

**HUNTING, HEALING & HUMAN-LAND RELATIONSHIPS:  
A REFLECTIVE INQUIRY INTO HEALTH AND WELL-BEING EXPLORED  
THROUGH INDIGENOUS-INFORMED HUNTING PRACTICES, LAND  
RELATIONSHIPS & WAYS OF KNOWING**

by

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## Abstract

This research is based on the premise that strategies to address Indigenous well-being might well be best found within Indigenous teachings themselves. More specifically, it seeks to explore the question: *How might human-land relationships, as developed through Indigenous-informed hunting practices and ways of knowing, facilitate health, healing, and well-being among North American Indigenous peoples?* The Interdisciplinary nature of this research merges concepts, theories and ideas from First Nations Studies, Anthropology, Health Sciences and Health Geography disciplines. The thesis and accompanying website embrace land-engaged storying and an autoethnographic reflective exploration of health anchored in Indigenous-informed relationships with land, hunting practices and ways of knowing the world. The research project engages a land-privileging, anti-colonizing, methodological approach that is embedded in relationship driven, spiritually accepting, and emotionally felt Indigenous epistemological ideologies. As such, this inquiry is both explored and expressed through the lens of Indigenous-informed pedagogies of knowledge transition and dissemination.

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## **Dedication**

To all my Relations.

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## Preface

My name is Katriona Siloen Auerbach. While I am of predominately Scottish heritage, I grew up on Coast Salish land in (and around) the city of Vancouver, British Columbia.<sup>1</sup> I share this because it is important, among many Indigenous communities, to acknowledge the land from which ones' roots have grown.<sup>2</sup> I also share this because it reminds me that the land here, in British Columbia, Canada, remains, in large part, the unceded traditional territories of an array of distinct Indigenous communities who have *lived*, shaped and cared for this land for thousands of years before I, or my ancestors, ever came to know it. I also acknowledge that I stand here today, in British Columbia, as a visitor on Indigenous land. As such, I remain deeply grateful for the opportunity to come to know this land, through growing up on it, and also in having the opportunity to step into a deeper relationship with it through the teachings shared by the Indigenous Knowledge Holders who have, very graciously, contributed to this project.

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<sup>1</sup> On the maternal side of my family I carry Scottish ancestry and am the first generation on my mother's side to be born outside of Scotland. However, I also acknowledge my paternal ancestry which, in addition to carrying Scottish heritage, also embodies Irish, French and other ancestry affiliations as well.

<sup>2</sup> I first learned about the importance of engaging proper Coast Salish introductory protocols from Elders in Residence (such as Uncle Ray Peters) at Vancouver Island University during my undergraduate degree.

## I. The Beginning: Conversations with Crow

I find, suddenly, as I sit here contemplating the complexities of this project, that a character from another story is irritatingly cawing at my window. No matter how intently I resist letting Trickster-Crow<sup>3</sup> in, Crow does not seem to tire from interrupting my work. This conjures an important issue, which, I have so far been avoiding. It seems though, that Crow is not going to let me procrastinate any longer. I move towards the window and try to explain to Crow why I cannot let him in. I explain.

*“I am a non-Indigenous person doing Indigenous-informed research and, just because I want to support Indigenous ways-of-knowing, does not mean I can appropriate Indigenous methods of story-telling. So, in other words, Crow, you cannot be here doing whatever it is you’re doing. Clearly you are making an appearance in the wrong story!”*

I suggest Crow return to a peer-reviewed article entitled, *A Trickster Tale about Integrating Indigenous Knowledge in University-Based Programs* written and co-narrated by Indigenous scholar Sylvia Moore (2012) and Crow who is also the main character in that paper. It seems this very same Crow is now scratching incessantly at my window and my mind demanding to be heard. Crow looks at me, shaking his head. He places his wings on his feathery hips and, looking rather annoyed, responds in clear exasperation.

*“Just whose story do you think this is anyways?”* he continues *“... it ALMOST sounds as if you think this is YOUR story!! Perhaps, if this is the case, you’re not quite ready to play a part in telling it.”*

*“Well ...”* I say *“Um .... Well, to be honest I guess I don’t really know whose story it is but I think it might belong to everyone; like a chapter in a story that is still being lived into being. I guess it’s kind of like an expression of the human condition as we try to figure out the*

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<sup>3</sup> Trickster characters, such as Crow/Raven and Coyote, have lived in stories and myths around the world throughout history. These characters often question, and push against the boundaries of the things we *think* we know. They are teachers who often play a prominent role in creation stories but they teach in a backwards sort of way that is often satirical. For a better understanding of the role of trickster characters around the world and within Indigenous mythology see Hyde (1998), Erdoes & Ortiz (1998), King (1993) and Reid & Bringhurst (1988).

*intricacies of how to live our lives together in a better way. Much like a chapter in a larger story about how some people bring their stories together in search of how to come back into a balanced relationship with the circle of life.”*

*“Sounds like an adventure that might have all sorts of hidden traps along the way! I like adventures.”* Crow smiles.

*“I like adventures too, but it is the traps I’m worried about. What if I get stuck in one? And besides, even if this isn’t MY story, I WILL be the one to be criticized for any mistakes made in its telling, especially if I, as a non-Indigenous person, MIS-APPROPRIATE an Indigenous story-telling method. Your appearance here in this way is bordering on plagiarism and that could get me into a whole heap of trouble!”*

*“Well”* Crow smirks, *“it just so happens that I like trouble and besides, it’s in our mistakes that all the best lessons are learned.”*<sup>4</sup>

*“That is precisely what I am afraid of Crow. Your being here is starting to make me feel very uncomfortable. I’m not sure if I’m ready to make such a BIG mistake before I even really get started!”*

Feeling a little deflated, I think about all the ways Crow messed with the article he has seemingly escaped from. “Crow,” I sigh, “are you going to turn this story inside out like you did the other one?”

*“Not at all,”* he straightens up *“I’m just here to make sure that YOU do!”*

I’m starting to realize that writing this thesis is going to be much more complex than I had originally anticipated.

*“Besides...”* Crow continues, *“I am my own bird and, as such, I certainly do not conform to human concepts of division, race, appropriation OR plagiarism. I ...”* Crow stands up straight sticking out his chest as he talks *“I... can go where ever I please and do whatever I want.”*

Which is, of course, what Crow always does anyways.

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<sup>4</sup> See King (1993) for an example of how mistakes become a place of learning through an example of Indigenous storytelling.

I try to explain that, while Crow does (or more likely does not) follow his own set of rules, the laws that govern the rules of academia are overwhelmingly complex and carry within them consequences should mistakes be made in their name. In fact, to identify one of the many traps that lays before me: many of the institutionally based rules of research (among some disciplines), favor anonymity, objectivity and a preference for categorical separation. This not only actively diminishes but also stands in stark contrast to Indigenous epistemologies (Graveline, 2000). In other words, I need to find a way to engage this work while somehow following sets of rules that at times do not align with each other.

*“Crow ... how can I possibly do this without making a whole HEAP of mistakes!”*

*“You keep talking like mistakes are BAD things.” Crow screeches “If you keep thinking that way you’re never going to learn anything important.”*

*“But,” I reply “it’s a sure means of imminent scholarly death for an academic to risk engaging in cultural appropriation or the taking of other people’s ideas AND, if I lose my voice in telling this story, then I can’t rightly tell it now can I? Besides, how can I possibly DO Indigenous-informed research without employing the concept of race? What really IS Indigenous-informed research and isn’t race just a socially constructed concept anyways?” (Kobayashi & Peake, 2000; Ignatiev & Garvey, 1996).*

Crow whispers in my ear *“... that’s it, now you’re starting to turn the story of this research inside out. This is where it starts to get good.”*

I think I’m going to cry.

*“But Crow! I NEED to figure out the answers to these questions and include them in my thesis and YOU are just confusing me more.”*

*“Some questions,” states Crow in an all-knowing sort of way, “have many answers and if you try to define and acknowledge only SOME of those answers then you consequently negate the rest. Sometimes it’s best to just keep on thinking about them so that all the possible answers can continue to live and grow into their own stories.”*

*“But ...”*

*“Listen.” Crow caws in frustration that I STILL don’t seem to get it “Mistakes are a part of life that cannot be avoided. They are the place of evolution and growth, places where new and exciting things can emerge out from. If you’re too afraid of making a mistake then how do you intend to change anything? How can you engage an anti-colonial role within the academy if you’re too afraid to push up against the walls that confine it? If you are so afraid of making a mistake then perhaps you are NOT the right one to be telling this story!”*

*“And another thing,” Crow straightens up “what’s all this talk about research? Don’t you know the negative role that research has played in the lives of Indigenous peoples? (Tuhiwai Smith, 2012; Wilson, 2008). Just what kind of research are you trying to do here?”*

*“Well research is just a word...” I start to explain “People can and have done many good and bad things in its name. And besides, research is what the academy calls what we HAVE to do when we do a Master’s Degree in the social sciences.”*

*“Again, with your rules. Don’t you see that words are like seeds that can be planted in the minds of people and from there can form ideas that elicit all sorts of change? You want to be sure to elicit the right KIND of change with this story. So, I suggest you CHOOSE your words wisely”*

*“Okay, but if we don’t think of it as research what should we think of it as?”*

*“Well, Indigenous scholar Shawn Wilson (2008) says that ‘Research is Ceremony’ so why don’t you treat it more like a ceremonial coming together and sharing of stories.”*

*“Hmmm, yes I like that. Maybe we can even ask the Knowledge Holders,<sup>5</sup> who inform this work, what they think about this concept?”*

*“Now it sounds like you’re talking about collaborative research ... er ... I mean collaborative story sharing.” Crow adds with a wink as he turns to leave.*

Crow flies away leaving me more confused than ever. What just happened here? It suddenly seems that I am breaking rules all over the place. Even as Crow appears to me, isn’t there the risk that I have appropriated an Indigenous story-telling technique while also stealing an entire character from someone else’s story?! I’m quite sure there will be

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<sup>5</sup> I have chosen to refer to the Indigenous peoples who have informed this project as Knowledge Holders, rather than participants, as I feel this title more appropriately honours their place in this project.

Indigenous peoples, academic critics AND Indigenous academic critics who are going to be having words about this one! But, Crow DID bring up some good points so let's work through this.

Yes, it is true that I am not Indigenous to British Columbia or to the places where many of the stories explored in this thesis stem from. Still, I carry stories and lived experiences with these lands,<sup>6</sup> that align with at least some of the people who do identify as being Indigenous from these same places. Does this then make it okay for me to express myself in an Indigenous-informed manner? What, in fact, defines an Indigenous experience on the land? It seems to me, that it might, instead, be the stories connecting us that we should be focusing on. In poetic voice, Métis scholar Fyre Jean Graveline (2000) states that she can employ First Voice narrative because, she argues, she is both the subject and the researcher. In doing so, Graveline notes that, "Only those who Are Aboriginal can speak about Being Aboriginal" with any context while the Elders, at the same time, caution not to "...talk about what you don't know" (p. 362).

I support this perspective. I certainly do not wish to speak about being Aboriginal, how could I? I do however, draw from Indigenous-informed stories, and ways of relating to questions, about the land. The primary reason this research has come to be is also because of my own lived experiences on the land. I am, however, aware that my experiences of living in and with the land are the experiences of a non-Indigenous (to these parts) person. Still, I feel my experiences, in part, align with at least some local Indigenous land pedagogies and I believe other settler peoples, might also have much to learn from Indigenous perspectives on these matters.

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<sup>6</sup> In this case I refer to personal experiences taking place in various locations occurring across Western Canada.

At the same time, I understand these Indigenous perspectives of land are born out of an accumulation of stories experienced through tens of thousands of years of embracing a culture that deeply connects people to specific lands. I do not have this same experience, nor is my genealogy connected to over 10,000 years of story-telling in the places I write about in this thesis. However, I have had some small experiences in and on these lands and, working from that, I make my best effort to learn from the stories and teachings shared with me by Indigenous peoples of this land.

In my case, it has been teachings gifted directly from Bear, Wolverine, the Land and now, apparently, also from Crow, that have led me to seek out Indigenous-informed ways of knowing and engagement. I have also followed this route because I see Indigenous Knowledge Holders as experts who might bring deeper meaning to my own experiences on this land and, perhaps, to many others as well. First though, it seems important to find a way to engage this process in a manner that does not continue to mirror the colonial history of oppression already shared. How do we develop the trust and respect required for us to walk forward together in a good way? Shawn Wilson (2008), explains it is through our relationships that we shape our reality and, from this perspective, it seems crucial that we focus on our relationships and the ways we are connected rather than the many ways we strive to separate ourselves.

*“This all seems very confusing.”* I say to Crow who has now returned, landing in a flutter, on a branch above me. He now peers down at me as I write in my backyard surrounded by a sea of Tobacco plants blowing in the breeze. *“What if I can’t figure it all out? There are just so many layers to unpeel.”*

*“I Suppose you’ll just have to keep on thinking about it”* Crow nods *“and, perhaps give up some control.”* Crow sits up indicating that this next point is an important one. *“You might*

*want to leave SOME of this to chance ... looks like you're going to have to learn to adapt.”*<sup>7</sup>

*“But I don't know if the academy will let CHANCE direct my research Crow. It kind of goes against what so much of Western based research is about.”*<sup>8</sup>

*“Don't forget that what we are talking about here” states Crow, who now stands up and straightens out his feathered neck ruffles “...is decolonizing our minds, both in and out of the academy. To change anything, especially mistakes, you have to keep throwing everything up in the air until it all lands in its right place. The muddling up of things is, in fact, an essential part of the process.”*

*“Crow, do you think things will land in their right places in THIS story?”*

*“It's hard to know, but I do think it will be a toss in the direction of trying.”*

*“I suppose that's all we can really hope for in the end isn't it.”*

*“I suppose.” Crow readies himself to fly off again “Why don't you quit trying to make sense of these complicated issues and just get on with the good stuff already!”*

*“Great idea Crow!” I reply excitedly “But, first I think I should define a few important concepts pertinent to this work so as to try and avoid some of those pesky traps hidden along the way.”*

## **1.1 Important Concepts**

### **1.1.1 Storytelling**

This thesis is interlaced with stories of all kinds. Storytelling remains an important element of Indigenous cultural and spiritual continuance and, as such, remains an irreplaceable method of sharing knowledge and learning (King, 2003; Gorman & Toombs,

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<sup>7</sup> Indigenous scholar, Gerald Vizenor, posits a theory for Indigenous survival through chance, change and community which elicits, at its heart, an ability to adapt to ones' surroundings (personal communications with Laurie Meyer Drees & Melody Martin, 2013-2015).

<sup>8</sup> Western research agendas are commonly recognized as those based in objectivity and embedded in imperialist and colonial ideologies that have a history of harbouring Eurocentric value systems and perspectives (Tuhiwai Smith, 2012). Thankfully, in the last 20 years or so, feminist and post-modernist critiques have done much to push academic research parameters beyond this strictly empirically-based Western research agenda.

2009). The stories in this thesis come from Indigenous Knowledge Holders and from characters of the land (Crow). I have also inter-woven some of my own land-based stories, in the form of reflective vignettes, to honour the processes of experiential learning deemed so important to many Indigenous pedagogies (Roue, 2006; O’Conner, 2009; Radu, House & Pashagumskum, 2014). The stories informed by participating Knowledge Holders are clearly introduced as such. Conversations with characters, such as Crow, are indicated by single spaced italics and, finally, as a means of differentiating my own land-engaged vignettes from the rest of the writing I have presented them as boxed and single spaced inserts.

### **1.1.2 Identifying Indigeneity**

As has been shared with me on a growing number of occasions over the years, we are all Indigenous to the land somewhere.<sup>9</sup> However, while this may indeed be true, it is important to nuance the term further to understand the meaning and context of Indigeneity within the context of this work. The United Nations suggest it is important that Indigenous peoples not be defined, per say, but to rather use the characteristics of Indigeneity to identify Indigenous peoples instead (United Nations, n.d.). The United Nations Working Group of Indigenous Populations (UNWGIP) has, therefore, drawn together a number of characteristics to aid in identifying Indigeneity, some of which include and consider: the amount of time a specific territory has been occupied; a “perpetuation of cultural distinctiveness; self-identification and recognition as a collectivity by others...; and an experience of marginalization and dispossession either now or in the past” (Trigger & Dallery, 2010, p. 47; Kenrick & Lewis, 2004). The final identifying characteristic, rather than implying that all Indigenous peoples must experience marginalization and dispossession to identify as being Indigenous, is

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<sup>9</sup> This saying has been shared with me from a number of Elders, Indigenous Knowledge Holders and even in university classes over the years.

included as a means to separate and identify Indigenous rights over claims made from other minority groups in the same locale (Trigger & Dallery, 2010; Bowen, 2000). I would like to further expand on these identifying characteristics by also understanding Indigenous peoples as those “...who identify their ancestry with [that of] the original inhabitants of ...” the land upon which they reside (Wilson, 2008, p. 34).

### **1.1.3 The Land**

Another important concept, informing this thesis, is in that of “the land.” Settler colonial capitalism and consumerist societies broadly know the land, and its constituents, as a compilation of inanimate objects most appreciated by the potential of their monetary value (Robbins, 2013). Such is not the perspective, however, for many Indigenous peoples. In fact, many Indigenous people see the land as a teacher and, as such, it is often turned to as a means of seeking out the answers to life’s questions (Kimmerer, 2012; Simpson, 2014;). Not only is the land seen as a teacher, and holder of knowledge, it is also thought to be imbued with its own spirit and a consciousness that connects all plants, animals and beings who reside upon it. To come to know Bear is thus to come to know the land upon which Bear lives and likewise, to come to know the land is to come to know Bear and all other life forms that live upon and in that land. In this way, an Indigenous understanding of land is a relational one that comprehends the manner in which all things are connected (Wilson, 2008; Tuhiwai Smith, 2012).

So, in following this Indigenous perspective, when I refer to the land I do so with an understanding that (to name but a few elements) the wind, rain, lightning, stars, plants, trees, mountains, rivers and animals (humans included) are all intertwined in deeply connected relationships and, as such, each is equally imbued with their own spirit and consciousness

(Cajete, 1994; Kimmerer, 2012). This concept of land also recognizes that all aspects of land are relations rather than resources in an all-encompassing understanding of the relational connectedness of all things. To carry forward and honour such relations I also refer to Mother Earth in a feminine form throughout this work because, drawing from Indigenous perspectives, she is most commonly seen as a mother and is expected to be respected as such (McGaa, 1990).

#### **1.1.4 Nuancing Conversations of Identity**

People, communities and identities, are complex topics of consideration. Within this thesis, for example, I write about Indigenous peoples, settler peoples and hunters. In understanding the wildly varying complexities and constituents that make up each of these very generalized groupings of people, I feel it necessary to nuance these concepts further.

For example, I discuss an Indigenous-informed relationship with land that embodies a concept of relationality which, to reiterate, is a belief that all things in the natural world are connected through relationship. It is important, however, to understand that there are both Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples who identify with this concept and there are, of course, also those from each and all groups of people who do not. It is therefore important not to stereotype all Indigenous peoples (Mackie & Hamilton, 1993) as being relationally orientated. It is similarly important not to think of all non-Indigenous peoples as equally not being orientated in such a manner. Rather than to turn blindly towards all Indigenous peoples with an expectation of this type of knowledge, I feel it is again crucial to turn instead towards the beliefs and the stories carried within individuals.

Furthermore, there are many vibrant Indigenous communities living across Canada and the United States of America. It is therefore also important to acknowledge and understand

the “complex understandings” and many truths of Indigenous ways of knowing (Newhouse, 2002, p. 6). In essence, every Indigenous community brings with them their own distinct cultural beliefs and practices (Collins, 1991). Even within any community, individuals carry a variety of differing beliefs, opinions and teachings. As such, while there may be a significant cross over of ideas, it is important to understand that the perspectives shared by each of the Knowledge Holders informing this project belong to that individual alone. In other words, the contributing voices may not be of the opinion of the other Knowledge Holders or even that of the entirety of their own communities.

Much like the many varying Indigenous communities, the settler peoples who first came to North America also came with a plethora of varying ideologies, cultures and belief systems. While many Asian laborers settled in Canada, for instance, they were not the driving force behind the colonial action that strove to dominate Indigenous life and land (Day, 2016). Likewise, many Irish and Scottish workers who, in coming to North America, were attempting to flee a violent history in Europe. In fact, many of the land-based European communities, that honoured land, plants and animals in a similar manner as do the Indigenous peoples of North American, had themselves endured violent attacks during the time of the “witch burnings” occurring across Europe between the 14<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries (Goodare, 2005; Levack, 2015).

The settler peoples, to which I refer, should thus be understood as those who both colonized North America and forced upon it an imperialist, capitalist, post-industrial, profit and resource-driven, neo-liberal colonial rule over the land. It is, after all, the now globalized neo-liberal ideologies of settler colonial capitalism and a consumerist economy that continues to drive unsustainable resource extraction practices and capitalist relationships with land (Chapman, 2015). These are the same settler ideologies that have forced many Indigenous

communities to have to stand up in resistance to colonial land-use projects that continue to expand across North American unceded Indigenous territories (Hill, 2009). As settlers on this land, I believe the least we can do, in an effort towards reconciliation,<sup>10</sup> is to actively seek out a better understanding of Indigenous relationship with land and why this relationship is so important to so many Indigenous peoples. Understanding that Indigenous health and well-being cannot be separated from relationships with the land is a concept that needs to be acknowledged beyond the reach of Indigenous communities if genuine reconciliatory progress is to be realized (Place & Hanlon, 2011).

I would also like to nuance my referencing of the hunters who play a part in this research. It is, after all, a direct result of hunting stereotypes that I grew up an anti-hunter. Growing up in the city, the stories I heard about hunting and hunters most often involved that of poaching and other disrespectful engagements with land and animals. Although I am, of course, aware that this kind of disrespectful hunter does most certainly exist, these are not the hunters to which I refer throughout this work. When I speak of hunters in this work, I refer to those who have developed a more heart-centered relationship with land and animals through hunting. This heart-centered hunter understands the respect and reverence required in taking (or even being gifted) the life of an animal. The heart-centered hunter accepts and embraces the many responsibilities that also accompany the act of hunting.

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<sup>10</sup> Reconciliation is an important process necessary to healing Indigenous and non-Indigenous relations in Canada. According to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2015), “[i]n order for that to happen, there has to be awareness of the past, acknowledgement of the harm that has been inflicted, atonement for the causes, and action to change behaviour” (pp. 6-7). Understanding Indigenous relations to land is a key element to engaging this process.

## 1.2 The Project

This research project is a reflective exploration of health and well-being anchored in perspectives of Indigenous land relationships, hunting practices and ways of knowing. The formal research question asks: *How might human-land relationships, as developed through Indigenous-informed hunting practices and ways of knowing, facilitate health, healing, and well-being among North American Indigenous peoples?* However, in this question, I struggle to suggest that this research searches out benefits for *Indigenous* health and well-being for several reasons. First, I am well aware that Indigenous peoples most certainly do not need my help in seeking out their own pathways towards health and wellness. Second, I do not intend to imply that Indigenous peoples would be affected any differently than any other group of people. This would create a superficial division across groups of people who are all human beings who have simply endured quite different circumstances.

The reason I have maintained the objective to identify pathways to health and healing for North American Indigenous peoples is because of the manner in which colonial history has specifically affected Indigenous health. Furthermore, this research is informed by Indigenous Knowledge Holders and therefore must, first and foremost, benefit Indigenous peoples. That said, I also recognize that the teachings shared throughout this research carry a potential benefit for all people. As such, my hope is that, through this project, we might all come to know each other and ourselves better and, in doing so, that we might also engage an opportunity to come to experience a richer relationship with the land. This land is, after all, a home we all share and one we must all come to love, respect and care for accordingly.

From an Indigenous perspective, individual health and well-being cannot be separated from the health and well-being of the land (Gunn Allen, 1992; Howard, 2012).

Understanding this, I have worked hard to align the processes of this project to honour

Indigenous ways of knowing by engaging a land-based, anti-colonizing, methodological approach embedded in relationship driven, spiritually accepting, and emotionally felt Indigenous epistemological ideologies. This methodological approach is to encourage an opening to Indigenous ways of seeing and being in the world; a perspective that elicits a shift from a colonial mindset to one that embraces spirituality in both ourselves and in the land. With this in mind, the main research objectives are to a) explore Indigenous land-relationships, hunting practices and ways of knowing; b) identify how these practices might benefit the health and well-being of individuals; and c) find methods of best expressing those benefits throughout a wider community.

This project is presented through several separate components that should be explored and understood together. The first component comes in the form of this written thesis which exists as both a reflective account of the processes embarked upon throughout the project and the interviews shared by Knowledge Holders who have contributed to this project. The second component exists as an accompanying website which includes photographs, text and videos of the same interviews shared by Knowledge Holders. The intent behind the website, is to maintain the integrity, as well as, the context of the words shared by the Knowledge Holders without the need for me to retell their words in my own writing. Also, to include the interview transcripts here in their entirety, would greatly over-extend the parameters of this thesis. While I have only included sections of the interviews within this thesis, I have ensured that all words shared by the Knowledge Holders remain accessible on the website. The third and final component of this project has been my personal participation directly engaged with teachings, shared by the Knowledge Holders, which I have presented through autoethnographic reflective narrations in both the thesis and the website alike.

An important element of Indigenous teaching and ways of knowing exists as engaged first-hand experience (Roue, 2006; O’Conner, 2009; Radu, House & Pashagumskum, 2014). It is not enough to simply share words to gain a full-bodied understanding of the teachings. Full knowing, instead, comes from lived experience. This project thus provides an example of three modes of knowledge transfer: listening (the interviews), writing and reflection (the thesis), and personal experience (actual engagement with teachings shared by the Knowledge Holders). This project thus also stands as one small example of how to appropriately and more fully engage in systems of Indigenous ways of knowing and knowledge dissemination.

In understanding the complexities of sharing knowledge in this way, I have chosen to err on the side of caution in regards to my role in the sharing of this knowledge. Indigenous peoples of Canada have had others speaking for them for far too long (Cole, 2002; Bennett, 2004; Louis, 2007). Given this, I do not analyze in any formal manner the words shared by the Knowledge Holders. My writings, instead, take a reflective form that encompass my own personal experiences engaged in the process of knowledge sharing. I do not wish (even inadvertently) to alter or dishonour any meaning behind what the Knowledge Holders contribute by shifting their words into mine. Again, the accompanying website provides an essential role here in that it becomes a place where viewers can directly see and hear the words and stories shared by the Knowledge Holders themselves in video form. The words of the Knowledge Holders there speak most powerfully on their own.<sup>11</sup> As such, this thesis largely exists as a reflective document expressing my own experiences engaged throughout this Master’s Degree project. In many ways, however, the heart of the project lives on the accompanying website – earthluv.ca.

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<sup>11</sup> See Cole (2002) for an example of the power of a passionately Indigenized voice in the academy.

### 1.3 Outline of Thesis Sections

This thesis has been broken into five sections. The Beginning (Conversations with Crow), The Middle (Understanding the Story Within), A New Beginning (Learning from the Elders), An End without End (Storying the Teachings into Life, Art & Healing), and a final Summary (An Open-Ended Conclusion). The first section provides an introduction to the project and, in doing so, has introduced some of the characters, concepts and ideas important to the project. The second section explores current academic works and discussions around topics important to this work through a review of current literature. This discussion of literature also has woven through it a selection of my own stories honouring Indigenous appreciation of personal experience in a manner that also appropriately adds to the current academic discussions. Some of the topics explored in the second section are: a brief history of North American land-relationships, why these relationships are so important, the morality of hunting, how health and well-being might be associated with hunting, and the importance of stories. Following this review of literature, the same section delves into the theoretical frameworks and methodologies that inform and frame the work before, finally, outlining the methods used to bring the project to fruition. The third section of the thesis introduces the Knowledge Holders who have informed this project and provides a summarized account of the interviews they have provided.<sup>12</sup> The fourth section then explores, through autoethnographic narratives, my personal experiences directly engaged in land-based teachings shared by the Knowledge Holders and, finally, the fifth section pulls everything together with some concluding thoughts in a brief summary of the project.

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<sup>12</sup> See the website [www.earthluv.ca](http://www.earthluv.ca) for access to videos files of the interviews.

