

**Whispering the Circle Back:
Participating in the Oral Transmission of Knowledge**

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B.A. University of Northern British Columbia, 2002

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Abstract

Within the pages of this document you will find the whispers of ways of being that have come to live within my heart as I journeyed towards obtaining a mainstream education through participation in the oral transmission of knowledge.

As a member of the *Stl'atl'imx* Nation, I needed to honour the ways of knowing that are traditional to my people in the fulfillment of the requirements for my Master's degree in First Nations Studies. In doing so, I have recorded on my heart the teachings so gently shared with me by my Uncle Ray Peters, Aunties Laura Purcell and Rose Smith of the *Samahquam* Band, my Aunty Toni Archie of the *Tsq'escen* Band, and by Tina Fraser and Leona Neilson from the First Nations Studies department at UNBC.

Through blending the understandings I have gained from both the academic and Indigenous worlds, this thesis represents the possibilities that await us when we seek to honour and value diverse ways of knowing.

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I thank Heather Harris for showing me that not only First Nations peoples are colonized but so is most of mainstream society and for instilling the importance of humour in me. Heather's teachings helped me to work through the anger and the distrust that flooded my being when I realized that I was a colonized person.

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I thank Wendy Aasen for the high expectations she had of all her students and for grooming me to read and think critically. I strived continuously to meet (and beat) her expectations and I came to understand, through her teachings, that theory is but a big word for understanding our thoughts on different ways of being.

I thank Monty Palmantier for sitting on my committee although he knew nothing about me--- his input was always helpful and I especially appreciated his background in First Nations' education.

I also attribute much of my understanding to Chris Hannibal-Paci and to Paul Michel; I only wish there had been more opportunity for me to learn from you both.

For leading me through the processes of the oral transmission of knowledge, I am forever responsible for the teachings of this study's participants.

Although diagnosed with cancer just before our first interview session, and we did not follow the interview guide for the purposes of this study, I learned a great deal about connecting the circle of my life from my Uncle Ray. It is the teachings he shared with me that pound in my heart and reflections of our times together that permeate the discoveries and commitments outlined in this work. *Kukstumc*, Uncle. I will remember you always.

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Reconciliation

We are waking up to our history
from a forced slumber
We are breathing it into our lungs
so it will be part of us again
It will make us angry at first
because we will see how much you stole from us
and for how long you watched us suffer
we will see how you see us
and how when we copied your ways
it killed our own

We will cry and cry and cry
because we can never be the same again
But we will go home to cry
and we will see ourselves in this huge mess
and we will gently whisper the circle back
and it will be old and it will be new

Then we will breathe our history back to you
you will feel how alive and strong it is
and you will feel yourself become a part of it
And it will shock you at first
because it is too big to see all at once
and you won't want to believe it
you will see how you see us
all the disaster in your ways
how much we lost

And you will cry and cry and cry
because we can never be the same again
But we will cry with you
and we will see ourselves in this huge mess
and we will gently whisper the circle back
and it will be old and it will be new

by Rebeka Tobobondung

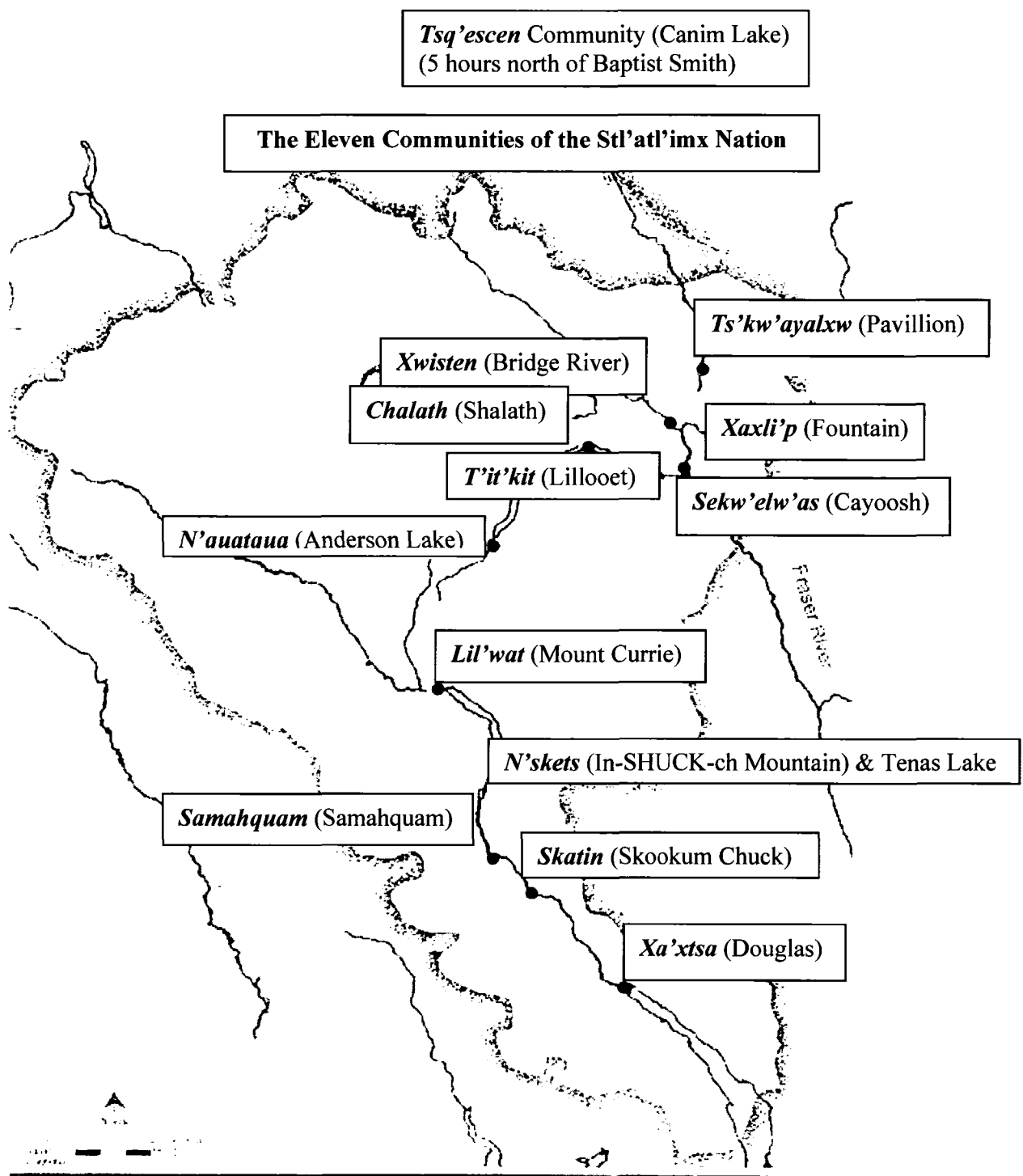
DEDICATION

I dedicate this written final product to all students and educators who strive to transform academic accomplishment into meaning something more than the acquisition of status and/or economic success. May your teachings and/or learnings contribute to the creation of a world that is a better place for all.

I dedicate all that I have learned throughout this process to my children, Cory, Devon, Sara and Dusty and to my mom, Maggie Schneider, who for many years had to share me with a full time job and this thesis. Thank you all for your patience, love, and support.

I dedicate my life and everything I do to the memory of those who have passed on to the Spirit World. I regret not taking the time and initiative while you still walked this earth to draw near to you to hear your whispers of how to live a good life. I am committed to learning what you needed to teach and to passing these important lessons on to my children and future grandchildren.

Most of all, I dedicate “Whispering the Circle Back: Participating in the Oral Transmission of Knowledge” to my Uncle Ray. You have been in my thoughts and in my heart throughout this journey and although I have garnered much information and many good teachings from all who contributed, the tears I fought to see through as I wrote much of this paper were cried for you and your family. It was my Uncle Ray who instilled in me the importance of our circles and maintaining them --- I dedicate my life to carrying out your wish to reconnect the peoples of our families and nations in a very real and meaningful way for that is where our strength lies, where our healing begins, and it is what our futures are dependent on.
I will carry you with me always.



Adapted from Kennedy, D and Randy Bouchard, *The Lillooet People* in Sound Heritage, Lillooet Stories, Volume VI, No. 1. Aural History, Victoria: 1977, page 2

Chapter One

Beginning in the Beginning

A very long time ago, the Great Chief approached a man called Ntci'nemkin and instructed him to bring the people together to gather cedar to make a rope. Ntci'nemkin did as was requested and worked hard with his people for many, many, days to accomplish this task. After some time, Ntci'nemkin's brother, Ints'tnlum-qun, grew weary of gathering cedar and preparing it for rope making and he asked Ntci'nemkin why they did not use sinew for this increasingly long rope. Ntci'nemkin told his brother that he was doing as the Great Chief instructed him to do and that they should continue to do so until the reason was revealed. Ints'tnul-qun was not content with this response and encouraged the people to go with him to make an even longer and better rope out of sinew. Some of the people chose to stay with Ntci'nemkin and others chose to follow his brother.

After much time had passed both brothers had made very long ropes and it soon began to rain. It rained and rained and rained and as the waters rose to a height that frightened the people, the Great Chief told Ntci'nemkin to have the people get on their rafts and float atop the still rising waters and when they were at the level of the peak of the split like a crutch Mountain, (N'skets) they were to throw the ropes they had made over the peak to keep them afloat above the territory of their ancestors. Both Ntci'nemkin and Ints'tnul-qun did so; many of the



N'skets Mountain

families boarded the raft with Ntci'nemkin and many climbed onto another raft with his brother. When they rose to the precipice, the brothers threw their ropes over the peak to help keep the people close to this sacred place. The braided cedar held strong and the people on Ntci'nemkin's raft remained on their territory as the waters eventually subsided.

Ntci'nemkin's brother's raft floated down the valley as the rope of sinew stretched farther and farther away from N'skets and the people on Ntci'nemkin's raft. As the water level dropped the people on Ints'tnul-qun's raft were dispersed across the land. This is how our Stl'atl'imx nation came to be spread throughout the valley.



Kic'ya7 dancing

I am a member of the *Samahquam* Band of the *Stl'atl'imx* Nation and this story is shared with permission, as I recall it from the tellings of my Grandmother, Annie Jim. The traditional name she carried is *Kic'ya7* which means Mother. My Mother, Maggie Schneider, was born to *Kic'ya7* and my Grandfather, Alex Smith, and she carries the name *Claco Chaqwa* which means twin

creeks. I am the first of eight children born to *Claco Chaqwa*, and William Schneider, Sr. I have five sisters and two brothers, four of whom are twins born to my Mother who is also a twin. I was born and raised in the city of Prince George, British Columbia, by a German

father and a *Samahquamicw*¹ mother. I have yet to receive my traditional name. I am the mother of four amazing children, Cory, Devon, Sara, and Dusty French.

Like everyone else on this good earth, I have a story to tell. I realize that, generally, in Eurocentric mainstream society, only the stories of extraordinary lives get to be heard, and there are very specific times and places in which that may occur. The conditions are far more stringent around incorporating personal stories in the university environment and I know this because I have one foot in that world. However, the other foot is firmly planted in a very different place and I am taking liberty here because my Indigenous spirit informs me that we are ALL extraordinary and we are all meant to have our stories heard because that is how we form our relationships, our connections to each other.

My father was the first to expose me to the racial slurs that would eventually lead me to be ashamed of and deny my *Stl'atl'imicw* heritage and although I have successfully blocked out much of my childhood years, I will share one memory that refuses to be forgotten. I was thirteen years old and was accompanying my numerous younger brothers and sisters to the circus. This was a rare occasion for the Schneider kids because it cost a great deal of money to send so many children on an outing such as this. Needless to say, my siblings and I were feeling quite fortunate to be there that day, laughing at the clowns and striving to take in all that was happening in the three rings below us. We didn't want to miss a thing; who knew when we would be blessed with an opportunity like this again?

Unfortunately, this sense of excitement was to be short-lived for me, for not long after the show began a cotton candy vendor interrupted the happy experience when he asked if I was Italian or Indian. I do not know why he did that, but I remember my cheeks

¹ *Samahquam* is a member of the *Stl'atl'imx* Tribe, located in the southern interior of British Columbia of the *Ucwalmicw* (Salishan) language group.

immediately turned red as I retorted, “Neither, I’m German!” How humiliating it was to be asked if I were an Indian, so humiliating that I chose to claim the ancestral heritage of a father who clearly despised the Indigenous background of my mother and I. I felt so ashamed that this stranger saw that side of me, that side I barely knew or understood myself. And I felt just as ashamed for denying that which I knew I was inside.

In the Spirit of Reciprocity and Respect

Much thought went into the naming of this thesis, “Whispering the Circle Back: Participating in the Oral Transmission of Knowledge,” because I felt a strong need to honour the magnitude of importance we, as *Stl’atl’imx* people, place on the naming process. Names are earned, passed down and held with the utmost of reverence. Considerable deliberations occur prior to the actual giving of a name. My Uncle Ray told me that a name should not be given until the person who holds it passes away, and the family must gather and dialogue until consensus is reached as to whom the name should pass on to (Ray Peters Interview, 2005). My Aunts Rose and Laura spoke about names needing to be earned and passed on to healthy individuals who are not consumed by unhealthy addictions to gambling, alcohol and work. Protocols must be followed so that the name may be passed on in a good way, ever mindful of the many ancestors who carried it before us. Much ceremony accompanies the bequeathing of names and small gifts are often given to a member from each area of the nation so that they will witness to those who were not present that the name has been given. This is the way of my own nation and I was fortunate enough to witness the giving of the

name *Claco Chaqwa* to my Mother, Maggie Schneider, by my Grandmother, *Kic'ya7*, a few years ago.²

Just as "...our spirit (Indian) names are a guide for us..." and they tell us where we come from, where we are going and what we need to do³ (Anderson, 2001: 203) so too was this work guided by its name. The significance lies not only in finding a title that proficiently discloses what is found within; it is much more involved than that. "Whispering the Circle Back: Participating in the Oral Transmission of Knowledge" has become the guide and conscience of this entire lived process. I purposely chose verbs to keep me mindful of the need to be active, to go beyond the domain of reading and writing, to get outside of my head and move into my heart, my spirit, and to participate in the relationships that our teaching and learning are grounded in. "Whispering the Circle Back" (Tabobondung, 2002:17) conveys the need to listen carefully, to pay close attention to our own ways of knowing, to our Elders, Ancestors and to the Creator, and it signifies gentleness, respectfulness and an approach that is non-interfering, non-demanding. "Whispering" also suggests the breath of life that is present in the oral tradition and how without close proximity our human ties and communal connections can never be fully restored, strengthened, maintained, if we are not present and carefully listening for the stories and ways of being of our nations. When we care enough to strain ourselves to capture first-hand the whispers of a good life so gently shared with us, we will become participants in whispering our circles back and we will be moved to

² The community drummed and sang for my Mom who sat in the centre of the hall wearing the regalia my Auntie Rose gave to her that I had embellished with beaded figures to represent all of my Mom's children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Because many of our community members live outside of our traditional territory, gifts were presented to a member from each direction with the understanding that they will inform other community members that *Kic'ya7* had presented Maggie Schneider with the name "*Claco chaqwa*" at a gathering in *Skatine*. Sadly, I have not received a name yet and it had always been my dream to receive it from *Kic'ya7* who passed away in October of 2004.

³ Quoting Ruth Morin.

carry the lessons of our Ancestors and Elders in our hearts---where they will be triggered for retelling in our future relationships with others. This is when we honour our own ways of knowing and *this* is the only way those ways might truly be preserved.

The circle is one of the strongest shapes in nature. When we see the world from a Native American perspective, that circle shapes our vision. We find circles and the idea of the circle everywhere, from the shapes of [many] Native dwellings to the view of the world as a series of continual, repeating cycles. Human life, itself, is seen as a circle, as we come from our mother, the Earth, when we are born and return to that same earth when we die.

~ Joseph Bruchac, III, 1993 ⁴

I came to internalize the importance of the circle through listening to my Uncle Ray. I could see the sorrow the disconnection within our families brought him as he told me on numerous occasions how sad it is that we could pass our own cousins on the street without even knowing it. Through the course of my mainstream education, I had learned much about the processes of colonization and as I considered the words of my Uncle Ray I came to understand the impact those processes had and continue to have on me at a very personal level. The separation inflicted upon my community by the residential school system, the dispossession of our lands and rights to govern ourselves using our own laws and ways of being has resulted in our alienation from each other, our territory (for many of us) and our rightful inheritance to our language, stories, and vital connections to past, present and future family members. Our circle has unravelled over the years and to honour the wishes of my Uncle Ray, which have since become my own dream as well, and to ensure this academic pursuit is also pertinent to First Nations' people in general and my family and community specifically, the name, methodology, and purpose of my work had to be committed to the reconnecting of our circles.

⁴ Bruchac, Joseph. <http://www.faculty.de.gcsu.edu/~mmagouli/ttnarr.htm>

Herein lies the importance of this work to both the academic and First Nations' communities; although I learned much *about* First Nations' philosophies and ways of being in the university setting, I encountered few opportunities to experience First Nations' methodologies in gaining this new information. This thesis demonstrates the potential to produce an academically sound document that is firmly rooted in the processes of gaining knowledge through participation in the oral tradition and connection to the relationships this process creates. The idea that when we lose an Elder we lose a library (Calliou, 2004:73) speaks volumes to the vast amounts of knowledge our community Elders have to share with us, but it is important also to note the significance of our relationships with our Elders, and each other, in the transmissions of that knowledge. "... [W]hen a person comes into relationship with certain knowledge, he or she is not only transformed by it, but must assume responsibility for it" (Newhouse, 2004: 151). Such implications must also apply in the universities that enable access to Indigenous teachings and to the students who seek them out as well. This is a moral responsibility --- one grounded in the very tenets that underpinned the reasons for sharing by our Ancestors, to demonstrate that which is necessary to live a good life and to walk a good path. It is about being connected to one another in a very real and meaningful way and this message is not so obvious in the university setting, yet. First Nations Studies needs to consistently relay the responsibilities we have to our families and communities and increasingly instil in its graduates, not a devotion to the academy or an individualistic sense of success, but a sense of belonging to something greater than that. The First Nations Studies discipline plays an important role in decolonizing us into taking actions that serve to reconnect our circles, and to strengthen our families and communities. First Nations Studies graduates transformed by participating in the discipline to the extent that

they commit themselves to such work would be a clear indication of the beginnings of truly reciprocal relationships between universities and First Nations' communities and the initial stages of authentic reconciliation between First Nations' peoples and mainstream society.

As to the ever-present concern for reciprocity, fulfilling my own responsibility to gaining this new knowledge involves more than submitting a copy of the finished work to the communities whose members shared their knowledge with me. I am forever indebted to the many people who took the time to speak to me, to listen to and respond to my numerous questions with great thought and aspiration for the path I would choose because of what they shared. Words and ideas were not expressed to leave an imprint on the pages of my final thesis, they were shared to impact the hearts and spirits of myself, my children, and those who would read the finished document and to guide us in directions that would serve our families, communities, First Nations' peoples and mainstream society in general.

This work aims to provide a solid argument for the incorporation of not only First Nations' worldviews, histories, stories, knowledge and material culture in the university setting, but also the traditional ways of knowing and passing on that knowledge as well. The processes of orality and the importance of "human links"(Mather in Schneider, 2002:63) manifest in the teaching of courses, especially First Nations Studies at the university level, represents a reciprocal relationship of a magnitude that, I believe, holds the potential for real transformation in academia and, ideally, in mainstream society and First Nations communities at large.

