methods and protocols. Building on the work of preceding chapters, Chapter 5 has culturally-infused, reverential and reciprocal conversation that owe much to the works of Indigenous writers across tmiw-Turtle Island with a significant debt to writers and thinkers from British Columbia. This conversation has been enriched through dialogue with Nl̓m̓ and Syíl traditional oral and contemporary narratives. The chapter begins by discussing a couple of key insights that inform the evolving space and understandings by Indigenous peoples about power, place and responsibilities. This has led to the recognition that our nations, our languages and our ancestors all play important roles in the project of telling our stories, as does the processing of grief and its movement into renewal together with our ancestral and re-imagined practices of narrative cycles and interconnections.

Summing Up: We Are the Ones

What I've learned through this research is firstly that decolonizing Indigenous stories illustrate a returning to a deep connected belonging, a lived and embodied reverence for traditional homelands and particularly for Indigenous cultural location. Cultural location is the appearance of characters and settings that are rooted within nation-based Indigenous voice, identity, landscapes and knowledges which are infused by ancestral narrative memory, languages, cultural epistemologies and Indigenous ways being. This includes the dynamic, embedded intellectual histories of specific tribal or national contexts as articulated in creative forms of expression, including text-based stories and orature. This form of Indigenous narrative storytelling practice, used by Indigenous writers, is often referred to as Indigenous literary nationalism.

Secondly, liberation demonstrated through Indigenous narrative storytelling practices and cultural frameworks are examples of cultural resurgence. As story-plot or as theory illustrating the revival of Indigenous knowledges, demonstrating and normalizing active, embodied transformation to an empowered state is absolutely vital. A lot of these frameworks and methodologies have been lost or in this contemporary culture and simply no longer exist. Today's Indigenous storytellers and knowledge carriers are actively returning, relearning, recreating and creatively exploring the development of Indigenous narrative frameworks and this is critical to Indigenous learning styles, that of demonstrating through example: healing and transformation. Health and wellbeing for Indigenous people remains directly interconnected to land and resource rights, specifically to stewardship and access to traditional food sources. The significance of this relationship continues to be demonstrated, recounted and documented through ceremony and through every form of storytelling and narrative practice.

To witness, remember and recount is a sacred responsibility within the practice of imparting Indigenous stories. It is a sacred responsibility to witness, recount, reflect and carry knowledge embodied within Indigenous stories because they are alive and the voices and knowledge of our ancestors is embodied within them. Through the lens of colonial thought and cognitive imperialism, we are often unable to see their philosophies and strategies for mobilization and the complexities of their plan for resurgence. Indigenous stories have the power to impact all Indigenous people across tmíxw-Turtle Island—nationally and internationally. As a result, we are also held accountable not just to our own community and Elders from home territories, but also, in a sense, to Indigenous people across tmíxw-Turtle Island—nationally and internationally.

The spiral we are all a part of continues to move us forward, cyclically we move through the seasons and with each passing year and generation, with each passing season, we have an opportunity to reflect on the past and reflect on the future. Colonization and colonial denial of genocide would wipe our minds free of any memory of truths.

Indigenous societies have maintained a practice of remembrance and recounting of events that have taken place, community governance, laws and lessons learned, since the beginning of time. In the footsteps of those who have gone before, the work of storytellers today remind us of our continued sacred responsibilities. Their stories exhibit a powerful embodiment of narrative traditions through the recreation of ancient cultural and spiritual teachings, practices with the purpose of reminding us of our sacred responsibilities and journey of healing. The elegant and ethical interconnections and reconnections between land, water, spirit and the people depicted through weavings of language, culture, history. As a transmitter of cultural memory, rooted within Indigenous consciousness, contemporary Indigenous stories activate liberation and resurgence.

As a vital strategy for intergenerational healing and empowerment, we look back in order to move forward. We move forward as we learn from the past. Hands reaching back, we carry forward the teachings of our ancestors. Heart, mind, spirit and body, the transfer of ancestral knowledge embodied within Indigenous stories functions like a spinning compendium mounted on an axis that allows the traumas of the past to transform into narratives of empowerment and strength. The cycle of stories brings us around and around and around—and with each cycle we move from one stage of story to the next. There is a new lesson that has been learned, a new skill that has been embodied through the journey and through each generation.

In truth, the English language was brought to Indigenous peoples and, in particular generations of Indigenous children by force, horrific forms of physical violence and at its worst, fear of death. The recovery of language and the reawakening and reopening of heart, mind, spirit and body of our Elders represents a courageous multifaceted journey of healing. Ortiz reminds us:

And those future generations the ancestral grandmothers and grandfathers spoke about are the present generations who are living today, meaning our present-day selves. We are the generations our ancestors spoke about. They thought about us; they planned for us; they provided for us. (*American Indian Quarterly* 288)

At the core and centre of our being, our central story as Indigenous people, our original instructions, the matrix to all cultural praxis and cultural ways of being are the ancestral voices, narrative bundles of embodied sound, story, songs, teachings, channeled from the landscapes we call home. In re-thinking and re-claiming our stories, re-imagining our past and present existence, and thereby developing a creative strategy for re-vitalizing Indigenous stories of resurgence. Present-day Indigenous storytellers are the living legacy of survivors of residential schools and colonization. We are reclaiming cultural pedagogies and epistemologies and actively re-imagining and reassembling our indigeneity through creative and critical work. Stories are relational, they are enacted, they are sacred, they are descriptive, they are powerful, they are medicine. Indigenous narratives and storytelling practices represent an embodied remembrance, spoken conduits carrying the guidance, love and teachings of the ancestors. Dynamic and fluid maps to the past, the present, and the future. We understand that Indigenous stories are spirits.

The concept of Indigenous “poetics” contributes to Indigenous healing and recovery from the oppressive impact of the english language on Indigenous storytellers. The action of moving “beyond the conceptions of the Anglo-moniyaaw interpretive matrix” (*Indigenous Poetics* 3) and realigning within an Indigenous interpretive centre that is culturally and linguistically rooted creates momentum. Like a spindle whorl that is centred within nation and land-based linguistic rhythms and cultural ideologies, articulated through the cultural and linguistic lens of Indigenous artists and storytellers.

The Nishnaabeg Seven Fires Prophecy came together in my mind as a young person. As a call to action and mobilization for all of us, this call helped me gain courage, endurance and momentum. This mobilization and awareness is absolutely vital for the decolonial journey and cultural resurgence of Indigenous nations around the world. As “Original Instructions,” the Nishnaabeg Seven Fires Prophecy have been uttered in many ways across the land. Perhaps not recorded in the same manner, however, the context, responsibilities, the state of

accountability, has existed as a living oral tradition conveying prayers of hope and endurance within the hearts of Indigenous people all across tmíxw-Turtle Island and around the world. These words are not new; they are the set of instructions we have all been directed to follow in different ways by our Elders.

The healing, recovery and resurgence work that is taking place among Indigenous peoples today has been spoken of by many Elders in previous generations. I recall my friend sharing the words and responsibilities as spoken by her grandmother. Each strategic step and stage taken to achieve healing and resurgence reflects exactly what has been foretold. As Indigenous peoples, these remain our sacred instructions and sacred responsibilities.

This doctoral research and my past and future work as a creative writer and scholar are part of a lifelong commitment and contribution toward meeting the challenge of strategically engaging Indigenous resurgence within all elements of our work. The stories and insights encountered through this research have effectively challenged me to push with greater endurance towards an embodied ethical purpose: to learn and employ deeply intellectual and courageous acts of decolonization through creative and critical practice and to challenge others to do the same.

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