#### 1.4 Who does the Research Benefit?

This project makes an effort to address critical social issues that have plagued First Nations communities since the time of settler contact. As such, I look at how colonialism<sup>13</sup> has effected Indigenous peoples across North America and, in so doing, seek a greater understanding of Indigenous ways of knowing and being in the world beyond the realm of colonial perspectives. Revitalization efforts, such as those which seek to reconnect and/or maintain intimate relationships with the land, continue to shape and reinvigorate Indigenous identities and health today. This is important because being connected with land and landscapes also imbues an important connection to one's culture, ways of knowing and identity. Angèle Smith (2008a) more fully describes this concept:

While once perceived as the mere backdrop to human action and life, it [landscape] is now recognized as having a more critical role in how people live and make sense of who they are and what is their identity. More than simply a physical place, landscape is now understood as also having social and ideological or cognitive elements. It has taken on a metaphorical quality in which people talk about the landscape ... as a body of knowledge, and most significantly as a body of lived experiences of the world. To know the landscape is to know and control the access to that knowledge or to those experiences" (p.15).

Revitalization of Indigenous relationships with land (as this research explores), then also plays a vital role in necessary processes of decolonization. This project seeks to further these efforts. It is, furthermore, essential that above all else Indigenous research must benefit the

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<sup>13</sup> "Colonialism is in part the physical removal of a people from their place along with the infilling of outsiders into that same place. But colonialism is also an act of the ideological clearance of people from place in order to justify and authorize the physical acts of clearance on the landscape" (Smith, 2008b, p. 56).

Indigenous peoples who inform it (Graveline, 2000; Louis, 2007; Wilson, 2008; Tuhiwai Smith, 2012).

With this in mind, the first and most important benefactors of this research are the Indigenous peoples whose voices have, for far too long, not been acknowledged. In fact, to recognize and work to re-establish Indigenous land pedagogies is also to participate in an act of cultural repatriation and, in bringing some of these discussions to the foreground, this work also hopes to support a genuine dialogue towards reconciliation and revitalization. That said, through the teachings shared, I hope all who engage this work also feel invited to explore a deeper and more heart-centered relationship with the land. The process of engaging a more heart-centered relationship with land, in itself, also holds within it a potential for environmental benefits as well. As Knowledge Holders share in this work, we need to heal ourselves (by getting back out on the land) so we can come back into harmony with the natural world. According to Kelbessa (2015), it is also going to take conversations across multiple disciplines and multiple nations to brainstorm new solutions to the environmental problems we currently face today (p. 387). It is from these conversations, across disciplines and through differing perspectives, that I now return to introducing this project and how it came into being.

### **1.5 Researcher Background**

After graduating from high school, in the early 1990's I travelled to Smithers BC. There I completed a guide school training course before traveling further north to work along the Yukon/BC border. This was when I first started to spend time with hunters and people who lived off the land. At first, I worked as a cook and horse wrangler but, with time, I became a fulltime guide working in the Spatsizi Wilderness Plateau, travelling each year for months at

a time on horseback. Eventually, I became an internationally known and award winning big game hunting, fishing & wilderness guide (McGhie, 2000; Shockey, J & Shockey, G, 2002; Davis, 2004; Davis, 2012). During the off season, when I wasn't guiding in BC or Alberta, I was off travelling the world backpacking through Africa, Australia, New Zealand or Southeast Asia. While traveling, I was always connecting with other hunters and harvesters the world over. However, it was during my time spent hunting on the land as a guide that my relationship with the land was most profoundly deepened.

Previous to a personal experience I had with a Grizzly Bear, I had been an anti-hunter. I loved animals and believed hunting counteracted this. Although I was, rather hypocritically, also a meat eater. Somehow, having grown up in the city, I remained disassociated from the fact that the plastic wrapped steaks I bought in the grocery store once lived and breathed as did the animals I so loved. These animals, lining the grocery store coolers, had become a product and I, as a result, harboured no thought of the great sacrifice they had given. I did not hold gratitude for them in my heart because I was too far removed from the processes of their death. I wasn't there to witness them take their last breath. I didn't feel my heart throb from both the love and the sorrow in the moment their life was exchanged for mine. I simply chose the best cut of meat in the cooler and headed for the cashier without a second thought. This perspective, however, quickly changed after my encounter with Grizzly. For Bear was also hunter and from him I would come to learn much about our relationships with each other. A relationship where life's energy continuously jumps between flora and fauna, from one body to the next, in the cyclical dance of life and death that we all share.

After many years of guiding and travelling, one winter I had a skiing accident that left me bedridden for several years. It was during this time that I was enticed into going back to school. I first had to engage distance learning, as I was not able to attend classes in person,

but school, in many ways, helped move me to move through the healing process. I, thankfully, finished a Bachelor of Arts degree in Anthropology in full health and was feeling ready to take on the world again. After completing my BA, I decided to continue on with a Master's Degree and explore, academically, the impacts of further deepening my own relationship with land.

By the time I started my Master's Degree, I'd had many profound personal moments of self-discovery and healing through spending intimate time on the land. Nonetheless, over these years, when I shared stories of my experiences with various non-Indigenous people, most were not able to relate. It wasn't until I started to connect with Indigenous peoples, who maintained strong cultural and spiritual values, that my experiences seemed to be understood and often even reciprocated. Today, when I look to some Indigenous teachings about land relationships, understood broadly and in a somewhat universalizing way, I see within them my own experiences on the land. I see a truth in those teachings because I can see that many of those perspectives are also born from teachings the land has provided. In this way, and for so many Indigenous communities, the land is both teacher and healer of the people (Roue, 2006; Simpson, 2014). It is, in fact, because my own personal experiences seem to best align with Indigenous epistemologies that I have chosen, for this project, to explore the healing nature of human-land relationships from an Indigenous perspective.

*"Crow, are you still here?"*

*"I'm always here."* Crow caws from somewhere above.

*"Do you know how this story is going to end?"*

*"I have a pretty good idea but I'm not going to tell you because it might change the way you choose to tell it! First, you need to decide if you are a rule breaker, and if so what kind. The ending of this story depends entirely on which rules you choose to follow and which ones*

*your willing to push up against! Now get some sleep, and maybe you'll find some new insight in your dreams.*"<sup>14</sup>

Crow then winks at me as he flies off into the fading sun in pursuit of self-inviting himself, no doubt, into someone else's unsuspecting storyline.

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<sup>14</sup> See Kracke (2006), Kovach (2009) and Million (2011) to understand how dreams inform many Indigenous epistemologies and interactions with the waking world.

## II. The Middle: Understanding the Story Within

### 2.1 Review of Literature

This review of literature focuses upon the unique manner in which Indigenous<sup>15</sup> health is intertwined with human-land relationships and the means by which that relationship is both developed and maintained. Specifically, I ask of the existing literature: *How might human-land relationships, as developed through Indigenous-informed hunting practices and ways of knowing, facilitate health, healing, and well-being among North American Indigenous peoples?* Perhaps more specifically, I search for existing evidence about this question in preparation for personally engaging a land-based experiential exploration that further seeks to explore the same inquiry.

The interdisciplinary nature of this review will merge many years of my own personal experiences working as a hunting guide with concepts, theories and ideas from First Nations Studies, Anthropology, Geography and Health Science disciplines. My review unfolds through an Indigenous-informed lens and draws on Indigenous-informed concepts that celebrate the integrity of Indigenous ways of knowing. This is in line with the citational practices challenge Eve Tuck (2015, April) puts forth where she encourages all people to elevate their understanding of, for example, Indigenous topics by reflecting on the citational politics around whose words one chooses to recirculate. In this case, I have chosen to prioritize the words and teachings of Indigenous peoples themselves. In an effort to further

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<sup>15</sup> In Canada, First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples make up three distinct groups of Indigenous/Aboriginal peoples formally recognized within the Canadian Constitution. However, it should be acknowledged, and reiterated, that each of these three nations consists of many diverse subgroups, each of whom maintain unique cultures, languages, histories and spiritual traditions. There are, for instance, approximately 200 individual Indigenous communities in British Columbia alone and such Indigenous diversity is also found across the United States of America. Therefore, it should be understood that, all subsequent use of the terms “Indigenous” or “Indigenous peoples” is in no way intended to diminish the complexity of the many distinct and diverse Indigenous communities who reside across these regions, but rather, is used to acknowledge instances where commonalities might well instead be found among them.

push the pedagogical boundaries of academia, this research further seeks to acknowledge and validate ways of knowing beyond those practiced by a dominant culture or reflected in literature written by non-Indigenous scholars. This decolonization of institutional academic processes, and the means by which knowledge is attained and shared, is critical given the nature of my work and in understanding that many Indigenous people remain wary of Western driven knowledge systems and research methods. Indeed, academic methods and methodologies are, to many, considered a continuation of the colonial processes that have violated Indigenous life since the time of settler contact (de Leeuw, Adam, Maurice, Greenwood & Holyk, 2012; Dei, 2013; Simonds & Christopher, 2013).

Indigenous paradigms often perceive knowledge to be relational and universally sustained within all of the natural world (Wilson, 2008; Tuhiwai Smith, 2012). From this perspective, to gain knowledge is to build on a relationship with all things natural within the universe (Campbell, 2014; Hoffman, 2006, p. 44; Roy, 2014; Tuhiwai Smith, 2012; Wilson, 2008). When Indigenous peoples speak about the land, they often intrinsically refer to this kind of cosmological relationality. For the purpose of this review, therefore, I also seek to embrace an Indigenous-informed, all-encompassing, perspective of the land.

This literature review also honours Indigenous preference for experiential learning by referencing several of my own personal reflective vignettes gathered while working as a big-game hunting, fishing and wilderness guide across northern British Columbia and Alberta (Davis, 2012; Davis, 2004; McGhie, 2000; Shockey, J & Shockey, G, 2002). These personal narratives have been included for the purpose of either supporting the reviewed literature or to address gaps in the literature that my personal experiences on the land might fill. Some of these experiences might also be cross-referenced in some of Wade Davis's writings. As such, Davis has shared many years connecting to the same land and people with whom I have

also spent much of my time, including Outfitters Reg and Ray Collingwood and Elders such as Alex Jack, a much loved and now passed Gitksan chief (Davis, 2001; Davis, 2004; Davis, 2012).

Peer-reviewed articles, university-published literature, government reports and statistics, as attained through Vancouver Island University and the University of Northern British Columbia libraries have also been thoroughly analyzed to inform this review. Finally, it should be noted that, while there is evidence for the healing effects of Indigenous ways of knowing around the world, this review will limit its findings to that of Indigenous peoples across the North American populations of Canada and the United States of America.

### **2.1.1 A Brief History of North American Land Relationships**

At no time in history has a transition across North American human-land relationships been so evident as when white Euro-colonial settlers introduced an industrial capitalist and resource-driven ideology. In an effort to comprehend the extent to which these changes have impacted the health of Indigenous peoples, my research considers Indigenous human-land relationships both before and after relationships between Indigenous people and their land were interrupted by settler imperialist ideologies.

Despite the distinct differences among North American Indigenous communities, many of these communities lived healthy and vibrant lives for thousands of years prior to European contact. Archeological evidence suggests Indigenous hunter-gatherer and agrarian societies maintained healthier lifestyles than did the agricultural societies that prevailed after contact (Waldram, Herring & Young, 2006). Many Indigenous peoples maintained deep reciprocal relationships with the land, the animals they hunted and the plants they harvested for food, medicine and ceremony. As such, it was often common practice to acknowledge the land as

both teacher and healer of the people (Radu, House & Pashagumskum, 2014; Restoule, Gruner & Metatawabin, 2013; Simpson, 2014). Potawatomi scholar Robin Kimmerer (2012) explains how many Indigenous peoples saw (and still see) the natural world (the land) as embodying its own consciousness, intelligence and spirit. She explains how plants are seen as living beings that have been around for much longer than human beings and therefore hold within them an abundance of intelligence. They are looked upon as teachers who inform and guide the people with their knowledge. Not only do they provide humans with the air we breathe but they also nourish us with food and medicine (Kimmerer, 2012). These cultural teachings have connected Indigenous peoples to the land in a manner that gives structure and meaning to a way of life that also fortifies a foundation for increased health and wellness (Howard, 2012).

Laws that governed many Indigenous people's lives were derived from teachings that the land provided. Through looking to the natural world, such as with observing the relationships between specific plants and animals, Nishnaabeg peoples also learned how to maintain their own relationships with each other and the land (Simpson, 2014). Cree land use practices incorporated vast information systems that provided a holistic understanding of the ecosystems from which they regularly harvested and hunted (Peloquin, 2009). Haisla worldviews also acknowledge an interconnected system linking all of the natural world in a manner that also informs them how and when to fish or hunt (Green, 2013). Such is the case among many other Indigenous peoples and communities (Basso, 1996; Cajete, 1994; Deloria, 1999).

Although Indigenous peoples often followed strict regulations in regards to hunting and harvesting rights, they did not see the land itself as something that could be owned. They did however, believe that if you carried a right to hunt or harvest across a certain landscape then

you also carried a responsibility to take care of that land and the other living beings residing there. Haisla scholar, Jacquie Green (2013), explains how Haisla spiritual and ceremonial rituals, that specifically link environmental conservation methods with resource-based activities such as hunting, stand as an excellent Indigenous model for environmental sustainability based on reciprocity. Tewa scholar, Gregory Cajete (1994), similarly explains how hunting and preparing for the hunt in his community also involve "...a spiritual ethic of conservation and [an] ecologically sound approach for maintaining the life of the animals hunted" (p.98). The epistemologies that keep these Nishnaabeg, Haisla, Cree and Tewa conservation methods alive are often borne out of creation stories which, in their telling, further link Indigenous people to the land in a myriad of ways.

Such stories also guide and inform a complex system of governance that both shapes and drives the nature of resulting human-land relationships. Through creation stories, communities learn that the land is sacred and, rather than simply residing on it, teach people they are intricately connected to it. Paula Gunn Allen (1999), a Laguna Pueblo scholar, states that in the American Southwest, Indigenous peoples see themselves as a part of the land, without separation. One of her community members further describes this concept by simply stating, "...the earth is the mind of the people as we are the mind of the earth" (p. 315). An episteme such as this revitalizes a relationship with the natural world and creates within it a desire for people to care for the land as if it were an intimate and well-loved family member.

A Tahltan Elder from northern British Columbia shares that "...the measure of a Tahltan was not [decided by] the colour of [their] skin or the makeup of [their] blood but [rather in] the manner in which [one] treats the land" (Davis, 2012, p. 55). Delgam Uukw (1992), a Gitksan hereditary chief from British Columbia, explains how his people are married to the

land, and when that marriage is cared for in a proper way, the land produces a power for the people that can be handed down generationally through songs, drumming, dancing and community sharing. This, in of itself, creates a give-and-take, self-sustaining, reciprocal relationship in which the land and the people care for each other with both benefiting and perhaps even thriving as a result.

### **A Child's Grave**

One afternoon, while wandering alone through the forests of the Spatsizi, I happened across the very old remnants of a child's grave. The fragments of the short wooden fence sheltering the burial were almost as weightless, in their age, as the tall dry grass framing its posts. Sitting, I shared a moment in the fading sun, contemplating the life of the child who lay in the land beneath me. Later that evening, arriving back at Hyland Post, I inquired about the grave and was surprised to learn that no one seemed to know of it despite its close proximity to base camp. It wasn't until later in the season that Alex Jack, a Gitxsan Elder from the area, was able to provide us with the details of the young Indigenous girl who had been buried there during a time when Alex and his people still moved nomadically across those same landscapes.

Sometime later, the Ministry of Fish and Wildlife arrived in camp to start a prescribed habitat rehabilitation burn and this young girl's grave lay at the foot of the mountainside destined to be set ablaze. I was deeply saddened in the days to follow, as I watched the fire rage along the ridge where this small grave had lain protected for so many years.

After the fire, and with the ground still smoking, I walked alone through the smoldering haze determined to locate the gravesite so I could once again mark the land in some way to honour the child who lay within it. The land, now black and crisp, snapped beneath my feet as I searched its charred remains for some recognizable landmark. Then to my surprise, I came across a small patch of land (barely large enough to fit the single grave within it) that had miraculously escaped unscathed from the fire. There, in its centre stood the small grave. The fence posts remained as dry and fragile (and as unburned) as they had been the very first day I had happened upon them.

I can come up with no rational explanation as to how that gravesite survived such a raging fire. However, I cannot help but notice a whisper in the back of my mind that speaks to an Indigenous episteme better explained by Sophie Thomas, an Elder from Saik'uz, who states simply that "[i]f you take care of the land, the land will take care of you" (Teegee, 2015). These teachings depict a deep, sacred and meaningful merging with the land that is

strengthened by an understanding that the land itself is imbued with intelligence and ecological consciousness (Cajete, 1994, p. 85, Kimmerer, 2012); a consciousness that might even recognize and remember those who have nurtured their relationship with it.

In direct contradiction to this Indigenous relationship with land, when settlers<sup>16</sup> arrived in North America we, in large part, did not see the land as sacred and while we also recognized a power in the land we often searched out that power through domination, manipulation and through owning the landscapes. Capitalist settler governance has, in this way, largely been based on manmade non-reciprocal policies rather than on teachings that the land, itself, has provided (Miller, Ruru, Behrendt & Lindberg, 2010). In many ways, the arrival of white Euro-colonial settlers attempted to desacralize the landscape and, in doing so, fractured both Indigenous human-land relationships and identity (Ireland, 1996; Peloquin & Berkes, 2009).

However, even before settler contact ensued, European and Asian disease, spreading north through South and Central America, devastated North American Indigenous populations with epidemics of small pox, influenza, measles, whooping cough and tuberculosis. In some cases, these epidemics wiped out between 50% - 90% of entire Indigenous villages (First Nations Health Authority, n.d.). As such, many of the Indigenous peoples of North America did not survive this pre-contact wave of disease that washed over the land (Meijer Drees, 2013; Waldram, Herring & Young, 2006). Those who did survive, were subject to yet another wave of disaster in the colonial assimilation processes that would soon challenge what remained of their way of life (Howard, 2012).

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<sup>16</sup> It should be reiterated here, that the settlers who colonized North America covered a vast array of people, cultures and objectives, not all of whom intended to bring an imperialist rule over the land. As such, in this case, I refer to white Euro-colonial settlers who also carried with them imperialist, capitalist, profit and resource-driven ideologies.

Furthermore, when white Euro-colonial capitalist settlers arrived in Canada, we largely perceived, what remained of these Indigenous communities, as a barrier between us and a resource rich land. The only thing standing in the way of attaining ownership of this land was the fact that it was already occupied, and being cared for, under Indigenous governance. Therefore a number of political strategies were employed with an aim to grant settlers more access and control over the land.

Drawing on the Papal Bull “Inter Caetera,” issued in 1493, the Doctrine of Discovery was implemented in the Americas as a political means of delegitimizing and devaluing Indigenous authority and rights to occupy land (Gilder, 2009-2016; Miller, Ruru, Behrendt & Lindberg, 2010, p. 100). Land dispossession was further implemented through treaty negotiations and, while Canadian treaties formed prior to 1850 focused largely on military alliance and peace and less commonly on land title issues, treaty agreements in and after the 1850’s started to gravitate more towards negotiating large tracts of land out of Indigenous control and into that of the government (Dion, 2008).

The Constitution Act of 1867 continued to increase legislative authority over Indigenous peoples and their land (Dion, 2008). Come 1870, sickness and starvation, largely due to loss of the Buffalo<sup>17</sup> as a main food source, set the stage for the implementation of treaty negotiations on the prairies. Such treaties compensated communities, who surrendered large tracts of land, with items such as “a small cash annuity, [smaller] reserves of land, schools, agricultural assistance, and hunting and fishing supplies” (Dion, 2008, p. 8). Between 1871

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<sup>17</sup> So long as Indigenous peoples had the buffalo they had food and, it was thought, unless they were starving they would never agree to treaties. This ideology led to a massacre of millions of Buffalo, in large part, as a means to better control the Indigenous populations of Canada and the United States. This was a US policy/activity that naturally affected Plains peoples in Canada due to the south/north migration of the herds. As Tasha Hubbard (2014) describes, “...destroy the buffalo, and one destroys the foundation of Plains Indigenous collectivity and their very lives” (p. 294).

and 1921, eleven Numbered Treaty agreements were signed in Canada. The standard objectives of which were to: “(i) settle Indians on reserves; (ii) provide them with farm implements, and (iii) educate them in preparation for an agrarian lifestyle” (Dion, 2008, p. 9; St.. Germain, 2001).

As such, many Indigenous communities, who had traditionally moved with the animals and the growing seasons, were relocated to restricted reserves of land (Bussidor & Bilgen-Reinart, 1997). Over the coming years, a growing number of hunting, trapping and game regulating policies continued to further restrict Indigenous peoples by limiting their ability to hunt, trap and survive off the land (Ireland, 1996). This shift, from hunting, gathering and Indigenous agrarian practices to that solely of stationary colonial agrarian practices, necessitated an increased dependence on the government. This not only granted the government more control over Indigenous peoples but it did so while also removing whole Indigenous communities from their resource rich lands.

Along with land dispossession came a number of other assimilation practices designed to eradicate Indigenous culture and identity. Indigenous languages were banned in residential schools, for example, and on a larger scale Indigenous ceremonial practices were made illegal (Hoffman, 2006, p. 3; Howard, 2012, pp. 3-4; Kulchyski, 1992, pp. 181-182).

Approximately 150,000 Indigenous children, were taken from their families and placed in schools designed to “educate” the “Indian” out of the child (Thielen-Wilson, 2014). More than 50,000 of these children would never return home to their families (Annett & International Tribunal, 2010).

Under Canada’s assimilation policy, Indigenous “people[s] were expected to have ceased to exist as a distinct people with their own governments, cultures, and identities” (Truth & Reconciliation, 2015, p. 53). The idea was to replace Indigenous identity, governance,

culture and language with a learned colonial identity as seen fit by the colonial governing forces of Canada. One of the most efficient ways to interrupt entire cultures, in this way, is to remove generations of children from their families and communities. This became the goal of Canada's Indian residential school system. For over a century, Indigenous children were torn from the arms of their parents to be placed in residential schools, sometimes hundreds of miles from their families, where they were often abused mentally, emotionally, physically and sexually (Annett & International Tribunal, 2010; Truth & Reconciliation, 2015).

While not all residential schools (and faculty) were places (and facilitators) of such abuse, the extent to which such cruelties ran rampant was widespread enough for many to consider these schools as key contributors to the attempted cultural genocide of Canada's Indigenous populations (Annett & International Tribunal into crimes of church and state, 2010; Thielen-Wilson, 2014). After years of hearings, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission released the following statement in their final report:

For over a century, the central goals of Canada's Aboriginal policy were to eliminate Aboriginal governments; ignore Aboriginal rights; terminate the Treaties; and, through a process of assimilation, cause Aboriginal peoples to cease to exist as distinct legal, social, cultural, religious, and racial entities in Canada. The establishment and operation of residential schools were a central element of this policy, which can best be described as "cultural genocide" (Truth & Reconciliation, 2015, p. 1; Akhavan, 2016).

These schools became places of, "...at best, institutionalized child neglect" (Truth & Reconciliation, p. 47, 2015) and, at worst, many became unfettered places of unimaginable child cruelty and torture (Annett & International Tribunal, 2010). As a result, many of the children traumatized by these practices, have turned, in their adulthood, to alcohol, drugs, and other forms of addiction as a means of coping (Elias, Mignone, Hall, Hong, Hart &

Sareen, 2012; Dion, Cantinotti, Ross & Collin-Vézina, 2015).<sup>18</sup> This has, in many ways, facilitated a cyclic pattern of continued trauma for family members who, even today, continue to be affected by residual trauma passed down from those who lived through the residential school experience.

Under colonial rule, abuse and racism came to dominate Indigenous life from all angles. These events (the Indian Act, the residential school system, displacement, land dispossession and the fracturing of language and culture etc.) coupled with the marginalization and social exclusion that also paralleled these processes, have left generations of Indigenous peoples traumatized in its wake (Roué, 2006, p. 15-18). These, and other colonial practices, set in motion events that continue to manifest today in land use conflicts (Davis, 2011; Yearwood-Lee, 2008), racism (Braun, Brown, Ka'opua, Kim & Mokuau, 2014/2013), and the impoverished health and well-being of many Indigenous communities (Douglas, 2013; Greenwood, de Leeuw, Lindsay & Reading, 2015). These colonial practices have resulted in overwhelming health inequities and disparities experienced across numerous Indigenous communities (Greenwood, de Leeuw, Lindsay & Reading, 2015; Loppie, Reading & Wien, 2009; Reading, 2009; Richmond & Ross, 2009).

Today, Indigenous peoples make up 5% of Canada's total population, yet they account for almost 25% of both the country's prison population (Statistics Canada, 2015a) and its homicide victims (Statistics Canada, 2015b). The leading cause of death among First Nations people under the age of 44 is self-inflicted injury and suicide (Health Canada, 2015). In British Columbia, Indigenous peoples are five times more likely to be hospitalized for

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<sup>18</sup> Canadas Indigenous peoples are an amazingly resilient and strong people and while there have, understandably, been many Indigenous peoples who have fallen to addiction and other self-harming practices as a direct result of these colonial assimilation practices, it is important to also acknowledge that there are many who have stopped the destructive cycles of abuse set in motion by these same colonial practices.

substance related disorders than all other groups combined (British Columbia, 2009).

Clearly, there is a social crisis in effect that is devastating a portion of Canada's citizenry and impacting the human capital of this country. This crisis remains a direct result of Canada's history of colonization, exploitation and what has come to be recognized as the attempted cultural genocide of a people.

While there is a growing movement to address these health concerns, such efforts are often strategized from the same colonial mindset that separated Indigenous peoples from their land and culture in the first place.<sup>19</sup> Rather than continue to burden Indigenous communities with colonial notions of "health" and "help" in regards to their own health and well-being, it seems essential that these communities be allowed the space and the support to self-determine their own pathways to health as well as the freedom to do so on their own terms (Hirsch, 2011).

Today, as a means of healing, many Indigenous peoples have, with great success, turned back to their own cultural teachings and the ceremonies that have long connected them to the land (Francis, 2008; Robbins & Dewar, 2011; Ruml, 2009). Many of the practices linking wellness to land have, for thousands of years before settler contact, provided a foundation for the continued existence of vibrant and healthy Indigenous communities to thrive (Green, 2013). Furthermore, evidence suggests that hunting also acted as an important means of connecting individuals to the land in ways that strengthened human-land relationships and, in doing so, have also acted as a means to improve physical, emotional, mental and spiritual health (Brody, 1988; Roué, 2006).

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<sup>19</sup> A colonial view of health, well-being and healing, while it may be beneficial in some cases, is often not culturally appropriate as a sole means of achieving increased health and wellness when dealing with the colonial traumas experienced by many Indigenous peoples across North America.

However, colonial-driven, corporate-sanctioned environmental dispossession has significantly impeded this process. Land dispossession, driven by modern consumption practices, increasingly disrupts and threatens important Indigenous pathways to land and health (Gatrell & Elliot, 2015; Richmond & Ross, 2009). In fact, Nishnaabeg scholar Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (2014) argues that land dispossession is currently the biggest threat to Indigenous systems of knowledge today (p. 21). I would argue that land dispossession is also one of the largest threats to Indigenous identity, health and well-being today as well.

### **2.1.2 Why Land Relationships Matter**

The importance of human-land relationships is becoming increasingly recognized across a growing variety of disciplines. Paralleling an Indigenous perspective, Angèle Smith (2008a) shares an understanding that, “[l]andscapes are made by the people [who] engage with them, and in making landscapes, the people themselves are made...” (p. 14). Kathleen Wilson (2003) also shares that, while current academic conversations on “therapeutic landscapes” focus on the physical and symbolic connections linking geography and health, they fail to grasp the full breadth of the importance of daily engagement with the land and the social, emotional and spiritual links to land that commonly form Indigenous identity (pp. 83-84). Understanding the significance of this concept of dailiness<sup>20</sup> is crucial because it is through these daily interactions on the land that a deeper spiritual connection with that land is realized. Sarah De Leeuw (2016a), in examining British Columbia’s colonial geographies, further reveals how a connection to place through spirit, sometimes experienced as an

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<sup>20</sup> Dailiness is a term coined by scholars Laurie Meijer Drees and Melody Martin. Both were professors at Vancouver Island University during my undergraduate degree. I was first introduced to this term in 2013 during an FNAT 300 Indigenous Knowledge: Land as Life course co-taught by both Dr. Meijer Drees and Dr. Martin.

ancestral connection to a specific landscape, might also have a significant impact on an individual's experience of identity, health and well-being.

Anishinaabe scholar Gerald Vizenor (2008) explores the reasoning behind why he thinks so many settler ideologies seem to have developed an emotionally and spiritually void relationship with the land. In doing so, he explains that a belief in one God, the conviction of many colonizing populations, "...takes the risk out of nature and natural reason..." (p. 11). Vizenor (2008), continues to describe how this belief often promotes an emotionally absent and dominating relationship with the land and its inhabitants. Alternatively, when all aspects of nature (rather than a single God) are understood to have their own spirit and consciousness, the landscape then becomes alive again with emotion and even risk, should one not engage the land in a respectful manner.