To continue to transmit First Nations' teachings utilizing Western methodologies is comparable to collecting the material culture of a people while presenting them as backward

heathens in need of assimilation.⁵ Although the mainstream education system has come around to viewing First Nations' knowledge and ways of being as important enough to be present within its walls, a wedge has been effectively jammed between First Nations' knowledge and the way it is transmitted. The "[o]ral tradition seems to present one way to challenge hegemonic history" (Cruikshank in Calliou, 2004: 78) and we, as First Nations' students/graduates, must strive to not only resist the colonizer's tools but also to transform⁶ (Smith, SAGE 2005) them to reflect our own ways in academia. This is an important intersection and when we leave the university with too heavy a dependence on western tools to "preserve" or transmit our Indigenous know ledges, we are co-opting into the colonial process on an intellectual level (Battiste *et al*, 2002: 1B). To allow colonization to take root in our minds would further impact our First Nations' communities in numerous ways as we sever our hearts from our Elders and story tellers and the stories they need to share with us. This knowledge passed forward through the oral tradition is necessary for us to assert our rights in the Nations' land claims and struggles for sovereignty. To be truly sovereign nations we must carry forward not only the knowledge but also the ways of knowing these things that make us *Samahquamicw*. Choosing to record the information of our nations on paper and in tape-recordings instead of on our hearts serves only to perpetuate colonial practices by taking what has the potential to benefit the colonizer while devaluing, and excluding, the very First Nations' processes that created and maintained it. This is indicative of the continued need for mainstream institutions to maintain their place of privilege over the crucial components of

⁵ I am referring here to the early days of contact when historians and anthropologists rushed to save the tangible traces of the numerous cultures their counter-parts were rushing to stamp out. The "Vanishing Race" photography of Edward Curtis is representative of this movement.

⁶ Graham Smith writes about the transformative process, and I was exposed to the concept through my participation in the SAGE group Smith started to facilitate the success of First Nations' PhD graduates.

what information will be transmitted and, equally important, *how* it will be conveyed.

Although great strides have been taken to change how First Nations' knowledge is viewed, it will never be seen as truly valid until it is presented in a holistic manner, with respect for the fact that much knowledge is sacred and meant only for the people of the Nations, as well as traditional environmental knowledge that may need to remain within the First Nation's community to maintain the integrity of the territory. I am referring to the need for a genuine respect for the *processes* and relationships that have carried First Nations' knowledge forward so that it is possible to share in the mainstream education system. "The diverse elements of an Indigenous people's heritage can be fully learned or understood only by means of the pedagogy traditionally employed by these peoples themselves" (Battiste *et al*, 2002: 3B). This means persons who have been immersed in the processes of gaining that knowledge must share it using First Nations' methodologies. It also means that relationships must be formed in the sharing of First Nations' worldviews, interpersonal connections must be made (Rose Smith Interview) along with the understanding that responsibilities lie *beyond* the academy, mainstream employment, and personal success. To continue to deny the possibility of accurately transmitting knowledge using First Nations' methodologies will serve only to perpetuate the scepticism surrounding the validity of the knowledge being transmitted.

Though I will consistently advocate through out this paper for change in the manner in which First Nations' knowledge is shared in the university setting, I cannot ignore the fact that this discipline has also played a very important role in my finding my right path. With its origins rooted in Indigenous discontent with education systems that completely ignored First Nations' history and values, and in an effort to increase enrolment and solve the "Indian

problem” (Sikand, 1981: 186), I have to admit that First Nations Studies has consistently grown and changed in purpose and program delivery over the years. These disciplines, also known as Native Studies (Sikand, 1981 and Kulchyski, 2000) and Indigenous Studies (McLeod, 2000), are becoming increasingly stable as more programs are chaired by Indigenous people and as more courses are being offered by culture members and/or respectful and sensitive non-culture members (McLeod, 2000:30). First Nations Studies professors and students of today have access to an ever-growing canon of Indigenous literature that facilitates the dissemination of First Nations’ know ledges, worldviews, and experiences. Such progress is commendable and many Native and non-Native scholars have worked hard to ensure the discipline is received as one with academic integrity.

Although “...universities have not featured prominently as an object of anticolonial or actively decolonizing inquiry” (Battiste *et al*, 2002:2B), one can easily see the differences that already exist between First Nations Studies and the various other disciplines found in academia. The primary one is that First Nations Studies provides a space in the academy where Indigenous voice and experience may be expressed as experienced first-hand by its professors and students. Peter Kulchyski believes the First Nations Studies discipline is about “... the righting of names as much as the writing of names” and he sees Native Studies as a place in which to recognize the knowledge of Indigenous consultants and Elders by no longer leaving them un-named (Kulchyski, 2000: 11). Kulchyski states there is great power and implication in this and that the Native Studies discipline represents an important forum in which First Nations’ peoples may engage in the intellectual struggle for a post-colonial space (Kulchyski, 2000: 25).

Like any other discipline, First Nations Studies departments have a teaching component, along with research and service requirements that are to be fulfilled by the department (Wright, 1990: 2). Unlike its' counterparts, however, First Nations Studies disciplines strive to increase First Nations enrolments and success rates in academia while seeking an alternative to the taken-for-granted theory that knowledge is universal (Graveline, 1998:10). First Nations Studies is at the forefront of the decolonization process and continues to transform and grow along this path. The ideas expressed in this document are endeavours to contribute to the development of not only the discipline but the resultant worldviews of the graduates who venture forth from it in an effort to connect different ways of knowing that must inevitably grow together and impact the many circles of First Nations' lives. The academic education and the understandings and values we bring from our communities must also come full circle to connect in a meaningful way so that those impacts are positive and beneficial to the communities that participate in them, so that the academic work we do in First Nations' Studies is always respectful and reciprocal in nature.

This work constitutes more than partial fulfillment of the requirements to obtain a Master's degree in First Nations' Studies. This is the story of my journey towards that end; of my struggle to consistently remember and successfully include my Indigenous spirit in all aspects of this mission. This is a story that strives to reconcile heart and mind, written and spoken, the past with the future. It is a story of reciprocity, giving of myself to balance all that has been given to me. In return for all the knowledge and stories shared with me by professors, scholars, family, and friends, I offer a glimpse of myself in the hopes that connections will continue to be made. By sharing my experience I hope to honour my Aunty

Rose's wish that I project, in my thesis and ways of being, how necessary reciprocal relationships are to the learning process. (Rose Smith Interview, March 31, 2005)

Walking this Path in a Good Way

Because I was born and raised away from my home community of *Samahquam*, and because I had spent most of my life feeling uncomfortable about being what I knew in my heart I am, I was immediately drawn to the First Nations Studies discipline when I began my university experience. I took every opportunity to learn about my culture during my undergraduate years at the University of Northern British Columbia. Although I learned much about First Nations' philosophies and ways of being in general, I discovered there were very few publications about my own *Stl'atl'imicw*⁷ people available. This led me to visit my *Samahquam* community on numerous occasions to acquire the information necessary to complete various research papers and presentations and it also served to quench my thirst for understanding what it meant to be *Stl'atl'imicw*. This is how I came to know my community, my relatives, and some of our ways, because these initial quests for research material quickly transformed into a sense of belonging as my visits came to be more about family, community, and the land.

Four years in the university setting had trained me well in Western ways of learning and knowing, and my first instinct for my Master's thesis was to interview community members, record the stories they had to share and write a *much needed* ethnography about the *Stl'atl'imicw* people. After all, one of the requirements of writing a successful thesis is to fill a gap in academia and as I indicated earlier, I had an extremely difficult time finding publications about the *Stl'atl'imx* Nations.

⁷ The *Stl'atl'imx* Nation is made up of eleven tribes, *Sekw'ele'as*, *N'quatqua*, *Lil'wat*, *Samahquam*, *T'it'kit*, *Skatin*, *Xa'xsta*, *Xaxli'p*, *Chalath*, *Xwisten*, and *Ts'kwa'ayatxw*. See Map page viii of this paper.

As I completed the course work for my Master's degree, I became increasingly aware of my propensities to utilize the methodologies of a system foreign to *our*⁸ own ways of knowing. I realized that I was no longer comfortable with the idea of learning the stories of my nation to fulfill the requirements of academia. It began to feel inappropriate for me to choose this path of discovery to gain the knowledge that was of such personal importance to the continued remembering of who I am as a *Stl'atl'imicw* woman. I became concerned about the implications of setting to paper the knowledge that would be shared with me, and I questioned the integrity of my taking this *fast track* to heightening my cultural awareness without honouring the value of our own ways of learning and knowing by experiencing and practicing them. I came to realize that the lack of publications on the *Stl'atl'imicw* people was in fact a blessing, for it inspired me to take the time to travel to my community on a number of occasions, establishing a crucial connection that might not have been made had there been an abundance of information readily available in the university library. I was not only exposed to *Stl'atl'imx* ways and knowledge while connecting with family and community, I also came to understand my responsibilities to these connections.

This enlightenment led me to the realization that I needed to learn and honour the ways of my people in the manner they were meant to be learned and was the driving force behind everything from the oral tradition methodologies I chose to complete the thesis to the eventual title of the work.

Honouring Different Ways of Knowing

Because I began to feel I would be appropriating the knowledge of my Nation by recording and disseminating our stories for anyone who could read, I researched the existing

⁸ As a *Stl'atl'imicw* person, I will use the term *our* to indicate my belonging to the *Stl'atl'imx* Nation, to the collective, and to the common underlying principles of the Indigenous peoples of Turtle Island.

literature that discussed literacy, orality and First Nations' education in general. I approached this investigation with an acute consciousness of the ever increasing belief that higher mainstream education was the path to our peoples' futures and successes and an increasing awareness of First Nations peoples' need to *preserve* the stories of the Elders by documenting and recording their words for future generations. I found myself questioning whether it was appropriate or even possible to record the oral traditions of First Nations' peoples and to consider the implications mainstream education is effecting upon our own ways of learning and knowing.

Though we as First Nations' peoples are aware of the pitfalls on the paths of the colonizer, I can see that we continue to map our futures along some of those paths. Time and time again, we are encouraged to *get an education* not only by our Elders, but also by our leaders and the Indigenous scholars we look up to. Our Elders direct us to pursue a mainstream education so that we might better understand the ways of the society around us; so that we might have the best of both worlds and therefore enjoy a better life. Our leaders promote higher learning so that we might engage in the battles for our lands and ways of being on a footing equal to those who seek to consume all that we hold sacred. Our Indigenous scholars wish academia upon us so that we might effect changes in the dominant society's worldviews and theories and therefore become catalysts for change at the ideological level. Many First Nations see education and its western trappings of research and documentation as tools to be utilized in establishing our own ways of knowing as valid and acceptable in mainstream society through the documentation of the oral histories and traditional knowledge of our Nations (Lawson, 2001: 18). Others view literacy as "a necessary monster" that First Nations' groups *must* come to grips with in the transmission

and preservation of their cultural ideas and languages (Mather, 1999:13). In other cases, documentation projects are being forced upon us as a last resort to save our territories from a society that acknowledges only those words or lines written or drawn upon pages and maps (Lawson, 2001: 18).

As a learner with an understanding that all of these wishes for the people are made with good intent, I do not doubt that mainstream, higher education has benefited First Nations' peoples in numerous and profound ways. I worry however, that, as Rebeka Tabobondung alludes to in her poem, *Reconciliation*, by copying the colonizers' methodologies and *acceptable*⁹ ways of knowing, we are killing our own traditional ways of knowing and transmitting knowledge (Tabobondung, 2002:17).

The purpose of this study came to be an investigation of the issues surrounding literacy and orality while considering the possible impacts an increasing reliance on literacy may have on remembering our own ways of knowing, our stories, histories and philosophies. To honour my responsibility to my ancestry, I decided to actually participate in the oral transmission of knowledge so that I might gain some understanding of different ways of learning while fulfilling the requirements of the First Nations Studies Master's program.

Dreaming “Whispering the Circle Back” and Participating in the Oral Transmission of Knowledge

My journey towards better understanding our *Sil'atl'imx* ways of knowing and being has shown me that when I consider and reflect upon our traditional ways, my spirit opens to the possibilities of those ways that I had previously only read about.

⁹ Acceptable to most of the mainstream, dominant society in which we must function on some level.

I have read and heard on a number of occasions that what is to be painted on our drum will come to us in a dream. As I have learned many of my community's songs, I often drum and sing when I am in the community, but have yet to receive my drum. As I reflected upon the ideas and concepts I had sought out for the purposes of this paper and my life path, I awoke one night with the memory of a dream; a dream that informed me I was on the right path with not only the title of but the purpose behind this work. In this dream I was excited about an image that I thought had come to me for the work of a friend. I described in detail the image of a circle of people who were all connected by lines of communication. I expressed the positioning of each person, the colors and the lines that appeared so vividly in my mind. I could not understand why my friend was not as enthused as I was by this image that had come to me in a dream. I thought it fit her project perfectly! As I sadly accepted she was not interested in the design, I awoke from my sleep to a gentle voice saying clearly in my ear, "Whisper the circle back..." I realized upon waking that this image came to me for *my* work and one day, for my drum. As I considered the implications of this powerful dream, I came to recognize that this entire process has been a spiritual journey for me and when I slow my life down enough to consider the significance of the thoughts shared with me, I travel to a different place within my being and my visits there enable me to receive the dreams and understandings sent to guide me. To dream this particular dream of the image for my drum at this point in my life clearly indicates that my academic work can certainly be, and is, connected to my living a good life.

Another significant awareness came to me through my participation in academia in the form of a Story Stick. The *Tohono O'odham* people of the southwest record stories and track rainfall and other important information by carving images on a flat piece of wood

known as a calendar stick (Zepeda, 1995:9). I first learned of this technique for recalling events at a conference I attended in my role as the Family Involvement Worker for the Aboriginal Head Start programs. A young woman shared the Story Stick she had created by tying strings and various memorabilia around it to serve as triggers to remind her of the significant events in her life. The memories she shared with the group as she “read” her Story Stick inspired me to create my own Story Stick to fulfill the requirements of the last course in my graduate studies. The purpose of this exercise was to determine what I had learned through connecting with my family and community and to record and share the information without resorting to writing and reading what had come to me through the oral tradition. I chose this activity because I am by no means an orator and because I am somewhat consumed by the need to become one. I saw the Story Stick as a potentially useful strategy in my attaining this goal to speak fluently without the need to resort to reading – to become as comfortable with my orality as I have become with my literacy.

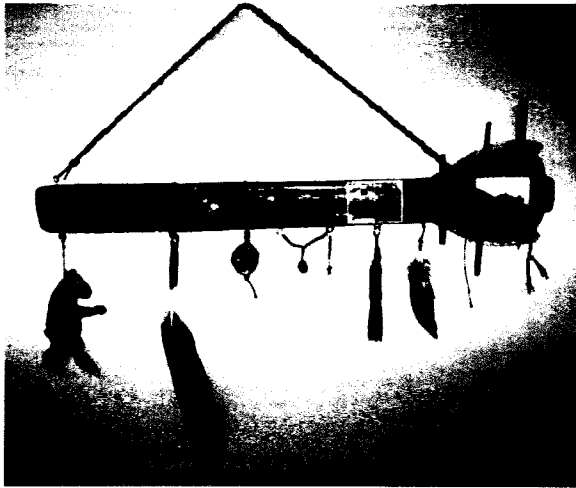
I began this project with concerns that I would not have much to record on my Story Stick but soon found the memories about our nations’ ways were coming so quickly that I could barely find ways to mark them fast enough.

Memories of my Grandmother, my Aunties and Uncles and the beautiful territory from which we come, flooded my mind as I began this process of recollection. I chose to start with our sacred mountain, *N’skets*,¹⁰ and the story of *Ntci’nemkin* because that is where we originate and because it is the only story my Grandmother had the opportunity to share with me. I started by gluing a picture of this important and sacred place on the right end of the cedar stick that my son Cory had brought from my Grandmother’s farm that is nestled

¹⁰ *N’skets* means “split like a crutch” (referring to the split precipice at its peak) (<http://www.inshuckch.com>)

between *N'skets* Mountain and the shore of Tenas Lake. My Uncle Victor had shown Cory how to make a cedar barbeque stick on the beach of this sacred Lake that provided the salmon we feasted on that day. Cory had retrieved this piece of cedar from the banks of Tenas Lake and brought it home with the intention to make his own barbecue stick and to honour his generosity in gifting this perfect piece of cedar to me to record our learnings on, my Story Stick looks like a traditional barbeque stick, complete with a salmon skewered by slivers of cedar to hold it in place.

I did not realize it at the time, but in placing the image of *N'skets* Mountain on the right end of the cedar plank I would be “reading” my Story Stick from right to left instead of left to right because I could not begin to share my learnings in any other way --- I need always to begin with *N'skets*. This suited me fine because I was and am resisting the inclination to read and write our First Nations histories and stories! Because this Story Stick was created to be shared in a way that honours my connections to the people, places and ways of being that it depicts, it is important to note that the images, memorabilia, bead work and feathers you see on it represent the many stories and memories of important people, places and ways of being that came to me through my participation in the oral transmission of knowledge. Although I am aware of certain practices and when to conduct them, I am not aware of the reasons behind all of them... and I am okay with that because they all just feel right to me. Because the stories and memories were shared with me and my family by persons we love and respect, some of whom have since gone on to the Spirit World and because it has been created from a piece of the earth that is considered sacred to our people, I consider this creation to also be sacred and I look forward to sharing it with many because as I learned when presenting it to Paul Michel as part of my course work, the stories I share



My Story Stick

connect with the stories, memories and knowledge of those who hear them and my understandings grow as my Story Stick grows.

This Story Stick is sacred because it is made of cedar and because it was gifted to me. Cedar has provided much for my community for thousands of years; we use

the soft, deep green boughs to splash ourselves with lake water when taking a sacred bath. I remember my Mom telling me that my Grandmother slept on these boughs to mourn the loss of a loved one. I don't know why, but when a young man is entering puberty, cedar boughs are tied at each corner of his bed. Cedar boughs, like the sage that grows wild in our territory, may be dried and used for smudging for spiritual cleansing and to carry our prayers to the Creator. Cedar roots are dug up, split and dried to be used in basket and garment making.

I started my Story Stick with *N'skets* Mountain because it is our Sacred mountain and to remember my Grandmother, *Kic'ya7*, who told me of its importance to our people so many years ago, during the Great Flood. The story, shared at the beginning of this paper, demonstrates the importance of the land, of our traditional knowledge and of our connections to those who live around us. Although some of the families were dispersed further down the valley than where they had started, we are still connected and the re-telling of this story reminds us of that.

The importance of knowing the uses of the gifts the Earth gives us has also been passed down through the generations in this story. The importance of the land, especially the

land found at the foot of *N'skets* and on the shores of Tenas Lake has been instilled in me by my Grandmother, my Aunts and my Uncles. All that comes to us from the Earth is sacred and it is our duty as *Stl'atl'imicw* people to protect it. Receiving this story from my Grandmother and being present on the land, seeing the mountain that meant as much to our ancestors of long ago as it does to us today, has a powerful effect on my spirit and I am tied to this beautiful territory forever.

This story is also representative of the enduring presence of our people on the *Stl'atl'imx* territory and our connections to our ancestors as I am reminded of how I was recently introduced to a man in Mount Currie who now carries the name *Ntci'nemkin*. I have also heard stories about a petrified log from *Ntci'nemkin*'s raft that is lodged at the precipice of *N'skets* Mountain. I remember my Grandmother's gentle and caring eyes and the smile that telling this story always brought to her lips.

To dream "Whispering the Circle Back" and to discover that I had garnered numerous teachings from my family and community members by spending time with them and by participating in community events speaks volumes to the capacity for us to blend various ways of knowing in a balanced and positive way. By fulfilling the requirements of my academic education I recognized that I have and do participate in the oral tradition and had learned more than I suspected when I needed to consider the information I would share on my Story Stick.