To maintain a healthy landscape, an emotionally connected and holistic understanding of that landscape must also reside within the values that drive management decisions and land-use policies. However, as is so common in many colonial and neo-colonial practices, respect for the natural world often remains absent with any larger contextual understandings of relationality being most often either oversimplified or ignored altogether (Peloquin, 2009). The environmental damage from clear-cut logging, for example, affects not just the loss of the immediate habitat, but effectively alters an entire ecosphere of life for at least 50 years after its re-plantation (Dombrowski, 2007). These long reaching consequences are rarely prioritized or taken into adequate consideration.

A growing body of evidence suggests that Indigenous health and healing is fundamentally reliant on re-establishing the healthy human-land relationships that were first fractured with the onset of colonization (Big-Canoe & Richmond, 2014; Radu, House & Pashagumskum, 2014; Tobias & Richmond, 2014). Jessica Place and Neil Hanlon (2011) state that

acknowledging First Nations' environmental value systems, especially in regards to land use and stewardship issues, remains a critical step towards realizing improved health and well-being among northern British Columbian Indigenous populations. As such, Indigenous land use and stewardship practices are also intricately woven into Indigenous hunting practices and ceremony. Regardless, many people today, who remain sensitive to the land and the lives of the animals who inhabit it, also hold a perspective that the act of hunting itself is an immoral activity. This, unfortunately, creates a divide between two groups of people who, I believe, may in fact have more in common with each other than might first be expected (Knezevic, 2009).

### **2.1.3 The Morality of Hunting**

Is hunting a moral activity? Many would argue that it is not (Worcester, 1995; Simon, A. 2016). Others recognize hunting occurs naturally throughout the zoological scale of life (Ortega y Gasset, 1995). There are also those who understand hunting to be an important expression of the natural laws of the land (Wade, 1990). However, there are as mentioned, many different kinds of hunters and a good number of them do not harbor respectful relationships with the land and animals they hunt. I tend to think of this group more as killers and, as such, I feel the need to reiterate that this group does not represent the hunters I refer to in this work. To better understand how hunting might be linked to health, it is vital to identify what kind of hunter I refer to within the context of this inquiry. Therefore, for the purpose of this review, I understand a hunter as being a person who has developed a respectful and holistic relationship with the land and the animals they hunt, who understands the weight of the gift of life that the hunted animal provides, and who expresses some form of gratitude for that gift. In short, this group might be referred to as more heart-centered

hunters. It is from this perspective that the act of hunting should be realized in this discussion.

Some scholars argue that the morality of the hunt should be determined by the manner in which the act exhibits virtuous characteristics resulting in a reflective, respectful and humble fair chase of game (Kowalsky, 2010, p. 31). The act of hunting demands a hunter spend a considerable amount of time in the wild places where animals reside and that the hunter learn the most intimate details of those landscapes and the animals who reside there (Harper, 1999, pp. 66-67; Reo & Whyte, 2012; Simpson & Cain, 2000). Hunters can become so enlightened by nature's nuances that they begin to read the land like a story and start to see the land as though through the eyes of the animals of which they hunt (Davis, 2004, p.114; Leopold, 1949; Ryden, 2008). For heart-centered hunters, the more they develop their knowledge base the greater the respect and awe grows within them for those animals and the lands upon which they reside (Kowalsky, 2010, p. 31). This might also result in a growing desire to maintain harmony within the environmental systems that support the foundation of that knowledge base. In this way, the wild places become a second home for the hunter that might also inspire an underlying desire to protect and care for it.

Some prominent environmentalists have rigorously supported the act of hunting. Aldo Leopold, for example, has long argued that ethical hunting deepens a hunter's connection to the land. Leopold even goes so far as to claim that mindful hunting acts "as an expression of love for the natural world" (Simpson & Cain, 2000, p. 183). Leopold further suggests that the ethical hunter is, in fact, more harmonious with the natural world than the non-hunter (Simpson & Cain, 2000, pp. 187-188). The cyclic nature of life and death feeding into one another has governed the planet for millions of years prior to human existence. I consider this pattern to be a driving constituent of what might then be considered the natural world

and the natural laws of the land that govern it. I would argue, as human beings, when we attempt to remove ourselves from, or place ourselves above, these cycles of life and death, we actually start to lose sight of who we are and how we are, in fact, intricately connected to all other life on this planet. It is when we become so disconnected, from the reality of an environment that sustains us and gives us life, that we in our ignorance become capable of causing that same environment (and ultimately ourselves in the process) significant harm.

Calvin Luther Martin (1992) describes "... how deeply interdependent biological systems are..." when he talks about relationships between predator and prey (p. 85). These relationships might be expressed and understood as constituents of a biotic pyramid (Wade, 1990). This biotic pyramid describes the manner in which all inhabitants of the earth, each equal in their own right, feed off of one another in a consecutively growing array of species, ranging from the smallest of organisms to the largest. As one species feeds on the next, this relationship eventually circles back onto itself when the largest of species dies and once again becomes nourishment for the smallest of organisms (Wade, 1990, pp. 20-21). In other words, death itself is what feeds life, and life in turn feeds death. One does not exist without the other. Rather than remove ourselves from this ancient cycle of life and death, I suggest we instead learn how to embrace the cycle in a more honourable and respectful manner.

This cyclic understanding of the natural world also parallels many Indigenous perspectives and epistemologies. A hunting member of the Lac du Flambeau Reserve shares his understanding of this cycle of life when he describes his relationship with a hunted deer. He shares that "[j]ust to eat [a deer] is an honor, and for him to give his life to feed me is one of the greatest gifts you can ever receive... I wish I could give my life up to feed one of them but I can't, but who knows, one day when [I'm] pushin' up daisies maybe one'll eat off my grave" (Reo & Whyte, 2012, p. 21). Indigenous epistemologies also seem to acknowledge

this pattern and understand how, in death, every organism supports the life of an entire cosmos of species as is described in Wade's (1990) description of the biotic pyramid.

For humans to remove ourselves from this cyclic relationship with the land is not only to disconnect ourselves from the natural laws of the land but also to remove ourselves from our own understanding of self in regards to our cosmological relationship to all other life on earth. "Wellness is [about] knowing who we are" and knowing who we are is intrinsically linked to knowing where and how we are there as well (Greenwood, de Leeuw, Lindsay & Reading, 2015, p.141). Every being on this planet requires nourishment to survive and thrive. In recognizing the inevitability of the kill, I feel the morality in attaining the nourishment required for life should then be determined by the level of honour, integrity, respect, gratitude and responsibility lived and expressed towards the life source of that nourishment (McLean, 2000, p. 178; Leopold, 1949, p.224). This kind of gratitude, is often not realized when the source of our sustenance, be it plant or animal life, remains a comfortable distance away. However, gratitude often becomes a defining characteristic for those who engage a holistic understanding of the natural laws of the land embedded in the cyclic processes of life and death as understood through the act of hunting.

It is not easy to watch death overcome a being. This is precisely why being present and respecting the life of that animal becomes so important. Witnessing such an event is what continues to humble the heart-centered hunter, reminding them of the gift of life that the animal has provided. It has been my experience that many hunters (even among the world of sport hunters) partake in some form of moral code (Wade, 1990, p. 16) and consider the act of hunting to be a privilege rather than a right (Henderson, 2006, pp. 49-50). Many hunters I have worked with engage in some ritualistic act of gratitude, each acknowledging this gift of life in their own way. For the heart-centered hunter who witnesses an animal take its last

breath, those raw and intimate moments become impossible to forget. There are, however, many who continue to survive without ever needing to witness such an act. This creates a distancing from the actuality that the cost of our life exists only in death of another, be it plant or animal.

An example of further distancing from this reality can be found in the use of language. Contemporary meat-eating societies typically refer to the meat we consume, for example, as beef rather than a cow, or pork rather than a pig (Presser, 2011). According to Donald McLean (2000), the use of non-specific terms to refer to food animals often results in distancing the consumer from the idea that the meat we eat was once a living being. This process allows for animals to become products on a shelf; destined to become a resource for human consumption (p. 178). Using language in this way may, according to some, provides a layer of protection from the often-harsh realities of the natural world and the idea that for life to exist, it must feed off of other life.

A tendency for some, perhaps even many, people to create this kind of distancing from the land and our sources of sustenance, may in fact, drastically reduce our ability to maintain a healthy existence on the planet (Hild, 2007, p.17). Alternatively, when we develop the skills required to become a skillful and heart-centered hunter, these processes may then act as a means to reconnect us to the land and the laws that govern it. When we become intimate with the landscapes around us through hunting, and witness the exchange of life that hunting provides us, then these processes may also encourage deepening notions of self-identity and self-worth and, in turn, might even provide an improved experience of health and well-being.

Indigenous peoples, such as the Anishinaabe,<sup>21</sup> have long considered hunting to be a

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<sup>21</sup> I have referred to the Ojibwe, as identified in Reo and Whyte's article, as Anishinaabe here and in future reference as this is the more commonly preferred term of the Anishinaabe (Ojibwe) peoples.

sacred act and the ethical actions that maintain the spiritual framework of hunting are strictly adhered to through moral codes that follow traditional belief systems (Reo & Whyte, 2012). Many Indigenous hunters, for example, often pray to the game that they hunt and believe that the animals give themselves up willingly so long as relations are properly maintained (Laugrand & Oosten, 2015; Reo & Whyte, 2012). Sacred and symbolic gifts, such as Tobacco, are often offered to an animal before, during and after a hunt (Reo & Whyte, 2012). It is not uncommon, among Indigenous nations, for the death of an animal, in many respects, to be treated in the same manner as the death of a person (Reo & Whyte, 2012). This is indicative of a belief system that prioritizes the sacredness of an animal's life to be on a similar level as with that of a human being. I have also experienced animals offering themselves willingly to the hunt.

### **The Gift of a Hunt**

Hunting through a landscape is entirely different from hiking through one. When a hunter walks every sense is on high alert: the softest of sounds are inspected, the sound of a distant snapping twig, the smell of a nearby moose, awareness of the slightest shift out of the corner of your eye, the touch of a twirling wind on your skin telling you which way to make your approach, and the taste of the crowberries you encounter as your body hugs the ground in a slow approach to a ridgeline as you peer over the other side in heart thumping anticipation.

This is just the beginning though, soon, and with enough time spent on the land in this way, senses you did not know you had start to awaken within you and you start to feel the land around you in a whole new way. Elders such as Alex Jack and Charlie Abou shared stories of how they connected to the same landscapes and how they could feel where the animals were miles and mountains away. Some see these stories as myths and others know them from a much deeper place that comes from knowing the land in this way through experience and time.

Every day, before hunting, I developed a habit of sending out a prayer of gratitude. I asked if there was an animal who was ready to cross over to the other side, that they present themselves to us, so we could assist them in their transition. I ensured them that we would make that transition as quick and as painless as possible.

One day, while hunting with a client, I was given a powerful vision of a moose. I instantly knew, stronger than anything I had known before, that my hunter would shoot that moose on the banks of Hotlesklwa Lake the following day. I knew exactly where that moose would be and I knew that he would be there because he had already given himself up to the hunt. In doing so, he had called us to him.

The following day, before first light, we headed straight for Hotlesklwa Lake and long before we could see him, I knew he was there waiting for us. I could literally feel him with my whole body. This was my first teaching from the land that convinced me in a fully encapsulating way that, if the act of hunting is engaged upon in a mindful and respectful manner, then human beings might actually be invited once again to participate harmoniously with the cycles of life and death, as directed by the natural laws of the land.

For the Anishinaabe, the prayerful communications that take place with the animals before the hunt are known as *taagoziwin*. These special talks are part of a detailed protocol that presents itself throughout every stage of the hunt. When an animal gifts itself to a hunter it becomes the responsibility of the hunter to care for the landscapes where those animals reside. It is the pride of an Anishinaabe hunter to show those animals the highest respect, to protect their habitat and to make a quick and painless kill (Reo & Whyte, 2012).

### **Connecting with the Land**

It has been my experience, when a person spends enough time in deep relationship with the land, that a part of them starts to seep into that land and, in a cyclic flow of energy exchange, a part of that land also seeps back into them. Sometimes when this occurs, this energy exchange is also accompanied by a larger body of knowledge that is not normally otherwise attainable. When I first experienced this level of connection to these northern landscapes it quickly instilled in me a deep passion for every aspect of this land. Recognizing a plant along the trail became like seeing an old friend and learning their medicinal properties became as exciting for me as it was to spot the most majestic Caribou or Grizzly.

We were hunting, yes, but the hunt, for me had become all about understanding the intricacies of the land and its inhabitants. It had become more about life than it was about death. After experiencing the spirit of the land flow through me I wanted to know all of it on an intimate level. I was impassioned. When this transition started to occur, my body, mind and spirit also started to experience something remarkably beautiful. I speak from first-hand experience when I proclaim that a connection like this makes a person stronger mentally, physically, emotionally and spiritually and provides, at least in my experience, an incomparable sense of well-being.

Wade Davis (2012) also speaks about how Indigenous Elders, Charlie Abou and Alex Jack, could feel the animals in this deeper way. In a discussion about hunting, each animal is described to be "... a sacrifice, a gift to man [so] that people might live, all with the understanding that human respect in turn had to be given so that all wild creatures might thrive" (p. 16). For many Indigenous peoples, the sharing of knowledge is, in this way, often felt in a deeply embodied manner. Many Anishinaabe also feel that knowledge accumulates and is held in the land where it can be picked up by those who come into relationship with it. Consequently, for Anishinaabe peoples, knowledge about the world is infused "...by moving around in their environment, whether in dreams or waking life, by watching, listening and feeling, actively seeking out the signs by which [that knowledge is] revealed" (Peloquin, 2009, p. 543). Similarly, the most profound teachings I have received, throughout my journey of becoming a hunter, have also come from feeling direct teachings and experiences on and with the land around me.

Capitalist, profit and resource-driven ways of conceptualizing land seem to have disassociated humans from this capacity to feel, know and learn from the land. However, for many Indigenous peoples and communities, the concept of life and death are so intricately interwoven with land and animals that to think of them separately, or as something to be feared, is almost unfathomable. Indeed, for some Indigenous peoples, the living world readily engages with the Spirits of passed Ancestors, as they do with the Spirits of animals, plants, and even mountains, rivers and trees. In this way, all of the natural world is believed to be alive (Cajete, 1994; Davis, 2009). For Indigenous hunters, death is often simply seen as a means of moving into a different form, or as a process of reincarnating into a different body (Jefferson, 2008; Mills & Slobodin, 1994). So long as the hunted animals were respected and

cared for according to the appropriate protocols those animals would continue to reincarnate back into animal form and offer their bodies again to the hunters (Jefferson, 2008).

According to the Athabaskan oral traditions of the Tlingit and the teachings of the Inupiat Inuit, the mountains, glaciers and landscapes are considered to be sentient beings who listen and respond to their surroundings (Cruikshank, 2005; Hild, 2007). An Athabaskan hunter from northern British Columbia describes how, at his death bed, he “sang in” the Foxes, the Wind and the Rain. All of whom had become his allies early in life. At a vision quest he participated in as a child, the Fox, the Wind and the Rain had each taught him their songs, and in nearing his death, he sang them in one last time to thank them for all they had provided him throughout his life (Martin, 1978). Accounts like these provide an image of a heart-centered hunter who maintains deep and reciprocal relationships with the natural world. The words of this Athabaskan Elder and hunter underscore the importance of human-land relationships and, in so doing, hints towards the manners in which hunting, land relationships, health and healing might all be deeply interconnected.

#### **2.1.4 Hunting & Healing**

Indigenous identity and land are inseparable (Wilson, 2003; Gunn Allen, 1999). As such, hunting can act as a powerful medium for connecting individuals to the land and natural world in a myriad of ways that induce a sense of health and well-being. Cajete (1994) explains how historically “Indigenous hunting rituals [have] reflected the perpetuation of a covenant between the hunter and the hunted” and that in “... preparing for the hunt [the hunter] was also preparing for life, a preparation most essential to body, mind, and spirit” (p. 98). These life preparations not only taught hunters about courage, sacrifice and the importance of sharing, they also connected them to “...the special power gained through

vision and spiritual questing.” Through ceremonies, such as these, individuals learned they each had an animal spirit, or totem, residing within them and that “...understanding that spirit through hunting was one of the most important lessons of self-knowledge” (Cajete, 1994, p. 98). For some groups, such as the Oglala Sioux, once an animal totem was acquired, a hunter was often restricted from hunting that animal and often even from marrying someone who carried the same animal spirit within them (Jefferson, 2008, p. 38).

It is important to recognize, however, even if hunting may have been beneficial in the past, this does not mean it should still be considered a healthy activity in the present or potential future. Research that looks at the health impacts resulting from conflicting colonial and Indigenous land use ideologies today is hard to find (King & Furgal, 2014; Place & Hanlon, 2011). However, some scholars such as King & Furgal (2014) have specifically addressed this gap by engaging a transdisciplinary meta-analysis that looks at current health benefits and risks of Indigenous land-based hunting practices. The findings of their analysis suggest that increasing cultural and environmental changes have caused notable health impacts on Indigenous peoples who engage in traditional land-based activities such as hunting and harvesting in their traditional territories; a growing number of which have been contaminated by industrial pollutants. While this might well be the case, it also underscores the consequences of ever increasing materialistic human desire set within a globalized, corporate, and capitalist driven resource extraction based relationship with the land.

According to Robbins (2013), a healthy capitalist economy is dependent on any country maintaining an annual growth rate of two to three percent gross domestic product (GDP). Personal consumption is the main contributor to maintaining the accumulated growth of a country’s GDP. This means a capitalist economy depends on people purchasing more and more items. However, those items are largely created from resources that come from the

land. Therefore, as our need for material goods grow (to appease a healthy economy) so does the need for resource extraction and ultimately increasingly unsustainable environmental destruction (Robbins, 2013). While the pollution of the planet directly affects everyone's health, it is particularly devastating for land-based populations that depend on harvesting their food directly from the land itself (King & Furgal, 2014). Globalization further complicates things as the benefactors of resource extraction practices, that most effect local Indigenous communities, are often controlled by forces far removed from the communities and landscapes that they effect (Place & Hanlon, 2011). This makes it increasingly difficult for Indigenous communities to address these issues because the people who benefit from and control these resources will often never set foot on the land they destroy. Indigenous communities and allies have continued to resist this kind of environmental dispossession and devastation (Hill, 2009; Simpson, 2017). Such resistance is, however, commonly met with a strong state sponsored police presence that criminalizes the actions of Indigenous peoples and their allies who stand up to protect their rights, land, health and sovereignty.<sup>22</sup>

Despite globalized desires of unencumbered economic growth, a finite planet cannot support a resource-driven capitalist economy that continues to demand infinite growth (Pretty, 2013). As resources on the planet continue to diminish at a rate faster than can be replenished, it becomes increasingly more important to understand human-land relationships not just for the purpose of supporting Indigenous health (although this alone is worthy of the action) but also to come to understand how, in relationships with land, humans are affecting

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<sup>22</sup> Such was certainly the case in my own experiences at Standing Rock in North Dakota. In October 2016, I along with colleague and friend, Nicole Schafenacker, joined the Standing Rock Sioux Nation in their peaceful resistance to the Dakota Access Pipeline. Despite remaining in lawful silent prayer while standing with Indigenous leaders and Elders on Fort Laramie Treaty land, we were pepper sprayed, threatened with guns and tanks, and were arrested and held in jail for several days.

the health and well-being of all peoples the world over. Capitalist settler land relationships, and the epistemes that support such relationships, continue to ambush Indigenous pathways to health in a myriad of ways. Philosopher Ortega y Gasset (1995), for instance, has long recognized the drudgery and monotony of “civilized” settler work to be “degrading to the human spirit” (p.17). Furthermore, colonial systems of survival have, especially in the case of Indigenous populations, led to widespread issues of alcoholism and violence (Roué, 2006, p. 15). However, a resident from a Beaver Indian reserve in the Canadian north claims that “[t]he answer to the alcohol problem is to be found in one word, the *bush*” (quoted in Brody, 1988, p. 253). Hugh Brody (1988), describes the transformation he regularly witnessed among British Columbia’s Beaver Indians when they left town and headed into the bush to hunt and trap. He describes a people who, in town, were tense, violent and drunk, but who, once out hunting, stopped drinking and became markedly more confident, relaxed and supportive of one another (p. 253).

The James Bay Cree also provide an example of how healing occurs through acts of hunting. Several Cree Elders have been facilitating hunting and healing camps in northern Canada. The Elders focus on Indigenous youth troubled with addictions, violence and crime and, in accepting them unquestionably, create a spiritual bond with the youth as they learn to fend for themselves on their Ancestors’ land (Roué, 2006). These are not disciplinary camps with harsh consequences doled out when the youth act out. Instead, the Elders are quiet and patient, allowing the youth to give a voice to their pain, anger and frustrations without judgment. It is the land that quietly teaches them the consequences of their actions. When they do not gather water from the lake they go thirsty, and when they do not collect firewood they grow cold (Roué, 2006). If they want to eat, the youth must learn how to become heart-centered hunters. This means learning to listen to the teachings of the land. As the youth

learn to hunt, they also gain confidence. As this transition progresses, they slowly start to open up and trust again. The Elders understand that reconnecting the youth to teachings in the land can heal them and, as a result, the community has experienced unprecedented successes in helping these youth work through their pains and trauma (Roué, 2006).

A Chisasibi Cree nation in Northern Quebec has also followed a similar path. In doing so, they have developed a land-based healing program that involves learning traditional bush skills like hunting and fishing, but also incorporates a variety of additional lesson plans (Radu, House & Pashagumskum, 2014). Through community, patience and traditional teachings, these Cree Elders and communities are also successfully working to heal the colonial traumas that have been passed down through generations.

Another way that hunting might empower a person's sense of well-being, beyond the more obvious physical and nutritional health benefits, is that hunting practices and experiences bind families, friends and communities together (Cajete, 1994, p. 98). For many Indigenous communities, hunting provides the framework for important lessons around sharing and caring for others within the community (Place & Hanlon, 2011, p.169). Traditionally, at least half of an animal, and frequently far more, is given away to other members of the community (Reo & Whyte, 2012, p. 18). This practice is still a widely followed tradition for many Indigenous peoples. On the Lac du Flambeau reserve for example, a First Harvest Ceremony is held when a young hunter makes his first kill. The seasoned hunters first teach the youth about hunting protocols and then, by giving away all of their first deer, the youth learn the important gift of sharing and caring for others (Reo & Whyte, 2012, p. 20). This relationship, in addition to securing a person's sense of confidence, pride, compassion and identity, also minimizes stress in the whole community

through the added security realized in knowing that food will be available even when individuals can no longer hunt for themselves.

### **Healing through the Hunt**

I have personally witnessed the healing effects that a hunting community can create. For many years I worked alongside a man, who has struggled deeply with bi-polar disease. He is an incredibly skilled hunter, largely due to his unusual sensitivities that might be, in part, also a result of his bi-polar disease. To protect his identity, he has chosen to be referred to herein as Sylvio.

Every hunting season, lasting almost four months, Sylvio would become increasingly more confident and at peace. He would literally thrive from this time living off the land among the company of other hunters, horses and guides. But come the end of the season, Sylvio would have to go back to the city where the demands of life, and the loss of the camaraderie he had known in the bush, weighed so heavily on his shoulders that he usually would require institutionalization even when continuing with all of his prescribed medications.

I have watched this pattern unfold for many years. At the beginning of each season, when Sylvio returned to the bush he was barely surviving life, his spirit broken and his well-being dangerously diminished. Yet, each consecutive day spent connecting with nature through the act of hunting created a visible improvement in his demeanor and eventually resulted in, to all appearances, him reaching a picture of health.

Unfortunately for Sylvio, his heightened sensitivities also make it particularly difficult for him to witness the accounts of a disrespectful hunter. While most guides have their own ways of dealing with this type, the actions of a disrespectful hunter can be particularly damaging for a guide as sensitive as Sylvio.

There is, of course, no way to know the exact cause of Sylvio's improved health in this situation. However, I feel confident, having born witness to such patterns in his life over a great many years, that this time spent on the land plays, in at least some part, a notable role in Sylvio's improved sense of well-being. Sylvio stands as an example of how the impact of hunting, the communities built around hunting, and time spent in nature, can provide a level of healing significantly more effective than what might be achieved through Western

prescribed medications alone.<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, Sylvio's inability to witness disrespectful human-land interactions speaks to the value of hunting protocols that nurture respect and depicts an unsavoury image of the hunter who engages in the act void of these teachings.

### **Perspectives on Hunting**

I have also guided clients who could not be described as heart-centered hunters and I have witnessed the most significant healing transitions occur among some of their ego driven personalities, not because someone has lectured them to see things differently, but rather because they have been left in silence to learn directly from the land. The more time this type spends on the land, and the harder they have to work for an animal, the less they become a killer and the more they become a hunter. Every day, more of their ego personality melts away with the rain that soaks into and freezes their bones.

Slowly and methodically, the land breaks down their protective barriers. The loss of a superficial confidence creates space for fear. Vulnerability and unknowing seep into the psyche and with that comes humility and an ability to see the landscape surrounding them through a new set of eyes. I have witnessed hunters fall apart at the final stages of a stalk, after hiking to exhaustion and facing the loss of so much of who they thought they were. Many times, I've had a client give up the hunt at this point even though they know they only need climb the last 100 yards to finish the job.

They fall apart. Many of them cry. They're too tired. It's too steep. It's too cold. It's too far away from anything that resembles the comfort and safety of their home. All of a sudden, they realize that the land decides their fate, not the other way around. Something inside of them breaks and when it does the land seeps right in through the cracks.

As a guide, it is my job to pick this new humbled person up and hike the last 100 yards together with them. When they succeed with this hunt, there is a different kind of victory made. This hunter has received a true gift from the land. This isn't a process that can be taught in a classroom, or learned through the reading of a book. The lessons of this teaching demand full participation and a direct experience on the land, but the results of the experience can potentially alter a person's life forever ... so that even for the most accomplished businessman who has reached the highest successes in a capitalist world, when all those superficial layers of "who he is" are stripped away, and he is left with only his raw self and the land beneath his feet, it is he who suddenly realizes how vulnerable he has become because he has made no relationship with the land upon which he stands.

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<sup>23</sup> By western medicine, I refer to a medical approach that "follows the way of hypothetical deduction," divides health from disease, and "tends to change the environment" as opposed to inductive medical approaches that prioritize balance and "prefer to adapt to the environment" in their processes of seeking pathways to health (Tsuei, 1978, p. 551).

This is a phenomenon that, although not spoken about often, most guides know well. So many times, I have witnessed unpleasant hunters arriving on a floatplane only to see them fly home having blossomed into a more grateful version of their previous selves. There is something undeniably spiritual in this interaction with the land. An increasing number of academics argue it is precisely this revitalization of spirituality and reintegration with traditional ecological knowledge systems that remain key and pivotal components to realizing genuine Indigenous health and healing (Robbins & Dewar, 2011; Wilson, 2003). I do remain aware, however, that some of these ego-driven hunters may cast aside these powerful transitions when they return to their homes, social groups and/or business boardrooms. Never-the-less, in the moment on the land, I have witnessed men breaking down in this manner and I have seen it to have a lasting impression, although how long it lasts, I cannot say.

Allowing ourselves to become vulnerable to the land in this way is an important aspect to coming to know ourselves but this experience is increasingly buried in the shadow of profit-driven capitalistic desires. In this day and age of globalization, many North American Indigenous peoples stand in direct opposition to the globalized, corporate, profit-driven mindset that impedes Indigenous pathways to health and that continues to perpetuate Indigenous environmental dispossession and the degradation of Indigenous land.<sup>24</sup> Indigenous scholars such as Leanne Simpson (2014), in fact, actively call out for help against this battle and, in doing so, reiterate the need to acknowledge Indigenous land pedagogies.

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<sup>24</sup> Some current examples of Indigenous lead movements against resource extraction projects can be found in the ongoing resistance movements of the Sioux Nation against the Dakota Access Pipeline near the Standing Rock reservation in North Dakota, in Lax Kw'alaams in resistance to the Pacific Northwest LNG at Lelu Island, BC, in the Kwakwaka'wakw resistance against the Norwegian fish farms along BC's West Coast and in the Unist'ot'en resistance against a number of pipelines that have been proposed to cross Wet'suwet'en territory in northern BC.

Simpson further suggests that if the academy is serious about valuing Indigenous ways of knowing, then it should be equally as engaged in protecting the landscapes from within which that knowledge resides. One such way of acknowledging these Indigenous land pedagogies can be found in the processes of storying.

### **2.1.5 The Importance of Stories**

Stories are, and have been, an important medium for linking both hunting and health with values that foster the maintenance of a respectful relationship with the land (Radu, House & Pashagumskum, 2014). Moreover, there is clear evidence that suggests the process of storytelling holds therapeutic qualities in of itself (Albert & Cox, 2003; Parker & Wampler, 2006; Koch, 1998; Buck, 2012; Rahmani, 2011; Lachman, 2013; Weaver, 2016; Stapleton, Whiteside, Davies, Mott & Vick, 2014; Hart, 2011). The therapeutic benefits of narration can thus be considered when conceptualizing the sharing of hunting stories among friends and family. In other words, sharing stories of the hunt may also have beneficial impacts on the health and well-being of hunters and the communities with whom they share both their bounty and their hunting stories with.

Storytelling has long been a favorite pastime among hunters. Consider stories describing the excitement of the stalk, characteristics of the landscape, and the manner in which that landscape communicates how best to traverse its features in relation to the direction of the wind and the location of the hunter and the hunted. Did the hunter understand the animals relationship with the land to know where to find them? Once found, did it take hours for the hunter to finesse into a position that allowed for a clean shot? Did they harbour the foresight and patience to wait hours for the animal to get up and start to feed in a certain direction in order to get that clean shot? In other words, did the hunter have to consider the future actions

of the animal? Did they have to learn how to think like that animal, essentially “becoming-animal” in some deeply felt way (Watson & Huntington, 2008, p. 257)?

In this way, hunting stories are imbued with a wealth of ecological knowledge and, when shared with others, also become powerful vehicles of ecological knowledge transmission (Cajete, 1994). Audre Lorde (1980/2006) shares, “I have come to believe over and over again that what is most important to me must be spoken, made verbal and shared, even at the risk of having it bruised or misunderstood. That speaking profits me, beyond any other effect.” (as cited in Koch 1998, p. 1187). Even the process of sharing stories of the hunt might then be considered a therapeutic and healing process in of itself (Kovach, 2009).

According to Indigenous scholar Vine Deloria (1999), “...every feature of a landscape has stories attached to it” (p. 252). Indigenous creation stories, for instance, often contain important teachings that celebrate a sacredness in all living things and, in doing so, connect people, animals and landscapes in deep and meaningful ways. Many creation stories speak of a time when humans and animals spoke the same language and were even linked together through common ancestors (Jefferson, 2008, p. 37).

For the Woodland Peoples of northeastern Canada, human-land relationships play a crucial role in their understanding of the creation of the world. Their creation stories share how the Great Hare made the ocean and the land and then, after making people out of the corpses of fish, birds and animals, taught them how to hunt using bows and arrows (Harper, 1999, p. 20). The teachings in these stories continue today to define and shape the nature of human-land relationships among Woodland Peoples. The sharing of these kinds of stories, and especially those that teach about hunting, often begin while a child is still in their mother’s womb so that, for example, the Spirit of an expected child might learn not to follow their father out on hunting trips and potentially frighten away the game (Harper, 1999, p. 22).

For over 3 decades, scholar Carl Hild (2007) focused his research on traditional knowledge systems and land relationships of the Alaskan Inupiat in an effort to assist in the improvement of health and well-being among their northern communities. Hild shares that these “Indigenous people[s] celebrate space and time in the marking of ... hunting success at a location. The place and story [of the hunt] become the means to sustain and make sense of life [and] [t]he cultural patterns of that spiritual process bec[o]me the stories of belief and survival...” (p. 17). Here, Hild presents a theory of survival built on a connection to a specific landscape that provides sustenance for the Inupiat people through the act of hunting. Personal stories about hunting frames the landscape and holds in place a belief system that maintains the sacred relationship between humans and the land.

Davis (2001) suggests, similar ties binding space, place and story are also embedded in the epistemologies of other northern Canadian Indigenous peoples. Davis describes the Canadian north as “... a world where animals dominate and the dialogue is between predator and prey” (pp. 27-28). He further explains how even “[t]o record the myths of Athabaskan Elders, one has to become a hunter, for the myths are an expression of the covenant that exists between men, women and the wild, a way for the Indian people to rationalize the terrible fact that in order to live, they must kill the creatures they love the most, the animals upon which they depend” (p. 28). Davis, in sharing how Gitksan Elder Alex Jack had, with his father, walked 64 km through the snow for the sole purpose of determining the length of a cycle of tales, describes how deeply entwined with the landscapes these stories are (p. 36). For many Indigenous peoples of northern Canada, when a question arises they turn to the land for answers, whether to support a rationale of their existence on the land or simply just to move across its features in an effort to frame the content of a story in some cyclic element of time, story and space.

Davis (2001) also describes how, when Alex shared a story, his audience was pulled into the tale almost as if they were experiencing it themselves: “Every telling was a moment of renewal, a chance to engage through repetition in the circular dance of the universe” (p. 33). For this reason, these stories were meant to be passed on orally. Learning to witness and engage in a story with one’s whole body and mind seems to be an important Indigenous skill that is linked to the oral traditions. This skill is often developed by learning how to properly *sit, watch* and *listen* (Meijer Drees, Martin & McFarland, 2012). This way of sharing important teachings and knowledge is not meant to be written down on a piece of paper that can be put aside, lost or forgotten. The teachings gained through oral traditions and repetitive storytelling are designed so that the message is taken inside the body and carried there, so that these stories also become a living part of the people who carry them.

In the same way that human-land relationships demand a direct experience on the land, Davis (2001) describes how Alex’s stories also needed to be experienced to receive the full gift they provided. These oral stories from long ago teach how the people were once married to the animals, how they are taught directly from them and how the teachings they receive are passed on orally generation to generation (p. 34). In this way, the people learn, with their whole bodies, a healthy way to respectfully engage with the animals they are required to hunt. Additionally, time spent out on the land hunting also provides an opportunity to strengthen the cultural bonds between Elders and youth, which provides even further benefit by strengthening the cohesiveness of whole hunting communities (Howard, 2012, p. 3).

In “Telling Stories about Stories,” de Leeuw (2014) argues alongside a wealth of Indigenous scholars and authors, including Thomas King and Leslie Marmon Silko, that it is through the language and imagination of stories that we come to know ourselves and that, in the end, we are defined entirely by the stories we carry within us. In the same article, de

Leeuw introduces the Raven Speakers of Haida Gwaii and shares how the Ravens have, for many years, informed the Haida through stories (pp 65-67). But the Haida are not the only peoples listening to the stories Raven has to share. Gitksan Elder and Chief, Alex Jack, spoke of an old Native tale that taught how listening to the land and the animals could lead a hunter to game. In this story, it was also said how hungry Ravens would often alert hunters to large game they couldn't kill themselves.

### **Raven Teachings**

It was late one cold and windy afternoon. Myself, another guide and a client had been Moose hunting hard for days. Just as the rain started to transform into soft and silently falling flakes, we started to hear the caws of a Raven. Remembering the story, we decided to follow the Ravens cries, which eventually led us to a small lake. Glassing the shoreline, we were astounded to find a magnificent Moose feeding near the bank of the lake. Above the Moose, through the silently swirling snow, we made out our first glimpse of the Raven who had called us there. We thanked Raven and provided him a belly full of Moose as we prepared the meat and hide for travel. Then I silently thanked Alex Jack for the teachings he had provided us through the sharing of his stories.

Stories can teach people how to hunt, but, as Keith Basso (1996) explains, those stories can also hunt back. Like many Indigenous epistemological beliefs, the teachings found in stories follow a cyclic pattern. Even when someone might believe they are the one following a storyline, that story can sneak up behind them; stalking them at a later date; ensuring they continue to live their life right. In “Stalking with Stories,” an excerpt from Basso’s book *Wisdom Sits in Places*, Apache Nick Thompson, describes how stories are like arrows that stick into you “work[ing] on your mind and mak[ing] you think about your life” (p. 58). Basso further suggests that the power found in Indigenous stories exists in their ability to create genuine relationships between people and their landscapes and through that relationship suggests that they directly shape the moral codes by which the people who engage those stories live.

Hunting stories, however, do more than set moral codes. They also inform the peoples who circulate them about healthy ways of living in all manners of life. Haisla scholar, Jacquie Green (2013) expresses an urgency to preserve and retell the ceremonial stories that teach her people how, through preparing properly for the hunt, to live an emotionally, mentally, physically and spiritually healthy life. Furthermore, Indigenous stories often hold within them the potential to re-establish and revitalize cultural, spiritual and community life lessons that lay at the heart of what it means to know who you are (Simpson, 2014). As such, these benefits foster the capacity to impact the health and well-being of any people. Stories, in this way, become a tool for sharing knowledge about how to connect with the land in a way that holds very real potential for increasing health and wellness for those who engage them. The act of hunting then, also becomes a means of both exploring the teachings found in stories and a means of living those same teachings into real life experience. Through this process, the teachings brought forward through story might then manifest into powerful full-bodied knowings. It is through the direct experience of hunting-the-teachings-into-being that their full-bodied and fully felt capacity becomes manifest and, with that, an even further enriched sense of health and well-being.

Indigenous stories are also often steeped in spirituality and the spiritual relationships with the land, plants and animals portrayed throughout the storying. Living such stories into being requires time spent on the land to come to know firsthand the spiritual side of these relationships. Thus, understanding Indigenous spirituality and the value placed on experiential learning also then becomes an essential constituent to understanding Indigenous relationships with land and the myriad of ways these relationships might connect to the health and well-being of a people.

## **2.2 Indigenous Methodologies & Theoretical Frameworks**

### **2.2.1 Experiential Learning & Spirituality**

Most Indigenous peoples and communities have maintained spiritual relationships with the natural world for thousands of years prior to colonization (Basso, 1996; Cruikshank, 2005; Delgam Uukw, 1992; Gunn Allen, 1999). Perceptions of land and human-land relationships were largely desacralized with the onset of colonial and capitalist rule (Harper, 1999; Peloquin & Berkes, 2009; Davis, 2011). As Ross Hoffman (2013) posits, alongside a wealth of other scholars, Indigenous peoples today often maintain the epistemological belief that living a good life stems from maintaining a balance between both spiritual and physical dimensions (as cited in Dumont, 1976; Bopp, Bopp, Brown, & Lane, 1984; Battiste, 1988; Colorado, 1988; Beck, Walters, & Francisco 1990; Irwin, 1994; Ermine, 1995; Couture, 1989, 1991, 1996; Simpson, 1999; Kawagley, 1999; Brant-Castellano, 2000; Cajete, 2000; Fixico, 2003; Meyer, 2003, 2012). It is thus crucial that this spiritual dimension, which is often overlooked in academia (Ver Beek, 2000), must also be honoured and acknowledged throughout this work. However, as Jane Bennett (2010) points out, there have been negative connotations associated with animist and anthropomorphist belief systems commonly affiliated with Indigenous epistemologies. As such, these belief systems are often considered, by some, to be pre-modern and out-dated ontological perspectives (Sundberg, 2014). Thankfully though, there has been a growing critique of research paradigms that privilege empirical data collection over those driven by less tangible means, such as, research that takes into consideration a spiritual dynamic (Hoffman, 2006/2010). These conflicts mirror some of the issues that researchers, who engage Indigenous-informed methodologies,

face when that research is critiqued purely through a scientific and empirically driven Eurocentric lens (Seligmann, 2014).

Indigenous ontological perspectives remain deeply varied. Nonetheless, faith and the moral codes that govern many Indigenous hunting practices, are known to actively shape and harmonize the ecological landscape and, in that, might ultimately produce a sustainable co-existence with nature (Fang, Hu, & Lee, 2016; Kelbessa, 2015). Tim Ingold (2011) explores the nature of this deeper relationship with the land when he explains how the land is “infused with human meaning” that can be “picked up” by those who come into deep relationship with her (p. 57). Nevertheless, these kinds of less tangible, and spirit-based, land pedagogies have often proven difficult for some Eurocentric science-based scholars to accept and acknowledge in the past. Thankfully, a more full acceptance of such epistemologies and ways of knowing has been growing within and among many academic circles today.

Ingold (2011) continues, “In hunting and gathering, as in singing and storytelling, the world ‘opens out’ to people...[T]hrough the practical activities of hunting and gathering, the environment...enters directly into the constitution of persons, not only as a source of nourishment but also as a source of knowledge” (p. 57). In a film series inspired by Richard Nelson’s (1986) book *Make Prayers to the Raven*, Nelson and Badger (1987) share that there have been “many taboos observed [among Koyukon hunters] in order to ‘show reverence for the spirit in each animal’” (As cited in Button & Murray, 1989, p. 524). The development of *this* kind of experiential and spirit-based learning experience, is steeped in respect and reverence and is often gained through personal engagement in ceremonial practices and time spent on the land. This is precisely what is needed to start to develop the “eyes” to see and the “ears” to hear what the land has to share.

...

*“So Crow,” I call “what is the best method for someone like me to engage in this kind of relationship-driven, experience-based, spiritually connected kind of work?”*

*“Well,” Crow flies in, fluffing his feathers and seemingly trying to look all official “the research methods ARE important but the processes of decolonization, which are certainly needed to do this kind of work, are more about relationships and the MANNER in which the researcher engages the theoretical mindset and methods behind the approach” (Tuhiwai Smith, 2012; McDonough, 2013, p. 459).*

*“In other words,” I chime in because I think I get this one “what you’re saying, is that the presence of Indigenous methods in university research does not necessarily mean that decolonization is taking place. Rather, it is the mindset (and methodology) behind the methods that makes all the difference AND changing the mindset entails making an effort to EXPERIENCE Indigenous paradigms first hand.”*

*“Exactly!” Crow agrees. “For instance, when scholars talk about Indigenous ideologies in an academic setting without first building a personal first-hand relationship with that ideology the effort remains something of an empty vessel.”*

*“Yes!” I jump in again excitedly “AND ... when we talk about Indigenous land pedagogies, for instance, it doesn’t matter in how many academic journals the topic presents itself, it matters if the readers (and the writers) have a PERSONAL understanding of what it MEANS. And Indigenous land pedagogies are not something you can learn in a book. There are not words that can elicit the phenomenon. This is something you have to come to know firsthand. It’s a relationship you have to build and experience yourself before you can talk about it (or negate it) with any kind of meaningful substance.”*

*“Very good,” states Crow “sounds like you have some experience on these matters.”*

*“Well, just a little bit,” I reply shyly.*

I recall growing up in the city and how I had, freshly out of high school, discovered a wilderness guide school taking place in Smithers, British Columbia. I applied to the program, got in and made what would become the first of many northbound trips. Once there, we learned wilderness first aid, how to make a lean-to and had a bear awareness day with old time trapper Herb Green who taught us the intricacies of reading a bear’s intentions and the myths of bear spray. About a month into the course, we were to put all we had

learned into practice by surviving a night alone in the remote wilderness after hiking to exhaustion. To replicate a real-life survival situation, the only items we were allowed to have with us were the clothes on our back, a knife, a lighter and a can of bear spray ... and with that we were dispersed deeper into the bush to survive for the night alone.

### **Grizzly & Me**

In the dimming light, I searched the forest and found a place suitable to spend the night. I started to gather firewood as the rain that had soaked us on and off throughout the day was quickly turning into moments of hail and snow. I was exhausted, and as I watched the sun threaten to slip behind the silhouette of the mountain peaks, I knew it was going to be a long cold night.

I quickly started a fire to dry my clothes, collected the branches that would become my survival shelter, the spruce boughs that would become my bed and blankets for the night and enough firewood to last until morning. I built a shelter and fire reflector wall and then crawled into my bed of spruce boughs and drifted off to sleep under an icy canopy of trees, warmed by the dancing light of my fire and blanketed in a seemingly eternal night sky.

I awoke from the cold many times that night, each time falling back into a dream world filled with bears. In every dream, the bears were just doing their thing, going about their life, except that their life was like ours. It seemed perfectly normal for them to be doing the things that we humans do. It was dream after dream after dream. And the bears continued to move through me, in this way, throughout the night.

So, when the morning sun was just starting to dissolve the darkness of the night and I heard strange bear like grumblings, in my exhausted state, I simply thought I was still dreaming. I rolled over in my bed of boughs turning my back to the fire, and the world beyond it. It took a little while for me to realize that I actually felt more awake than I did asleep but I was confused because, if I was awake, how was it that I could still hear the bears in my dreams?

Panic suddenly overcame me and I was instantly jolted awake. I tried to think of all the things in the forest, other than a bear, that could be making the sounds I was hearing. In my head, I went over everything we had learned about bears: that it was most important to remain calm, stand your ground, don't scream and at all costs don't ever run! I knew that to stay calm, if it was a bear, I would need to, at least feel like I, had some control of the situation. With my back still to the fire, and whatever was making that noise, I thought about where I had left my can of bear spray. I then decided I would slowly roll over and reach for the spray before allowing myself to look out in search of the source of these sounds.

So, I rolled over, keeping my eyes down, and reached for the bear spray. Then I sat up. And I looked out to see a massive Grizzly Bear. Standing up. Downwind of my camp about 40 feet away. He had one paw on a tree beside him as he stretched his nose towards the sky searching out the scent of my camp. Instincts kicked in and I shot out of that lean-to so fast I hadn't even realized I had done so. I found myself wedged between two logs and the fire staring, in disbelief at the biggest Grizzly Bear I had ever seen. He was at once both magnificent and utterly terrifying.

I immediately felt the blood pumping through my veins, threatening to explode, and my heart rhythmically bursting through my chest making it difficult to breathe. I scanned the forest for some safe place to escape to and found none. My heart sank as I realized this could likely be my last day on this earth. I didn't think there was any other option when found in a situation such as this. Then, after reaching the depths of my despair, I started to pull myself together. I realized, so I told myself, that I did have two things in my favour. The first was I had a can of bear spray. The second was that the Bear was on the other side of the log, directly in front of me, which now lay there like a line drawn across the forest floor. In my mind, as long as the Bear was on the other side of that log it meant I wasn't yet bear breakfast.

I thought about what we learned about Bears in the course. Herb had explained to us how using bear spray can often turn a nonaggressive Bear aggressive and can, in turn, spark an attack that might otherwise not have happened. I watched the Bear closely and determined that he didn't seem to be acting aggressively. But I really didn't know. I was just a young kid fresh out of the city, I was certainly no Bear expert. However, realizing I may only have one chance to get this right, I made a promise to myself that I would not use the bear spray unless that Bear was coming over the log directly in front of me. That way I would know, without a doubt, that he was attacking me, that the spray would have the most potent affect, and that spraying him directly in the face would give me the best window to try and make an escape. Although, where I would escape to, I did not know.

As if responding to my deepest fear, this massive Grizzly got down on all fours and slowly started meandering towards me. He walked to the left and then to the right, stopping to stand every so often; his nose stretching high into the sky, investigating my smell floating towards him in the chilled air. As he slowly approached, I couldn't believe what I was witnessing. Could this really be happening?

15 feet ... and that bear kept coming ... 10 feet ... I anticipated what his teeth were going to feel like as they crushed through my skull ... 5 feet ... and everything was in slow motion, creating in itself a disorienting sense of an alternate reality. But this wasn't a dream, I had never been more awake in my life.

That Bear walked right up to my log and then he stopped. I could have reached out and touched his face; his head round and huge before me; his small dark eyes piercing into my humbled humanness. His smell wafted over me and I could feel his breath steaming into the air between us. I wondered then, seeing this moment as the calm

before the storm, if I would still feel my arm, as he fed on it, after he ripped it free from my body. But then something happened.

I looked across the log and suddenly saw *into* the depth of his eyes for the first time. And it was as if cool water was washing over my body, from my head to my toes, it happened slowly and my body tingled with the sensation. Strangely, as the coolness washed over me, it started to displace my fear and I suddenly felt like I could see into this Bears soul; like this Bear had pulled me inside his body; our souls combining in utter grace. I could suddenly feel what he was thinking and what HE was feeling. I instantly realized, beyond doubt, that he had no intentions of hurting me. He had simply been going about his business in the early morning hours when he came across a strange and unknown smell. He had simply come to investigate its source.

If there was ever a moment in my life I could choose to relive, it would be this one; this moment when the fear left my body; standing within arms-reach of this magnificent animal. What seemed like a lifetime passed looking into his eyes, feeling his thoughts and seeing the world through his eyes from the inside out. I was completely mesmerized by him. He pulled me right inside him and I liked it there.

When he finally broke our gaze, he lowered his head, turned and started to slowly walk away. Before I realized what I was doing, I discovered my body was following him. As my body climbed over the log in front of me with full intention of following this Bear into forever, a flash of reality hit me (or at least the reality that I normally reside in) and I quickly remembered that here, in this reality, we don't follow Grizzly Bears deeper into the wild places of the world. Yet, he was calling me. My body could hardly resist the temptation.

That's when I realized he was perhaps calling me to follow his path symbolically. And I knew in that moment I would not be returning to the city. I realized, with my body still tingling from the experience, that my life would be forever changed from this moment on. I had no idea where this new path would lead me but I knew I had to find out.

He continued to walk away. At about 20 feet he stopped and turned to look back at me, then he turned again, the golden hairs on his hump shimmering in the gentle golden early morning sun, and went along his way. I never saw him again.

Note: After our survival night the class did not believe my story with Bear. However, when we went to visit everyone's survival shelters the next day we found fresh scratches in the tree where Bear was standing when he woke me up as well as his tracks leading right up to the reflective log of my shelter.

All my life I assumed hunting was about killing. Through the teachings of Grizzly, I have come to understand it is really about much more. How ironic is it that a Bear would lead me into a deeper more respectful relationship with the land through hunting. For this is where

the path of the Bear would lead me. It was this moment with Bear that ultimately enticed my mind, and my heart, into a new relationship with the plants, animals and the land around me; a relationship I had previously and unknowingly remained so deeply disconnected from. In following the path laid before me by Bear, I would no longer remain separated from the cycles of life and death. I would, from this point forward, come to experience them first hand. This project was ultimately born from that crisp morning the day Grizzly Bear invited me into his being and, as such, this story, lived and experienced in and with Bear, remains the seed from which the passion that drives this research project has grown.

*“But I know what I have experienced is just the tip of the iceberg! I have SO MUCH MORE to learn!”* I exclaim to Crow. *“That’s why I am going out on the Land (with the Knowledge Holders informing this project) so I can personally experience Indigenous methods of connecting deeply with the Spirit in the Land!”*

*“Ah yes the SPIRIT in the Land,”* Crow winks at me in a way that suggests he already knows the answer to the question he is about to ask. *“So, by this do you mean that an Indigenous relationship with the land is a matter of religion?”*

*“Well no...not necessarily in any kind of organizational sort of way,”* I think quietly to myself for a moment *“but...I think...like religion, it IS about connecting to something much larger than ourselves and there is definitely a SPIRITUAL dynamic in that.”* I continue *“In my experience, it’s like all the plants, animals and landscapes have their own spirit and intelligence and they are, in turn, connected by a greater consciousness that can be interacted with. This is really important because when we honour this Spirit-in-the-Land, especially when we harvest from it, we can also learn, from it, how to do so in a way that is respectful. This, in turn, might then elicit a sustainable and reciprocal relationship with the natural world of which we are all embedded.”*

*“And ... if more people had this kind of relationship with the land we probably wouldn’t have so many clear cuts, oil spills and polluted rivers, eh?”* Crow caws looking slightly irritated suddenly.

*“Yes Crow, but I think it’s even more than that. It is precisely this kind of relationship that I suggest nurtures and supports good health not only for the land but also for the people, plants and animals as well.”*

Although not all disciplines view religion and spirituality as being so deeply linked, many academic works to date, do consider religion and spirituality to be synonymously connected. Ver Beek (2000), however, suggests that “[w]hile religion is generally considered an institutionalized set of beliefs and practices regarding the spiritual realm, spirituality describes the personal and relational side of those beliefs...” (p. 32). In fact, scholars such as Wilber (2000), MacDonald (2009), Dyll-myklebust and Lange (2015), even “subscribe to the idea that spirituality is considered inseparable from identity” (as cited in Dyll-Myklebust & Lange, 2015, p. 1). Spirituality has been further defined as being a “[l]ife Force, where the interconnectedness of the physical body, mind and soul...is perceived...as love, compassion...humility, [and] as shared sacrifice” (Dyll-Myklebust & Lange, 2015, p. 2). Crisp (2010) and Hocheimer (2011) describe spirituality as “...the perception and expression of connection to self and others, a higher being/s and the world and/or environment around us” (as cited in Dyll-Myklebust & Lange, 2015, p. 2). It seems important to point out that these definitions, combined, sound very similar to Indigenous perspectives of relationality.

Among some Indigenous circles, knowledge experienced and attained through ceremonies, such as Inipi,<sup>25</sup> Sundance<sup>26</sup> and Hanblecheya,<sup>27</sup> are legitimized as equal to that attained through the more tangible means that Western science relies so heavily upon (Louis,

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<sup>25</sup> An Inipi Ceremony (Lakota for Sweat Lodge) is a healing and purification ceremony wherein participants enter a covered lodge to sweat together in the dark while participating in singing songs and prayers. This ceremony is often used in conjunction with, and in preparation for, other ceremonies such as Hanblecheya and Sundance. See Bucko (1999) and Crawford & Kelley (2005, p. 1069), for more details on this ceremony.

<sup>26</sup> Many Indigenous communities consider self-sacrifice or the “giving of oneself so that others may live” to be among the most honourable ways of giving (Ruml, 2009, p. 192). Sundance Ceremonies, where dancers pledge to pierce to a tree, fast and dance for 4 days, is perhaps the most powerful ceremonial expression of that self-sacrifice. See Drysdale & Brown (1995), Pettipas (1994), Crawford & Kelley (2005, p. 1050), Ruml (2009) and the National Film Board of Canada (2008) for a more detailed understanding of Sundance Ceremonies.

<sup>27</sup> Hanblecheya (Lakota for Vision Quest) is a ceremony wherein individuals pledge to fast with no food or water (usually) for four days while staying alone in the wilderness. The term Vision Quest was first popularized by anthropologist Ruth Benedict in the 1920’s but for the Indigenous communities who engage this ceremony there is rarely reference made to the idea of a quest. Instead, as the Lakota term translates, this ceremony is more appropriately understood as a “crying for a dream” (Crawford & Kelley, 2005, p. 1127).

2007). It is because “[m]etaphysical phenomena are [so] highly regarded and...integral to [Indigenous] learning processes,” that the space for understanding these relationships must be created within the academy (Louis, 2007, p. 134). Therefore, in understanding that “...there can be no radical break between social and ecological relations,” Ingold (2011) suggests:

... a new kind of ecological anthropology, one that would take as its starting point the active, perceptual engagement of human beings with the constituents of their world... [and would] recognize that the relations with which it deals, between human beings and their environments, are not confined to a domain of ‘nature,’ separate from...the domain in which they lead their lives as persons (p. 60).

With this in mind, I employ a land-privileging methodology in this research that honours the mental, physical, emotional and spiritual relationships that connect us to all other aspects of the land and natural world. This land-privileging theoretical perspective acknowledges such a landscape as being a valued holder of knowledge, attainable through deep relationship and shared through firsthand experience, as well as, through the personal narratives of those experiences expressed thereafter. These narratives are important because, as geographer David Turnbull (2007) describes, they are entirely interwoven into the manner in which we choose to walk our world into being (Sundberg, 2014). Crisp and Beddoe (2013) also suggest spirituality, as expressed through storytelling, can not only aid in establishing and or bolstering one’s sense of identity but also that the process of engaging aspects of Spirit can, itself, facilitate a much deeper feeling of connectedness (Dyll-Myklebust & Lange, 2015). It is through story, especially among the oral cultures, that these kinds of teachings are most often passed on.

However, contrary to a land-privileging connection to our environment, many capitalist ideologies have fostered a far different relationship with the land. This alternative relationship seems to have stifled a sense connectedness with the environment (now predominantly related to as a resource rather than a relation) and this shift has consequently

led to much unsustainable environmental destruction. This shift in relations may, in fact, be one of our most central crises today. Furthermore, a number of scholars have identified the spiritually void nature of some of these capitalist ideologies to be a root cause of the resulting “virulent” human-land relationship and environmental destruction that they foster (Grande, 2000; Denzin, Lincoln & Smith, 2008; Magnat, 2012). As Gus Speth, a former US advisor on climate change, states:

I used to think that [the] top environmental problems were biodiversity loss, ecosystem collapse and climate change. I thought that thirty years of good science could address these problems. I was wrong. The top environmental problems are selfishness, greed and apathy, and to deal with these we need a cultural and spiritual transformation (as cited in Mabey & Knights, 2018, p. 19).