Chapter Two

Reviewing the Literature

Although it is extremely important for me to convey the words and thoughts of those who have orally transmitted them to me, I cannot deny the impact that literacy has also had on the views I am expressing in this work. I see mainstream education as a circle in my life. Because my Mother attended the Mission residential school, mainstream education removed her from our culture, our language, our community and our ways of knowing; it effectively removed her from the ability to pass on that important knowledge. Now, many years later, it is mainstream education that has returned the possibility of all these things to me (and my children). Although I may very well have returned home and to my heritage without attending First Nations Studies at the University of Northern British Columbia, I do not know if doing so would have led me to the realization that I was a colonized person. The writings and teachings I was exposed to in academia taught me to see the beauty of First Nations' cultures and ways of being (Armstrong, 1992: 209) and led me to seek the ways of my own nation. Exposure to this diverse collection of voices and understandings also facilitated the reconciliation of my past with my future, in that I came to understand why I had so blatantly denied who I knew I was inside, those many years ago. This understanding enabled me to forgive myself for doing so and it allowed me to leave behind the shame and to embrace the possibility of valuing different ways of knowing to the extent that I could consider completing a Masters' degree utilizing both literacy and orality.

Considering the Legacy of Literacy

"We are living in the age of literacy. We write everything down, and expect everyone to be able to read" (Mather, 1995: 90). Mesmerized by this process of reading and writing,

we are increasingly lured away from our own traditional methods of sharing and keeping knowledge. Have we learned nothing from a history of struggling and/or being forced to learn a foreign tongue only to lose our own? Reading and writing our stories instead of hearing, remembering and retelling them constitutes the same type of co-optation of colonial mechanisms and we must be cognizant of the need to find balance so as not to lose our capacity to carry our own ways of knowing into the future.

Walter Ong submits that this process of writing is a technology that restructures thought (Egan, 1991: 180) and although orality can and has existed without writing, writing has never existed without orality (Ong, 1982: 8). Ong goes on to say that “writing makes ‘words’ appear similar to things because we think of words as the visible marks signalling words to decoders: we can see and touch such inscribed ‘words’ in texts and in books” (Ong, 1982: 11). I find it challenging to imagine all the character, personality, beauty and spirituality of our stories reduced to images of letters in our heads as we try to imagine/feel the words we are reading on the page. This is the point of disconnect—where we become accustomed to making connections in our mind’s eye as opposed to where it matters, in our hearts and spirits. The site of assimilation has shifted to our minds as we imagine our sacred ways and places in the very same spellings/lines/marks and words as everyone else in mainstream society.

Oral literature, in Ruth Finnegan’s opinion, is a “strictly preposterous term... [that] reveals our inability to represent to our own minds a heritage of verbally organized materials except as some variant of writing, even when they have nothing to do with writing at all” (Ong, 1982: 11). Literacy seeks to consume orality just as English seeks to consume the languages of our ancestors, and when we write translations of the stories of our nations the

“...language becomes appropriated...the stories become fixed pinned crucified interpreted romanticized...the stories are then no longer our stories”[sic] (Cole, 2000: 55). The idea of writing our stories in chapters, with beginnings, middles and ends, is, as Cole puts it, “anathema” to who we are as indigenous persons because “...it implies western order and format as “the” legitimate shapers of discourse” and this essentially “...put[s] us in our place illiterates illegitimates iterati” [sic](Cole, 2002: 448). Orality is not about ‘writing down’ (Cole, 2000: 55), literacy is; and “literate forms of knowledge constitute a key vehicle for the imposition of Euro-American ways of knowing...” (Cowell, 2002: 24). Cowell reports that the development of literacy is threatened by the decline of the Arapaho language and many Elders see literacy as an appropriation of the language (Cowell, 2002: 38). I would submit that it is also an appropriation of the stories and ways of knowing when used as a tool for remembering First Nations’ oral histories and traditional knowledge. It is the ‘conversion scene’ transforming ‘indian stories into white books’ (Cole, 2000: 68). To remember our histories, stories, environmental knowledges, and ways of being, by relying solely on literacy, is to submit to the ultimate appropriation of who we are and who we will become.

On Writing Orality

Because I began with the intention to conduct an ethnographic study of my Nation so that I might learn our stories and ways of being, I began my literature review by looking at what the scholars had to say regarding the idea of researching and writing/recording our oral histories and traditional knowledge as a method for learning and/or preserving them.

Elsie Mather, a Yup’ik educator and language teacher, has faced this issue in her own work and she writes: “The desire to preserve and perpetuate oral traditions is ambiguously linked with the process of writing them down” and this scholar admits she is trying to “come

to grips with the ‘necessary monster’ of literacy in relation to the transmission of her Yup’ik Eskimo language and cultural ideals...” Mather also feels that the stories of her people are best appreciated when they are shared and experienced for they lose their ‘fluidity’ when they become fixed to the page (Mather, 1995: 13). Once written or recorded, these stories become ‘fixed commodities’ incapable of conveying the presence of storytellers, their performances, the responses/reactions of the audiences as well as the context so crucial to this way of knowing (Schneider¹¹, 2002: 6). I was fortunate to feel the meaning of this statement when at the graduate students’ writing retreat in the Nass Valley Blanca Schorcht shared a tape recording with us. I had read the text, *Write it on your Heart*, by Harry Robinson (1989) a few years earlier and at the time felt an absolute absence of the storyteller’s presence. I had enjoyed the book and it was a real blessing to hear Harry Robinson telling a story in English, on the tape recording that Blanca shared with us in that seminar. Although I do not understand the meaning behind the story shared, I am compelled to communicate the impact hearing Robinson’s voice had on me. Experiencing the sound of his voice, listening to his pauses, and hearing his smiles, brought a sense of joy to my own spirit as I found myself imagining this person, an Elder, fulfilling his responsibilities to pass forward the stories that had been shared with him. The rhythm of his voice and the words he chose told me that he was comfortable with this sharing and that he was determined to relay this information to the listener. Although I could not see Mr. Robinson or the person recording his storytelling, (Wendy Wickwire) I could hear his personality shine through and I knew he was smiling knowingly as he shared what he needed to share. There was something very powerful about hearing the story as opposed to reading the words on the pages of a

¹¹ Although my father and brother are named William Schneider, the person I reference in this paper is of no relation to me.

book. I felt connected because I could hear this was a living and breathing human being, an Elder, a Grandfather, and I respected his words and his sharing.

I also found myself imagining the characters and the animals in the story Mr. Robinson told --- numerous images came to my mind as I listened to his voice. There is something crucial missing when reading about these same characters that disables our ability to visualize what we are reading. When our eyes are not scanning text and instead our ears are listening for the information, the details of the story, it seems we are more apt to visualize the information that comes to us through our ears. I felt a connection that was not present when I read the book, and hearing Robinson's tape-recorded voice for a few minutes demonstrated for me my inability to relate with what the text was saying and that hearing the same words spoken instantly connected me to the storyteller and the story being shared.

William Schneider also questions whether it is possible for future audiences to understand the meaning of stories simply by listening to recordings of them. He submits that recordings are but artefacts of moments and can only make real sense when considered against past and future tellings of the story along with an in-depth understanding of the reasons behind telling a specific story at a certain place and time (Schneider: 2002: 7). Chief Peter John of the Tanana Chiefs region in Central Alaska puts it in more poetic terms when he says, "In between the lines is something special going on in their minds, and that has got to be brought to light, so they understand just exactly what is said" (Schneider, 2002: 51).

Thomas King writes that the printed word "...once set on a page, has no master, no voice, no sense of time or place...oral stories can be stuck in a book" (King, 2003: 154). Stuck and waiting to be used, inactive and incapable of responding to the impact, if any, they might have on the reader. The written story is done---it is no longer attached to the teller and

his or her memories and/or experiences, or the feelings evoked by the story. The written word does not have the potential to gather and share further meaning or understanding nor does it have the capacity to perpetuate itself (Lawson, 2001: 9). Only people and communities can keep the stories and languages living and I agree with Nora and Richard Dauenhauer that preservation is for berries and salmon, not our oral traditions (Lawson, 2001: 18). This “dead on the page” point of view is shared by numerous scholars, including Socrates who is quoted by Egan as describing the written word to be but an image of the ‘living word’, an inanimate corpse that has lost the vital spark of human breath (Egan, 1991: 191). Phyllis Morrow agrees with Michel Foucault that the very act of authoring is an authoritative one that “...is and exists in, a peculiarly western milieu” (Morris, 1995: 31). Walter Ong elaborates on the subject with his description of writing as being pre-emptive, imperialistic and assimilative in nature (Ong, 1982: 12).

Writing ethnographies has the tendency to distance the voices of those it purports to depict and depiction itself raises further issues in that the authors of ethnographic studies rarely hail from the communities they are describing and therefore often lack the cultural context that informs the ways of being of First Nations’ societies (Morrow, 1995: 9). Further, “since depiction and representation are filtering---and therefore distorting---processes...” ethnographies tend to be the descriptions of the describer and not the described (Morrow, 1995: 30). I would add that the sense of responsibility is different for the receiver of knowledge, depending on whom that person is gaining the knowledge from. Phyllis Morrow suggests that to be written about at all “...involves a loss of innocence...” for the group under study (Morrow, 1995: 25) and Mather sees the recording of First Nations’ stories and

languages as a formidable task, as a 'necessary monster' that we must deal with (Mather, 1995: 25).

Kim Lawson argues that numerous First Nations groups participate in documentation projects with the hope that our ways of knowing and being may become accepted by the larger society (Lawson, 2001: 18). However, we must consider the ramifications of the publication, dissemination and deposition of such processes. Removing First Nations' storytellers from the transmission of their stories while making the stories accessible to the mainstream public without the necessary contextual information and moral framework, defines the very nature of intellectual hegemony (Rasmus, 2002: 296). I am inclined to view literacy as a monster indeed---a potentially colonizing monster that is absolutely **un-**necessary, for to slay **this** beast we need only turn to our own ways of knowing to understand what must be done. And who knows our ways better than the Elders of our nations?

Spending Time with Our Elders

It has become common knowledge that our Elders are outstanding resources and are the primary carriers of our oral histories. Many First Nations' communities are concerned about the loss of important information that leaves this earth when we lose an Elder. Unfortunately, it is not only through death that we lose our connections to these carriers of our histories for although they are still with us, many are often left alone, forgotten and ignored at our modern day meetings (Mather, 1995: 16). As highly aware persons who have experienced life through extremely difficult and changing times, these bearers of the oral tradition are our only links to our traditional values and ways of being and as Joseph Couture writes, our Elders are our standing reference points for they have much to teach us about our own ways of knowing (Couture, 1991: 61).

One of the strongest messages that comes through the writings of numerous authors discussing the oral tradition is that in order to gain a 'right' perspective and direction, we must hear the stories in the proper context (Couture, 1991: 61) with the first condition being that we spend vast amounts of time at the sides of our Elders listening to and observing not only the stories but also the ways of being these teachers demonstrate in their every day lives. Many of life's most valuable lessons "...are understood slowly over the course of a lifetime" (Couture, 1991: 54). Because Elders don't spell everything out for us and instead open the doors to reflection and imagination, it is crucial that we experience the passing on of knowledge with them to gather the full depth and understanding of all that this tradition has to offer (Mather, 1995: 18). Furthermore, our Elders have great expectations of us as the receivers of the stories they share, in that they expect us to not only become knowledgeable about the stories and histories, but to also learn and demonstrate the living of a good life as we carefully pass on this important knowledge (Mather, 1995: 16). This special relationship must not be bypassed in the gathering of our stories and knowledges for it is the means of transmission. Lummi Elder, William James, recalls his own learning as a young man at the side of his Elder, "That was fascinating to [him], as a young person learning of [his] own identity, and it was important to [the Elder] to pass it on to someone. And [James] was that person that would listen and [the Elder] would tell...and it was important to both of [them]. [They] were important to each other" (Rasmus, 2002: 293). James speaks volumes here to the significance of the relationship, gently coaxing us away from our single-minded need to preserve only the knowledge to the equally important consideration of preserving our relationships. Though I value what I have learned through many hours of reading and attending First Nations Studies classes, I have come to realize the impacts literacy may effect

upon First Nations' orality and traditional ways of knowing. I did not expect to find that it was not only our ways of knowing that are jeopardised but also the relationships and gaining of knowledge necessary to walking a good path. I am blessed to have taken a very different route from the one I had originally envisioned for my thesis work. Had I gone on to gather the stories of my community by video-taping and documenting them for future generations I would have missed out on the most important understanding of our ways --- to establish, strengthen and maintain my connections to the members of my nation is what learning is really all about.

The Elders of our communities need us to actively participate with them in the perpetuation of our oral traditions and communal relationships. They need to fulfill this important role and they cannot do it if we are not there watching, listening, practicing and remembering.

Elders are not only the carriers of our knowledge and ways of being, they are also the transmitters and our concerns need to focus more on the possibility of not having these important transmitters in the future because we are not recording on our hearts *today* what the Elders have to pass on. It has been my experience that although words on the page have impacted my thinking and way of being, I find I do not feel as committed/ dedicated/ responsible to them as I know I am to the words my own Grandmother/Aunties/Uncles and Mother have shared with me. This is the vital connection that ties us at the spiritual/moral level to our responsibilities to our past (ancestors) and our future (children). It has been through relating with Elders that the lessons have come to have meaning in my life because they have been transmitted personally to me, for me, (and my children to carry forward) from the spirits of persons who care about me and the path I choose to travel. This is important

because we are all important to what our communities and nations will look like in generations to come.

Understanding the Importance of Context

Cultural backgrounds and understandings play significant roles in oral traditions (Morrow, 1995:43) and meanings shift accordingly with the extent of cultural understanding shared by storytellers and their audiences (Cruikshank, 1995: 70). Jocks, quoted by Rasmus, concludes that “without implicit knowledge of a people and a way of life, the value of data drawn from publicly available knowledge is ‘ethically clouded’ and ‘logically and intellectually unreliable’ ” (Rasmus, 2002: 296). Although I thoroughly enjoyed reading the stories in Darwin Hanna’s “Our Tellings: Interior Salish Stories of the *Nlha7kápmx* People” (Hanna and Henry, 1995), I must agree with Jocks on this point. As an outsider to this particular culture group, I do not recall any of the wonderful stories Hanna and Henry have gathered in this collection because there was nothing within me for them to connect to. I had no stories or teachings inside me that recognized the lessons to be had; there were no personal ties or visual images for me to refer to and no seasoned and smiling voice to listen to that could help me to attain the essential first step to receiving the underlying messages in each of the stories which is feeling the connection. This resulted in my failure to gain even an inkling of understanding of the lessons I know each of these stories carry within them and although enjoyable and entertaining to read, writing the stories of this community down did not disseminate the full depth of meaning they were meant to convey.

There is also the ever-important significance of land and place to First Nations’ peoples and ways of knowing to consider. “The stories give meaning to the objects and the objects then remind us of the stories behind them” (Schneider, 2002:45). I cannot look at my

own nations' sacred *N'skets* Mountain without recalling the story of *N'tci'nemkin*, the only story my grandmother, *Kic'y7a*, ever told me. This *Stl'atl'imx* origin story ties me to that mountain, my territory and community, and it forever ties me to the cherished memories I have of my grandmother, Annie Jim. This is the vital context that cannot be written into a book or captured in a picture. "...[W]hen Native stories began appearing in print, concern arose that the context in which these stories had existed was in danger of being destroyed and the stories themselves were being compromised" (King, 2002: 154). We cannot preserve the stories in their entirety, to their full meaning and potential, without first preserving the oral tradition itself by participating in the relationships, the reflecting, remembering, re-telling and being responsible for the role we play in it. In doing so we preserve the integrity of the context in which these stories come to life and become a part of who we are.

Connecting with the Teachers and the Teachings

My culture has been labelled oral in terms of traditional practice by western scientists humanists ethnographers and other academic researchers yet oral does not go far in describing the sense of community facilitated through gesture eye contact being in good relation with audience participation breathing the same air walking the earth together...[sic]¹² (Cole, 2000: 53)

Elsie Mather calls it the "human link" and she submits that our relationships with each other invite stories that are key to values and memory (Schneider, 2002: 63). Rasmus adds that "[o]ral history in context was intended to be a very intimate process where it sustains the humanness of things or the humanness of interactions among people" (Rasmus, 2002: 293). It is this human relationship or connection that creates the necessary context for our own ways of knowing. Without it we defeat the main purposes of gaining knowledge--- to live a good life and to connect with one another. These require us to contribute to the

¹² This is how Peter Cole's thesis is written; void of punctuation marks etc and I discovered that reading his thesis has a real rhythm to it.

quality of life of those around us, of all living things. "Writing can extend the message to a larger audience, but the act of telling and retelling fulfills human needs---a need of the tellers to make personal contact with others and a need by the audience to hear the narrator" (Schneider, 2002: 49). Though writing our stories would make them available to more people, reading is often a private act (King, 2003: 154) and we need to think of this as a complement to our own methods of knowing for no matter how many people read these stories, many will have read them by themselves. There is less opportunity to form relationships in this mode of knowledge transmission, and although we may access important messages through reading, we continue to disconnect from our communities when we seek to preserve our stories utilizing the tools of literacy. Again, I am reminded of my responsibilities and a need to commit the necessary time our storytellers require to transmit what they need to share.

Performance is an art in storytelling. Schneider quotes Ruth Finnegan as suggesting "...this dynamic is what enables storytellers to choose settings for maximum impact, to create metaphors, to add emphasis, and to use rhythm to build dramatic and powerful meaning each time a story is told" (Schneider, 2002: 50). Separated from their tellers, the stories trapped on the printed page have no power to fulfill this aspect of knowledge sharing. In essence, by writing them down or recording them on a disk, we dehumanize our stories because they cannot fulfill the human needs they have been perpetuated to fulfill. "Oral traditions...have social histories, and they acquire meaning in the situations in which they are used, in interactions between narrators and listeners" (Cruikshank & Sidney, 1995: 70). The stories are entirely relational in that meaning is created in the connections between the telling, the teller, the listener, the times and the setting (Morrow, 1995: 40). There is no such

interaction between the reader and the book; printed words cannot dance on the page, they cannot tune in to the reader's state of mind, nor can they know why they are being read at a particular time. The stories set on paper cannot adapt to the circumstances and they cannot attain the "...potential range of meanings that all good stories have" when they are removed from their tellers (Cruikshank & Sidney, 1995: 57).

Kim Lawson points out that a receptive audience is just as vital as a skilled orator or performer in the transmission of traditional knowledge (Lawson, 2001: 18) and Angela Sidney agrees that the oral tradition "...demands an expressive community sharing similar expectations" (Cruikshank & Sidney, 1995: 73). The audience plays an important role in verifying the information storytellers share. It requires a communal effort to remember the oral histories of our nations where together the speakers and their audiences play a collective role in the correction and/or elaboration of the communities' stories (Schneider, 2002: 63). Once written, "...there is no way directly to refute a text. After absolutely total and devastating refutation it says exactly the same thing as before" (Karena, 2004: 4). It does not matter who or how many people dispute words written on the page, those words will say the exact same thing to the next person who reads them whereas with the oral tradition much ceremony is afforded to this passing on of knowledge whether it be the passing on of a name or the telling of our histories. The audience is always given the opportunity to correct or contribute to the statements that are being made in the oral tradition. Through ceremony the relationships are carried out with respect (Newhouse, 2004: 152) as communities remember and re-tell the stories together. William Schneider submits that the written tradition without its narrators is "like a ship without a pilot" (Schneider, 2002: 63). Who knows where it will end up?