However, engaging a cultural and spiritual transformation involves moving through some sensitive terrain. If I, as a non-Indigenous person, wish to engage Indigenous ways of being in and knowing the world such as has been discussed in this review, what if any, is an appropriate manner for me to do so?

### **2.2.2 Locating the Researcher in the Research**

The problem with my doing Indigenous-informed research as a non-Indigenous person is, of course, that I am not an Indigenous person. This begs the questions: (a) What right do I have to inquire into the lives of Indigenous peoples to extract their knowledge and wisdoms?; (b) For whom and for what means are those wisdoms extracted?; and (c) What, if any, is an appropriate manner for me to engage methodologically in this process? Recognizing these dilemmas also leads me to grapple with the nature of why I am doing what I am doing and further entices me to engage a most critical process of self-reflection (Moore, 2012). This in turn, leads me to realize how important it is for me to identify my place in this research (Koch, 1998; Sundberg, 2014). The process of contemplating my place in this research also

sets the stage for introducing the theoretical framework and methodological approaches engaged throughout the work. However, before I continue to address these questions of rights and cultural identity, I first need to grapple with the question: Who am I?

I suddenly hear a flapping at the window and look up from my thoughts to see Crow has stopped in for another visit. I think he can sense that I am precariously balancing on the edge of one of those traps we had been previously discussing.

“Crow” I say, *“I’m glad you’re back because I’m really struggling with all the human-constructed methods we have devised to separate ourselves.”*

*“Ah yes, I was wondering when you were going to come back to this.”* Crow caws.

I explain to Crow that I am having trouble maneuvering around the interface of where concepts like race, culture and appropriation meet. I understand that, while it is imperative that we acknowledge Indigenous systems of knowledge in this work, there is also a danger in focusing too intently on human constructed concepts of division such as race (Conklin & Graham, 1995).

I ask Crow, *“How am I to ensure that my methodologies and methods do not inappropriately appropriate Indigenous knowledge or ways of knowing when I don’t really understand the boundaries of what divides us into different groups of people in the first place?”*

I continue, *“How am I to ensure that I properly honour and acknowledge Indigenous ways of knowing when I also understand that the lines upon which we seem to most commonly divide ourselves (like the idea of race) are in fact false?”*

Robbin DiAngelo (2012) explains:

Many of us have been taught to believe that there are distinct biological and genetic differences between races. This biology accounts for differences we can see with our eyes such as skin color .... The idea of race as biological makes it easy to believe that many of the divisions we see in society are natural. But race, like gender, is socially constructed. The differences we do see with our eyes, such as hair texture and eye color, are superficial and emerged [simply] as adaptations to geography (Cavalli-Sforza, Menozzi, & Piazza, 1994) (p. 79).

*“In other words”* I say to Crow, *““there really is no race under the skin””* (DiAngelo, p. 79, 2012). *“So we really are all just human beings carrying different stories!?”*

*“Yes,”* pipes up Crow, *“and some of those stories have been carried for many thousands of years.”*

Crow sits back (I think he likes watching me try to wrap my head around all these concepts) and lets me continue.

*“We can, of course, divide ourselves by the idea of culture and the stories that different cultures carry,”* I sigh *“but that is problematic too because ANYONE can belong to a culture, it doesn’t matter the heritage or the colour of your skin.”*

*“Your falling back into the ‘race’ trap again.”* Crow interrupts me, *“Remember the concept of race is not built on anything real and certainly has nothing to do with the colour of anyone’s skin”*

*“But...”* I add, *“if ANYONE can belong to a culture wouldn’t the idea of appropriation then also become problematic? Someone might, for instance, identify as being a member of a particular culture but there might be others of that culture who disagree. What really is ‘a Culture’ and how can we possibly hope to define or confine it?”*

In my struggle to come to terms with the lines between appropriation, culture and the human experience, I pull a book from my shelf and see the first sentence in the introduction starts with “Culture is born of the imagination...” I continue reading:

... Perhaps the closest we can come to a meaningful definition of a culture is the acknowledgement that each is a unique and ever-changing constellation .... [observed through the study of] language, religion, social and economic organization, decorative arts, stories, myths, ritual practices and beliefs, and a host of other adaptive traits and characteristics....And no description of a people can be complete without reference to the character of their homeland, the ecological and geographical matrix in which they have determined to live out their destiny. As landscape defines character, a culture springs from a spirit of place (Davis, 2008, p. 8).

*“Ah yes...”* I breath deep *“again with this Spirit-in-the-land. Everything seems to come back to the land doesn’t it Crow?”*

Crow nods his head; his beak bobbing in an overexerted gesture and lets me continue.

*“If cultures, that spring forth from the land, emerge as an expression of that place, does this mean that we really ARE the land as so many Indigenous scholars claim?”*<sup>28</sup>

*“I think this is a GREAT question to ask!”* Exclaims Crow, *“Perhaps one you can explore more intently as you spend time on the land during your Hanblecheya Ceremony.”*<sup>29</sup>

*“But Crow,”* I’m really starting to worry now *“these are questions I need to answer BEFORE Hanblecheya because I need to make sure I do not appropriate Indigenous systems of knowledge or ways of knowing through Hanblecheya. I know I have been invited to participate in this ceremony but, what if there are Indigenous peoples who feel that I, as a non-Indigenous person, should not BE participating in a Hanblecheya ceremony? What if my coming to know the land in this way IS cultural appropriation?”*

I am really starting to panic now. What AM I doing? I want most of all to honour the Knowledge Holders and their teachings but what if, in my engaging with the teachings they share, I am actually dishonouring them through appropriation?

*“Crow ... what if I am about to make a HUGE mistake?”*

*“Remember, mistakes are the places of evolution and growth! AND it is more important to ASK some of these questions than it is to confine them to the story of a single answer.”* Crow caws as he spreads his wings and readies himself for flight.

*“But Crow”* I call desperately now as he slips into the air, *“please help me, I really need to do this right but I am so confused about where these lines are that divide us.”*

*“Maybe...”* I can just barely make out Crows’ words now as he disappears into the horizon,

– *“... maybe you’re not MEANT to BE divided!”* –

Conklin and Graham (1995), suggest that focusing on socially constructed concepts such as “race” can lead to significant limitations such as running the risk of devaluing other types of “...local,’ ‘traditional’ or ‘practical knowledge...” that may also provide equally revealing insights (as cited in Bicker, Ellen & Parkes, 2003, p. 317). I would further argue

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<sup>28</sup> See Gunn Allen (1999), Dulgam Uukw (1992) and Cajete (1994) for more on how many Indigenous peoples identify with the land.

<sup>29</sup> Crow is referring to the Hanblecheya ceremony that I, at the time, was preparing to participate in under the care of Knowledge Holder SherryLynne Jondreau as a part of engaging the teachings shared first hand.

that focusing on the idea of “race,” or other divisive human constructed concepts, might also act to separate people in superficial ways denying the reality that we are, in fact, all human beings living an abundance of different stories on the land. The trick then becomes, how to honour and acknowledge the many distinct cultural teachings (because this *is* very important) without giving too much power, in the process, to the racial or other divisive human constructs that try to trick us into engaging an “us” and “them” kind of mentality.

I acknowledge that I do not know how to navigate these huge concepts and concerns because I know that, no matter what I do, there will be people who will criticize the manner in which I engage this work. Therefore, I must fall back to a process of feeling my way through the work and, in that, I must bring forward the teachings I have received from Bear, Wolverine, Crow and all the Knowledge Holders who have helped to inform me up until this point in my life. As such, and in understanding the complexities involved, I acknowledge and honour the Indigenous teachings shared throughout this work. In doing so, I also weave together stories (including my own non-Indigenous stories) in a manner that (I hope) recognizes yet does not stumble on the divide we so often create. My hope is to grow into a better place of learning how to *be* together on this land.

A part of my story is that I was born into a good<sup>30</sup> family, whom I grew up with in the city. Regardless of this good start in life, my drive for adventure caused me to leave home at a young age in order to explore the happenings of the larger world around me. I witnessed many sides of the human experience along this journey but one day my explorations led me into the northern British Columbian wilderness. As shared earlier, it was there I met Bear

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<sup>30</sup> By this I mean I have grown up with many privileges in life. Of course, all families have their issues but the issues we faced as a family were nothing compared to the difficulties so many Indigenous families faced and continue to face as a result of past and ongoing colonial practices.

and soon after had another profound and life-altering experience with Wolverine: a story for a different time and a different context.<sup>31</sup> Both of these life-changing experiences (and the stories of them) live within me and have, in so doing, enticed me into traversing many new and unexpected landscapes.

As it turns out, I chose to follow the story of the land that Bear & Wolverine presented me.<sup>32</sup> The life I was to enter was built on relationships where I was to learn not only from the Elders and the people who had walked before me but also, and perhaps more importantly, from the land itself. In using the term land, I again refer here to an Indigenous-informed concept of land that sees all aspects of land, plants and animals as being connected in an intricate web of life and with each embracing their own spirit and wisdom (Cajete, 1994; Wilson, 2008; Tuhiwai Smith, 2012; Kelbessa, 2015). It was this land that opened up beneath me and let me fall into its grand expanse, an expanse that encompassed an intricate connection to all life on earth. I have, as a result of these experiences, focused my research on Indigenous-informed relationships with land because my own personal experiences most closely align with these Indigenous-informed relationships with land.

For many years the stories I lived on the land grew into me and I into them. There was a converging of selves and this converging is, I believe, an important anti-colonial action that has played a critical role in informing and directing this research. I might even go so far as to suggest, if I could do so within the confines of the academy, that this convergence with land, or at least the driving energy behind it, is in fact the “speaker” behind this work and “I”

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<sup>31</sup> In the oral traditions, it is not appropriate to write down certain stories. This is to ensure that such stories maintain their capacity to shift and change according to changing contexts of time, place and audience (Personal communications with Laurie Meyer Drees and Melody Martin).

<sup>32</sup> See Cajete (1994) and Simpson (2014) for a deeper understanding of how many Indigenous peoples learn from the animals and the land.

simply a means through which the message is delivered. To acknowledge and engage with Indigenous epistememes, such as engaging the land in this way, we (as non-Indigenous peoples) must, in both our bodies and in the institutions we engage, decolonize our own relationship with the way we know and interact with the land and natural world around us. Therefore, engaging anti-colonial and decolonizing methodologies throughout this work is essential.

### **2.2.3 Anti-colonial and Decolonizing Methodologies**

Scholars Annette Watson and Koyukon hunter Orville Huntington (2008), describe how the rationality of the enlightenment era has devalued Indigenous knowledge (IK) to be considered ‘irrational’ and ‘primitive’ and has, thereby, linked the notion of progress explicitly to technologies and advancements of a Western European mindset (Watson & Huntington, 2008; Tuhiwai Smith, 2012). In opposition to this perspective, some scholars, interested in engaging Indigenous-informed research, suggest a posthumanist perspective that equally values IK with that of the Western sciences (Watson & Huntington, 2008). However, because colonial oppression has been so closely linked with Western research agendas in the past, in order to equally value IK, it becomes necessary for the whole practice of research to undergo a process of decolonization (Hampton, 1995; Crazy Bull, 1997b; Abdulllah and Stringer, 1999; Battiste, 2000; Gegeo and Watson-Gegeo, 2001; Bishop and Glynn, 2003; Harvey, 2003; Thaman, 2003; Absolon and Willet, 2004; Howitt and Stevens, 2005; Shaw, Herman & Dobbs, 2006; Louis, 2007; Wilson, 2008; Tuhiwai Smith, 2012; Sundberg, 2014).

Researchers who employ anti-colonial, decolonizing methodologies are often seen as activists who, rather than “invest[ing] social justice in state rule” actively seek to bring that rule to its end (Morgensen, 2012, p. 805). Regardless of the connotations often associated with the change activism so often calls for, it remains crucial that efforts be made to push the

boundaries of current academic methodologies to acknowledge ways of knowing that do not limit Indigenous means of expression to those condoned by a dominant culture (Simonds & Christopher, 2013; Kuokkanen, 2007; Dei, 2013). Indigenous ways of knowing are so intricately linked to the land that coming to know the land from an Indigenous-informed perspective becomes an anti-colonial practice. This, I would argue, is an essential action. Some scholars suggest that every geographic location is intricately connected to some form of expressed racialization and that this is, in fact, a normal and normalized phenomenon that must be accounted for when striving to come to know any landscape on a deeper level (Kobayashi and Peake, 2000). In this way, and in understanding how our own experiences (or lived stories in geography) affect how we come to know place, it becomes clear how important it is for non-Indigenous researchers to come to understand Indigenous perspectives (and ways of knowing) that shape Indigenous relationships with those places.<sup>33</sup>

St'at'imc and Celtic scholar Peter Cole (2002), expands on the importance of embracing Indigenous ways of knowing and expression in an article that uses a canoe as an Aboriginal methodology. Cole uses Indigenous-informed prose, written for meaning rather than grammar, as a literary rebellion against the plethora of colonial minded rules that define what Cole describes as a cultural prison of “academ(ent)ia” (p. 450). While Cole recognizes the manner in which the English language has restricted and shaped the minds of the settled masses,<sup>34</sup> he also acknowledges English writing and language as a means of transporting intellectualized and Aboriginalized decolonizing ideas into settler minds of the academy. He

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<sup>33</sup> See Tuhiwai Smith (2012) & Wilson (2008) for a better understanding of how and why it is so important for non-Indigenous researchers to understand the theoretical perspectives behind Indigenous epistemes when engaging Indigenous research.

<sup>34</sup> By using the term ‘settled masses’ I acknowledge the manner in which colonialism and a colonial language has infiltrated the homes and bodies of so many people across Canada including both Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples.

sees language as a landscape traversed to best serve his people. In a gesture towards colonial hierarchal regression,<sup>35</sup> Cole (2002) metaphorically calls for the “academically merited” to take a seat in the canoe, lest they fall out in the storm filled, reference-less, relationship based, Indigenized literary journey he presents before them (p. 448). In this way, the structural hegemony that first threatens to spring leaks in the “canoe” of Coles writing, suddenly, becomes a source of strength as he transcribes meaning through an Indigenous voice that decolonizes and contrasts the act of *experiencing* with that of *referencing*, the framing of a *Sweat Lodge* with that of a *theoretical perspective*, and the communion we share as people with the natural world as an alliance with *relations* rather than mere *resources*.

After introducing the landscape of the “university” as a forest under siege, a savage landscape flattened into pulp and print, Cole (2002), in contrast, states that “we [emphasis added] learned to take a canoe from a cedar without felling it” (p. 459). Of course, what Cole means by this, is that the Spirit in the tree was never broken by its transition into canoe but, rather, held up in all its glory in gratitude and respect; a powerful expression and example of how, as consumers, we might also maintain relations with a natural world that so willingly provides us the things we need to live a good life. In this same way, we also must create space for academic writing that does not kill the metaphorical tree in the building of the literary canoe; a vessel that contains within it the much-needed voices of the for-far-too-long marginalized Indigenous peoples of North America (Koch, 1998).

In using a passionately Indigenized voice to contrast colonial and Indigenous relationships with land, ceremony and narratives, Cole (2002) addresses key concepts that define the ecologically-privileged epistemes pertinent to this research. Driven by the same fervor and

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<sup>35</sup> In other words, Cole (2002) uses his writing to dismantle the hierarchal systems of colonialism.

passion apparent in Cole's writing, this research follows the pathway he lays out. It is crucial for other Indigenous and non-Indigenous allies to do the same (Louis, 2007; Kovach, 2010). Anti-colonial work, that inspires reconciliatory action, will involve communications between Indigenous and non-Indigenous participants and, as such, cannot take place simply from within an Indigenous or non-Indigenous community alone (Truth & Reconciliation, 2015). It is in the learning and sharing that takes place across ontologically contrasting paradigms that acceptance, respect and even true friendship might, in fact, even come to blossom and thrive.

Today, it is recognized that Indigenous peoples have been overwhelmingly marginalized and dominated throughout scientific research (Bishop, 1997; Louis, 2007). They have also been problematized and objectified through a Eurocentric lens for far too long (Louis, 2007). The time has come for Indigenous-informed research to be engaged, legitimized and honoured from an epistemologically and ontologically Indigenous perspective within the academy and beyond (Louis, 2007; Wilson, 2008; Kovach, 2010; Tuhiwai Smith, 2012). My own research seeks to engage Indigenous epistemologies by putting into practice the knowledge that Indigenous scholars and Indigenous Knowledge Holders have to share. In living those teachings into reality, whether it be through writing or time spent on the land, this work also seeks to legitimize Indigenous ways of knowing and further honours Indigenous-informed modes of expression by engaging multiple modes of storying.

According to Hawaiian scholar Renee Pualani Louis (2007), having non-Indigenous allies in the academy is one of the most important components to decolonizing the system. However, just because Indigenous methodologies challenge colonial mindsets does not necessarily mean that they reject colonial ideas about knowledge and research. Engaging with Indigenous methodologies does, however, involve making a marked effort to reframe dominant ways of knowing in a manner that creates space for Indigenous epistemologies,

such as those that acknowledge the value in relationship, respect, humility and even spirituality, in the academy (Louis, 2007; Kovach, 2009).

Furthermore, scholarship does not need to come at the cost of *obfuscation* – to use overly technical vocabulary to elicit a simple concept – and the bewilderment of those who have not graduated from the school of academic jargon (Cole, 2002; Bennett, 2004). Good, change inducing, scholarship should not be a cause to speak above others but rather to include them and, in fact, perhaps even acknowledge that real meaningful change often takes place outside the academy. This sheds light on the irony of fighting for Indigenous methodologies from within the confines of an institutionalized language. It seems no surprise then, as a result of being so embedded in an intellectualized use of language, that academics from a colonial mindset struggle to fathom many Indigenous epistemologies. In fact, as suggested in this work, these Indigenous epistememes might never be fully realized from the language of the “other” – being, in *this* case, the academy – but rather, might best be experienced in the tongue that they represent and experienced on the land in the same manner in which Indigenous peoples engage their non-human relations. This fight for decolonization is not going to be won using a colonial tongue. Educated scholars might, however, be enticed to feel something more, and therefore understand on a different and perhaps deeper level, if they come face to face with the power of an unrestricted Indigenous voice unleashed within the academy and voiced from the land.

#### **2.2.4 Feeling the World Around Us**

Anti-colonialism and decolonization are, in part, processes of learning how to see and do things differently. It is no coincidence, then, that we also need to speak about feeling the world differently as well. When Cole (2002), for instance, speaks of decolonization I feel

empowered by his words, I feel a passion in them and they elicit a similar passion in me. There is an emotion that emerges from Cole's Indigenous driven, colonial-rule-breaking writing style that is highly effective. But feeling takes on an even more meaningful role when one engages it united with Indigenous-informed relationships with land.

In a 2016 interview with EcoWatch, Wade Davis describes two distinctly different relationships when he speaks of Indigenous Elders who feel the forests as being alive with Spirit in contrast to those who have grown up only knowing them as a source of revenue for the timber industry (Hoggan, 2016). The bodily sensations elicited from these contrasting relationships with land feel very different from one another. In an article discussing emotional geographies, Joyce Davidson and Christine Milligan (2004) express a "...need to explore how we feel – as well as think – *through* 'the body'" (p. 523). They highlight the significance of how emotional attitudes and interactions with the environment further determine the nature of our own personal geographies "...and experience of...being-in-the-world" (Davidson & Milligan, 2004, p. 524). It is through coming to feel the mind and body in these deeper ways that Indigenous ways of knowing and relationships with land, animals and even hunting may be more deeply understood.

Perhaps it is an intuitive feeling that some Indigenous hunters experience when they speak about animals who give their bodies up to the hunt (Watson & Huntington, 2008; Berkes, 1999; Brower & Brewster, 2004; Feit, 2004; Scott, 1996; Wishart, 2004). The Koyukon believe that a respectful hunter is given "luck" during the hunt and that it is out of a mutual respect that an animal gifts their body in return (Watson & Huntington, 2008; Nelson, 1986). Perhaps it is also through intuition, a specific kind of feeling, that a hunter is able to feel an animal's presence and the offering of their body to a hunt. Hunting with feeling also involves becoming-animal or learning to think about and see the world as that animal does.

This also elicits, as Huntington states, an understanding that “...there is a spiritual aspect to every part of the environment...” (Watson & Huntington, 2008, p. 271). Feeling this spiritual relationship between wo/man, land and animal also further reinforces the responsibility to respect, protect and care for all aspects of the natural world. This also becomes a means of coming to know and engage an Indigenous-informed epistemology which I will next explore.

### **2.2.5 Indigenous Epistemologies and Relationality**

Epistemologies are born out of the way we come to know and experience the landscapes of our lives (Watson & Huntington, 2008). Indigenous and Eurocentric epistememes however, often stand in stark contrast to one another. This is especially true when it comes to relationships with land (Wilson, 2008; Tuhiwai, 2012). Broadly speaking, epistemologies that drive post-industrial society and late stage capitalist land relations, which are largely based on profit-based globalized commercialization and consumerism, remain at the heart of many of the world’s most critical environmental issues today (Robbins, 2013). Ronald Wright, sees the “self-serving and short-sighted” post-industrial colonial patterns of growth as pushing the advancement of civilization to unsustainable heights (Hoggan, 2016, par 9). Wright states that, “one of the absolutely clear essences of history and archeology is that a healthy economy depends on a healthy environment and once you start eating into the environment to grow your so-called economy you are on the path to ruin” (Hoggan, 2016, par 12). David Suzuki, explains how the critical nature of our environmental issues lies most profoundly in our psychological disconnection from the natural world (Hoggan, 2016). Davis (2009), however, optimistically reminds us that there are many different ways of connecting with the environment and suggests that Indigenous peoples around the world,

who have interacted with the land for thousands of years without destroying her, might be able to provide us the insight we need to change our own perspectives:

“Living from nature ... [the first hunting and harvesting North Americans] watched the Earth for signs. The flight of eagles helped fishermen track salmon. Sandhill cranes heralded the onset of herring runs. The flowering of certain plants brought families to the shore to gather clams, but if ravens and crows abandoned the beach, so did the people, for it was a sure indication that the shellfish were toxic. Between humans and animals there was a constant dialogue, expressed in physical action, in gesture and repartee, but also in myths and stories that resonated with magical and mystical ideas. The Tlingit addressed plants as spirits, offering prayers before harvesting a tree. Nuu-chah-nulth ceremonies sought protection for the hunter and beseeched whales to give freely of their lives. When raging currents threatened Haida war parties, paddlers scattered swan feathers upon the water to calm the sea. Encounters with grizzly bears brought power to the Gitksan. (Davis, 2013, p. 129)

According to Kincheloe & Steinburg (2008), many Indigenous communities’ “[c]ultural identity, [I]ndigenous ontology and spirituality are inextricably linked with land” (as cited in Dyll-Myklebust & Lange, 2015, p. 4). My research takes these claims seriously, thinking not through the, commonly perceived, ethnocentric and mistrusted approaches of Western research (Tuhiwai Smith, 2012; de Leeuw, Adam, Maurice, Greenwood & Holyk, 2012) but, rather, through a holistic Indigenous-informed paradigm from which exists an understanding that knowledge, being relational, is universally sustained in plants, animals, and landscapes. In this way, I also learn from land and bring those experiences forward into this research.

From this perspective, to gain knowledge is to build relationship with the universe and all things within it. Likewise, to extract knowledge without acknowledging the context of its relationship with all things (in essence separating that knowledge from its cosmological whole) is, in fact, to misrepresent the truth of that knowledge (Wilson, 2001; Wilson, 2008; Campbell, 2014; Roy, 2014). It seems to me that this perspective acknowledges a vast and connected knowledge system that is held, united with all its relations, in the land. Hawaiian scholar, Manulani Aluli-Meyer (2008) explains how “[o]ne does not simply learn about land,

we learn best from land. This knowing makes you intelligent to my people. How you are on land...opens doors to the specificity of what it means to exist in a space and...that existing extends [also] into how best to interact in it” (as cited in Dyll-Myklebust & Lange, 2015, p. 7). A main focus of this research has involved working with Knowledge Holders to ensure the methods of data collection and knowledge sharing do not damage the integrity and relationality of the knowledge being shared. As such, storying has proven to be an essential means of discussing and expressing the nuances of this work even if the process of interweaving story and storying within an academic piece, such as this, does bring along with it its own set of issues.

### **2.2.6 Storying as a Methodology**

“Crow,” I exclaim *“there is another problem with your being here. Your appearance has turned this thesis into a story and it is not supposed to be a story. The methodology section, for example, is meant to be an analytical discussion about the theoretical frameworks that guide this research. It is supposed to be scholarly and academic and this story doesn’t feel very scholarly and academic to me.”*

“Listen,” pipes up Crow *“do you want to play an anti-colonial role in the academy or not?”*

*“Of course,”*

*“Well, have you not, in your research preparation, determined how important the presence of stories and story-telling are in Indigenous land pedagogies and epistemologies?”<sup>36</sup>*

*“Well... yes...”*

*“Have you not explained how Indigenous stories provide a much deeper framework from which to guide a person’s expression and experience of life?; how animals (and especially Crows I might add!) along with the plants, rivers and mountains all carry wisdom and intelligence?; AND how they even act as teachers who inform Indigenous paradigms in both stories and in life?”<sup>37</sup>*

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<sup>36</sup> See King (2003), Gorman & Toombs (2009) and Koch (1998) to learn more about the importance of stories.

<sup>37</sup> See Cajete (1994), Kimmerer (2012) and Simpson (2014) to learn more about how Indigenous teachings are shared through land, plants and animals.

*“Yeeees ...”*

*“Then,” Crow continues “wouldn’t Story-telling and MY being here right now, in this very moment, then be a powerful expression of engaging with an anti-colonial decolonizing Indigenous methodology that supports Indigenous land pedagogies and ways of knowing?”*

*“Well yes ... but ...”*

*“Then, what’s the problem?”*

*“The problem is that I don’t know if they’ll let me tell it this way.” I explain “It’s one thing to TALK about Indigenous methodologies in the academy and it is another thing, all together, to let them disrupt the well-defined and well-established rules of scholarship.”*

*“Do they think this is THEIR story to tell?” Crow seems to be getting a little annoyed now.*

*“To be honest, I don’t know what they think, but I’m pretty sure they’re going to want to have a say in how this story is told.”*

*“Well, I guess that’s a risk you’re going to have to take.”*

*“I suppose...”*

*“Aren’t other researchers already talking about some of these same issues?”*

*“Well yes actually, they are. In fact, I just finished reading a review of Maori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2012), who states:”*

*For researchers working alongside [I]ndigenous people, being able to use theory to imagine, recognize, and make visible your positioning relative to your research...also means radically reconsidering and reconceptualising one’s methodologies... (as cited in McDonough, 2013, p. 461).*

*“Now it’s starting to sound like you might be developing an argument for keeping me in your storyline” Crow continues “WITH some good old fashioned scholarly support.”*

*“Hmmm ... I suppose I am, and the academy DOES love a good supportive argument! Maybe we can make this work after all!”*

Cherokee and Greek scholar Thomas King (2003) tells us to listen up because “[t]he truth about stories is that that’s all we really are” (p. 2). Stories are perhaps the best hope we have

for understanding what it means to be human. Fortunately, the healing benefits of storytelling are becoming more widely recognized across a multitude of disciplines (Hart, 2011). Additionally, narratives hold the capacity to connect the listener spiritually, emotionally, physically, and mentally to a unique relationship with knowledge, space, place and time (Thomas, 2005; Kovach, 2010). For many Indigenous communities, storytelling and narration have not only "...been used for centuries as a powerful vehicle for communication," (Koch, 1998, p. 1182) but also as a central means for instilling moral values, spiritual practices and other important systems of cultural knowledge (Louis, 2007; Gorman & Toombs, 2009).

Moreover, Terri Janke *et al* (1998) shares that it is essential, especially among land-based communities, that oral traditions and story-telling practices be continued in order to effectively maintain cultural teachings and *care* of culturally important landscapes (Gorman & Toombs, 2009). In addition to instilling moral value systems, stories also inform Indigenous peoples "...how to move *with* the forces of their surroundings...[and,] [a]s people move around in the landscape...[especially in the case of hunters and] set up camp in one locality after another, their own life histories are woven into the country" (Ingold, 2011, p. 54). In this way, the same stories that make the people also embed them into their landscapes through time, space, place and reflective narrations (Watson & Huntington, 2008). This elicits a different way of engaging the knowledge being shared and perhaps learning to engage the teachings in this different way might also elicit a different way of seeing the world that exists beyond those stories as well.

Additionally, Indigenous-informed storytelling gives characters from the natural world, such as Crow, a voice in research which also makes the teachings more personalized and relatable (Moore, 2012). Scholar, Robina Anne Thomas (2005) shares that "[w]hen we make

personal what we teach...we touch people in a different and more profound way” (p. 253).

Sami Scholar, Rauna Kuokkanen (2007), adds that we also need to engage ‘multi-epistemic literacies’ as we learn to create dialogues across different epistemic worldviews. Considering all these perspectives, it seems storying might well be the best suited method and framework to guide the sharing of this research project.

As such, some scholars argue that incorporating story and reflective narration into academic writings, as is being more recently embraced by some scholars,<sup>38</sup> creates within it the potential for those stories to become not only a bridge between humans and landscapes but also across cultures (Gorman & Toombs, 2009; Morgensen, 2012; Moore, 2012). I argue what is needed most when it comes to anti-colonial action is to find a way to get through to people, to touch them on a deeper level, and open not only their minds but also their hearts to a place where they can personally begin to see and feel the world from a different perspective so as to wholeheartedly open to a fundamentally different way of experiencing the world. It seems to me, that storying might be a perfect means to support this end.

## **2.3 Methods**

### **2.3.1 Storying as a Research Method**

To reiterate, the value of employing stories in research is becoming increasingly recognized within a number of disciplines. Nursing professor Tina Koch (1998) for instance, legitimizes storytelling, through detailed contextual and reflective writing, as both a process and a product of academic research. Koch breaks down the process of rigorous storying into five interconnected categories that include: (1) journaling, (2) observing and (3) listening, transformed into (4) writing, and legitimized by (5) rigor. The research methods for this

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<sup>38</sup> See Sundberg (2013) Moore (2012) for examples of how other scholars are using reflective narration and storying in their academic writing.

project also engage each of these processes. Storytelling, when engaged responsibly, harbors within it an impressive capacity to connect people with ideas and emotions and can therefore be inarguably beneficial to many research designs (Koch, 1998). That story-telling is both a critical and essential constituent for Indigenous systems of sharing knowledge (King, 2003), also identifies storying as a distinctively appropriate method for engaging this research. As such storying has been embedded throughout all aspects of this work in a number of varying forms. This research, might then be understood as a story telling, a telling of story and a sharing of knowledge through story.

### **2.3.2 The Research Environment**

The story of this research, anchored in anti-colonial and land-privileging theoretical frameworks, has taken place across multiple locations and has involved interactions with individual Indigenous contributors from a variety of communities across British Columbia and Alberta, Canada. Data collection involved assembling text, audio, video and photographic compilations from each of the participating Knowledge Holders. This “data” has been storied into a Master’s thesis and an accompanying website. In understanding that the thesis must conform to particular academic parameters, only some of the data gathered and shared throughout the process appears within this thesis. The accompanying website, however, allows for a more holistic representation of the findings. It is my hope that the website holds the potential to shift and evolve with the changing of time, audience and context as it holds the capacity to be added to and updated over time.

### **2.3.3 The Research Stages**

This research unfolded over a number of stages and rests fundamentally on trusted researcher-participant relationships. I have, to the best of my ability, extended the highest

regard and respect towards the Knowledge Holder contributors. Indeed, rather than naming contributors as “participants” I insisted on acknowledging them as Knowledge Holders and have also, regularly, turned to them for advice. Cree scholar Shawn Wilson (2008) suggests that it be a requirement for academics engaged in Indigenous research to seek approval for the research and research methods from the “participants” themselves (p. 59).

In following this advice, prior to building the initial framework for this project, I visited potential Knowledge Holders and offered each a gift of Tobacco. This offering of Tobacco was an important and crucial initial aspect of this research. Hoffman (2010) captures the significance of this exchange when he discusses this protocol from a Plains Cree perspective:

The fundamental and underlying understanding that guides this protocol is that the acquisition of knowledge is a sacred process. It is a gift from one being to another. Therefore, it must be respected. Respect for knowledge, the act of acquiring knowledge, and the person that may give the knowledge, is demonstrated through the act of offering tobacco. Tobacco is a sacrament. In the same way that the burning of tobacco is a means by which an individual makes their intentions known to the Spirit World and to other non-human beings, a tobacco offering from one individual to another makes it possible for the recipient of the tobacco offering to become aware of the intentions of the supplicant. Because the giving and receiving of tobacco is a sacred act, it allows Elders and spiritual knowledge holders (as recipients) the opportunity to sense beyond the supplicant’s spoken words, to gain an understanding of whether or not the request should be granted. Is this person ready to receive this knowledge? Are they responsible enough? Can they be trusted? (p. 130).

With this offering of Tobacco I introduced the ideas I had for the research project to potential Knowledge Holders and asked them, first, if they thought this would be an appropriate project and, second, whether it might be something they would be interested in participating in. In each case, after taking the appropriate time to contemplate (which was often four days), my offering of Tobacco was accepted. We then focused on how to move forward with incorporating the Knowledge Holders thoughts, teachings and ideas into the project so as to ensure we moved forward in a respectful and culturally appropriate manner. I felt it was important to present the intentions behind the project early on so as to give plenty of time for

potential contributors to sit with the idea of participating and to contemplate the nuances of engaging the project well before we committed to submitting the official research proposal to the university. This also provided the opportunity for Knowledge Holders to approve the research design before the proposal moved through the university's Research Ethics Board approval process. This, being aware that the universities ethics review objectives may differ, was especially important to me because I, first and foremost, wanted to ensure that the ethical parameters of the project aligned with the Knowledge Holders epistemologies and value systems.

Scott Lauria Morgensen (2012) identifies the all-too-often occurring "issue of ethics" when he speaks to the irony of ethical review boards that review Indigenous-based research with little to no Indigenous representation sitting on the boards. Even when the best intentions of the board are to protect Indigenous interests, as Morgensen (2012) suggests, the process, at times, can constitute a continued colonial mindset charged with making important decisions for Indigenous peoples from a perspective that often does not comprehend the inner workings of Indigenous epistemologies. Although this is not the fault of an ethics board per se (they are there, after all, to review all manners of research) I, and others, believe special ethical considerations should be made when Indigenous-based research is being reviewed (Flicker & Worthington, 2012). This is particularly important when the necessary procedures and contracts required for human and community-based research so often do not align with Indigenous traditions and epistemologies (Flicker & Worthington, 2011; Stiegman & Castleden, 2015).

In fact, Sarah Flicker and Catherine Worthington (2012) have identified the following three reoccurring themes in response to the most common issues emerging out of attempts to ethically engage with Indigenous research protocols: "(1) the importance of understanding

Aboriginal research as a distinct form of research; 2) the unique nature and complexity of negotiating community consent; and 3) the importance of trust and relationship-building in the research process” (p. 19). I have addressed this first concern by utilizing Indigenous-informed methodologies and methods throughout this project. In contemplating the second concern, I can see that when a panel of non-Indigenous peoples engage in the process of assessing what constitutes a *right way* to engage Indigenous research it presents a problem. I did not know if any members of the ethics board reviewing this project identified as being Indigenous, so, I made an effort to ensure this second concern was addressed by first seeking approval from the Indigenous Knowledge Holders who might participate in the project should it be approved. I did not know who would end up participating at that time. I did, however, manage to meet with four out of the five main contributors and this step allowed us to collaborate in building the framework of the project before I carried it forward through the Research Ethics Board approval process. Finally, I addressed the third concern by drawing on my own life experiences and therein was able to engage Knowledge Holders with whom I had, over the years, already developed trusted relationships with.

Once the research project was approved by both the Knowledge Holders and the university, I was able to start the interviews. Data collection took place over the summer of 2017. Five Knowledge Holders (Bill Bertschy, SherryLynne Jondreau, Arthur Manual Dick, Daisy Gina Laing and Mildred Martin) provided interviews and guided me through experiential teachings. Two additional Knowledge Holders (Clarence George and Ronald Desjarlais) also provided interviews and Mildred Martin’s daughter Yvonne Pierrero, a gifted and knowledgeable Knowledge Holder in her own right, also provided some insights during her mother’s interview that I felt should also be acknowledged in this work. Finally, as can be viewed on the website, a small drum circle, was held, prior to completing the final

interviews. Present for the drum circle were Knowledge Holders Bill Bertschy, Ron Desjarlais, Clarence George and two additional Knowledge Holders, George Aslin and Rodrick Solonas, who also shared some songs and contributions for the website.

I first met Bill Bertschy at a Sundance Ceremony near Merritt, BC in 2014. SherryLynne Jondreau and I first crossed paths at an Inipi Ceremony in Nanaimo, BC in 2011 but it was in 2013 that our relationship with each other became forever forged. In 2013, I was also invited (along with two friends) to a Potlatch Ceremony in Alert Bay, BC where I would meet hereditary chief Arthur Dick. I established a strong relationship with Art from this initial meeting as he so whole-heartedly opened his home and his heart to us throughout our stay in Alert Bay. Daisy Gina Laing is the mother of a dear friend I came to know during my undergraduate studies at Vancouver Island University in 2012. Gina also quickly became a much loved and respected addition to my life. I met Mildred Martin and Yvonne Pierrero during a Moose-hide tanning course facilitated by them through the University of Northern British Columbia in 2016. I also met Clarence George in 2016 after returning from Standing Rock and being invited to his Inipi lodge on the Nechako River in Prince George, BC. I was introduced to Ronald Desjarlais, in 2017, by Bill Bertschy who travelled with him from O'Chiese, AB specifically for this project. I met both George Aslin and Rodrick Solonas through Clarence George's Inipi ceremonies when I started to regularly attend them starting in 2016. Although I engage in many Indigenous ceremonies and activities, the work that these particular Knowledge Holders do for the people and the wealth of knowledge that they carry is the primary reason I chose to turn to them for the knowledge and teachings shared throughout this work.

As such, the goal of this project has been to gain quality insights from this select group of participating Knowledge Holders. In so doing, the research model has employed a carefully

designed mixed methods approach. By combining semi-structured interviews with a land-based iterative sharing of knowledge, the process of data collection moved from an academically structured research design into a more Indigenous inspired sharing of knowledge. Another important aspect to the methods builds on Shawn Wilson's (2008) idea that engaging Indigenous research is, in fact, a ceremony in of itself. Indeed, one of the participating Knowledge Holders (SherryLynne Jondreau) suggested all peoples present during the interviews engage in both an opening and closing Inipi (Sweat Lodge) ceremony to ensure all aspects of the work be fulfilled in a "good" way. This also included the film crew who were present to record the events. Through my brother Michael Haldane and his co-owned company, NorthKamp Productions, we had several other crew members present to record the sharing of knowledge: Michael Haldane (director and sound for the Northern BC interviews); David Pullmer (sound for the southern BC interviews); Blake Ponto (cinematographer for the southern BC interviews); and Shaun Lawless (cinematography for the northern BC interviews). In this way, everyone present and involved with the processes of carrying this knowledge forward also participated in a ceremonial "entering into" the experience of participating in Indigenous-informed research and story sharing. Knowledge Holder, SherryLynne Jondreau, opened the ceremony of research with an Inipi ceremony in Nanaimo BC and Knowledge Holder, Clarence George along with Bill Bertschy and Ron Desjarlais, provided a closing Inipi ceremony when all the interviews had been completed.

Virginie Magnat (2014) states, in her quoting Wilson (2008, p. 59), that academics engaged in Indigenous research:

...must engage in a "deep listening and hearing with more than the ears," and develop a "reflective, non-judgmental consideration of what is being seen and heard," as well as "[a]n awareness and connection between logic of mind and the feelings of the heart." Ultimately, researchers bear the "[r]esponsibility to act with fidelity in relationship to what has been heard, observed, and learnt" (p. 245).

Honouring this kind of full-bodied engagement may be what imbues Indigenous-informed research with ceremony. These are some of the characteristics of engaging Indigenous-informed research that I have attempted to honour in my speaking about this project from a reflective and autoethnographic perspective.

Margaret Kovach (2010), suggests that conversational research methods are particularly complementary to Indigenous-based research because of the long history and regard placed on oral traditions among many Indigenous communities. Carrying this forward, the first stage of data collection, for this project, engaged a conversational semi-structured interview where a selection of questions were presented to each of the Knowledge Holders on a one-on-one basis. Although I had questions drawn up for the interviews I found, in most cases, our conversation took on a life of its own. As such, interviews unfolded where I never once looked at my questions because I came to trust that the conversation would naturally flow where it needed to go.

This letting-go of the control around the interview was an interesting process as it also followed the teachings being shared with me by Knowledge Holders participating in the project. On several occasions, in between interviews, I was reminded that “the Ancestors want this story told ... we have shown up for the work, now it is out of our hands ... what needs to be shared will come out...” (personal communications with Knowledge Holder Arthur Manuel Dick, 2017). When these words were shared with me, I thought of the teachings Crow had also shared with me. Crow told me to let go of control and be willing to adapt to what needs to happen. “*Let the project grow into what it needs to be...*” I hear Crow whisper from someplace in the distance. I listened with my body and also felt this was the right way to honour these teachings being shared. In this way, I gave up control of the interviews and let the sharing of knowledge follow its own path. I also felt it was important

that this process not just be about the information I hoped to gather in line with the projects topic. I felt this also needed to be an opportunity for Knowledge Holders to share anything important that they felt needed to come out at the time.

After spending time in conversation with the Knowledge Holders, I made arrangements to also spend time on the land, or engaged in a land-based project, with each of the five main Knowledge Holders. With Bill Bertschy, I worked on building a Bear Drum with the hide of an animal I hunted. I participated in a Hanblecheya Ceremony under the care and direction of SherryLynne Jondreau. My mom and I both took a trip with Arthur Manuel Dick to visit the home and land where he grew up on Village Island. With Daisy Gina Laing, and other members of her family, we spent several days exploring the Uchucklesaht village and the land upon which Gina grew up, and I spent several days visiting with Mildred Martin scraping hides and learning to turn the resulting brain-tanned buckskins into baby beaded moccasins. All of this was embarked upon in an effort to move the teachings and stories shared in the interviews from a place of logic in the mind into a more full-bodied knowing embraced through personal engagement with the teachings and the land itself.

Some scholars are exploring what has become known as earth writings in an effort to shift knowledge relationships and, in turn, actively decolonize academic disciplines through the use of land-based storying (de Leeuw, 2016b; Sundberg, 2014). Hunting stories, themselves deeply allied with earth writings and other land-based storying, "...allow[s] knowledge to be carried forward, reconstituted, reflected upon, enriched, and ultimately relocated by and for new interlocutors in new experiences and places" (Palmer, 2005, pg. i). I chose to use reflective writings as a means to express the land-based sharing of teachings I engaged with Knowledge Holders informing this project. I have also turned a "critical gaze," towards myself, in this process as a means to add rigor to the personalized and reflective account of

the knowledge shared throughout (Koch, 1998, p. 1184). In doing so, I have employed an autoethnographic reflective narration of my own experiences and thoughts while engaged with the research and teachings shared throughout the research process.

Autoethnography, requires vulnerability, fosters empathy, embodies creativity and innovation, eliminates boundaries, honors subjectivity, and also provides therapeutic benefits (Custer, 2014, p.1). In the *Handbook of Autoethnography*, Carolyn Ellis describes how:

... autoethnography is not simply a way of knowing about the world; it has become a way of being in the world, one that requires living consciously, emotionally, reflexively. It asks that we not only examine our lives but also consider how and why we think, act, and feel as we do. Autoethnography requires that we observe ourselves observing, that we interrogate what we think and believe, and that we challenge our own assumptions, asking over and over if we have penetrated as many layers of our own defenses, fears, and insecurities as our project requires. It asks that we rethink and revise our lives, making conscious decisions about who and how we want to be (Jones, Adams & Ellis, 2013, p. 10, as cited in Custer, 2014).

Autobiographical narratives teach stories as valid experience and feeling, while instilling “principles of respect, reverence, responsibility and reciprocity” (Moore, 2012, p. 326).

Autoethnography insists we account for the way we choose to interact with our environment. The internal focus it creates, around how and why that process feels the way it does, makes this approach a particularly appropriate method to inform the findings section of this thesis.

The personalized reflective analysis presented in this thesis is not intended to be a critique of the data collection findings. Rather, it stands as an example of how others might “read between the lines” (Graveline, 2000, p. 369) of the stories to gain personal insight from the stories in a way best suited to individual readers and viewers of this work. Snuneymuxw Elder and story teller, Ellen Rice White (2006), otherwise known as Kwulasulwut, shares how important it is for the listeners of stories not to be told what to think about those stories. Instead they need to “...figure it out for themselves” (p. 10). White (2006), encourages story learners “...to use [their] energy through thinking, imagining, feeling, doing,... dreaming,

and talking to make new story meanings that are helpful and relevant to [them personally]” (as cited in the foreword by Jo-ann Archibald/Q’um Q’um Xiiem, p. 10).

Fyre Jean Graveline (2000) also heart-fully suggests, in an effort to maintain the holistic integrity of Indigenous story sharing in research settings, that data collected through such sacred methods be left un-edited and un-analyzed. This research similarly embraces the voices of contributing Knowledge Holders whose voices also remain unaltered. Instead of critically analyzing the stories and comments shared on the website, I instead reflect on the experience of how the stories and teachings have related to my own personal life experiences.

The process of expressing my own reflective observations also provides me a voice in which to contemplate *one perspective* of what it all means to me at the time of this writing. It is understood, and in fact expected, that different people may gain different teachings and insights from the same stories. Presenting my personal relationship to the storied research both honours Indigenous epistemologies and provides an example of how others might also navigate their own sharing of the stories in a way that brings greater purpose and meaning to their own lives.

This process is designed to allow individualized meaning to emerge from the work in much the same manner as is intended within Indigenous storytelling practices. Among many oral traditions, the telling of Indigenous stories are often intended to shift and change with time and with an understanding that different teachings are needed at different times and in the different contexts of their telling (White, 2006). I do not intend to render the sharings of this work stagnant by ‘pinning on them’ a specific analysis and arguing for its rightness. Rather, I present the original stories and teachings shared in video form on the website so that readers and viewers might draw their own understandings from them in a way that aligns with the personal and changing temporal context of their own lives. The presentation of the

data (which are stories), in this way, is intended to honour the many truths and different understandings that reside within the material. Some scholars suggest the process of reflectively writing about personal research observations might also provide a fuller understanding of how the world is experienced and perceived by the research participants (Koch, 1998). This process of coming to understand how others see, feel and interact with the world, is after all, also an essential element to engaging effective anti-colonial action.

This research also provides a platform for Indigenous Knowledge Holders to contribute their knowledge, teachings, and thoughts on a research topic. However, the quantity of wisdoms shared, in their full form, would overwhelm the capacity of a thesis. To address the issue of maintaining the integrity and context of the Knowledge Holders words, I have developed a website where Knowledge Holders' full contributions will remain available for open source viewing. This website hosts participant bios, video and photographic files as well as a full version of the thesis. Knowledge Holders can add to, or remove, any aspect of their contributions to the website at any time. In this way, in keeping with teachings associated with the oral traditions (White, 2006), this website becomes a living, evolving and accessible source of knowledge with a founding intention to honour and give back to the people who have generously contributed their time, stories and teachings to this project.

Finally, all participants were provided full access to the thesis and website before the project was defended. I felt it was crucial for all participants to have the opportunity to approve the manner in which their contributions were presented and, more importantly, to ensure they were not misrepresented in any way.

...

Through the implementation of hunting regulations, residential school systems, land dispossession, relocations and other colonial processes, the sacred relationship between

Indigenous peoples and their land has been interrupted. This interruption with land (and with culture and identity) continues to seriously impact Indigenous health and wellbeing. Angèle Smith (2008a), in speaking about land dispossession, suggests that “[c]learance as an act of colonialism is an act of ethnocide, perhaps even genocide – rupturing people’s sense of place and thereby destroying some part of the people themselves. Short of killing and doing bodily harm, this is one of the worst and effective acts of cruelty and violence against a people” (p. 18). As such, evidence suggests that so long as land relationships remain fractured healing the wounds of colonialism and dispossession, for the Indigenous peoples of North America, may also remain significantly limited. It therefore seems crucial for all North American peoples, policy makers and governments to recognize the important role that relationships between land, culture and identity play within Indigenous pathways to both health and ways of knowing the world.

Indeed, many Indigenous people and communities might well experience a betterment of health and well-being through re-establishing meaningful relationships with the natural world. This may be facilitated by (re)turning to storytelling and cultural participation with land-based teachings such as hunting. Indigenous communities, according to many Indigenous peoples, have much to gain in reconnecting with cultural heritage. The moral codes that inform, for instance, a respectful hunter’s reciprocal and ceremonial relationship with the land may enliven a variety of Indigenous systems of relating to and knowing the land. A review of current literature suggests that hunting might well act as a powerful medium for redeveloping a meaningful relationship with the land. Hunting may also contribute to increased health and wellness among Indigenous hunters, the communities within which hunters interact and, perhaps, also to any peoples who make an effort to

genuinely engage with land from an Indigenous perspective that teaches people to come to know a relational and Spirit-infused perspective of land as a relation.

These teachings have informed and helped to frame the methodologies, theoretical perspectives and methods of this project. By bringing forward my own experiences of the land (Bear), allowing characters of the land their own voice (Crow), and by inviting Indigenous Elders and Knowledge Holders to bring forward their own stories and teachings of living with, living on and living in the land I have employed storying throughout all aspects of this work. It has been necessary to engage anti-colonial and decolonizing methodologies to create space for spirituality and other important Indigenous-informed land pedagogies, epistemologies and concepts of relationality. This process has foregrounded the importance of first hand experiential learning (engaging ceremony and time spent on the land) as a means to start to feel the world in a different way. In my own “opening” to different ways of knowing the world, I navigated my own place in this research through speaking with and learning directly from Crow who has also continually pushed and encouraged me through all aspects of this work.

As such, the methods, data translation and personal reflections regarding this research have been contextually framed through story-exchange, reflective narrations and ceremony. A mixed methods data collection approach has combined semi-structured conversational interviews with an Indigenous-informed land-based sharing of knowledge through iterative story-exchange. Text, photography, audio and video recordings also provide a further enriched and enhanced experience of the knowledge shared on an accompanying website. Data analysis, rather than following Western research designs that privileges critical analysis, are instead represented through reflective autoethnographic narration of my own experiences throughout the data collection process. By purposefully avoiding critical analysis, I avoid the

issue of speaking for or over-taking the voices of the Knowledge Holders. In doing so, I leave their voices to speak for themselves in this thesis text and in video form on the accompanying website. This research model has been designed to align with Indigenous knowledge sharing protocols that do not direct the reader about how or what to think but, rather, allows them the opportunity to draw from the material what is most personally relevant to them within the context of their own life experiences.

### **III. A New Beginning: Learning from the Elders**

#### **3.1 Knowledge Holder Interviews**

This section focuses on Indigenous Knowledge Holders personal experiences and teachings about Indigenous ways of knowing, hunting practices and relationships with land. Knowledge Holders also share comments on what they deem to be important beyond the inquiries of this research. There are five main Knowledge Holders who have provided interviews and with whom I have participated in a land-based project with: Daisy Georgina Laing, Arthur Dick, SherryLynne Jondreau, Bill Bertschy and Mildred Martin. Two additional contributors shared interviews only: Ron Desjarlais and Clarence George. Finally, Mildred's daughter Yvonne Pierrero provided important contributions during Mildred's interview so I have also embedded some of Yvonne's contributions within Mildred's interview.

The interviews have been shortened to better fit the constraints of this thesis. As the interviews also took place within a relaxed conversational style context, I have summarized my questions and, in some cases, also rearranged the order of the questions so as to better fit the sharing of knowledge for this thesis. I have employed three ellipsis to indicate where text has been removed so as to let the reader know that the Knowledge Holders have actually shared more details on the topic. The context of the way the interviews appear in this text has also been shared with the Knowledge Holders for their approval. The full and complete stories and interviews contributed by the Knowledge Holders can be found on the accompanying website at [www.earthluv.ca](http://www.earthluv.ca). As has been the case throughout all stages of knowledge sharing and exchange within this project, each Knowledge Holder was also gifted an offering of Tobacco prior to commencing the interviews.

### 3.1.1 Daisy Georgina Laing



**Figure 1:** Knowledge Holder Daisy Georgina Laing.

Daisy Georgina Laing, also known as Awoomatock, is a Residential School Survivor from the Uchucklesaht Band. She grew up in a Uchucklesaht Village along on the West Coast of Vancouver Island, BC. Gina has six children, sixteen grandchildren and six great grandchildren. Gina's sixth great grandchild was born on the day she gave her interview for this project. During residential school, Gina created a number of art pieces that have been repatriated back to her. She has more recently turned to art as a means to help heal the wounds inflicted during her time in the residential school system. Her powerful artistic pieces have brought much-needed attention to the reality of the horrors that so many Indigenous youth experienced at many of the residential schools. She has also dined with both past and present Prime Ministers, Harper and Trudeau, after her works toured across the country. Today several of Gina's paintings are on permanent display in the Canadian Museum of History (see the Canadian Museum of History website at <https://www.historymuseum.ca/event/survivors-stories/>). Gina gave her interview at her house in Port Alberni, BC in the company of her daughter April Laing and her son Jimmy Laing.

*Gina, please go ahead and introduce yourself.*

*Gina:* My name is Gina Lang. My legal name is Daisy Georgina Lang. My parents were Kelly and Daisy Coots. We were from the Uchucklesaht Tribe in the West Coast, Vancouver Island. My first seven years of my life I grew up at the cannery down in the Uchuck Harbor, which is about 24 miles from Port Alberni. The rest of my life I spent on my reservation. The Uchuck Reservation. My Native name was – when I was a child – was Okeyadee. It was more like a nickname ... My adult name ... I didn't get an adult name. All of the Elders died so ... now my ... old [Elder] name is Awoomatock. It means Medicine Bird Woman ...  
*I wonder if you'd share a bit about hunting and why our relationship with the land is so important?*

*Gina:* Yes, I grew up near the Broken Group Islands. My reservation is in a really nice little, I guess you would say, a harbor where it's sheltered. My father was a hunter. I grew up as a child eating wild game and seafood ... We ate seal, deer, ducks. We had everything off the land ... We took what we needed and if you shot something, you ate it. We made use of every part of it. There were several rituals involved with just that, showing the respect to the animals and to the land. That was to return the entrails and the bones back into the land so it could recycle if we didn't use it ... There was several things my father did before he left to go hunting and one of them was to say a prayer ...

When I grew older, because my brothers were in school, I was the one who went hunting and fishing with my father. I learned many things from him. We never hunted for sport. We went hunting and we went out there to get food and we brought food back. It was a huge process and my mother would can almost everything that we got because we didn't have refrigeration back then. Deer, seal were canned and ducks were canned and berries were canned. We went out and we picked berries in the proper season. Gathered medicines from

out in the woods and we always thanked Creator for everything ... Anything that you picked, anything that you shot, anything. There was always respect for the land and there was always thank you to the Creator and to the animals that you're taking. You never just shot it and got it and took it home. There was always the thank you. Yeah ...

Well, living off the land and having the respect for the land, it came natural for me, because my father practiced it, and the other men on the reserve did the same thing. They practiced that respect for the land and replenishing and never taking more than you need. Now, we have to get licenses and permission and you have to keep count and everything. I guess it was kind of like, you had to honor, you had to respect the land because if you took it all, your children, grandchildren, won't have anything. So, there was always the thought of the future. There was always talk of it. Everything that came home to [the] reserve was shared with everyone. It was a gift. It was a gift from the Creator to us. We showed our respect by sharing, and by reintroducing, like I was saying, the parts back into the land and thanking the Creator ...

It wasn't common for women to hunt. But I did because I was at home and my brothers who should have been getting all this teaching were in residential school. I learned a lot about hunting through my father, through experience I would go with him. And you had to be very strong and you had to prepare for two or three days before you even went out. And that meant fasting sometimes and not eating certain foods, especially if it had blood in it and preparing. It was never just pick your gun up and go out in the car and shoot something. It was a lot of walking, you have to be strong. You had to be physically strong and able, and it took a lot of walking over a lot of mountains. And then you had to carry the deer back, or whatever you were hunting for ...

I think that understanding nature and understanding that you're taking a life and that you need to pay for that in the form of praise and thank you, is really important. Because you give the blood back to the land and you give the entrails back to the land. And it reproduces ... it goes back into the berries, and the roots, and shoots and stuff that you pick and eat. And other animals, they'll come along and they'll eat the same thing, and it's a cycle. And if that cycle's broken you're going to have nothing for the future, and it seems to me that that's happening a lot lately. A lot of animals are coming extinct and I think it's from disrespect. They're dumping more than what's natural into our lands these days, and it's effecting the cycle of almost all of the animals. It's really frightening, it's frightening for a lot of Native people when they see this happening and no one seems to want to hear or listen ...