Traditional Ways of Knowing

Our traditional ways of knowing and learning were/are characterized by watching, listening, paying attention and learning from our mistakes (Drozda, 1995: 114). Repeatedly doing so is necessary for gaining full understanding of the stories (Schneider, 2002: 25). We also practiced what we learned in our every day living, incorporating the knowledge through our direct experience of it (Kirkness, 2001: 7). Our teachers were our own community members and each adult was aware of his or her responsibility for ensuring the children learned how to live a good life. “Central to the teaching was the belief in the sacred, the Great Spirit” (Kirkness, 1994: 10). Bobiwash suggests that the living of a good life is made up of many things, but is basically about the balance and beauty that comes about by the fulfillment of one’s responsibilities (Bobiwash, 1999: 4). “In the traditional setting, one effectively learns how to become and be a unique expression of human potential... [and of] responsibility towards self and community” (Couture, 1991: 206). The teachings and knowledge itself are considered sacred, and are often transmitted through ceremony. “Native ceremonies are the primary oral literature...” (Couture, 1991: 58) where knowledge and information are integrated into ceremony and rituals, into daily and seasonal events like potlatches and sun dances (Lawson, 2001: 6). It is through ceremony that we experience the transmission of knowledge in a manner that impacts us at an emotional level as messages embedded within the stories connect us to our communities and to the land (Egan, 1991: 188). “Knowledge of place is...closely linked to knowledge of the self, to grasping one’s own community, and to securing a confident sense of who one is as a person” (Lawson, 2001: 4).

Our traditional ways of learning, our ways of being, and our stories are connected to our territories, our communities and our ancestors. I am reminded of an incident that drove this concept home for me. It happened Easter weekend about halfway through my thesis writing. I had returned to our village to attend the funeral of my Uncle Tony. Sadly, being raised away from my community, I had not been afforded the opportunity to get to know my Uncle very well before he passed on to the Spirit World. Because Uncle Tony lived in Mission, British Columbia, and had spoken often of returning home, the family decided the funeral procession would visit the farm he grew up on before proceeding to the burial ground. I was in a Suburban filled with women-- my mom, Aunties and cousins, and as we made our way back along the narrow, bumpy, lake road my Auntie Laura shared with us a story about the log that sticks up from the center of Tenas Lake. My aunt told how one day many years ago she could not find her brother Tony. After searching the farm, my aunt went down to the beach to look for him and she noticed one of the family's boats sitting in the center of the lake, empty. Auntie Laura climbed into another boat and rowed out to retrieve the vessel. Upon arriving at the center of the lake, my aunt could hear my Uncle Tony crying in the bottom of that boat. He never did tell Auntie Laura what had upset him that day, but none of us would ever again see that log in the lake without remembering Uncle Tony sobbing out there so long ago. It is just as William Schneider wrote—the stories give meaning to the objects, or to the land, and the objects then circle us back to the stories and the people connected to them through story (Schneider, 2002: 45). It was at that moment that I understood for the first time what it meant to be connected to the land. I felt the sadness we were all experiencing over the loss of our family member and I felt the presence he had on this beautiful space. I witnessed the respect, honour, and strength our people found and find

in each other, in tradition and in the stories we have to share. I am certain I could not possibly have harvested all of this from even the most eloquently written passage describing it. Jo-ann Archibald expresses this point succinctly when she says, “It is important to preserve the oral traditions, but perhaps even more important to let them preserve us” (Lawson, 2001: 18). As I pass this story on to my own children, the memory of my uncle is preserved for the generations to come and we participate in the preservation of not only the memory of my uncle and this story but also the preservation of the oral tradition.

Although much work is being done around how First Nations Studies programs are being delivered, we as First Nations students need to remain alert to our tendencies to feel the need to *save* our stories/songs/histories/languages using Western methodologies. It is difficult not to hear on a regular basis the importance of saving our stories for future generations using tape and video recorders, whether in mainstream society or in our home communities, I feel this message is loud and clear. My concerns lie in the potential for this omnipresent message to over power and drown out the whispers of many other equally important ways of knowing. If nothing else, obtaining a degree in First Nations Studies must leave the graduate with an equally strong and sincere need to establish/strengthen/fully participate in reciprocal and respectful relationships with First Nations’ peoples/ organizations/communities. To do so would demonstrate a clear respect for not only the tangible components of who we are, our stories, philosophies, material cultures, but also for our ways of knowing who we are. It is a package deal, First Nations’ knowledge resides in First Nations’ peoples and it is manifest in the relationships that come into being through the sharing of it...you cannot completely experience one without the other. Orality and human connections are key to the sharing of First Nations’ knowledge and, I submit, all knowledge

sharing. Nothing is complete until that human connection is made and honoured and I would venture this concept carries over into healing as can be seen in Maki Umeda's thesis, "Spirituality in Helping Others: Learning from First Nations Elders and Counselors' Alcohol Related Experience" (Umeda, 2005) as well as all other areas of human existence.

Education is a conversation that goes both ways. It is a process that brings people together, a process that holds great importance in that, if done respectfully, with minds open to numerous ways of knowing, we may succeed in having a meeting of minds and spirits to the extent that we all contribute to an "aspirational practice, goal, or idea used to imagine and advance toward a new form of society" (Battiste *et al*, 2002:49); a society that values the gifts and offerings of all cultures and understands the importance and vulnerability of this planet that gives us life. (Armstrong, 1992: 211) This work is a call for First Nations Studies disciplines in all universities to ensure its graduating students are aware of and striving to find this balance.

Remembering, Reflecting, Retelling, and Responsibility

When the Elders say that the answers are within us, they are directing us to consider our own experiences when we listen to the stories they tell. Our Elders tell us to "...listen even when we don't understand, that later on we will make some meaning or that something that we had listened to before will touch us in some way" (Morrow, 1995: 33). And it is in the listening to the story at different times and places that we are moved to reflect on what we are witnessing and to consider the significance of the story on each occasion. In taking the time to reflect upon the conversations with the participants for this thesis I was able to visualize how we are all connected in that reflection on the words of one often led me to recall the words of another and often became entwined to the point that I no longer knew

which participant said what, but the meaning behind the words was never lost. Reflection also serves to tie the information we are hearing to something already within us as we make connections within our hearts and minds, internalizing the stories so that they too become ingrained within us.

Remembering is important to the oral tradition because, as William Schneider writes, we lose some of their personal narrative when an Elder dies and we lose a teller of the oral tradition (Schneider, 2002: 78). If we do not take our own places in this ancient tradition by listening, reflecting, remembering and retelling the stories of our Nations, the oral tradition may not die, but, like so many other aspects of First Nations peoples' lives, it will become severed from a unique and distant past which holds so many important details about what it means to be First Nations.

Although memory plays a paramount role in oral cultures, where what one knows is what one remembers, (Egan, 1991: 179) it is not as one would expect in a literate society. It is more than learning something by rote to recite before a captive audience. Oral cultures' memorization is a communal activity where the audience does not simply listen to a story---it is invited to live it (Egan, 1991: 183). Kieran Egan submits that the emotions we bring as active participants "are most effective at sustaining, and helping in the recall of, memories of events" (Egan, 1991: 188). Perhaps that is why Elder James Lummi says that the stories are to be held in our hearts and carried with us everywhere we go (Rasmus, 2002: 298). These stories are more than just words to remember and recite, they are a part of who we are and they provide important insights into how we should live. Our hearts **need** to be in the oral tradition for it to proceed within our communities in a way that honours its roots. "When someone speaks from the heart that's when I receive it the best. When someone shares right

from the gut level of their heart, I know and I can feel that, then I know that's where I'm going to receive it" (Cole, 2000: 113). People tend to speak from the heart more often with those they have established relationships with and this impacts how the knowledge is transmitted, received, remembered and retold.

Another strong point is raised by Jeanne Perreault when she writes that, "Memory is the most effective weapon against exile that is not geographical but nonetheless in effect" (Perreault, 1999: 255). If we choose to utilize the colonizer's tools of literacy to remember our histories, stories and ways of being **for** us, how will they ever come to live within our hearts? For many Indigenous peoples the world over, geographical exile is all but complete--- should we not fight the ideological Diasporas that threaten us today?¹³ "Memory...is the source of nourishment, the site of awakening, and the content of spiritual celebration... [it] is an essential human requirement. Its absence creates brutal violations, stupid destructions..." (Perreault, 1999: 259). Remembering is humanizing because we internalize the experience. Emotions and memory are indispensable components of the oral tradition for they facilitate the perpetuation of the information into the future (Egan, 1991: 188).

Essential to the transmission of oral history is the retelling of the stories. "...The more a story gets retold, the more it comes to be understood in a larger context. So in one way, we preserve in retelling---that is we keep the story alive in peoples' minds and understandings..." (Schneider, 2002: 12). Schneider goes on to say that without the retelling of the stories, they stagnate, or worse, are lost from memory (Schneider, 2002: 52). Lawson agrees with this point in that she feels preservation of the stories does not occur by freezing

¹³ I am referring here to the displacement of our Indigenous communities from our territories, resources, and potentially our ways of knowing should we choose to utilize western methodologies for passing forward our stories, histories.

them on the printed page, but in the retelling of them (Lawson, 2001: 18). To stop telling the stories by turning to preserving them utilizing western tools of literacy is to “discover that neglect is as powerful an agent as war and fire” (King, 2003: 98). Phyllis Morrow suggests that it is the way the stories reflect a timeless past and the many retellings that makes up the oral tradition (Morrow, 1995: 32). It is not only about the personal narratives of today, but also about how they reflect on what we know from our past. Retelling maintains the connections between the past, present and the future while maintaining the crucial human connection.

This tradition also requires that only those who have gained the authority to pass the histories/stories/knowledge on do so. Responsible transmission of our nations’ stories is possible only through years of observing, listening to and learning from our Elders. These sharers of knowledge expect us to carry the stories with us and to share them with our children in the same way they have been shared with us (Rasmus, 2002: 298). “For native storytellers, there is generally a proper time and place to tell a story...”(King, 2003: 154) and authority comes with meeting our responsibility to know when that time and place is as well as which stories to tell and who to tell them to.

Our main responsibility in learning our oral traditions is to pass them on in a good way, in a manner that helps us to live good lives as individuals and as collectives (Newhouse, 2004: 144). Earning the authority to tell the stories is realized when we accept the fact that we are not the experts of any of these tellings and when we acknowledge those who have carried them before us and passed them on to us.

We are also responsible for shifting our priorities back to our own ways of knowing to the extent that we dedicate the time necessary to allow our Elders to fulfill their roles

within our communities by sharing our oral histories, their own life experiences and learnings with us. By doing so we are modelling for the next generation the importance of participating in our oral traditions and re-establishing those crucial familial and communal ties.

Protecting Knowledge

Though I advocate for the valuing of various ways of knowing and for the blending of them, it is important to note that the interactions must be based on respect. My Uncle Ray told me how when he was very small, his grandfather told him about a place on *N'skets* Mountain where the people used to hunt and he and Jimmy Peters used to go there and build up a certain spot with rocks for sighting mountain goats on---but he never told anyone for all these years. "Many people tell everything they know and show important places to outsiders and that's not the way to go" (Ray Peters' Interview, 2005). My Uncle Ray does not tell anyone of such places and many First Nations people will agree that in the past much harm has been done because of the sharing of knowledge. We must remember that much of the knowledge we hold is sacred because it is about special or sacred places and/or ways of being that have been transferred over centuries of time with purpose.

Because knowledge is sacred, it must be protected. This literature review led me to the realization that once written or recorded, there is no way for me to ensure the full meaning of my nation's stories would be appreciated nor could I be certain they would not be manipulated or used in a disrespectful or hurtful manner. That is why our stories must be passed down in the way they were meant to be passed down if they are to maintain their integrity. That spot on *N'skets* Mountain held treasured memories for my Uncle Ray and for many of his descendents. The knowledge of these places that has been offered to us through the stories of our Grandmothers and Grandfathers along with our "...songs, knowledge of

rituals, morals, and practical techniques for living...” are our wealth and as such decrease in their inherent value when they become mainstream, public knowledge (Rasmus, 2002: 291). Lummi Elder, William James, feels we need to protect the stories of our nations because they are the “last strongholds that we have as a unique people to hang onto our identity” (Rasmus, 2002: 291). The words of my Uncle and many scholars have led me to the realization that our First Nations’ knowledges and stories have an important place in our world--- and they tie us to our territories and communities. To gather this information utilizing only western technologies is, in my opinion, doing only half the job, for there is so much more to understand/feel/experience when one hears the stories unencumbered by the tools many of us have come to rely upon. Responsibility encompasses not only the perpetuation of the knowledge and the stories, but of the oral tradition itself and in doing so we are better equipped to protect the sacred knowledge of our nations.

Chapter Three

Designing a *Blended* Research Methodology

Although I place great value on the education I have acquired from my university experience, and the tools that facilitated my doing so, I discovered that I needed to know *why* (beyond the obvious colonizing potential) Western methodologies were potentially inappropriate transmitters and/or keepers of irrefutably disappearing languages and oral histories. As a critical examination of Western research methodologies and its impacts on the perpetuation of oral history, the methodology for this study was rooted in two worlds. First, a review of the pertinent academic literature was undertaken. From this I gained insight into the opinions and beliefs of the scholastic segment of the spectrum. Second, I approached this subject by participating in a more traditional First Nations' methodology for gaining knowledge. By disseminating the results of utilizing the methodologies of both the oral and written traditions in this final paper, I am demonstrating the plausibility of utilizing First Nations' methodologies in the delivery of First Nations Studies course work in a Western institution.

Participating in the Oral Transmission of Knowledge

By conducting fourteen short, **un-recorded** open format interviews with my Uncle Ray Peters (*Samahquam*), my Aunty Toni Archie (*Tsq'escen*), my aunties Laura Purcell and Rose Smith (*Samahquam*), and with Tina Fraser and Leona Neilson of the First Nations Department at the University of Northern British Columbia, I experienced learning by listening to, reflecting upon and retelling the conversations of the interviews. The sessions were not recorded because I wished to experience gaining knowledge through the natural processes of the relationships I have with each of the participants. I wanted to see how I

listened and what I heard when I knew there were no recordings or notes to rely on---I had only my remembering of the session and personal reflections (both important components of the oral tradition), to consider and document in writing after the session was over. It seemed that making notes *during* the interview would have been very distracting for both the participant and myself, and because doing so would have occurred simultaneously with the responses, I would not have been afforded the optimum opportunity to reflect upon the words I was hearing and the expressions I was seeing because my mind would have been focussing on the act of spelling/writing as quickly as possible. My attention would have been divided using this method and I wished to do as I heard a Maori Elder said the Maori once did, listen not only with the ears but with the heart¹⁴---in effect doubling, and changing, the attention I gave to the person so kindly sharing his or her thoughts with me.

It was my first intention to conduct interviews with nine different people; an Elder, Teacher and Storyteller from each of the two First Nations' communities and three First Nations' people from the academic community of the University of Northern British Columbia for a total of nine separate interview sessions. However, upon careful consideration of what my main goals and hopes for this study were, I came to realize that it would be more beneficial to my understanding of traditional ways of knowing to interview, without recording, two people from each community on three separate occasions. In this way I might experience different levels, or stages, of participating in the sharing of knowledge and move through the various levels of knowing, mapping and considering the traditional methodologies of passing on and receiving knowledge. With this approach, I practiced transmitting back what I heard or understood on each successive visit after I had had the time

¹⁴ Personal Communication, Tina Fraser, 2004.

to reflect and internalize what had been shared with me. The questions in the Interview Guide focussed on the participant's experiences with learning from both mainstream institutions and the oral tradition.

Once I had written down what I recalled from the interview sessions, I forwarded copies of the notes and my reflections to each sharer of knowledge for feedback. I then contacted each participant by telephone or in person where possible, to provide them the opportunity to offer comments or clarifications as needed. All confirmed my recollections to be accurate and let me know they were available should I have further questions.

I did not wish to 'capture' knowledge, I sought to participate in it from the perspective that we all have knowledge and we all attain and use it in different ways. "The researcher cannot successfully interpret someone else's experience by analyzing their story, but can do so only through a shared experience" (Cole, 2000: 62). This thesis is a demonstration of the blending of various ways of knowing. In choosing not to rely solely on western tools and methodologies, I chose to implement, in the university setting, the methodologies so critical to First Nations' ways of knowing. Not only did I listen to the words of the participants, I worked to remember them, reflect upon them and retell them. I accepted that what I was learning may be informed by my own past experiences and knowledge, much of which I had accessed through Western methodologies. Reflection is crucial because, as the Elders say, the answers are inside each of us (Couture, 1991: 61). In reflecting upon our conversations, we all have the innate capacity to discern what is meaningful and what works for us. This study is a journey into the methodologies of very distinct and different ways of knowing; all have much to offer and I believe that Indigenous ways of knowing can co-exist in the university setting---and *must* prevail within First Nations

Studies programs. It is in demonstrating the possibility of blending different ways of knowing in the university setting and in reflecting upon how and what I remembered when I knew I had only my own recording devices to rely upon--- my memory, heart, and spirit, that I have something to offer to academia, my family and to the First Nations' community.

Introducing the Knowledge Sharers

The communities I conducted my research in were *Samahquam* (my community), *Tsq'escen* (Canim Lake Shuswap) and the First Nations' Center at the University of Northern British Columbia. I chose these three communities because I already had established ties to them, important because I could not invest the tremendous amounts of time necessary to generate a real and meaningful rapport with members of communities I did not already know.

Because the methodology I implemented in this stage of the research is based on the concepts of oral tradition, namely listening, remembering, retelling and taking responsibility for the lessons learned from persons to whom I am connected, I will not, out of respect for the relationships I have with the participants, refer to the knowledge sharers by their last names in this document. This is a Western academic preference and to honour my commitment to value numerous ways of knowing, I will refer to those who shared their knowledge with me as I would refer to them were I conversing with them. I call all of my Aunts "Aunty", my Uncles "Uncle" and I call my friends and acquaintances by their first names. In the oral tradition we learn from people we are connected to, from people who feel a responsibility for us and I feel that to refer to them here as "Smith", "Purcell", "Neilson" and so on, the significance of these important relationships would be lost, to some extent, in this transmission of the lessons being shared. It is my hope that by referring to the participants in this manner, the reader will not forget the importance of these connections, of

the relationships that are so critical to our understandings of what the purpose of knowledge is.

My Aunties Laura Purcell and Rose Smith from the *Samahquam* community assisted me in this study. Both are sisters to my mother, Maggie Schneider.

Aunty Laura has a good grasp of our *Ucwalmiets* language and she resides at our home community of Baptiste-Smith which is located in the *Samahquam* territory just east of the farm located at the foot of *N'skets* Mountain. A respected, hard-working, and vocal Elder, she recently started an Elders' Group and is continually fundraising to support the transportation and care of our Elders to forums where their knowledge is needed. When I first met my Aunty Laura, approximately twenty-five years ago in Chilliwack, I was impressed by her entrepreneurial skills and her energy as she was always busy making pies and gathering other goods to sell to provide for her family.

I see my Aunty Laura as a storyteller who spends much time utilizing Western and Traditional research methodologies in her quest to document our rights to the territory. In my visits with her for the purpose of this paper, she informed me that she wants to return to school and go into journalism.

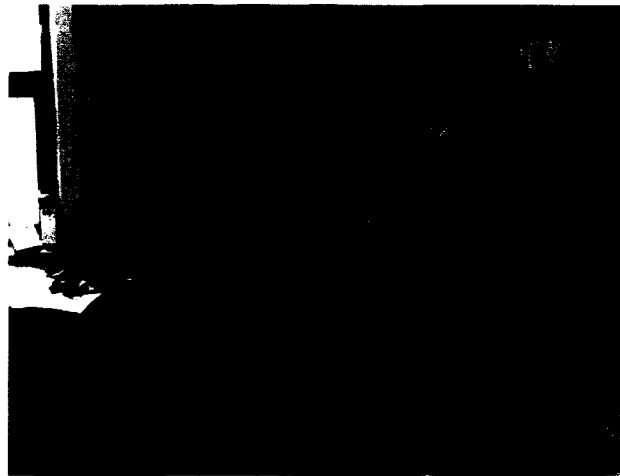


My Aunty Laura Purcell (*Samahquam*)

“I’m a late bloomer!” she told me with a smile. Aunty Laura has a strong connection to the past and our family’s history, and I learned at my Uncle Victor’s funeral that she was like a second mother to her siblings which helped to explain, for me, why the recent passing of her

brothers and sister has hit her so very hard. I pray often for Auntie Laura for she is a true blessing on us all. I have learned much about what is important to our people from her and her words and values permeate not only what is shared in this thesis, but the way I live my life as well. It is a great honour to be the niece of this strong and energetic seventy-two year old *Samahquamicw* woman.

Auntie Rose was my first real connection to my home community in Baptiste-Smith as it was her home my family and I always invaded when we travelled in for community meetings and/or research paper information. Long before I knew I would be entering the Master's program, I was learning about being *Samahquamicw* from my Auntie Rose. I never felt hesitant about asking her questions about our ways of being because she was always ready and willing to share information with me.



My Auntie Rose Smith (*Samahquam*)

My Auntie Rose understands our *Ucwalmicts* language and has served our community in the capacities of both Chief and Counsellor over the past thirty years. She has been our Nations' accountant for several years now and is also a hand-drummer and singer.

Auntie Rose has lived at Baptiste-Smith since the first houses were built there in the late 1980's. She often models speaking what is in one's heart and her concern for the health of our community is evident in the way she spends her time. Auntie Rose is a strong and

independent woman who has demonstrated for me that the retelling of what has been shared is a responsibility she will gladly fulfill and she has instilled this value in me.

My Uncle Ray Peters, brother to Laura and Rose, married into the *Tsq'escen* Nation



My Uncle Ray “Zeke” Peters (*Samahquam/Tsq'escen*)

many years ago, and had agreed to share his knowledge with me. My Uncle Ray’s memory was clear and it reached far back into the lives of *Samahquam*. He was fluent in both the Shuswap and *Ucwalmicts* languages and was also an avid reader which, I

believe, enabled him to articulate precise meanings when translating from *Ucwalmicts* and Shuswap into English. Uncle Ray had a great need to share what he knew and he asked me “Why would I quit when you want to learn?” when we came to the section of the informed consent package that asked if the participants understood they could withdraw from the study at any time.

Uncle Ray was a cowboy who lived his life to the fullest. He tended to his wild horses right up until he was admitted to the hospital for the last time. His strong and open character immediately endeared him to the hearts of all who had the privilege of knowing him.

The second person I was to listen to was my Uncle’s wife, Toni Archie. My Auntie



My Auntie Toni Archie (*Tsq'escen*)

Toni is fluent in the Shuswap language and she works tirelessly to ensure the people of her community keep the language and culture alive. I was immediately struck by the quiet and gentle ways of this *Tsq'escen* woman and she showed me that actions could easily speak louder than words. My Aunty Toni models the importance of sharing the knowledge she was given in everything she does and is a fine example of why we need to come close to hear the whispers of the Elders who can guide us towards a good and beautiful path.

Because I do not speak or understand *Ucwalmict's* or Shuswap, all conversations were conducted in English.

From the University of Northern British Columbia community, Tina Fraser and Leona Neilson agreed to share their knowledge with me. Tina is a lecturer in the First Nations Studies discipline and Leona teaches the Cree language courses.

Tina is a Maori woman born and raised in New Zealand. She is fluent in Maori and the traditional knowledge of her people. Tina has also obtained numerous degrees and certificates from mainstream educational institutions and is a strong advocate for Indigenous educational success.



Tina Fraser (Maori/UNBC)

Tina naturally shares knowledge and stories with those around her. She initiated many discussions with me about my work long before I knew I would ask her to participate in my research. I found Tina to be extremely knowledgeable, and talented, and our everyday discussions were typically focussed on the importance of orality, connections to land, our

ways of being and respect.¹⁵ Although it was not official, I came to see Tina as my mentor not only because she had successfully completed her Master's degree and she is currently a PhD (ABD) in Education at the University of British Columbia, but also because she took it upon herself to actively support me in my endeavours to do the same, in a way that allowed me to remain true to my own Nations' ways of being. The idea for my chosen methodology came from one of the many conversations I had with Tina over the past three years. Tina's philosophy is grounded in reciprocity and she told me that someone helped her get where she is so she in turn helps someone else and I must turn around and do the same; we all help each other.

Leona is a Métis woman who is committed to teaching the Cree language from the preschool level right through to the university level.¹⁶ University of Northern British Columbia lecturer and culture and language teacher for the Power of Friendship Aboriginal Head Start Program, Leona generously shares everything she has to share about being Métis not only with the children of the program, but with the parents/caregivers and staff of Head Start.¹⁷ I especially appreciate the spirituality Leona brings to the work environment and



Leona Neilson (Métis)

¹⁵ I worked with Tina at the Prince George and Power of Friendship Aboriginal Head Start Programs for two years.

¹⁶ Leona also contributed much to the creation of a preschool Cree reader titled, "I Walk", which was part of University of Northern British Columbia student, Caitlin Nicholson's, Master's degree project.

¹⁷ Leona has shared much with me over the past two and a half years as we work together at Head Start.

have learned much about the material culture of Cree people from her. I felt especially blessed when, after my son gave his regalia to her grandson, Leona shared the gift of drum



Dusty with his drum

making with my son and me to reciprocate Dusty's gift. It was a true honour to receive such valuable teachings and, as with all five other interview participants, her sharing of knowledge extended far beyond the parameters of my thesis research. I connected on numerous occasions with all of these knowledge sharers prior to and after the

actual interview sessions which had a very positive impact on my life and ways of being, as well as in the resultant final paper.

Documenting the Interview Recollections

The notes from the interview sessions were written as the thoughts shared with me were recalled and were not documented with proper grammar, punctuation and/or vocabulary in mind. Some thoughts were recorded immediately after the sessions and others were entered in the appropriate place at later times as they came to me. Some points were added after I shared my discussions with my children, which often triggered further remembering. My sons Devon and Dusty and my daughter, Sara, traveled with me for my interview sessions with my Uncle Ray and with Aunty Toni. Devon and Dusty were also with me when I visited Baptiste Smith to interview my Aunties Laura and Rose; sharing what their aunts and uncles had shared with me was of interest to my children and I am encouraged by their need to understand our ways.

Some of the thoughts shared with me were jotted in point form simply to trigger those ideas that impacted me at a deeper level where I felt I would not need the written record to remember them--- in essence I felt they were already internalized within me to the extent that I felt certain I would not forget them.

When I first started to document my memories, I did not write down any stories that were shared because I had started this process with a bias around sharing Indigenous stories in print. I had decided I would not contribute to the appropriation of the stories by writing them down, even if I did remember them which is why I changed the focus of my thesis study and the Interview guide. I did, however, have a change of heart because it began to feel as though the participants, who were natural story tellers, might feel I had not listened or perhaps thought the stories they chose to share were not important to my work, so I began to document the stories as I recalled them. As suggested by Tina, I did not record all of the elaborate details the participants expressed in their stories—I can visualize those in my mind. I chose to instead document only the main ideas of these portions of the sessions in my notes. After all, we all enjoy the right to imagine the characters, the animals, and the “thumping head on the cabin roof” (Leona Neilson, 2005) in our own ways.

Participants were provided in the Information and Consent package and in the final stages of reviewing their own sections with the freedom to prohibit any or all sections of their interviews from appearing in this document. With the permission of the participants I am including all the notes from each of the sessions in the thesis directly before the sharing of my reflections and the impacts their words have had on me. The notes of the recollections are being shared to allow the reader to see how much information was documented and to consider how much of what is not written has impacted my life. There are fewer notes for the

sessions with my Aunties and Uncle than with Tina and Leona and I believe that is because much of the information my community members shared had something to connect with within me, whereas much of what Tina and Leona shared with me was new information and I felt I needed to make notes to help me recall the details.

Chapter Four

Awakenings of the Spirit facilitated by the Whispers

In this chapter I will share the notes of my recollections of each of the sessions with the knowledge sharers, Laura Purcell, Rose Smith, Ray Peters, Toni Archie, Tina Fraser and Leona Neilson. Directly after the boxed notes will be my reflections on their teachings and how they have impacted my life and the life of my children. As suggested earlier in this paper, I am not comfortable with analysing the thoughts shared with me because it is not our way to critique or question what our Elders share with us. That is why I have chosen to instead write about the awakenings of my spirit that their caring whispers have facilitated.

Recollections of my Sessions with My Aunty Laura Purcell

I visited my Aunty Laura on three occasions for the purposes of my thesis work. The first time was in her home at Baptiste-Smith on March 29th, 2005, the second visit occurred the following day in my cousin John's car on our way into Mount Currie to attend my Aunty Martina's language class. This is an hour-long drive that gave us much time to converse as we travelled. It was amazing to sit in on an *Ucwalmicts* language class with my Aunties and to not be the only one having trouble pronouncing the guttural words of our language.

Our last session took place in my Aunty Laura's home on March 31st, 2005.

My Aunty Laura Purcell Session I

Time of Session: 3:35 to 4:10 pm

Date: March 29, 05

Place: Laura Purcell's Home in Baptise-Smith

What is the role of the Storyteller, Elder, Teacher?

Who were your first teachers and what did they teach you?

What do you remember most about your early learning experiences?

I was to meet Aunty Laura at her home at 3:00 pm, but as I kept bumping into community members on my way I was 35 minutes late. When I apologized to my Aunt for this she responded, "Oh, that's ok, you were in the community"

We completed and signed the informed consent package.

The storyteller is cooperative and should know a lot of the history.

Elders, you need to ask questions so they will start to tell the stories.

For Aunty Laura, old songs, music, bring memories to her and she will talk. Aunty has vivid memories of Grandma triggered by an old Hank Williams song. Aunty Laura talks a lot to John about the past on the road to and from town, he is interested.

If you ask Elders for advice, they won't answer right away---maybe a week later. Elders are not impulsive. Today we do things in a European way---deadlines to meet etc.

In the old days, Elders waited for answers to come to them and things worked out naturally.

Aunty Laura has a lot of video and audio recordings of various events...Grandma's birthdays, etc. Has many recordings of Grandpa Smitty talking---Aunty Laura said she should listen to those tapes when she is baking so it will all go into her memory.

Aunty gave me a copy of "A History of Indian Reserves in the Lillooet River Valley 1860-1916" She told me this is important, it is our history. She had given it to someone to photocopy and she found it by the photocopier. It should not be left lying around like that.

Aunty will get pictures out for me---has one to give of her as a small child. The family had recently gone through Grandma's belongings, and Aunty Laura knows who people are in the older pictures---she will go through and put names to the faces in them so others can know. Aunty indicated that so many papers that she comes across do not name the people in the pictures.

Some Elders will not speak in groups---some people interrupt them, or cut them off. Aunty Laura suggested I attend Aunty Martina's language class with her tomorrow night and we can complete our second session on the hour drive in to Mount Currie.

My Aunty Laura Purcell Session II

Time of Session: 5:35 to 6:10pm

Date: March 30, 2005

Place: On the road to Mount Currie

How does the western education system of teaching and learning compare to the oral transmission of knowledge?

What do you remember most about going to school?

Do you think literacy has had an impact on the oral transmission of your community's stories? In what way?

A lot of our people are still nomadic and don't fit into the system around us.

Aunty reminded me about doing things naturally and the resulting flow of good things happening.

The Western education system impacted us because they wrote the history, one that misinformed the public of who we were. People today still think we get free cars, houses, etc. This information created racism, brainwashed the general public.

We try to do everything for our children, we want to do it ourselves because it's faster---but the kids don't know how to do anything.

You never heard yelling in the past because you simply cannot yell in *Ucwalmicw*. Aunty never heard yelling as a child.

My Aunty Laura Purcell Session III

Time of Session: 10:10 to 11:35 am

Date: March 31, 2005

Place: Laura Purcell's Home

In your opinion, is it possible to learn First Nations' stories and ways of being by reading about them in a book or by watching them on a video?

Can the stories, philosophies, languages of First Nations' peoples be successfully transmitted outside the community from which they come? Should they be?

How important is place to the stories/histories of your nation? How important are relationships to the transmission of knowledge?

It's not really possible to learn First Nations' stories and ways of being through reading---unless it is a well-known Native author, someone you know has lived/experienced what he/she is writing about, otherwise Aunty Laura does not trust the written word.

A lot of our people are brainwashed, thinking education is good, but it takes them away from their traditions. Many believe that getting an education will provide opportunities for them but racism slams that door in their faces when they apply for jobs. "What good is this western education without dollars to do something with it? What good is western knowledge when we don't know how to skin or carve deer? When we don't know the tools of survival? What tools does western education give us?"

We need action...education is good for business. We seek western educations to get on the same level as Europeans, but most of our people give up when they still have no job

opportunities and turn to drugs and alcohol to cope. (Auntie's daughter went to school and applied for a position only to find her resume had been buried and not even considered.) Non-natives with education have the money, equipment, to come in and exploit First Nations resources and use First Nations peoples.

Elders tell stories amongst themselves at Elders' gatherings. Aunty Laura is passing what she knows on to her children. She said there is a gap in the transmission of the stories due to a language barrier. The Elders spoke the Language fluently and the youth/children did not understand.

Many stories may be lost, youth and adults need to ask Elders to share with them and to listen and not interrupt. Elders at meetings are interrupted when they start to talk or to get off track. Aunty Laura said we should be happy to hear what they have to say---we may not get the chance to do so again.

On Healers---you must always give something in return so the Healer's powers are maintained. Aunty gives *tswan* (dried fish) and other things she makes or bakes herself. She said it is not really possible for First Nations departments to really reciprocate, other than by really getting to know the people and what they go through and hope for. Aunty Laura also has a dream for the farm---a Healing Centre. She remembers having dreams when she was very little about a blacksmith building and a barn there. Aunty Laura believes the family must have had a business there.

Aunty told me a story about Uncle Victor and Uncle Tony going to the Mt Currie Rodeo when they were quite young. They played at the farm after that---Uncle Tony riding a stick like a bucking bronco and Uncle Victor was the announcer on a paper bull horn.

I asked Aunty if she had been interviewed before and she said yes but always recorded. It didn't feel any different to be interviewed without pen and paper or tape recorder.

We need to help each other more and to pray for everyone---that is what Aunty is trying to do. She also wants to become a journalist and feels she is a late bloomer just going to school. She keeps very busy and cannot sit still for long.

Many younger Chiefs do not know the proper protocols, the way of doing things. For example, at Grandma's funeral there was no tea and coffee available at the Hall/church for her grieving children. The community needs to take care of all these details and they need to ask the Elders what to do. Also, Grandma's belongings should have been at the Hall for her family to view/share.

Names have been given to persons when they are not healthy---like Hereditary Chiefs' names passed on to people who are not healthy---this should not be happening. Names must be earned.

Waiting for the Answers

My Aunty Laura Purcell

On the first visit, my aunt was busy baking in her bright, sunny kitchen. I arrived thirty minutes late for this session because, although the community is small, I am related to everyone I met on my walk over to her house. When I apologized for my lateness, my aunty Laura smiled and said, “That’s ok, you were in the community” (Laura Purcell Interview, 2005). Her comment made me realize how accepted it is in our communities to take the time to greet and acknowledge those we pass in our journeys without worrying about time and schedules.

In the literature review section of this paper there is a quote about how our Elders are ignored at our meetings today. My Aunty Laura has noticed this in our communities and she told me we need to appreciate our Elders when they are with us and listen to what they have to say. She said that sometimes it might seem as though they are off topic at our meetings, but we should be happy to listen for we may not get the opportunity to do so again. I believe that we, as community members, need to remember our Elders speak to guide us and even if we do not find the meaning at the time, we must remember to take the time to listen, remember, and reflect upon their words so the important message in their words may be revealed. Who knows what we are missing out on when we cut them off because we think they are not focussed on the business at hand? Aunty Laura also told me that we need to ask our Elders questions and talk with them to trigger the stories they have to share. She said we must listen to them and not interrupt, and to be prepared to wait for an answer when we seek their advice. Our Elders need the time to reflect and to pray about these things and may not respond until the answer comes to them. My aunt acknowledges this is difficult in this day

and age because we have so many deadlines to meet and she shared that this is why things do not flow naturally anymore, because we do not take the time to wait for the answers to come to us, people are expected to “think on their feet” and take action.

The words my Aunty Laura shared with me have played a tremendous role in the approach I chose to writing this portion of my thesis. I had been quite concerned about analyzing the thoughts/knowledge shared with me because these were people whom I respected and with whom I had very strong connections and responsibilities. The possibility of removing the participant’s voices by presenting analyses of their discussions was also of great concern to me. Reflection on my Aunty Laura’s words on ways of being encouraged me instead to allow myself the time to consider all that had been shared with me for as long as it took to understand how it might apply not only to my thesis but to my life, my path, and my future. As anxious as I was to finish the writing of this document, I knew the information I gathered needed to move from my memory, past my lips, and into my spirit before I could completely and honestly write about it. The learnings needed to apply to my ways of being before I could speak to them here. Rushing this process may have resulted in a rendition that was impersonal and that would have been a let down for both my Aunty Laura and my Aunty Rose, for both had indicated to me that First Nations’ authorship must speak from the heart—it must be felt if it is to stay with the reader. I have considered the words that were shared with me in my daily life and allowed them to sink into my being where, to my surprise, I found they were connecting with what often felt like memories--- like I somehow already knew this on some level. Being cognizant of this act of reflection also played a very significant role in the realization that what I was learning was also connecting to memories of words and concepts I had read about throughout the course of my university education. I am

grateful to my Aunty Laura for instilling this in me for in being patient I have also learned the significance of reflection--- and instead of analyzing what was shared with me by the participants, I have focussed on the impacts their words have effected on me and my children.

Recollections of my Sessions with My Aunty Rose Smith

I was able to complete all three of the interview guides with my Aunty Rose with the first session being covered as I drove my Aunty in to Pemberton to shop and to pick up her van on March 29th, 2005. Our second and third visits occurred as we watched our children have some fun at the Whistler swimming pool. Driving the one- hour long rocky road between Baptiste-Smith and Pemberton warrants a visit to all the amenities when ever possible.

My Aunty Rose Smith Session I

Time of Session: 5:55 to 7pm

Date: March 29, 2005

Place: In my car on the way to Pemberton

What is the role of the Storyteller, Elder, Teacher?

Who were your first teachers and what did they teach you?

What do you remember most about your early learning experiences?

Storyteller...tells stories:) Elders, of any nation, teach the youth how to live --- traditional ways of living.

Teacher...depends on what they are teaching, could be traditional herbs, medicines etc.

Aunty doesn't remember when she was young, she knows she was fluent in her language and then she was sent to residential school and she forgot it all. Today she can understand some but is no longer fluent. Walter remembers things that happened when he was 1.5-2 years old (broken arm) and not wanting to go to the hospital because they took his grandpa when he was that age. Aunty does not remember like that.

"A word can trigger a memory."

A number of people have the power to be Indian doctors but alcohol, work, gambling etc take over.

Traditionally parents taught the children what their parents taught them.