*Maybe you could speak a bit about how colonialism has interrupted your relationship with the land?*

*Gina:* Well to start off with they took our teachings away. They removed us from our homes and put us into residential schools and a lot of those teachings were taken away. Our language was taken away, our way of life was taken away. And we were introduced into a very military style life, which was really foreign to us. And we were introduced to food that was not natural to us, and we were given very little of it to start off with at the residential school. And I think Colonization has wreaked havoc with our people, family dysfunctions and it goes down through the generations. A lot the teachings that I had, I think I'm lucky that I have them. And that was interrupted as well when I was taken, when I was seven to go to residential school. I was learning plants from the forest and how to use them and how to prepare them and how to preserve them, and a lot of those teachings were interrupted. I have half teachings, quarter teachings because it takes years and years to understand and to learn how to use them.

And nowadays our people are very leery to give what little information they have because a lot of times that information is exploited and people make profit off of it, and that was not what medicine was for. Medicine was free and it belonged to everybody, and it was used on a daily basis, and now most of it is gone. And that's just one aspect of Colonization. Our language, which is who we are, my first day at the residential school I saw a friend ... and I hailed her in our language. I was so happy to see her because it was such a strange place to me, I had never seen a building that big before and it sounded like a beehive in there. It was really strange and scary ... When I had hailed her in our language, and I started talking to her in our language, because I grew up with it, I felt myself being lifted up by my hair and I was thrown across the room and then she [faculty from the residential school] came at me punching and kicking me and she never said why. That was the very first beating of my entire life, I was seven. And I curled up in a little ball and hid behind the door at the top of the stairs and I stayed there all day. Someone had to come and find me, which was my sister, and they took me. And she asked me "What did you do?" I told her, "I don't know, I don't know what I did." And she said, "Did you speak our language?" And I said, "Yeah I talked to Ann." And she said "You are never, ever, ever to speak our language." And that was the last time I ever spoke my language to this day ...

I was always in trouble. That's kind of hard, that one, because punishment for me, when I was a child, was my grandmother saying, "Sit down here. I want to tell you a story," and it was usually about a bad little girl, and it was a lesson in how to behave myself.<sup>39</sup> We never got beat up and stuff ... [at the residential school] some of my friends collapsed from malnutrition and they ended up in the hospital, being treated for that. And I used to sneak off

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<sup>39</sup> See the website, [earthluv.ca](http://earthluv.ca), to sit with Gina as she shares a teaching story, such as is discussed here, that has been passed down through her family for many generations.

of school grounds and go into the woods and gather roots and leaves and berries and stuff, and I used to take a bunch of the girls with me. I learned to steal and to cheat, and I learned to lie in school, because we used to sneak down into the kitchen, into the storage rooms way after hours when I was supposed to be in bed, and we would steal carrots and potatoes and share them around with the girls and pass them out to the little boys on the boys side ...

I missed my grandmother the most of anybody, because she was always there for me and she loved me, and she knew how to show it. My parents didn't because they had gone through residential school and they didn't really know how to show us that they loved us, either. They were dysfunctional because of it, and that passed down to me. I knew there was something wrong with that and tried to make some corrections by going to school and learning about it, and tried to apply some of that to my family. And everything I learned I tried to teach them, but it didn't help much. I wasn't a very good parent, and I understand that it wasn't my fault ... I know that now. But I took the blame for it for years...

I just wanted to say a little bit more about how colonization hurt us ... at one point, we were all lined up and taken out of our classroom and marched towards the infirmary in the main building ... and no one knew what was going to happen. And I remember us just seeing the girls coming out of there and they were all crying. And just the more closer it got to my turn, the more terrified I got. And when I got into the room, there was a person there, and he appears to be a doctor. I'd never seen a doctor in my life ... Me being me, I fought back. I got frightened. I started struggling. They called in a senior boy from the boys' side to come in and hold my legs down, and they bent me over a table, and I thought that I was going to be raped again, and I fought and fought. They had the nurses help him hold my other leg down. The nurse held my arm down, and the doctor was pushing my shoulder down, and I fought really hard. It didn't work. What they did was they took a needle off of

the counter, and they scratched my back with it. They had eight needles, and they put eight scratches on my back, four on each side of my spine. There was no explanation when I went in, and no explanation when I left, and I'm left today with the question, "Why did they do this to us?" ...

It's taken me well over 50 years to deal with all of this stuff, and it still hurts. I wish I could get the answers to my medical questions. The dentist used to come in and I remember him saying to me, "Can I pull your front teeth?" And I told him, "No, you can't. I don't want my front teeth out." And he told me, "You'll look really cute. Look at the other girls. They look so cute without their front teeth." ...

When we were sick, we were put into the infirmary ... When I was at home and I was sick, I was doted on. I was cared for. I was hugged, I was held. I was told I'll be okay, that I'll get over it, and I was given broth from fish which was medicine, and medicine from the forest. In there [residential school], we just went through it. You went through it without any of those things. There was no mom. No grandma. No siblings to tease you. It was so different. The treatment was so different, and we were treated like we were just nobody. And there was no love, no attention, no support, no talking to. You weren't allowed to talk. You weren't allowed to have an idea. You weren't allowed to have a thought. You weren't allowed to express it. You had to be quiet, and that was day-in and day-out ... We were completely controlled in that atmosphere, at the residential school. Completely opposite from what we were allowed at home. I don't know what else to say. There was so much ... Colonization just destroyed us, I think, and I think we're recouping as best we can, and I think that we're going to be okay. I'm still here, and I'm a survivor ...

Yeah. I have a list, and this list is something I've been writing down since I started trying to put together something for the TRC [the Truth and Reconciliation Commission], and for

my court case against the government and the church. I just want to know ... I want to let everybody know, too, that I really disagree with how it was dealt with. They had a list of offenses that were given a monetary amount. If this happened to you, you got this much. If that happened, if that happened, if that happened ... And I don't know any other court case that was ever like that. I don't know if there is, and I don't think that there is. So, I disagree with that. I heard stories of people taking the church down in the states for sexual abuse, and they got millions of dollars. My cousin, who was so severely hurt at residential school, she got \$17,000. That's it. And it really hurt her life. It hurt our life...

I call it the List of Residential School Horrors. That's what I have written here ... Threats of violence against our parents and our grandparents ... If they tried to fight to keep us at home instead of send us to residential school, they were threatened with court and jail time. So, they had to give their children away, give them up, and even sign papers saying they no longer have a right to them. A lot of our people were ... I call it stolen, or kidnapped ... literally taken out of the arms of their parents and their relatives, and taken away crying and screaming that they didn't want to go ...

We had surveillance. The surveillance was 24 hours a day. There was no privacy, and we were monitored, our every move. Almost every move that we made was with marching, like a little army, children from the ages of five onwards. We were given a number and not a name, and we were referred to by numbers. We were deprived of ... there was deprivation of everything, from freedom of thought, even. Freedom of expression. Just everything that's normal to people ... And we were indoctrinated into a completely new religion, which was so disagreeable because they taught us with force and violence. And what they taught us, they didn't practice, obviously. The Bible doesn't say, "Go and rape a five year old." The Bible

doesn't say, "Go and beat that child for having an idea." No. A lot of the kids were tortured. The means of punishment was really extreme, to the point of bleeding.

Then, there was the abuses. There was physical abuse, corporal punishment. There was emotional abuse. Of course. You weren't even allowed to express yourself. If you cried, you were told to shut up. When my grandmother died, it was the most horrendous thing that ever happened in my life, and I was not allowed to grieve. I was told to shut up and be quiet. So, I swallowed it back and tried really hard not to sniffle and cry ... There was spiritual abuse ... there was mental and cultural abuse, and they took away our identity ... Then, there was the sexual abuse, which was so prominent amongst almost everyone that went there ... We were used like ... we were used. I can't say it any other way. The girls and the boys, young boys. It changes you, and makes you completely into another person. They did scientific and nutritional experiments on us ... They controlled us, every aspect of our life ... and I intend to ... make it known and talk about it as often as I can to anyone who will hear me. I really encourage people to just listen to the words and try and understand what we went through and to remember that we were little children and to never let it happen again to anybody...

So I went to residential school. And when I went there, I was there with my four friends and they're my sisters to this day. We became sisters at the school and I speak for them. They allow me to speak for them when I talk about the abuses we went through. Two of them are still alive. One doesn't want to have anything to do with anything at all and she's so wise too. She can say things so proper and so well ... and my other sister lives in Chilliwack and she's been with me to Ottawa to the closure of TRC. She's come with me to some of the exhibitions I have of my paintings. She can't speak of it. All she can do is cry. So I'm her voice. My other friend committed suicide when she was very young. She jumped

out of a moving car and she was hit by another one and then she was hit again, run over by another car. And she didn't survive that. And I know what happened to her because the four of us used to be sent down to the vice-principal's office where he would sexually abuse us. And there was no fighting back with him. I mean, he was a grown up man and we were children. I remember getting my foot under his stomach one time and heaved him over my shoulder. I paid for that. He grabbed me by my hair and he slammed my head against the wall. And since then, I have not been able to do numbers or math. And to this day I still can't ... And that was when he first raped me. I was [knocked] out, but when I come to I was in a lot, a lot of pain. A *lot* of pain. I couldn't hardly walk. And it happened to my sisters from the residential school and I am still in contact with them to this day and I talk to them often. Like I said, I'm their voice and I take it seriously and it's a big responsibility for me ...

When we sat down to eat we were not allowed, in any way, to talk at the table which is really contrary to how we grew up. Because [at home] they taught us that you sit at the table and you eat your food, and there's where you carry on your conversations and talk about daily things and talk about teachings. Our people believe that while you're eating and you're being taught something or told something that, [when] you swallow your food, you [also] swallow the knowledge and it's yours. When we're at the residential school the complete opposite was done. We weren't allowed to speak a word at all at the table. Can you imagine 300 kids sitting at tables and not one word, all you hear is the sound of, you know, the cutlery and that's it ... We developed our own language there; a silent language, sign language ... When [the] supervisor wasn't looking, we spelled things out. Yeah, it was really awesome.

*I wonder if you have any animal stories you'd like to share?*

*Gina:* In our culture, Ravens are specially sacred. A lot of our people call them tricksters but you have to know how to decipher whether it's a trick or if it's actual, because they'll warn you. I have lots of stories about ravens warning us about things. One of them was, we were fishing across the bay, my husband, myself, and someone else and there was another boat. The Raven was flying above us and he was just squawking and I was telling Ron, my husband, that something is wrong. I think this is serious, I don't think it's a trick. We looked across the bay and there was this young fellow, his name was Bud. He was rowing his little canoe, and I mean it was little. It couldn't have been any bigger than that couch. There was three killer whales coming like this and they were aimed at him. There was three whales coming this way and there was three whales coming out [of] Snug Basin and they were all honing in on him ... He had another mile to go rowing his boat so, we figured, "Okay, they're mistaking him probably for a seal so we better get over there." So we had an outboard motor on the boat and we drove across and we told him, "C'mon, tie up, we're taking you home," and we dragged him home. But the Raven warned us. The Raven told us that this boy's in trouble.

The Raven used to warn our tribe a long time ago. There are stories that are passed down, about other bands coming to invade us. We would get to safety because of it, because they made a certain sound when it was a warning. You get to recognize them once you've known them long enough. They say never, never, never kill a raven. Someone killed a raven and my little brother got really sick. They called for our Indian doctor, who lived on reserve, and she came over and she asked, "Who killed a Raven?" Because he was really, really sick and I think he was close to dying. She was saying that because someone killed a raven, it has a mate and unless they kill the mate, he's going to die. Of course, everybody started praying and, all of the sudden, there was a huge commotion outside the bedroom window and I ran to

have a look and all the dogs on the reserve were tearing apart the other Raven. It gave itself up. My brother became better almost instantly and all he wanted was to go play. We really take Ravens seriously, we feel that they're spiritual beings ...

Yeah, we had our own medicine and a lot of it came from the land. I think we had three different types of Indian doctors way back. I don't think we do anymore. If we do it's very few. But one of them was, what I was being taught [before residential school], to take medicines from the forest; to preserve it; to prepare it; to use it. Lots of those steps I've missed out on, so I'll recognize a medicine but I won't know how to preserve it and I won't know how to use it. Some I know how to use; I know how to gather; I know how to preserve; I know how to apply it. But that was one kind of a doctor. The other one was spiritual healer. She got her power of healing from really intense rituals. She went out into the forest, you had to be young and strong, you weren't allowed to drink anything for three days and you weren't allowed to eat anything for a week. Eventually, you gain a power and they knew how to tell the difference between where the power came from; whether it was good or bad and what kind it was. Because there are several different kinds. She was a spiritual healer, this woman. Then there's the ones who are doctors just for children and babies.

This [one] particular doctor was a spiritual healer. I had been swimming all day and at first I thought that I had maybe been in the sun too long or that I had eaten something bad or whatever, or I had eaten too fast ... [and] I went swimming too soon or something. I started to make my way out of the water and head up the beach and lay on the ground for a while to warm up on the gravel and it just got worse. So I headed towards the stairs and by the time I got to the stairs, I could barely move. My mom took me and laid me down and she called for the Indian doctor to come over. When she got there I heard them speaking our language and

she was saying that she doesn't know if she's strong enough now because she's very old and she said she would try. But whenever she touched my head, I had this humongous headache, they had to close all the doors and the windows, put blankets on them and no one could walk around because it hurt so much when they moved. She would touch my head and when she touched something, I could feel it, but when she wasn't touching it I couldn't feel it. I just had extreme pain. She tried to get it up here on top of my head and I could feel her touch it. Then, she got very excited and started to sing songs to the Creator and praising Creator and talked to my mom and told me, if she doesn't get it before it gets to the bottom of my skull here that I would die.

She tried another time and it seemed like it got away again. Whenever she touched, the pain was gone. Then, she told my mom I may not be strong enough. It was very frightening. She was just down right here and I could feel her squeeze something. Then, she took her hand like this and she was asking everyone, "Can you see this?" Well, no one could see it and they took all the blankets off the windows and everybody was trying to see what she was holding and no one could see it. I just wanted to get outside and go swimming again. So, I was heading out the door already and she said to me that ... well, to everybody, "This is not a bad one. It didn't mean to hurt her. It just got lost so, we're going to let it go." So, she went to the backdoor and ... I see her like this and she goes like this and let it go. When she let it go, I could see what appeared to be a bumblebee. It looked like a glass bumblebee, kind of jellyfish type material, and it flew away. It went to the great big Hemlock tree in the back yard. She said it again, "It never meant to hurt anybody. So, we let it live"<sup>40</sup> ...

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<sup>40</sup> See the website, [www.earthluv.ca](http://www.earthluv.ca), to listen to Gina tell the story of how her brother also had an experience similar to this but with a bad "one" that did intend to hurt people.

Many people came to see her. A lot of people, even in hospitals, when all hope was gone. Some of them would call for her and she would help them. She would get them better. People used to come down there from everywhere. Not just native people, everyone. Minor things and really painful things and she helped them all. She had a wonderful gift and they knew how to decipher the spirits back then. They don't anymore. Nobody seems to know anymore ... No one taught me and no one taught anybody that I know of. So, I think it's a lost art now. I'm really sad about it. It's really scary to know that that information is gone, part of colonialism. Yep. They didn't believe in it. It was heathen backwards, and it was evil to them. We were told that many times in a residential school. Our rituals and ceremonies and our way of life was evil. Yeah ...

I was at the museum here in Port Alberni and, as you come into the display, there was a plaque there. And I took the time to read it, and at the bottom of the plaque they spoke about how the Nazis came to Canada ... it's a matter of record that they came here to go to residential schools to find out how to treat prisoners. And I think they even did experiments on the children there. I don't know if it was them or it was our own government that did it; using the electric chair and I guess many other things. I don't know about the other things, I only know about the electric chair that they practiced with that on children, on our children. And there was deaths in many of the schools, our people disappeared out of those schools. To this day some of them are still coming back from down in the states where they'd either been sold or they had been adopted out ... Yeah, a lot of people died as a result of that ...

*If there was one message you would like share with the world what would it be?*

*Gina:* I wish I could articulate it a little bit better, but there's been many things said about us; about Native people and how we're whiners for one thing. But I would really like people to know that we were little children and everything we learned at the residential school was

not good ... And I want people to understand that we were little children and we were brainwashed and everything that was ours, everything that represented who we were, everything that we are, was stripped from us. Including family, friends, community, our food, our language, all of it was taken. And when you're a child you can't fight an adult. And I want people to know this, when you grow up in that manner you don't know how to defend yourself. And when you get older and you've grown up like that, you're dysfunctional. And it takes a lot for – it took me 54 years to be able to speak about what happened to me there and to feel safe enough to talk about it. And sometimes I revert back to that little child and I want to hide again and not say anything. It takes a lot of willpower for me to keep talking.

I want people to understand what I went through, what I felt and how much work it took to get to the point where I am today. A lot of us are like that, some of us are in different phases of our recovery from that. I want people to understand too that it wasn't them personally that did this to us, it was the government and the churches that got together and decided we were not people and that we needed to have what we were taken away from us. And for everyone to please understand, please listen to our words, and please try and help...

I think that a good way to help with reconciliation and healing of survivors of residential schools would be to listen to our stories and acknowledge them. I would love to see children taught the honest truth about what happened to us in that institution so that they'll grow up knowing where they came from, understanding why their parents are the way they were or their grandparents, and just the truth. I would like to see the truth out there. I don't want to see it buried and a lot of people seem to want to bury it. I would like people to listen because I think a lot of them are afraid to hear it and may take it personal. I don't think it's anyone's fault. I think that we need to take care of it ...

### 3.1.2 Arthur Manuel Dick



**Figure 2:** Knowledge Holder Arthur Manuel Dick

Arthur Manuel Dick, also known as Ttakwagila, is one of the hereditary chiefs of the Mamalilikala tribe of Village Island, BC. The Mamalilikala are one of eighteen distinct tribes that make up the Kwakwaka'wakw First Nations. Kwakwaka'wakw territory reaches from the northern reaches of Vancouver Island to the middle of the island and includes additional islands and inlets throughout Johnstone Strait, Queen Charlotte Strait and Smith Sound. Art is a registered member of the Namgis First Nation and, at the time of this project, also sat as an elected Band Councillor for the Namgis Nation. Art is also one of the youngest traditional speakers of the Kwak'waka' language in his community. Please see Art's interview on the website to hear a *full* introduction in Kwak'waka. Art gave his interview in the U'mista Cultural Center surrounded by ceremonial masks and regalia that were confiscated from a potlatch ceremony held on Village Island [his home] in the early 1920's.

*Art, please go ahead and introduce yourself.*

*Art:* My name literally translated is Copper Maker, Ttakwagila. I'm from Village Island, that's my chief's name. And my dad moved me over here to Alert Bay to be with the people of my mother and uh the Namgis - and that's who I am.

*I wonder if you'd like to speak a bit about your relationship with the land and the manner in which it relates to hunting and harvesting practices?*

*Art:* The way my grandfather connected with the land and the animals was with the word *mayaxala*. A very important word in our language. And the new age people are saying it's a word of respect but it's much much more than that. It's a walk of life. It's a way of honoring every living thing and I'll just use my grandfather as an example. When I stepped on a Spider, in his house, he kicked me in the pants and I asked what he did that for. He says who's gonna feed that Spiders babies now that you got rid of the mother or the dad. So that's the concept of *mayaxala*.

That walk of life spreads through out every living thing on earth... The first deer I shot, my grandfather ran around it four times singing a song. I don't know the words to that song. I wish I paid attention. And then he got down on his knees after the fourth round and thanked the Creator for providing [us] with that animal. But he thanked the deer for dying in order for us to live. He did that with the halibut, he flipped it over on its white side up and ... he pointed [it] to his home, Village Island, and thanked it for dying in order for our families to continue to live. And those are things that I was brought up with. When we were jigging [for] the halibut we sang songs to the halibut, in order for them to come ... The most important thing he said was, if you're going to kill anything you make sure you eat it. That way you'll appease the spirit of that animal, that he died for a good reason. And that's the teachings I took with me when my grandpa went home.

The thing that happened with the hunting and whatnot was our people, before they went, they'd say their prayers and they'd bless the tools that they were going to use whether it was rifle or a bow and arrow. One of the things my grandfather talked about was the sweat boxes that we had. The old people went into the sweat boxes to get rid of the human smell ... Everything was done with a purpose in mind. It wasn't just something that you did on a whim. You had to go through a certain process in order to make things happen. I remember my grandmother telling my grandfather to go get four halibut. She'd tell him to get halibut and then he'd say how many? And then the next question was how big? So he knew exactly where to go to get the sixty pounders, at what specific tide ... so... if she wanted a great big huge one he'd go to a different place at a different time. We don't know that stuff anymore and it's a lost concept of our being connected to the spirit world. Ya know.

He always said take what you need and leave the rest for somebody else. I think that is a standing order for Indigenous peoples all over the world. It's not just us that do that ... cause if we did that haphazardly all over the world there would be nothing left for anybody... it's not like today, where you're just taking, taking, taking and not leaving anything for anybody else. That's what's happening today. Everything has turned into a monetary system where dollars and cents ... is the driving force. It's not to feed the people, it's to see how much money you're going to make ... So these are the things that guided our people and it wasn't just go out there to kill, kill, kill or cut trees down, cut as many as you can down to make a buck. It was sustainable and we always left enough behind to keep it going.

Today, through all kinds of government policies, that's been taken away from us and we don't get that anymore ... now it's a welfare system where your needs are being met by some other avenue than the hereditary chiefs. And um, because of the monetary system of the colonialism that has taken over and made it especially hard for the poor people to have access

to their foods. And with that system in place, our health is deteriorating because we're not eating our proper foods ... that sustained us throughout the centuries. I see a huge attack on our title and rights with the government taking away what used to belong to us. Why are you growing an Atlantic salmon in the Pacific Ocean? When all they've got is diseases? This is exactly the same thing they did with the small pox and everything else that they tried to annihilate *us* with. They got rid of a lot of tribes that don't exist anymore through that system, now they're doing it to the very thing that sustained us throughout the centuries ... And they're saying the fish that's out there now, you don't have any title and rights to it because it's not Indigenous to your land ...

Another thing that's not happening is, when there's an infringement on our titles and rights, under the system of the Haida and Taku<sup>41</sup> (that was the Supreme Court of Canada) the government was given a whole step by step process on how to consult with us. With that law case two words were stapled together, consultation and accommodation, and they don't accommodate us in any way, shape or form. I'll get off that topic and back to other things but I think that story needs to be told ... Anybody that was an activist before 911 became a terrorist after 911 and that's the truth of the matter. And I know it's a little bit off topic but the Spirits are guiding me and I needed to say it, thank you ... I dare any scientist to come and tell me that there is a way to clean up the oil that's being produced in Fort McMurray. There's no scientific way to clean that up once that spill happens, it's gonna be there forever and ever, they can't clean that up and for Stephen Harper to go ahead and do all this stuff and uh Trudeau to change his mind on the things he got elected for. It's just, ya know, just when

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<sup>41</sup> See Kaardal and Morellato (2004) and Wolfe (2005) for more information about Supreme Court of Canada decisions made in the Haida & Taku River case.

you think that's not a freight train coming at you they pull the wool over your eyes and all of the sudden that freight train is back...

What about the United Nations Declaration on Indigenous People where does it come in? The UNDRIP they call it. Ya know that stuff is meant to protect all people not just Native people. Its protecting all the minorities, the rights that we have as human beings and they're attacking you just as much as they're attacking me. And the rich get richer and the poor get poorer ... It's the same as Standing Rock. You got arrested down there, and a friend of mine, a friend of ours, Joy got arrested there on all these bogus charges that the government had. They do that everywhere when you go against the status quo of what bureaucracies are doing ... So, all I want to do is put the word out there and maybe have the United Nations have a look at what Canada is doing ... The Canadian government ... they're worse than China, the way they treat our people ... The governing system that they put in place for the Native people all across North America it's called scarcity governance ... and people are dying because of it. In Fort McMurray, that Athabaskan River ... I saw a thirty one year old, mother of five, talking and she only had a couple more months to live because of the cancerous stuff that's leaching into that river. What's the government doing about it? ... The governments are turning away saying there's nothing wrong. You watched the videos of the polar bears that don't have access to the seals. They're going to be extinct. What are they doing about it? Melting more snow, melting more ice because they want to get at the oil out there. Where does it stop? Who's going to get the last fish?

*If you could sit down with the executives of these companies, who are directly hurting the people and the land in this way, what would you say to them?*

*Art:* They're killing me. The only thing missing is the gun. They're killing my people. The only thing missing is the gun. Assimilation is still alive and well in Canada. That river

over there belongs to my forefathers. And the Spirits of my Elders are here with us, giving me the courage to speak like this. It's not me talking. These words are just appearing in my mind and it has to be said. If I don't say it there's nobody else here that's going to come and do it.

I think the reason the potlach was banned was because it gave our people strength to speak with one voice. The banning of it, in the 1800's, was a brilliant idea of the governments of the day to assimilate us into the mainstream thinking of the white man and to become dependent on a monetary system ... We never thought about sustainability because we never ever took more than we needed ... the Big House system, when they banned it, that was a way of our people of celebrating the seasons; celebrating the wealth that we had; the food that we shared. And um, ya know, the monetary system brought along with it greed. Dirty, dirty word: turns families against each other and that's what I see happening today. Families are breaking apart because they don't *mayaxala* (with the respect meaning of it) they don't *mayaxala* each other anymore ...

That's stuff that's happening all across the world and they call it poverty. Well, poverty to me is when the governments use up all the natural resources ... that's poverty forced upon the Indigenous people of that land and its happening as we speak today. It's happening right now. I can't go out there to fish my food fish because the Fraser River people need it more than me, why? There was plenty of it before, more than enough. But right now gillnet boats are going by steady for the last three days. I don't know how many hundreds of boats went by because there's a commercial opening and the only way these fishermen are going to survive is to go catch that fish; literally forced upon them because they owe money on their boats, they gotta pay bills; gotta feed their children. That monetary system, I don't know how to dismantle it or do we need to? Is there another way? That's what I'm looking for.

I'm looking for another way to get back to our cultural way of doing things and make the non-Indigenous world aware that we can do it in a different way ...

*How do you think we could start to reconnect with the land in a way that takes into consideration an Indigenous perspective and understanding of this land?*

*Art:* From the days of my grandfather and today the biggest thing I see missing in my life is the spirituality of it all, and that's what's needed. We need to get back to spirit. We're all spirit beings, in a human form, not the other way around ... spirituality, spirituality is to walk a walk that does not offend the Creator ... that's the biggest thing I see today. There's no spirit. And when you go to spirit your talk'in about your heart and the bureaucracy doesn't have one. There's a big hole in their chest where their hearts supposed to be ... To reconnect would be to go back to the beginning; to be where those lessons were taught; and to reconnect with the land and go back to your roots. When you've been uprooted from your Indigenous spot it's hard to connect to that kind, that kind of belief system ...

It's amazing to see [our] youth. They're so proud of what they've accomplished. I have great nephews strutting around like peacocks when they come back from a successful hunt. And I ask him, "how do ya feel?" and he says "GREAT!" Well they've been brought back to the land where their ancestors came from. And [they] say "hey, my grandfather did this, and I'm going to eat this ..." and stuff like that. That kind of success brings about that pride that you asked about earlier, in being able to go out there and do that. And that's been taken away, incrementally taken away by government legislation. And what do we do? We gotta fight back with paperwork, not bullets but words ...

I stand up for my title and rights very vocally and with a lot of force because the passion that those old people had has been instilled in me since I watched my dad in the political world, growing up. That's why it's so important to understand that we never signed anything

over to the Canadian government or the provincial government to say that it belongs to you. Yeah, and I say that with pride in my heart because my parents, and my grandparents, were a lot smarter than what they think. Yeah.

*I wonder if you could share a bit about why an animal might gift itself to a hunter?*

*Art:* Well there's legends about why animals come to us. My grandpa talked about the deer ... The deer was capable of climbing trees and the son of the sun, *Tlisalagilawq* was his name, he was conceived from the rays of the sun hitting his mother's privates and a knothole in the wall. And he had powers. And when the people of the day went hunting, the deer would climb a tree and hide from them ... he did it four times ... [he] climbed up there and *Tlisalagilawq* would come along and tell that deer to come down and it wouldn't. So he made one leg fall off and he did it four times and all his legs fell off. So *Tlisalagilawq* said from this day forward you won't be able to climb trees. So your job now is to feed the people of the land. So all these hoofed animals, they can't climb trees anymore and their responsibility is to feed us human beings. And I guess when the animals figured they've reached their time, or we have a cultural event happening, they will come to you and the only thing they want is to be thanked. And that's why my grandfather did what he did. He thanked the animal for dying in order for us to keep living ... it's a big basic part of what the job is for humanity. And the thanks that they [the animals] get will move them on to a different level of life. And that's the teachings of my grandfather. Whether it's true for every culture or not, that's up to them and I only go by what my Grandpa taught me. I'm not here to dispute anybody, I'm just here to say this is what I learned.