Smitty raised Keith---Smitty was to be trained as an Indian doctor but said no.

Stopped to shop, pick up transmission fluid and Auntie's van.

We can't live off the land any more---unhealthy environments.

You will find differences between nations, between *Sto: lo* and *Stl'atl'imx*---different ways of doing things, spiritual things.

My Aunty Rose Smith Session II

Time of Session: 5:05 to 5:40 pm

Date: March 31, 2005

Place: Whistler Swimming Pool

How does the western education system of teaching and learning compare to the oral transmission of knowledge?

What do you remember most about going to school?

Do you think literacy has had an impact on the oral transmission of your community's stories? In what way?

All that reading and writing...at meetings--- Aunty does not take notes; if they ask her to take minutes she will not. Aunty prefers to listen and gets more that way. "Writing interferes with taking everything in." Women get more because they listen with their heart and mind. Some meetings are video taped, but what good are they when no one takes the time to sit and watch hours of video. Just need the important points. Aunty may write a single word to trigger memory of entire thought.

I was reminded of a conversation I had with Aunty months ago---she confirmed my recollection ---the Chief's wife was always at his side to help him listen—to remind the Chief of things. Same concept when community listens together---remembers more together--confirm truth with each other.

Everyone is always writing.

School memory...being asked over and over again to say Hail Mary in English—Aunty kept repeating in *Ucwalmiçt*s. Also getting glasses in grade 4---round, brown, frames—was called "*Kalula*" (owl) after that. Being at school over Christmas and holidays and it lasting a very long time.

Yes, literacy impacts orality...we have to write everything down now, read and sign, governments' way of protecting self. The language does not translate into English...when writing the language, different spellings etc translations change story...we have to listen, pay close attention—pronunciation. EG Is “In-shuck-ch” the European spelling? “*N’skets*” the *Ucwalmicts* spelling. Aunty does not approve of this because it is changing the language. We need to hear the stories, the language---memories will be triggered down the road by a single word.

Ask for information, stories, they will be shared---Aunty was told that she would need to pass on what she was learning.

To learn our ways by reading of them in a book...requires a very good writer—some one who can make the reader *feel* what he or she feels to transmit our philosophies etc. If we do not feel what we are reading it will not stay with us. We remember with our hearts, our feelings.

Women can take in more because we are closer to Mother Earth---givers of life, nurturers...listen with our hearts.

Responsibilities come before all vices, gambling, alcohol, work etc.

Aunty suggested that I need to listen to Uncle Allan...he has lived in this territory all of his life, he knows it and was taught by Grandpa.

My Aunty Rose Smith Session Three

Time of Session: 5:45 to 6:10pm

Date: March 31, 2005

Place: Whistler Swimming Pool

In your opinion, is it possible to learn First Nations' stories and ways of being by reading about them in a book or by watching them on a video?

Can the stories, philosophies, languages of First Nations' peoples be successfully transmitted outside the community from which they come? Should they be?

How important is place to the stories/histories of your nation? How important are relationships to the transmission of knowledge?

First Nations Studies can be reciprocal if the students return to their communities to utilize their educations there.

It is Auntie's hope that we return home and fill the consulting positions that are hired out to non-community members who have the education/skills. “It would be nice if you come back and teach First Nations Studies!” Aunty said we are going to need teachers etc—reciprocity occurs when we make the choice to return home to work.

I am the first to even go back and do research in our community.

Knowing the land is very important to understanding why we do what we need to do.

It's about action...doing something with the knowledge---people graduate, come back and do not utilize their skills to the benefit of their communities.

Western Education- teachers MUST form relationships with their students, share experiences, and listen for learning to occur..."Make sure you get that in!"

Because stories are not being passed down and Elders are passing on, we may need to record the stories so they are not lost. It has to be done right though---not negative and in a way that transmits feelings.

Remembering through Feeling

My Aunty Rose Smith

Like my Aunty Laura, my Aunty Rose was quite familiar with the interview process and although I was comfortable with allowing the sessions to be more like conversations between a *Samahquamicw* woman and her niece, my Aunty Rose frequently steered me back to the interview guide, which I appreciated because although I had chosen family members and friends to interview, I still felt like I was pumping people for information if I held strictly to the interview guide.

A number of things stood out for me from the dialogues I had with my Aunty Rose. I found myself giving much consideration to her thoughts on education and literacy. Aunty Rose believes in the importance of receiving a mainstream education and she stressed that it is what we *do* with it that is most important. She indicated in our conversations that although our people do go out and receive such educations they do not always put them to work for their communities. When I asked her if a reciprocal relationship is possible between academia and our First Nations' communities, she replied, "It will be when you return home to teach First Nations Studies to our people" and when university degrees enable First

Nations' graduates to fill the consultant positions that First Nations' bands currently hire out to non-native persons who are not connected to the community. (Rose Smith Interviews, 2005)

Aunty Rose also had much to say about literacy and remembering. She shared that she never takes minutes at the meetings she attends and that writing interferes with taking everything in. She also believes that women take in more because we listen with our hearts and minds. Aunty Rose said that she prefers simply to listen and will sometimes jot down a single word to remind her of what was said or decided. "A word can trigger a memory" she told me as we drove into Pemberton to shop and pick up her van. Many of the meetings are taped, "but who has the time to sit and watch all of that footage?" (Rose Smith Interviews, 2005) It is better to listen and remember the important points and when she spoke of how we remind each other of what was said I was reminded of a conversation she and I had many months before about how the Chief's wife was always at his side to help him remember. Having a memory triggered at this point in our conversation led me to consider the learning processes I was utilizing for the purposes of this work and I became personally aware of the significance of this "triggering". It is not only in hearing a word or a song that memories are called forth, but also in seeing those special places on our territories that we recall the stories, as with the log in the middle of Tenas Lake. When I considered how I processed the words I found on a page I realized that the things I remembered were those things that rang true inside of me--- they were pieces of information that mattered to the reasoning behind my wanting to learn in the first place.

My Aunty Rose also stressed that I must get the need for relationships in the transfer of knowledge in my final paper. "Make sure you get that in!" she told me when we discussed

relationships and the transmission of knowledge. She stated that teachers need to make that connection with the students by sharing about themselves and to listen to what the students have to say. Leona Neilson also refers to making this connection on a physical level when she shares how she pulls the Head Start children close around her at Circle Time because the closeness connects them to her, to the other children, and to the story or lesson she is sharing.

Recollections of my Sessions with Ray “Zeke” Peters

Although I had travelled to Canim Lake on March 4th, 2005 to conduct the interview conversations with my Uncle Ray, as noted earlier in this paper, I chose not to proceed as such. My children Sara and Dusty were with me on that trip and were fully aware of the fact that I was to conduct the interview portion of my thesis while there. My daughter expressed to me her concerns about my not being able to do what I was supposed to do, but understood when I told her that it was more important to us and to Uncle Ray, to instead enjoy this precious time as a family. Sara came to understand the need for us to do what we could do for the family because first and foremost this was our family. This led me to consider how important the rapport truly is between researcher and participant and I wondered how many of our people have had to endure such interview processes because the human connection was not a consideration in the past.

It was on the first interview visit in his home that I realized my Uncle Ray did not always know who I was so I chose to visit with him not as a university researcher but as a niece. The second set of notes shared here are from the conversation we had in my car as we drove to and from the hospital in 100 Mile House. We did not discuss the questions in my interview guide but as may be seen here, a wealth of important information and understandings was shared in those precious moments we had together.

My Uncle Ray Peters Session I

Time of Session: 6:30pm to 8:15pm

Date: March 4, 2005

Place: Ray Peters home in *Tsq'escen*

Because of the situation, I did not proceed with the Interview Guide, but chose instead to appreciate this time with my Uncle. It did not seem appropriate to be interviewing him at this point as it had been recently discovered that my Uncle Ray had cancer and was being medicated for the pain. We did complete the Informed Consent package, as that was what was expected of me at this visit. My visits with Uncle Ray travelled the path of discourse chosen by my Uncle.

Informed Consent—Uncle asked why would we stop? I want to learn so he is going to keep on going.

When he was very small, Uncle's grandfather told him about a place on (*N'skets*) In-shuck-ch Mountain where the people used to hunt---he and Jimmy Peters used to go there and build up that spot with rocks---but he never told anyone for all those years. Many people tell everything they know and show important places to outsiders and that's not the way to go. Uncle doesn't tell anyone of such places.

Johnny and his wife used to tell stories---if you got them started they would go until daybreak and then everyone would go back to bed.

The language is understood (*Stl'atl'imicts*) but nobody is speaking it. Uncle asked me who is teaching it.

A name should not be passed on until the person with the name has passed away—Uncle told us his name and that people were already giving it away. Also, a meeting should have been held so everyone could speak about who Grandma's name, *Kie'ya7*, should go to. It should never be about arguing---only discussion and coming to an agreement.

My Uncle Ray Peters Session II

Time of Session: 7:10pm to 7:45 pm

Date: March 5, 2005

Place: The drive back to Uncle's from the 100 Mile Hospital

I asked how people get songs as we were listening to *Lil'wat* songs. Uncle said that when he goes out by himself and usually thinks about someone who passed away a few years ago, and he sings over and over again. Then he will sing the song after that.

When driving on the road into Canim Lake Reserve, watch for black spots, you never know it might be a moose and when you come upon them sometimes they will run right towards you. Sometimes it is better to keep your high beams low.

Connecting Our Circles

Ray “Zeke” Peters

I began my interviews in the *Tsq’escen* community. As I have mentioned, my Uncle Ray had been diagnosed with cancer right before my first session with him. When I called to see if the weekend was a good time to come and start this process, if he was up to it, my Uncle laughed and said that it was and, in fact, he was feeling well enough to wrestle! I had looked forward to hearing what Uncle Ray had to say and was excited to begin. However it was not long after my arrival to his home that I realized I could not proceed with my prepared Interview Guide. Once we had gone through the Information package and signed the papers, my Uncle Ray began to drift away from me and it became clear that he did not always know who I was and this broke my heart. I realized I needed to lay aside the intended agenda of that particular visit and appreciate this time I had with him. We talked instead about the importance of names and songs and about driving the very dark road from Canim Lake to the highway.



My Uncle Ray Peters

On one of our visits, as I drove Uncle Ray to his home, we were listening to the CD “*Lil’wat Songs We Sing*” and I felt moved to ask him how we receive a song. Uncle Ray stated that usually after someone dies, you go into the bush and you think about that person, and you start to sing and sing and after that you will sing that song. On this same trip, my Uncle, who knew I did not like driving the Canim Lake Road at night because it is so dark, told me to watch for dark spots on the side of that road because sometimes it is a moose and

if I have my high beams on, it may run right into them. Uncle Ray told me that sometimes it is good to drive with my low beams on. As I listened to his words, instructions, I knew deep inside they were being shared to guide me, I knew they were spoken with purpose, that my Uncle was not simply making polite conversation. I sensed he *knew* I would need this information in the future and I was so grateful for this time with him, for his concern and to know he cared about what happened to me and my family.

Seven months later, my Uncle Ray was admitted to the hospital. My cousin Juanita called to tell me the doctor had said her dad was going to die from this cancer. I tried to dwell on my memories of a strong and resilient man. I was determined not to face the possibility of losing him, and I stayed away. I could not bear to visit my Uncle Ray in the hospital, to be a stranger to him, and I would have remained a coward to the end, had I not been informed he had been asking for my children and me. When I heard this, I prepared my family to honour my Uncle's request and we travelled back to the 100 Mile House Hospital. It was Thanksgiving weekend and all of Uncle's children were there. I was just getting to know many of my cousins and I initially felt like my big family was taking up the precious little space in that small hospital room. My Uncle slept while we were there and we spent the time passing time with my Aunty and cousins and meeting more family.

Every morning of those days on which we visited the hospital, I awoke with an overwhelmingly strong pressure in my chest. It was like a force pushing to be let out and it was something I had never experienced before. I do not know *how* I knew, but I realized I needed to sing for my Uncle Ray. I have drummed and sung in my home community and I enjoy singing our *Lil'wat* songs, but never before had I done so in front of anyone. It was always in the background behind the seasoned and confident voices and drumming of my

Aunts, Uncles, cousins, Mother and Grandmother. Needless to say, I was reluctant to now go and sing in a quiet, tiny, hospital room, but on the morning of the day we were to return to Prince George, I told my children to bring our drums as we were going to sing for our Uncle Ray. When we arrived at the hospital we found they had moved him to a larger room and only my cousins and Auntie were present on that morning. After apologizing for being a coward, for waiting so long to come and see my Uncle and his family at this sad and difficult time, I asked my cousins and Auntie if I could drum and sing for Uncle Ray. I explained how, usually, I sang only behind my Aunties, and that the pressure in my chest was telling me I *had* to do this. My Auntie replied that her husband had been trying to sing all morning and their eldest daughter, Denise, told me they would support me in this. I was proud as my children stood and drummed and sang with me. My Auntie's gentle hand on my back carried me through as the power of the song broke my determination to not face the loss of this great man. All the pain and fear of loss was released from my soul as we drummed, sang and cried together. My Uncle Ray struggled to open his eyes, to see us, and Cory, my oldest son, found peace in knowing his Uncle now knew we had made the journey to see him, to be with him. I felt instantly bonded to my Auntie and my cousins in that moment and I became committed to Uncle Ray's wish to see our families reunited. I also saw the power of our songs and our traditions as I realized that I had to sing not only for my Uncle Ray, but also for my children and myself when I saw the effect this song had on my son Cory and how it allowed me to accept the hard reality of what was upon us.

Although we never did get to the formal interview guide, I learned much valuable information from my Uncle Ray Peters, information that directly applies to my life and how I need to be. The message that he sought to impress upon my heart is the importance of re-

connecting our circles and understanding where we come from. Numerous scholars have shared the importance of the Circle, but none had sparked in me this sense of personal responsibility to reconnect mine. I have my Uncle Ray to thank for that.

Recollections of my Sessions with My Aunty Toni Archie

Toni Archie is the wife of my Uncle Ray and although she and her family had suffered much loss just prior to my visit to the *Tsq'escen* community, she graciously shared her understandings with me. We met on only one occasion for the purposes of this paper. My Aunty Toni is a wonderful example of a strong but gentle woman and she models for us how to respectfully pass knowledge forward. She is not demanding or loud, but the message my Aunt conveys is powerful and it is clear.

My Aunty Toni Archie Session I

Time of Session: 1:45-3:10 pm

Date: March 5, 2005

Place: Home of Toni Archie

What is the role of the Storyteller, Elder, Teacher?

Who were your first teachers and what did they teach you?

What do you remember most about your early learning experiences?

Upon completing the Informed Consent package---this participant indicated a preference for anonymity, she stated that the answers come from her *Tsq'escen* background. She will be referred to as *Tsq'escen* in this paper. (I am happy to say that my Aunty Toni had a change of heart and gave me permission to include her identity and photograph in the final document.)

You don't have to be an Elder to teach as long as you have the knowledge.

Grandparents, aunts, uncles, older brothers, sisters, parents, were the teachers.

Aunty Toni worked hard in the past---and has memories of being little and going on the trap line with her brother and she had to drag the squirrels and remembers thinking her brother was having all the fun while she did all the hard work.

My Aunt and her sister do 4 day culture camps with the youth of the community every year—they teach them how to make berry cake, pitch medicine, bark medicine, pit cooking, building sweat lodge, *xoshum*, (whipped soap berries or “Indian” Ice cream) set up tipis, lake fun. The children take some home to share with family.

Aunty’s grandparents and parents taught her---her mom always used the language in the home and she worried people would laugh at her for speaking *Secwepmicts*. In the residential school my Aunty Toni was not allowed to speak the language, but she did speak with girls from the *Stl’atl’imx* Territory. Aunty Toni went to residential schools for eleven years and she never forgot the language, she was ashamed of it until one day she asked herself why she should be ashamed of such a beautiful language and never was again.

Aunty has wanted to mentor someone to work with her in the language classes to learn it as well as how to teach it. There are many speakers but you have to know how to work with the children, how to teach them. My Aunty hopes someone will carry on with the work she does to keep the language and culture alive.

“I think about all the knowledge we had in the past about every plant, the animals and medicines before other things were brought in. And they thought we were stupid Indians---it hurts to hear that.” But she feels better knowing they are just ignorant as to how much we know about our environment.

Non-natives fence everything in---*Secwempc* no longer have access to the spring water at yearly camps---have to haul it in from 40 miles away.

Aunty remembers how it felt to be told that she should love God more than her parents. She couldn’t believe they expected her to do that, it was unthinkable.

On Tuesdays/Thursdays community can ask Elders questions, hear stories, and play *Lahal*.

There are different dialects between *Secwempc* communities, but they can understand each other and *Stl’atl’imicw* too.

People are interested and want to learn, hear the stories. We need to be committed to learning the language.

The language and traditions are not lost, Aunty tries to teach everything she knows---the Elders pass it on. There are not many Elders left.

First Nations Studies in universities is ok but have teachers who have lived it---know it. Aunty keeps telling our people to get in there and teach! Her linguistic teacher was German and if she can teach *Secwepmicts* so can we.

When the kindergarten children first hear the words in *Secwepmicts* they insist they are not right “That’s not how mommy says it!” But slowly they come to accept them as correct.

There are only 2 certified language teachers in the community at this time, Aunty Toni and her sister, Elsie.

Passing Our Knowledge Forward

My Aunty Toni Archie

I was only able to complete the Informed Consent package and meet on two occasions for the purposes of my thesis with my Aunty Toni. This participant felt that her responses needed to be recorded as being the teachings/values she has received as a *Tsq'escen* person.

When I spoke with this participant, I found she continually referred to the people, to the land, the language and the culture. My Aunt works diligently to carry forth the *Tsq'escen* language and culture. She showed me many beautiful pictures of the community children and the activities she undertakes with them to pass on the knowledge she has to share around being *Tsq'escen*. She showed me the joy making berry cakes and pitch medicine brings to the children and I could feel the sense of fulfilment she receives from doing so.

The strongest message Aunty Toni shared in our conversations was her concern about not having someone to mentor, someone to carry on the work she and her sister have begun. Just as my Uncle taught me how important connecting our families is to our circle my Aunt instilled in me the importance of passing down our languages and cultures to the circles to come and she works long and hard to pass her knowledge on to the next generation but worries there will be no one to take over this transmission of the language and ways of being for her community.

Although she had denied her language for many years because of mainstream society's perceptions, Aunty Toni remembers asking herself why she should be ashamed of the language of her nation when she remembered how beautiful it was. After that, she chose to not only speak it but to teach it to her community and to never be ashamed of it again. My Aunt passes this sense of pride on to those who are fortunate enough to learn from her.

In hearing my Aunt's concerns, I found myself thinking about reciprocity and the claims of many Canadian universities as subscribing to this concept. Again, I willingly acknowledge the great strides that have been made in academia towards establishing more respectful relationships with First Nations students/faculty and communities. However, I feel that there is still a long way to go in this area. When urban First Nations' students are attending these mainstream education systems and enrolling in First Nations Studies to learn about being Aboriginal, the universities need to consistently relay the message that First Nations' communities need their First Nations' graduates. A huge part of learning about who we are as Aboriginal persons is bound up with the fact that we are an important part of the whole and when this understanding becomes ingrained within us, the Toni Archies' of our nations will have someone to mentor and carry on their important work.

Recollections of my Sessions with Tina Fraser

Tina Fraser is a very busy woman, so it was not possible to hold my sessions with her over three consecutive days – there was a time lapse of six weeks between session one and sessions two and three which were completed in one sitting. As I mention elsewhere in this document Tina is a natural storyteller and knowledge sharer and our sessions still flowed as though no time had passed.

Tina Fraser Session I

Time of Session: 1:15 to 2:45 pm

Date: March 9, 2005

Place: China Sail Restaurant

What is the role of the Storyteller, Elder, Teacher?

Who were your first teachers and what did they teach you?

What do you remember most about your early learning experiences?

Elders don't have to be old and not all older people are Elders. An Elder is a sharer of wisdom---guides in various areas, nutrition, medicines, etc.

Teachers are "spiritual researchers" knowledge comes from the spirit. Teachers explain the history, context of the stories.

Recording can sometimes interrupt the spirit---changing the tape or turning it over etc.

Tina's first teachers were her mom, grandmother, great aunts, grandfather. Tina was not sat down to learn but she was always around and although she didn't think she was listening she must have because she learned. "Peripheral learning"

Tina has a lot of memories that start from when she was two years of age---they come to her in her dreams and she talks about them with her mom and family and they let her know who, what, where etc. They fill Tina in on the details of these events that happened when she was a child. In one dream Tina sees a specific place beneath a certain tree, hearing chants, and watching people dig a hole and worrying someone was buried there. Years later, Tina's mom told her they were burying placenta there (a new life begins and is returned to the earth) Tina remembers chants for everything---her earliest memory is of chanting, when she was two, and wailing, a feast, casket, and not knowing it was her grandfather who passed away. She remembers the sadness.

Tina shared her story of Tina's cloak... "tears" (I forget what this means?)
Tuna(the eel) that gave her a ride across the water to show her grandmother her beautiful *kurikua* cloak---and upon missing the tuna ride home, and because the *kurikua* has no more feathers, the cloak is placed upon the water and the bird and the little girl float back home.

Maiden of the Mist story---woman hears flute playing in the woods and against parents wishes she goes to he who plays and falls in love with him. For ignoring her parents the union is cursed and something happens to all the children of this couple.

Women do not go ocean fishing---anger the waves---may be pregnant. Water doesn't listen....many monuments of women exhibit water.

Tina Fraser Session II

Time of Session: 1:10- 2:20pm

Date: April 27, 2005

Place: Boston Pizza

How does the western education system of teaching and learning compare to the oral transmission of knowledge?

What do you remember most about going to school?

Do you think literacy has had an impact on the oral transmission of your community's stories? In what way?

Elders did not have books; they spoke from their memories of place with great detail. Western system is so structured and it's hard to fit our ways in—learning through hearing, taking in and telling. We see in the western system.

Literacy has not impacted the oral transmission of Tina's community's stories. Oral literature is a big thing right now---but the language and stories continue to be passed down orally as they have always been. Tina learns best this way, through hearing, listening—peripheral learning.

Tina Fraser Session III

Time of Session: 1:10—2:20pm

Date: April 27, 2005

Place: Boston Pizza

In your opinion, is it possible to learn First Nations' stories and ways of being by reading about them in a book or by watching them on a video?

Can the stories, philosophies, languages of First Nations' peoples be successfully transmitted outside the community from which they come? Should they be?

How important is place to the stories/histories of your nation? How important are relationships to the transmission of knowledge?

Tina gave an example; her students did very well reflecting on what they heard Tina saying in class and no one touched on the video---feels video over stimulating---“we need to be creative”; to use our minds/hearts, and ears to learn.

The connection to the environment is also crucial—when back home Tina will look at a 150 year old tree and wonder if her great grandfather saw or touched that tree, did he stand on this very spot? Did they hear/see the same birds? (In a later conversation Tina told me that if you feel the presence of the ancestors on the territory it means they are there.) This is the connection to place so important to Indigenous peoples...what we see and hear where our ancestors saw and heard and stood and touched.

Tina is fluent in her language, her stories, reading and writing, and it is possible to be all without giving up any.

No the stories cannot be transmitted outside of the communities from which they come—they may be shared and Tina has shared many of her stories with various Indigenous peoples who always share their songs/drumming with her. When someone shares something in this way something must be given back to maintain the person's balance. This must be a reciprocal process for if only one person is sharing, what they are giving may be taken and used as bad medicine on them. If you share something with me too, then I know you will only use my story in a good way because I have been given something of you.

If non-Indigenous peoples want to learn our cultures, learn about us, they will immerse themselves in it—not come in and take the information.

A lot of the stories are personal, blood, meant to be passed down---grandmother to daughter to granddaughter etc. You often hear Elders say “This is a story especially for you” and those stories you do not tell, you can tell the lessons of the stories, but never the details of *your* special story. Tina has special stories for each of her grand children.

Language comes from the environment---we are surrounded by the environment...a part of it and this is very important to our stories. (How we treat our land is how we treat ourselves---disrespect our environment we disrespect ourselves.)

Bringing Spirituality into Learning.

Tina Fraser

Although I learned much from Tina about the ways of knowing and being of Indigenous peoples, I feel inclined to first share how images of beautiful cloaks made of feathers and forests covered in mist spring to my mind when I reflect on the sessions with Tina. I clearly recall the many stories she told me and I am amazed at the power a true storyteller has to impress images so vividly on our imaginations.

Tina’s reference to teachers as being “spiritual researchers” has stayed with me also. She did not explain what she meant by the term, but I was intrigued by this and another expression Tina used in our conversations: “peripheral learning”. I believe that the idea of “spiritual researcher” was shared to guide me towards the understanding that our teachers seek inside the lessons they need to offer. Knowledge sharing to the “spiritual researcher” is a sacred event and speaking from the spirit ensures the right messages are shared with the right persons at the right time. The responsibility to endeavour to share in a good way requires our carriers of the oral tradition to consider knowledge on a very different and deeper level--- the messages they share are shared with purpose --- to guide us towards a

good path; to show us how to thrive so that we might impact the lives of others in a positive way as well. I found that as I heard from more participants I began to shift my thinking from my head and I started to think about their words with my heart. This led to some extremely emotional sharing of what I had learned in the writing of this paper. The lessons I have learned have impacted me deeply and I need to share them at that level. This is something I was always too intimidated to do in the university classroom. It just never felt appropriate, or safe, to speak from an emotional or spiritual place in that environment. Approaching my work with the idea that I too am a “spiritual researcher” has allowed me to let down my guard, to do something I had never been secure enough to do in academia and that was to openly share my thoughts, understandings and emotions. Growing up ashamed of who I was, I naturally feared expressing anything and everything about myself. Tina’s belief that knowledge sharing must be reciprocated to ensure it will be used in a good way has inspired me to move beyond this personal preference and take steps towards connecting with others by revealing how these lessons have impacted me.

As to “peripheral learning”, I believe Tina was referring to how she gained much of her traditional knowledge by being on the edge of adult conversations and activities. As a child she did not consider this to be an education but in later years when considering her memories and dreams, Tina acknowledges that she did indeed pick up much understanding when she was not even aware that she was watching and/or listening. This revealed for me how important hearing and observing those we are connected to is to how and where we absorb the information. Tina was not actively seeking knowledge, yet the lessons she learned are triggered in her adult life and in her dreams. There is a spiritual connection that transpires when knowledge is transferred between persons who carry each other in their hearts and

perhaps that is the secondary implication of peripheral learning—it occurs not only at the intellectual level, but the emotional or spiritual level as well.

Recollections of my Sessions with Leona Neilson

I visited with Leona three times over a two- day period to go through the questions of my thesis interview guide. Also a natural storyteller, Leona filled the time I spent with her with stories, memories and much laughter and information sharing. The images she brought forth for me are still clear in my mind and I am fortunate in that I can still hear Leona share stories at the Aboriginal Head Start program.

Leona Neilson Session I

Time of Session: 7:25 – 8:20 PM

Date: Tuesday, April 19th, 2005

Place: Leona Neilson's home

What is the role of the Storyteller, Elder, Teacher?

Who were your first teachers and what did they teach you?

What do you remember most about your early learning experiences?

The storytellers were the Elders, Grandmas or Aunties and they would entertain the children while the parents were busy, cooking, sewing, sick etc. Leona remembers hearing stories, playing games etc.

Elders would visit and the children would be sent out to play---they could stay if they were quiet and did not disturb and Leona would ALWAYS stay and sit by the wood stove & listen. She remembers the table by the window, they always had tea, she does not remember them ever drinking coffee. And they would share stories of the events in their lives. Leona remembers one man who came in & told a story of how he was in his boat & he could see white water, Leona motions with her hands a split in the water with white rising up on both sides. In those days they did not have powerful boats---just small motors so he knew it couldn't be a boat splashing up water like that. Then he thought it couldn't be a plane...because after awhile the plane would come to a stop and the water would be calm again---that was not happening. Then he saw a huge grey shadow beneath the water and Leona remembers the Cree word for snake---but it wasn't a snake...and then he thought maybe a sturgeon but not a fish either. Leona must have seen and heard of whales at school, because she remembers thinking it was a whale. The shadow grew larger and then dove deep down and the man was telling how he was getting afraid, worrying that whatever it was would go beneath his boat so he throttled it.

Another story she recalls is one of an island that was flooded...the people are still waiting for a settlement on that because it was flooded by a hydro project and anthropologists proved the people used the island. But it was like a cemetery island---many people were buried there and this man was passing it in his boat one night when something told him to turn back and look at the island. When he did he saw a man and a woman waving him towards them---he felt afraid and didn't know what to do because maybe someone got stuck on the island. So, he slowed his boat down and watched them for awhile---as he did so they faded away. When he told the people this story, more stories of the island were shared by the people of similar events. Leona spoke of how people would know before the Elders who came to see them said anything that something had happened to a family member---saddened spirit knowing something is wrong. In one case a girl's dad was knocking on the door when he passed away. She asked who's there and he responded it's your daddy.

Leona remembers the visualizations of stories, people and places where they were told. Stories of *Wetiko* and *Wesakejack*. *Wetiko* was cannibal and *Wesakejack* ate his own sores. She was told if they went out at night or in the water, *Wetiko* would get them. After hearing the stories above, Leona was afraid to go into the water.

The youth would fetch water and chop wood etc for Elders (women who did not marry) Leona's "Grandma" would always give them bannock or her favourite puffed wheat cereal. While they were eating, the Elder would teach them things, how to be careful and not get hurt. She also told stories in Cree about her dating experiences, various things she had done. Leona can picture it all very clearly, where the wood stove sat, the crackling of the fire in it, the flickering candle and the soft tone of her voice.

Leona also recalls playing as children in their large log house when her parents were away. "Can't touch the floor" game. The logs crack sometimes and the oldest child would say "Time for bed now!! The woman's head is banging on the roof!" And they would be so afraid she was going to get them. Could picture the head banging on the roof! Or they would try to push them outside and they would hold back afraid to go out there where *Wetiko* would get them...all they could see were eyes out in the dark.

There was a man, Bill Ballantyne, whom the children loved to visit. He would gather them around and play songs on his guitar and make grand facial expressions and animal noises, the children loved him.

Difference between oral tradition and western education:

The storytellers/Elders had no books—they told stories in details and "our imaginations conjured up images" Leona can still remember today. The teachers had books and Leona can still remember the words and pictures of Dick and Jane and Tar Baby. Didn't have to imagine these. And the priest told stories of the devil and how being bad would send you to hell. Leona visualized devils, angels, heaven, hell as seen in pictures. She would feel scared when doing something wrong, the devil was watching, and feel good when doing/being good because God was watching. When she saw a white bird she thought it must be god.

Memories of story telling: soft toned Cree voices, flickering candles, gas lamps hissing, wood stove flickering, the set up of the space, always a table at the window, facial expressions. Leona's sister would make up stories to go with the comics, she always told them stories.

Remembers Hansel and Gretel, Big Bad Wolf stories. As the smallest, being left behind running home in the woods with wolves, real wolves howling in the woods. And wondering how a nice old woman could eat children.

Leona's Mom's story telling was stories from the Bible and she does this with her kids, grand kids. Leona had images of a loving god in the clouds—her Mom's role was to teach about God & heaven.

Leona Neilson Session II

Time of Session: 6:45 – 7:45pm

Date: April 20, 2005

Place: Leona Neilson's home

How does the western education system of teaching and learning compare to the oral transmission of knowledge?

What do you remember most about going to school?

Do you think literacy has had an impact on the oral transmission of your community's stories? In what way?

The western system and the books---were told to stand up and read in front of the class---we couldn't read and the added stress of standing up in front of everyone. They just expected us to know how to read. The stories were not of interest to her yet she was forced to read them. It was boring to sit there and focus on the words on a page---learning in the traditional manner was fun. They jumped from here to there, running, playing; listening to stories...it was much better that way. And the stories were of interest because they were about people they knew and they were about things they needed to know.

Leona watched her dad make snow shoes—the bark had to come from the trees in the cold months because it was stronger...her dad would teach while showing how to make them. Traditional learning is more like show & tell...when Leona takes her grandchildren out in the bush she encourages them to use their eyes---to watch they may see a moose and to listen to the beautiful sound that bird is making and to try and make the sound themselves. Leona tells them to smell the pine trees, the rose hips, and the flowers and to listen to the cracking of the branches and the singing of the frogs. This type of learning uses all of the senses including the imagination because she can see the children trying to imagine the arm of a tree breaking and making that cracking sound. The wonder in the children's' faces is evident.

Sometimes Leona will tell stories about when she was younger and the children love to hear those too—because they know her, they have a relationship with her. Leona has started to

pull the children at Head Start in around her at Circle time—the circle is good but when talking to children they need to be close to you and to each other. They need to feel that connection—it helps them feel related to the group and to focus.

Leona feels literacy has had an impact on the oral transmission of stories---she points out a positive impact because she thoroughly enjoys coming across books written by people she knows, telling stories she knows. She values them when that person has passed on because she has something to remember them and their story telling by. She knows them, she knows the stories and it makes her feel good about it.

Leona Neilson Session III

Time of Session: 7:45 – 8:35 pm

Date: April 20, 2005

Place: Leona Neilson's home

In your opinion, is it possible to learn First Nations' stories and ways of being by reading about them in a book or by watching them on a video?

Can the stories, philosophies, languages of First Nations' peoples be successfully transmitted outside the community from which they come? Should they be?

How important is place to the stories/histories of your nation? How important are relationships to the transmission of knowledge?

Leona has positive feedback about learning First Nations philosophies etc through reading and/or watching on TV. She has learned a lot from watching APTN---that is an awesome station—she often sees people that she knows on there and has learned a lot about the sweat lodge and various other aspects of First Nations ways of being.

The importance of place—Leona likes to tell stories out in the bush---when they are around a camp fire and they hear that crackle. Jean and Leona go to the Métis camp and after the tea and bannock are done the remembering begins..."I remember when I was able to canoe...how I loved to do that..." Leona also likes story telling in the evening when the day is done. Then going to sleep to dream about what they were talking about. Or when it is raining and you can hear the rain drops pattering on the roof, warm inside the house, a story always comes.

Leona told her children many stories, she passed on the stories from the bible just like her Mom used to tell her and she also tells stories of when she was young. Leona did a lot of things with her kids when they were growing up.

Leona thinks that many of the older stories are going to be lost. Too much drinking, TV, video games etc She remembers when she was young how they did everything as a community. There was Movie Night with the old reel to reel films. They would fit as much of the community as they could into that room. And there was an event where you would make a sandwich etc and put a lunch in a basket—it would be auctioned off and the person

who bought it would get to eat with the person who made it. There would be community gatherings for Christmas and Santa always came. They were happy with just one gift in those days.

Learning through Seeing, Telling and Doing

Leona Neilson

As with Tina, my memories of the sessions with Leona are filled with vibrant images of flickering candles, haunted islands and family ties that were built on story-telling. Leona is a skilled teller of stories and the past and who has a wonderful sense of humour.

Leona shared how learning in the mainstream system is very different from learning in a traditional First Nations' system. She recalls being expected to stand in front of a class and read and how the information she was gaining was not relevant to her life. Leona said that learning at home was fun; they watched, listened, practiced and sometimes played as the teachings were shared. She compares it to show and tell, indicating that learning required all the senses. She remembers there was always a table in front of the window, a fire in the wood stove and pots of tea as the Elders sat and shared their stories. Leona shared that, unlike the other children who preferred going outside to play to sitting still and quiet as the adults spoke, she *always* stayed behind to imagine the many places, characters, and creatures that would come to life in the evening discussions. Images of a long, dark, being, just under the surface of the water come to mind and I can feel the feelings of fear that must have welled up for the man in one of the stories Leona shared with me and I can feel why she preferred quietly listening to the adults to playing outside with the children.

Leona's story-telling skills are much appreciated in the Power of Friendship Aboriginal Head Start program where she teaches the Métis culture and Cree language. Leona likes to pull the children in close together so they feel connected to her and to the other children, and feel part of this important circle. She shares traditional stories like "How

Bear Got His Short Tail” and uses stuffed animals and various other props to act out the stories for the children. Leona’s animated techniques and contagious laughter inspire the children to remain focused on what is being said and there is always an underlying value being shared to encourage good ways of being in these little ones. It is obvious that Leona submits to the philosophy that human connection is a necessary requirement in the transfer of knowledge.

Leona also takes the passing on of her traditional knowledge very seriously and this is evident in the way she spends her time with her grandsons. Leona is teaching them the Cree language and spends great amounts of time in the bush with her older grandson, Austin. She teaches Austin to listen to the wind, the birds, and the cracking of the tree branches around them. She encourages him to imitate the sound of the frogs and to imagine the branch (arm) of the tree breaking and making that cracking sound. She takes her grandson and the children of Head Start on nature walks so they can see how medicinal herbs look in nature and how to pick them and use them for various health needs. Leona advocates that we need to see and do when learning and to use our imaginations. This is the most important message I received from my sessions with Leona.

More than Libraries

In the academic world a saying has emerged expressing the concern many have around the loss of First Nations’ Elders; “when an Elder passes away, it is like losing a library” (Calliou, 2004: 73). Although this expression pays tribute to and demonstrates an emerging valuing of Indigenous knowledge, I feel we are looking at a First Nations way of knowing through a Western lens. This idea serves to objectify something that, to truly be honoured, must not be objectified. To say that we lose a library whenever one of our

knowledge carriers passes on is an incomplete thought/view/idea indicative of a Eurocentric vision of knowledge that has forgotten the importance of relationships in the transfer of knowledge and the purposes for knowing.

Through the course of writing this thesis, my home community has lost several of our people, a number of them Elders, all of them carriers of knowledge. Within a span of two years my grandmother, three of her sons and my twenty-two year old cousin, Skylar, have passed on to the spirit world, and although I know they each had much to teach me, it is not only the loss of that knowledge and wisdom that causes me to grieve. While I appreciate the intent of the library comparison, I must draw attention to the need for a more humanistic perception of what is really lost to us whenever an Elder passes on.

When an Elder leaves this world you feel alone and the words these people took the care and time to share with you come back to you over and over again. You grieve over your loss, for not taking the time to spend more time with these knowledgeable, loving people. You vow to carry the messages nearest and dearest to their hearts forward. You consider the human connections, the pain your parents, aunts, uncles, cousins, sons and daughters are experiencing--- and you grieve at the thought of never hearing that special laugh and never being seen by these Elders with such honest love and appreciation again. My Uncle Ray's "Yeuhh Yeuhh" comes to me often and I am consistently reminded of a need/responsibility to create and cherish moments with those who are left behind. I cannot imagine any collection of books impacting me in a manner even remotely close to that which the death of an Elder evokes. I appreciate this comparison's attempt to acknowledge/honour our Elders as being equivalent to western libraries full of knowledge, but I find myself driven to convey the importance of people/family/community. It may go without saying that this point is

obvious, but in carrying out my duties as a *Stl'atl'imicw* person trying to maintain and project our ways of being in mainstream society, I feel it best to not leave anything unsaid. The sense of urgency to “collect” and “preserve” the stories/wisdom/knowledge of our Elders overshadows another very real site of loss that also holds the potential to impact us at every level, personal, familial, communal and national...I refer to the loss of living, breathing examples of what it means to be *Samahquamicw*, and the significance of our connections to them.

The loss of an Elder impacts us at the spiritual level, at the very core of who we are and what truly matters--- and for many of us who live and work in mainstream society and institutions, we must also suffer the realization that never more shall we have the opportunity to make the return trip home to experience the stories, the teachings, the histories and the memories of our Uncles, Aunts and Grandparents who could wait no more for us to do so. And “we will cry and cry and cry and we can never be the same again” (Tabobondung, 2002: 17). We cry not only for the loss of knowledge but for the loss of our teachers and the guidance, acceptance, laughter and love that was theirs to give that we might walk a good and happy path.

I cry because I will never again see the joy drumming and singing brought to my grandmother's eyes. I cry because my Auntie Endora will never again show me her beautiful beadwork, because, as much as he needed to, my Uncle Ray will never finish telling me my family's lineage, because I will never see my Uncle Victor build a cedar barbeque stick again and I cry because I will never get to know my Auntie Normaline, Uncle Pierre, Uncle Benji or my



Grandpa Smitty Groundhog dancing

Uncle Tony. I will never witness Grandpa Smitty dancing the Groundhog dance. I cry not only for the volumes of knowledge lost, but because these most important, very real and strong connections to people who loved our people and knew the good ways of being have been forever severed. I cry because so much more than a library is lost to us when we lose an Elder.

So much has been lost to us as First Nations peoples through the waves of colonization that continue to pummel us. In

many cases, when we lose an Elder, or any other of our community members, we not only lose the knowledge they each carried, we also lose any chance of ever getting to hear their stories, to know their life experiences, to know who they were and to connect with them. These great losses combine with the “effects of colonization and imperialistic policies that erode the base of Indigenous knowledge necessary for the healing and development of Aboriginal people” (Battiste, 1998: 16). So much more is at stake than identified in the saying that equates losing an Elder with losing a library; our very futures as Indigenous peoples are also at risk.

Chapter Five

Applying the Learnings

The Power of Sharing

To demonstrate how words and/or meaning may come to us at a later time, I will share the story of my journey home after my Uncle Ray's funeral. Because we stayed to have dinner with the *Tsq'escen* community before heading back, I found myself driving the Canim Lake Road after dark. Overwhelmingly sad and emotionally spent, I found my spirits lift as we listened to the CD of my Uncle's favourite music that my cousins had made and given me. As we moved further away from him I began to notice an increasing sense of anticipation growing in my stomach and chest. The words of Uncle Ray returned to me "Sometimes it's best to keep your low beams on..." (Ray Peters Interview, 2005) and flooded my spirit as I instructed my children to watch the side of the road for we were going to see a moose. Moments after the words left my mouth my headlights captured to the right of our vehicle the most beautiful and the largest deer I have ever seen. His antlers were majestic and he completely filled the circle of light that struck him as he stood strong on that spot to watch us pass. The moment was surreal and it floats in my memory like a dream, this moment when I realized the purpose of my Uncle's words. At the time I sensed they were shared with purpose and intent but it was not until after I had said my final goodbyes to him, that his intention was revealed to me. Every time I recall that magnificent image I feel comforted in knowing that my Uncle Ray wanted me to know he would always be with me, not only in spirit, but in everything I do that honours the teachings he shared with me. My Uncle had left behind a trigger that would remind me of the time we had together and the feeling of concern and love I felt he had for my family and me when he shared this

information; *that* was the purpose of sharing his knowledge with me that day. It was not so I could write a profound paper that would fill a gap in academic literature; it was not so that I might obtain a Master's degree and increase my status and earning powers; this little piece of information was offered that I might find peace in the knowledge that our connections to one another extend beyond this dimension and truly are forever.

As I considered this great gift he had blessed me with, I also came to terms with the purpose of another of my visits with Uncle Ray. On this particular occasion my Uncle had me driving my city/highway car through the fields for he wanted to check the gates of his corrals. I remember laughing at myself because I knew there was no way I would ever drive my car off the road had Uncle Ray not been directing me to do so. "You can do it, just watch where your tires are!" he told me as I slowly traversed the seemingly endless fields. It was a beautiful, sunny and crisp spring day that mirrored exactly how I felt being able to do this small thing for my Uncle. The field did eventually come to an end atop a small hill in the woods over a tiny clear creek. As I think back now I realize there was no fence or gate to check there and the spot where we stopped and backed up to turn around and go back was shown to me for a reason. As I took solace in knowing my Uncle left me with important information after seeing that deer at the side of the road on that particular journey, I realized the purpose of this visit to the creek in the woods and I know that I will one day go there by myself and I will think about my Uncle Ray. I will remember the day we drove out in my city car across the fields and the happiness I felt on that day. I will remember the hundreds of little creatures that scurried back into their holes in the ground as we drove across those fields and I will picture my son, Devon, jogging along side the car. I will remember the majestic deer that watched us begin our trip home after saying our final good byes to him and I will

pray and I will thank my Uncle for teaching me how we get our song. I will remember him and the stories he told me until a song comes to me. And I will sing and sing it and it will be my song and whenever I sing it from that point on, I will remember my Uncle Ray. And I will always remember the power of words that are spoken from the heart.

The Starting Points for Knowledge Seeking

As I reflected upon the many conversations I had through the course of this work, it became obvious to me that I had unintentionally sought out knowledge for two very different purposes. The Interview Protocol posed questions that, I believed, would assist in my critique of the ways in which Western institutions of education deliver or transmit Indigenous knowledge. When I found my Uncle Ray's health to be far worse than I had allowed myself to believe, I instead asked questions that came from my heart. I visited my Uncle with the realization that I may not have the opportunity to learn all I knew he had to share with me. Although I did not realize it at the time--- I now see that I chose to ask the questions that were important to my understanding of our ways --- the questions that would help me to carry my Uncle with me and it is the responses to those questions that echo predominantly in my every day life and within the pages of this document. It is my Uncle Ray's words that I share with my children---not because they hold more meaning or significance than the words shared by the other five participants, but because they speak to important ways of being as opposed to the differences between the oral tradition and written systems of knowledge acquisition which was the focus of the interview questions. This speaks volumes to the idea that education needs to be relevant to the knowledge seeker and because I chose to learn from persons I am connected to, there is also the ongoing possibility for new and deeper understandings.

Although the interview questions were not about ways of being, the responses shared with me were still shared with my future path in mind. The concept of reciprocity was an element of “getting an education” that is seen to be missing when it comes to our Indigenous educations. My Aunty Rose was clear on this when she stated that reciprocity will occur when I return home to teach First Nations Studies or to take on a consultant position with my band. Aunty Laura will see a mutually beneficial relationship when education equally benefits First Nations and non- Aboriginal graduates. My Aunty Toni’s concerns run along similar lines in that she worries she will have no one to carry forward the teachings and the language she holds so close to her heart. All of these comments have inspired in me a personal responsibility to remember my place in my Nation and to take the steps needed to ensure my gifts benefit the community as a whole. This has ultimately become the purpose of this study--- on a personal level, I have learned about the importance of the human connection, about taking the time to be with my Aunties and Uncles, to listen to their whispers of how to live a good life. I have learned that I need to be committed to the future of our ways of being by participating in them so that they may be carried forward. I have also come to understand that we are connected to various other ways of being and we need to take care not to allow ourselves to become consumed by them. We must find the balance that will enable us to fully participate in the world around us while holding on to those important aspects of what makes us who we are.

As an Aboriginal student, I must also strive to ensure these messages from my communities are transmitted in academia so that I do not participate in the further colonization of our ways. I must utilize this opportunity to transform the potential co-optation into not only resistance, but the sharing of First Nations’ views on the extent of reciprocity

and impacts that our communities are experiencing because of the relationship between universities and our First Nations peoples.

Although I asked different questions, I find that the areas I explored with my Uncle Ray truly informed how I would receive the thoughts shared with me by the other participants. Just knowing that this was to be my last chance to benefit from the wisdom of my Uncle, caused me to realize the power of our relationships and to recognize that I need to cherish the times and lessons my family and community members share with me. Whether we are discussing how we receive a name or the differences between education systems, if I listen closely and take the time to consider the thoughts expressed, the answers will always come to me when I need them most and they already have.

Chapter Six

Honouring the Expectations of Academia

Weaving the Strands of Knowledge Together

As I approach meeting the requirements of obtaining an academic, mainstream degree by blending various ways of knowing, I must demonstrate in this document that I actually accomplished what I set out to do.

As I reflect back on this seemingly long journey, I am filled with a sense of peace. The initial purpose behind my chosen stream of study came from an increasing sense of concern about my ability to decolonize myself from inside the walls of a colonial institution. I questioned whether I had the capacity to conduct research that was respectful, reciprocal, and relevant to the people who chose to participate in this endeavour. I had every confidence that I could write an academic paper worthy of a master's degree, but worried that simply doing so would not contribute to my growth as a *Stl'atl'imicw* woman or to the strength of the communities whose members contributed to it. Successful blending of the two knowledge systems requires that all of these conditions be met.

The second chapter of this thesis describes the eight main points that stood out for me in the literature review I undertook at the beginning of this process. I read various authors who were both First Nations and non-First Nations and I approached the readings with a specific goal in mind, to use the tools of the colonizer to reference academic scholars as supportive in my quest to establish the inappropriateness of “preserving” First Nations’ knowledges, stories, histories, languages and songs employing Western methodologies. Several authors demonstrated the disadvantages of doing so and I am pleased with my decision to not conduct an ethnographic study of the *Stl'atl'imx* Nation to fill the gap I

discovered through the course of my undergraduate years. These scholars confirmed what I already knew inside; that I must learn to be *Samahquamicw* in the right way, by visiting my community and spending time with our Elders. Although I am not connected to any of the authors I chose to read, many of their words triggered something beyond the intellectual level in me which was the sense of responsibility that comes with seeking knowledge from Elders.

The literature review also revealed that scholars since the time of Socrates have agreed with the idea that words become “dead on the page” once written. Authors like Thomas King, Kieran Egan and William Schneider are quoted within this document as agreeing with this concept, yet we continue to advocate on behalf of literacy as being perhaps the most important tool available to us in saving our Nations’ cultural ideals and languages. This notion came to me from the literature and it prepared me for conducting interviews without the use of any recording devices. In finding consensus on this point amongst numerous scholars I was motivated not to allow the words/feelings/thoughts of my participants to fall dead on the pages of my work, but to instead share what needed to be shared within this document and live what was given to me through the course of this study. These authors inspired me to receive the knowledge shared with me by the participants with great respect, humility and honour. Native American author Sandy Grande further evoked in me a determination to do as she strives to do in her own mainstream educational journey, to “...work hard at redefining the relationship between the academy and tribal America” (Grande, 2000: 35) to the degree that I too would eventually be led home in taking this path.

The concepts of context, remembering, reflecting, protecting knowledge and all of the other ideas that came to me from the academic end of this research all played an important role in how I would participate in the oral transmission portion of this study. I found that the

need to be present and the requirement of vast amounts of time to gain knowledge in a manner that is traditional to my communities along with the need to protect knowledge greatly influenced the design of the Interview Guide. I was careful not to ask about the stories of the Nations of the knowledge sharers and chose instead to ask very general questions that would shed light on the participants' experiences with different learning processes. I focused my line of inquiry on questions that would support the argument that we must return home to our teachers if we wish to learn about our traditional ways and histories and that the mainstream educational institutions that choose to offer First Nations disciplines need to utilize First Nations' methodologies in the transmission of those courses. I accepted guidance from the many scholars I read in directing the interviews with respect for the fact that, being born and raised away from my home community, I do not know the important context that comes with the stories I hope to one day have the authority to tell.

It is very evident to me that what I have learned in the university classroom has informed what and how I would learn from the people I chose to interview. And it is also clear that what I learned from the oral portions of this work have greatly impacted what and how I will disseminate back to the academy in this document and at my defence presentation.

The understandings that came to me through the interview portions of this work are poignant and many. Some have been recorded on my Story Stick, for example not taking uncovered food outside after dark and the implications of not washing in cold water after cleaning the graveyard before having something to eat. There are also images and hand-made pieces on my Story Stick that are symbolic of my Grandmother, Aunties, Uncles, my children and the land from which we all come. I have learned much about our ways of being and although I was encouraged to share more of what has been recorded on my Story Stick

and on my heart in this paper, I will stand by my conviction to not resort to writing down what was given to me through the oral tradition. I am more than happy to share the stories and the memories orally because then I might truly do them justice as I speak to your hearts from mine. I did not read about the stories and the ways to be so I am hesitant to write about them here, I am reluctant because the goal in completing this part of my life had as much to do with participating in the oral transmission of knowledge as it had to do with fulfilling the requirements of obtaining a Master's degree.

Giving Back to the First Nations' Community

Reciprocity is a need expressed by both the University and First Nations communities and although I hope this thesis will be of great use to both, I am comfortable with the fact that the final document may simply end up sitting on a university library shelf, trapping the many thoughts and words that have so greatly impacted not only my life, but also the lives of my children. The benefits of conducting this work extend far beyond the need to write and present knowledge in that I am blessed by the understandings I have garnered through the experience of completing this time consuming and significant part of my life. It is these very understandings that will lead me to give back to the First Nations community long after I have received my Master's degree in that I am committed to honouring the concerns expressed by the knowledge sharers, namely, connecting and perpetuating our circles. I am also committed to taking every possible opportunity to learn our *Ucwalmicw* language and culture and pass them on, and to applying for positions that serve the First Nations community.

I may have started this journey with the need to fill a gap in academia, but have since come to terms with the equally important need to give back to our First Nations communities

in a real and positive way. All that I have learned, both from academia and from the sessions with the knowledge sharers, has been transmitted to my children. I continue to reflect upon the stories and lessons and to receive further understandings in doing so and I



Devon, Sara, Cory, Dusty (in front)

am also committed to doing as Tina Fraser said, turn around and help someone else.

Coming Full Circle

I started this document by sharing a story about my childhood, a story that demonstrated the source of the shame I felt around my Aboriginality. My journey through the First Nations' Studies program and the return to my *Stl'atl'imicw* community and family that resulted from my enrolment in this discipline has been a long and winding road, with many dips and peaks, sometimes surrounded in beauty and peace, other times laden with deep and heavy feelings of disillusionment, pain and overwhelming loss. There were times when I could not see the road at all and I questioned whether I had chosen the right path and worried I was not where I was meant to be, and there were many times I felt torn between the two worlds from which I come. Although this part of my life journey has, at times, been a difficult process, it has also been a necessary one for it led me to discover and accept who I am and it led me to some very important realizations about my responsibilities as a *Samahquamicw* woman. Today I am proud and blessed to be an Aboriginal person, I am happy to claim my *Stl'atl'imx* ancestry and fully embrace the values and traditions I now see

always dwelled within me. I am blessed to have come to internalize the importance of the land and our connections to it, to each other and to our stories, something that I had previously only read about. This work has allowed me to experience first-hand what Indigenous scholars write about and strive to share. The true blessing is in my ability to pass this understanding on to my children so that they will not have to wait as long as I did to experience this, their inherent right to know and treasure these important connections to who they are.

Though I began my work with full intentions to build a case against using Western methodologies to learn our First Nations' histories, stories, ways of being and knowing, I have grown to see that it is in learning to value many ways of knowing that my heart and spirit were prepared to listen as closely, if not closer, than my ears to the words and guidance I was to seek in the interview portion of this work. It is through listening with my heart and spirit and sharing my own personal narrative (Schneider, 2002:15) that I participate in the oral transmission of knowledge and although this narrative is shared in a written document, it is my personal reflections and experiences of learning from both the text books and my human connections that have been set to print here.

I have accomplished what I set out to do and have reconciled my heart and mind through the realization of actually weaving intellectual and spiritual ways of knowing together. In fulfilling the requirements of academia utilizing my Story Stick and obtaining primary information using only my memory and the personal connection I have with the participants, I have experienced participating in and valuing different ways of knowing and understanding and am no longer hesitant to share that spiritual side of myself in academia. I sincerely believe that in keeping that side of who we are private, we are disengaging

ourselves from one other at an important level and would submit that we all need to promote the inclusion of the spirit in the intellectual process.

I have also come to see that Western ways of transmitting information/ histories/ stories/knowledge are not solely to blame for the potential decline in our First Nations' ways of knowing. Though I advocate for further changes in the delivery of First Nations Studies courses I am also inclined to encourage culture members to understand and accept their responsibilities to their communities and their communities' ways of knowing. Just as universities that choose to disseminate First Nations' knowledges need to incorporate methods that are reflective of the methodologies that sustained and carried forth that knowledge, First Nations people must also remember that using recorders of any kind to preserve the stories may have a place in perpetuating our histories, but must play only a supplementary role. When used with care, these tools can prove to be real blessings as I discovered when listening to the tape recorded voice of Harry Robinson. It is only when too much emphasis is placed on Western forms of preserving that we invite the potential to negate the most important reasons behind remembering and passing the knowledge forward – to facilitate our human connections and for fulfilling our human need to participate in close and meaningful relationships.

Documents and recordings do not make sufficient substitutes for hearing the words of a cherished Elder shared at a family or community gathering, feast or celebration. To choose these methods of preservation over our own when it comes to our stories, values and histories serves only to further sever the connections we have to each other, to our communities, to our identities, our past and ancestors.

I have learned that it is good to “get an education” after all, so long as we are exposed throughout that educational process to the theory that there are numerous and different educations to be had. All are valuable, all have a place in our lives and ways of being and it is in submitting to this concept that what I learn in the mainstream, in my community and through my own life experiences and connections to others that I am able to find a balanced and pertinent understanding of what it means to be an Aboriginal; woman, mother, daughter, grand-daughter, niece, sister, Auntie *and* Master’s student/graduate. This process has led me to value numerous ways of knowing for knowledge is sacred and it is absolutely necessary to live a good life and I am committed to do as Linda *Tuhiwai* Smith encourages us to do; “to remain connected, to build something with purpose and to remember that traditional knowledge continues to grow” (Smith, UNBC Lecture, 2005). Universities that choose to offer First Nations’ courses need to reciprocate at this point of contact--- they need to instil this important ideology in all their graduating students if they wish to truly enter the post-colonial era.

Further, because the educational institutions of the mainstream have played a major role in deconstructing our Traditional knowledges and in the severing of our connections to family, community and territory, these same institutions that choose to deliver First Nations Studies as a decolonizing process must also play a major role in the reconstruction of our nations. They must work to return the people to their families, communities, territories and ways of knowing--- this is the only act that has the potential to reconcile First Nations’ experiences with mainstream education in the past. These institutions can begin this process by utilizing First Nations’ methodologies in the delivery of their First Nations’ courses and by voicing an important message that has thus far been absent: urban First Nations’ students

not only belong to the academic world--- they also have a place and role in their Nations' communities. Some may choose to seek them out, or re-connect with their communities, others may not. I submit that it is a responsibility of the university to convey this message to its students so they can make the choice.

This study was a lived process that revealed for me the importance of connections to family, community, and to everyone I meet. I learned that for knowledge to impact us the way it is meant to, we need to internalize and preserve it on our own recording devices- our hearts and spirits, and let it work in our lives. We need to get out of our heads and move into thinking with our hearts so that human connections will be made. But, perhaps most importantly of all, I have come to understand the significance of learning from persons to whom I am personally connected and the responsibility that is transferred along with the teaching. In learning about the various processes and ways of learning, I have come to truly understand what it means to be a *Stl'atl'imicw* woman living, and learning, in two worlds.

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