So I've had animals walk right up to me from this far away right up to you, as far as you are. And there's some of them I wouldn't take, too young, too small you know stuff like that but yeah ... when it's time for them, they'll come to you. And my grandpa said, if you do

good things, they'll come to you. So, I didn't listen to that very well when I was growing up. But yeah, when I shot my first deer, at twelve years old, I remember him, like I say, doing his circle – always to the left. Always to the left because we are earth worshippers. That's the rotation of Mother Earth. There's no right or wrong way. The sun worshipers of the prairies go to the rotation of the Sun. So everything balances out there's no right or wrong way. It's just a matter of who you're worshipping.

And the river systems of our land is the blood that sustains the land. And without water nothing lives. So that's why water is sacred to us and that's why we honor it and respect it. Our cultural way is to look after our mothers and everybody has that instilled in their DNA. So the natural laws of the land wherever you're from is whatever you've been taught. And when the animal gives himself to you ... when they gift themselves they're saying 'I love you.' You gave me a gift, [Art holds up the Tobacco I have offered him] if I refused it what would that make me be like? ... That's saying I don't love you. That's the whole concept of the animals and there's a lot of things we need to learn from that. Some of us will never ever understand it ... Ya know, all the time my grandpa told me to take what you need ... and leave something, ya know, leave the rest for someone else. And that's the way the way we lived it ...

*Why do you think our relationship with the land is so important ?*

*Art:* The reason our land is so important to us is our people consider it as our mother and the female perspective in our culture is huge. The role of the mother and the ladies in our culture – they're more important than the chiefs because they're name givers; they're chief makers; they teach the songs and dances. The dances you see nowadays are being taught by aunties that have gone through that whole process and to bring it back to the way it used to be because we have evolved with the colonial aspect of the monetary system and it's not so

simple now to go back. We're having a huge problem with uh bringing our language back ... I'm one of the last remaining fluent speakers I don't mean this in bragging tone but I want to teach the newer younger chiefs how to speak in the Big House and leave something pertinent behind when I – when Creator calls me home. Yeah ...

*I know you are also a Grease Maker. I wonder if you could share a bit about the harvest and how important it is to your people?*

*Art:* That would be the Oolichan harvest, the grease is a product of the Oolichan. Yeah. The sacredness of that whole process is a part of our being. Oolichan is sacred to us and we could never ever abuse it ... never ever even talk badly about Oolichan ... During my lifetime the Oolichan ... started getting caught by drag seining in the river. And slowly the Oolichan started deteriorating. There was not that many coming back. And um, my uncle Stevie ... reverted back to the old weir that we used to use, tagat, they called it. And it was made out of spruce root and stinging nettle rope, twine. It was made during the winter time by the ladies. And with that tagat you caught the fish *after* they spawn. They're drifting down the river, barely alive and they drift into this weir. And it was built in such a way that the river acted like a hose and the narrow end of the weir tapered down, like this. At the other end of the weir you could put the Oolichan anywhere you wanted with a little bit of help. It's not just one person it's two or three guys doing it and you'd fill canoes with it in that manner.

But, they were already spawned out and all their offspring are being looked after up river ... They started um going back to that way ... The pits were big, huge ... after you let 'em rot ... and it takes 10 days to do that ... then you put 'em in a big vat ... and you let the heat cook the oil out of the fish ... then you strain it through a bedsheet from one pot to the next until you come to the third pot, which is the final product. And all the sediment and stuff is

taken out of that grease and its pretty good. Ya know, if you do it properly it's good stuff and its healthy ... and when you give away the grease in the Big House, that's the highest ranking you're gonna get ... you don't see grease being given away anymore today. I think it's only been one since I did it and I gave away over 150 gallons ...

*As a non-Indigenous person, or people, what can we do to help support the healing of colonialism?*

*Art:* I think what we need to do to heal, is to get know each other better. That generational guilt, that comes with what's been done in the past, really should not even exist because it's not right to take it personally. Because the people that are feeling the guilt, was not directly involved with the things that happened. And we gotta move past that guilt in order to fix things and get to know one another. The more we gather and the more we talk to each other [the more] we get to know who we are and what our feelings are because we're all human ... I was told that we are human beings not human doings so we need to work on that and work towards ... reconciliation ... In order to get ... the whole system to work is to build trust amongst each other and it's not a simple fact to just go ahead and do things without thinking it through ... [there is] a huge wall [of] distrust that we have for the simple fact [of] all the atrocities that happened to us. And it's still happening today in a different manner because, ya know, until they meet us halfway 50/50 it's not going to change ... There will never be any trust until you come and talk to us, not make some absurd decision over in Ottawa or Victoria and come and tell us what our problem is and how we're going to solve it. That's never worked in the past and it will never work now.

*If you had one message to share with the world what would it be?*

*Art:* Hmmm ... I think we should all go back to the spirit connections that we are and take lessons from the Indigenous peoples of the world. Not the itinerants that move from one

jump to the next because they're getting paid more, but, the people that live and stay and are proud of where they're from. You have to respect their values. We're all born good and, like I said, if you can't believe in God put another 'o' in that word and believe in Good and do good ... the message I got from my grandparents on both sides ... my mom's parents and my dad's parents were all the same, do good whether you're in the biblical world or whether you're in the Native cultural way.

### 3.1.3 SherryLynne Jondreau



**Figure 3:** Knowledge Holder SherryLynne Jondreau.

SherryLynne Jondreau, also known as Woman who Stands Strong, is an Anishinaabe 60's Scoop survivor. Despite having been stolen from her family and her culture as an infant, SherryLynne still managed to find her way back to the teachings of her people. After many years of healing the wounds that colonialism inflicted upon her, SherryLynne eventually evolved into a leader of the same Indigenous ceremonies that helped her to heal and leave behind a life of addictions and pain. Today she carries these ceremonies forward to continue to help "the people." Along with being a ceremonial leader, SherryLynne is also an Indigenous Culturist and Youth Advocate for the community at large. SherryLynne gave her interview inside an Inipi Lodge. Under normal circumstances there would never be photographs or filming allowed during an Inipi ceremony. However, SherryLynne felt that the nature of this work called for the interview to take place there so as to help carry this work forward in a good way. To bridge together these two methods of learning, sharing and growth, we held the interview inside the lodge. We did not start the Sacred Fire, as would have occurred with an actual Inipi Ceremony. Instead, SherryLynne smudged the lodge and each of us with Sage and simply asked the Ancestors to help lead us through the process in a good way.

*SherryLynne, please go ahead and introduce yourself.*

*SherryLynne:* Wonderful, thank you. My name is Woman who Stands Strong. That is my Medicine name. My English name is SherryLynne Vincent and my adopted name is Jondreau. I am an Anishinaabe Woman. I'm a leader of ceremony, Sweat Lodge, which is also an Inipi Ceremony, [and I am a] Pipe Carrier. Yes, and [I've been chosen to be] the head female Sundancer for Sundance Ceremonies. I am also a thirteen [fourteen] year Sundancer to date and carrying on that tradition ... I am also grandmother to Madison Menzies, mother to Nicole, Bryan Cam and Martin. Daughter of Virginia Vincent. I'm adopted daughter of Ambrose Edward and Sarah Anne Jondreau who adopted me when I was a very young baby. I am Anishinaabe, which is Ontario and right now we are sitting on Snuneymuxw First Nation Territory and I would like to thank them for letting us have this interview today in this way. Thank you.

*Why do you feel that our relationship with the land is so important?*

*SherryLynne:* When I think about the land, and all it's given to us, it's our life. Really. When I think about Mother Earth and the gifts she's given to me, it really supports who I am. When I am out there in that world all I have to do is pick a bit of Cedar and brush it over myself and whatever's happening it cleanses me. That's how pure Mother Earth is. There are no mistakes in Mother Earth. Mother Earth just is. And if we respect her the way she needs to be respected, she will look after all of us. Mother Earth looks after the quality of our life, looks after our food, looks after our relations, our two legged, our four legged. Looks after our trees, our trees give us our air. Water, we're 95% water. Water is life. Life belongs to everybody. Mother Earth needs to be respected. Not protected. I think they're putting way to much force into protecting her. She'll look after herself, she has since the beginning of time and she's still here. It doesn't matter what destruction that we do to her. She seems

to always come back, and look after us. It's us that needs to be healed, and doctored, and looked after so that we can look at Mother Earth the way that she looks at us with beauty.

*Is there is a ceremonial aspect to hunting or harvesting from the land?*

*SherryLynne:* For myself Tobacco in our culture was the first thing that came out from Mother Earth. So we picked her and was grateful for that. That's what we use for everything that comes from Mother Earth. If we are going out to pick some sage, we put down Tobacco first to say thank you to that plant and the Ancestors that showed us this way. If we're out using Sweetgrass we do the same thing. We put the Tobacco down first to say thank you for that medicine coming. It all has its different purpose in every ceremony. Sweetgrass is used to bring the Ancestors close to us, our Spirits, our guides. Tobacco is used all the time in gratitude. I've heard my brother, Bill, use it in a forgiveness sort of state. It's if you pray with it, and even before that Tobacco hits the ground, that person or whatever is forgiven. It's used by human beings to let that go. Believe me, I've seen it work and it's amazing how that is.

Cedar is a West Coast medicine. I use it to honor the Coast Salish people because that's what they used to build their canoes. They used it for their [clothing] wear. They used it for everything, right? So, it's that respect for the Coast Salish people that I use it for here. Then, the Sage is used to cleanse the air, to cleanse our Spirits ... It's a cleansing sort of medicine is what it does. I use it inside the lodge. I use it outside the lodge. I eat it. I drink it. It's a medicine that I use to cleanse everything. My aura, someone else's aura or inside. If I'm having trouble inside I use it on my insides.

Everything with Indigenous people of this land is a process. Nothing just happens. We get signs from the Creator, or an Ancestor that let us know when it's time. It was like building this lodge, I had to come out here and ask Mother Earth if I could do this. I had to

go and ask the Willow, and then I gather the people to ask them if they will come and help me and support me in this way, right. So, you might want to lay on her, and ask her quietly and you'll get the message, "Yes, we can help." So, we gather the medicine, the Sweetgrass, the Water, and the Tobacco. Those are the three things that I use to build a lodge. I go out and I light the Sweetgrass and I ask the Ancestors to come and help me. They do. I give them some Water, and I put down the Tobacco for thanks and the gratitude for them coming. This sometimes takes years. It doesn't happen overnight. It takes years for something like this to happen. So, you go out there and you ask. You ask permission. You just don't go and start digging up the earth, or cutting down trees. Cause that's not respectful, and that's what we always walk with is that respect. Respect is at the heart of Mother Earth. She's at the heart of us First Nations Indigenous people. If anything I can leave you with, it's that respect of self, of earth ... That's the way that the change is gonna come about ...

... So, if we respect her [Mother Earth] and acknowledge her, then she's going to do the same to us. Like, I asked to build this lodge. I asked Mother Earth. I asked the people of this land. I said, "I really, really need to do this." I asked the Earth, I asked Linda, I said, "Can I build here?" And the Earth told me it was okay. That still didn't give me the right to come and dig it up. I had to ask, "Is it okay if I put the hole here?" It's all very sacred because I don't ... when I think about it, it's like the womb of Mother Earth. You don't want to go into a pregnant lady and start digging into her. You want to ask her, "Can I take your baby out if it's not going to come out on its own?" It's the same as this Earth. "Can I build this alter?" When I leave here ... It will not be like this. It will be ... as I found it here.

*How has colonialism interrupted your own relationship with the land?*

*SherryLynne:* I am Woman who Stands Strong. There is many times that I should have been taken from this world. Colonialism almost killed me. Almost killed me. It killed

everything inside. I would have went gladly. I've found myself with child, with a child, pregnant with my daughter, Nicole Ann, who breathed life back into me. I'll always be grateful for her for doing that for me, bringing me back to life.

... I was one of those 60's scooped kids who ... I guess maybe the government thought it was a good idea to take Indigenous children from their families and place them with white families in order to try to assimilate them into the culture, and thinking that our culture wasn't good enough for them because it didn't have any monetary value, I think, is what it was. I guess if you raise an Indian and put them out on a farm, well, they're going to be making money. Well, we weren't like that. We went where the food was, and we gave back to the land. So, there's a transfer that happens. It's not like we just take. We leave something to say thank you to Mother Earth, because that's what's going to look after us in this big world is this earth right here, right?

... All I know is that I was in a family where I knew I didn't belong. I never felt connected, I felt like it was more or less a place where I was meant to be sort of like the slave, the person who cleaned up, the person who looked after the other kids ... I was made to feel grateful to be even in that home, to even be adopted ... Otherwise if they weren't okay with me being there, where am I going to be, because I didn't know where I belonged. I grew up very scared, very alone and it wasn't until I got out into the ocean or got into the water or got into the woods is where that all sort of left me. I left it there and I could be free. I could run in the woods and be with the birds and that's where I was at my best.

Even at a very, very young age, at I'd say nine or ten years old, I remember being grounded all the time. I couldn't do anything right, I'm telling you, when I was a kid. Could not do anything right. I tried. I would be such a good child. I'd get up all happy and try to fit into that box that they wanted me to be in. But man, I just couldn't. It was hard for me to

relate to them, and it was really hard to tell the truth about what was really happening in that home to a family who didn't know what to do about the truth; the truth about the sexual abuse and the beatings and all the dysfunction that I didn't even know at the time it was dysfunction. You kind of just go along, like we spoke about that ...

But yes, colonialism almost killed me. It slowly started to chip away at a reality ... and put me into a space where I was continually scared of who I was, who the people out there were ... I was very abused, severely, when I was younger and didn't even know I was. It was just a matter of fact that this is the way that the life is for you. There was a lot of suffering that happened in my early years, such as a lot of sexual abuse, emotional abuse, physical and spiritual. I wasn't raised in these ways. I didn't even know I really was a First Nation's people until at school one day I was called a wagon burner and I didn't know what that was. So, I went home and I asked my mother, who was white, and she just slapped me across the face and said, "Don't say that." But, I knew that it was about me and I couldn't understand why I was that and it was bad. So, that's what I mean about colonialism. Taking, not sharing, taking my life to the point of where I just didn't even want to live. I tried everything to kill myself, everything, and it just didn't work because I was supposed to be here today to do this work so that people can understand who we are ... Have that compassion for another human being instead of angst because our skin is brown.

But the Spirits never gave up on me. The ancestors never gave up on me ... they would actually come and talk to me and I'd have great conversations with them ... They surrounded me when I was about, probably, nine or 10 years old and said, "you're important." I didn't really understand because they're beautiful people. They told me to put my hands out so, I did and they put blankets on there. They said, "You need to take this down to your mother to thank her for taking care of you. She's going to take care of you if she accepts these

blankets.” So, I got my blankets and I go downstairs and I try to gift them to my mom, my adopted mom. She just threw them on the ground, not understanding what I needed. Sent me back upstairs. So, I went back upstairs and I told the spirits, “I can’t see you anymore. You can’t come. They’re going to send me away. I’m being viewed as crazy.” ... so, when the Spirits started to talk to me, the people that adopted me thought I was crazy in my head because they didn’t understand what this little brown girl was saying. “What do you mean you got these blankets? Why are you talking to people that aren’t there? How come you’re bringing in these birds that are half dead and doctoring them and letting them go?” When I think about the land and my relationship to it, it is me. It really is me. It talks to me, feeds me ...

So, at a very young age I was taught to drink. I was taught that by my [adopted] dad and it seemed to keep the spirits at bay. So, that was my journey ... So, colonialism is still alive and well through the racism that I experience today in my life. They still follow me in stores. They still look at me like I might be stealing something. That in itself is a disrespect and that needs to go too. Yet, how do I stop it? How can I stop that? Do I stop every person and get to know them? Or, does it happen on the bigger picture? That’s something I’m very ... I really don’t know what to say about that except that it does need to stop.

I remember my daughter, when she was born she was white. She came out white. I had a little white baby and I was never so grateful because I knew she’d have a chance. She wouldn’t have to experience the things that I had to go through. The same as my granddaughter, Madison. She was born white too and I was so grateful again. Oh my goodness, she’s going to have a chance. That’s crazy thinking because everybody deserves to have a chance. It doesn’t matter what the color of your skin is, Creator sees your spirit. And so, when I do ceremony, what that does, it brings me back to my heart and that’s where I

need to remain is in my heart. Because if I'm speaking or doing anything through my heart, it can't be wrong because I'm always checking in with my heart and with my insides.

The 60's scoop was necessary for them, not us. It was necessary for them. They tried to take the heathen out of us and I believe what happened with that is that they opened up the heathen inside of themselves and started to use that against the people. And so even though, that they were acknowledging us as Heathens, they opened up their door, their own door for their own Heathenism to come out and that's where the racism comes from. That's where the non-accepting comes from. That's where all the wars come from and I believe that if more people came into these ways, I believe that would go. I believe that Mother Earth would take care of them. I've seen healing happen.

I've seen it happen through people. Because even myself, I get a little bit off track and think that, "Man, I'm not helping anybody. There's no one that I'm helping." And then Creator will send me a sign like a drunk person showing up on a Vision Quest. What am I going to do? What do you do? There's a lot of medicine people that would send that person away. To me, that's where the doctoring comes. They're coming for that. So how can I send them away? I'm going to scoop them in and take care of them and have those Questers pray for them and hopefully through all those prayers and their own journey of being there for that reason, they'll allow Spirit to work with them.

My good friend David<sup>42</sup> is my walking prayer to this day. He reminds me of that. So I'm really, really grateful. It always comes back to that. It always comes back to that gratitude. It's so easy to get caught up in the world that we live in and all the wars – all the racisms – all

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<sup>42</sup> David Lawless is also my partner and I can confidently say that he would not be here today if it were not for SherryLynne taking him in in this way. SherryLynne not turning him away from ceremony literally saved his life. David's story, though, is a thesis in of itself and a story for another place and time.

the isms that are happening. But as soon as you refocus yourself on that gratitude, it calms you. It gives you clarity. It gives you that warmth. It gives you that generosity. It gives you that strength to move forward and move through these things. I honestly believe it's happening. That balance is happening. That acceptance is happening and we are standing up.

There was many, many generations that sacrificed a whole peoples for us to sit here today, inside this lodge, in order to have this recording happening. I believe it's only through my Uncle Pat, Chief White Cloud, that is allowing this to happen and I think he's in here with us right now, helping me. So that this can be done. Because that was his vision too. Was to have that Rainbow [Sun]dance of all the people, not just brown people. All the races and he crossed over before that could happen, but it did happen. And so I really believe that that is what's going to help every one of our peoples, is that gratitude. That acceptance, that unconditional positive regard that we could have for each other. It's going to lay down those isms. The 60's scoop happened for a reason. It was something that I survived. It's something that drives me today to be who I am *more*, in this world.

*As Non-Indigenous people what can we do to help support the processes of healing?*

*SherryLynne:* Well from my perspective, I really believe that we carry a lot of guilt from the past and I really do believe that it impedes people from looking beyond that because they [non-Indigenous peoples] show up in their guilt and then it kind of triggers the First Nation's People to feel guilty also, right? And so that's one emotion that needs to be gone from the conversation in order for people to move forward in that good way. And I also know that we all bleed red, the color of our skin just happens to be what Creator gave us for our challenges that we need in this lifetime. And part of the challenge of being First Nation is the racism that I deal with sometimes on a daily basis that a lot of people don't recognize and what I

notice is that people with privilege don't get it until they're actually walking with the First Nation's people and they see that happening. And then the guilt comes. Instead of acknowledging, "Oh I'm sorry that happened to you. How can we move this forward so that can't happen anymore?" So guilt is a big impedance on people moving forward and it needs to be extracted and gone from relations.

I believe these ceremonies are for everybody. Everybody needs an opportunity to heal. I also believe that some of the ceremonies were lost for some of the people, especially for our white race. They've forgotten, about their own culture and what they have to offer. So sometimes stepping into an Inipi Lodge will open that door for them. And they'll find their ceremonies, right? They'll find their ceremonies inside of them and what that means to them. For us, it's innate. It's in our body. It's in our DNA. It comes out from that right? And even though I wasn't raised in these ways, it was always in me. Always in me. I was always talking to the spirits and the animals and the birds that came to me. It was people that I had a difficult time with in trying to be who I am.

It's not for people to take and go and open up a Sweat Lodge or go and start a dance. It's a process with us. It's a journey. It's not an end. It's a continuum that we're on all the time. And it comes from Mother Earth and Father Sky and the Ocean and all the Animals give us our signs. Our Ancestors come from beyond and show themselves to us and give us direction in that way. The Grandfathers come from thousands of years. The ones that we sit here in this lodge came from thousands of years, just to sit here with us so that this could move forward right? I know that right now we are probably doing things untraditional, but I'm willing to do that for this work to move forward so that we're understood instead of, sort of frowned upon, instead of not understood.

So, when I reiterate about finding your own ceremonies, it's inside you. It's inside everybody. Everybody has an opportunity. Whether they find it in their own culture, or whether they go outside of themselves and take that opportunity and find an Indigenous person to see if they can find themselves through that way. Cause what I notice is that a lot of white people are very lost. Very, very lost and hurting, and [feeling] guilty ... Part of [healing from] that is coming to ceremony. A big part of that is coming to ceremony and acknowledging that in yourself that yes this is what's going to help us be one.

*As I will be participating in a Hanblecheya ceremony under your care, I wonder if there is anything you'd like to share about this ceremony?*

*SherryLynne:* Well, what I can talk about is my journey towards that. It's very individual. You might be out there with a group of people, but it's still individual to who you are...It's something that is given from the Creator. You get the message, you get the calling, for something bigger to happen in your life... I first went to a man named Pierre to ask him to put me out [on the land for Hanblecheya]. It's not necessarily a putting out, but you ask them to take care of you while you're in your space to do the work that you need to do. And so I asked him with Tobacco, and he said yeah. So the preparations started. Right? I was still really, really sick at that time. Right? And so you start to gather your cloth, your Tobacco, and your string.

So I started with that, and started cutting the cloth. You have to do 400 prayer ties, and that's your circle. I know for me, it was really difficult. Oh, my God, it took me months and months to do my prayer ties, because it just opened up so much. It opens up your heart. It opens up your truth. It opens up who you are. All the things that you've been hiding come out into those prayer ties, and it took me months. I was crying. I was like bawling. It was so traumatic to who I was, my spirit. I had a hard time moving forward, a really, really hard

time, because I'd kept it encased. Not only was I close to 250 pounds, but I was like hurting in my head, my heart, my whole body. I could hardly even move it, because I wanted to protect myself. Right? But all that comes away. All of it comes away, right, and you're sitting there raw. You sit there raw in your circle, because that's exactly what happened to me. So out I go, and I pick this spot, and get my prayer tie circle set up. And as soon as Pierre shut my circle, I could feel my Grandmothers hands on my shoulders letting me know, "It's okay. You're going to be okay."

Less is always more on a journey like that. And that's what I always tell the people, less is always more, because you're connecting with yourself, you're connecting with the land, and you're connecting with Creator and your Ancestors in that space of time of four days. Right? Which seems like a long time, but when you go through it, it just flies. It's so quick. It's so quick those four days. And you don't drink or eat for those four days....It's a beautiful thing, ceremony. It creates a space for people to be doctored. It creates a space for people to be heard. It creates a space for people just to be good, bad, and ugly. There's an acceptance in ceremony where you can't get anywhere else, which creates that acceptance inside, which my hope is that anybody who does come to ceremony has that acceptance so that when they are out in that world and it becomes harsh they still have that.

It's like the glow of the Grandfathers. You take that with you, and if your day is hard, you think about that glow inside of yourself, and you bring that forward. It's like that [Sundance] tree. It stands straight up and strong. That tree is inside of me, and it stands up straight and strong, keeps me standing strong. If I'm ever having a bad day, all I got to do is think of that tree, and it's there with me. All that medicine is there with me. And Uncle Pat, I always remember him saying, he says, "Remember, these are only tools. These are just tools. The medicine is inside of you, and it's always real, and it's always with you, and you can bring

that out at any time to either help yourself or somebody on the side. And don't be afraid to ask for help." Do not be afraid to ask for help. I might be sitting in this [leaders] chair of ceremony, but even I need to do that. Even I need to ask for help, and humble myself, and say, "I need some help." And acknowledge that and accept that. I know that these ways are for everybody, not just for Indigenous people. They are for everybody. And be grateful for what you have.

*Can you share a bit about the songs and why they're so important?*

*SherryLynne:* Well, it took me a long time to learn the songs, okay? It wasn't any easy process for me. I'm a dancer. I'm a Sundancer and that's where I had my strength but I also knew that when I started this work with the lodge, the songs are very important to the Ancestors and to our Spirit Guides. I know that everybody has a song inside of them. I know that it comes to them when they need it the most. For me, my song came when I was out on the land on my Hanblecheya, my Vision Quest. It came to me with the drum. I don't sing it very often [publically] because it's my song but most of the songs I had to learn inside the lodge or at Sundance.

There are songs that you sing to bring in the Ancestors and there's songs that you sing to doctor people. There are songs you sing to uplift people. There are songs you sing to brush them off. There are going away songs for the ceremony to close. Doesn't mean that the Spirits are ready to go because sometimes they hang around for an awfully long time. But the songs are there to help them, either welcome them in, do some doctoring, or to send them off. It's ultimately up to Spirit and our Ancestors on what needs to happen. It's nothing that I control at all. It's nothing I control. It's something that comes through me when I pray. And when I know a ceremony is coming, it takes me a week to prepare. It's like, "Okay, there's a ceremony coming." So, I start with the songs. I'll start with singing. I'll start with

smudging. Then, when the day comes, the ancestors are already here so, even if there's nobody that showed up I would still have to go in and do that ceremony for the Ancestors. That's how important these ways are to the people; our people.

*How might all of this be connected to hunting and our relationships with the land?*

*SherryLynne:* We're all connected. We're all connected. Somehow, somehow through some thread of either experience; Mother Earth; ceremony. We're all connected in that way, especially to the animals. The animals are a big part of who we are as a people. They guide us. They tell us where to hunt. You'll notice an eagle, they'll guide you. If you really, really want to pay attention to what's out there, you'll listen to the animals and what they have to say to us in this process that we're going through. I was lucky enough to receive the drum that I have as a gift. But, the man that did the drum for me went out there and asked the animal, "Can I use you for this purpose? To bring the people back." The animal would have to sacrifice his life for this drum to be here today so that it could sing the people back to their hearts.

There's different drums. This is a seal drum. So, this came from the water. There's moose drums, there's elk drums, there's deer drums. There's bear drums. They all have their meaning. They all have their purpose. They all have their song. There's reasons why we build our first drum and we gift it to somebody so it can be played by that person. The animals speak. They do. They speak to us. Then, when we play our drums they speak to us through this drum. They bring out that song in us, those prayers. It's an honor to have this as a medicine. It's nothing I take lightly and it's so important that I recognize the relationship with everything. It's not just people. It's everything. It's the rocks, it's the trees, it's the little birds. It's the creepy crawlies. It's everything. We're all connected. We're not separate, we are not separate. The relationship between everything and everybody *has* to be

acknowledged. I can't see how it would work without that respect. Sometimes we use animal skins or animal feathers for our ceremonies. They've given up their life to help us. They've acknowledged that this is what you need. This is what's important but it's not everything. Everything we have is inside. This is to support us to do the work. Without all this, I am still somebody and that needs to be acknowledged too. So, thank you for that, allowing me to do that.

*If you had one message you would like to share with the world what would it be?*

*SherryLynne:* There's probably many messages that need to be spoke about, but if I had one that I had to choose, I think it would be speak through your heart as much as possible. Check it in through your heart, and it if says, "Don't say that," [then] do not say that. If it says, "Yeah, go ahead," [then] go ahead. And I think if more people could at least try it, I think the isms would go away, and I think we as a people will survive and thrive and be in a world of sharing and caring and love, compassion, respect, honor. Not only for Mother Earth, but for everybody. Be grateful for what you have. All my relations.

### 3.1.4 Bill Bertschy



**Figure 4:** Knowledge Holder Bill Bertschy.

Bill Bertschy, also known as Oukcha Hotsusk Myo Myo, is from the Sliammon Band of the Coast Salish First Nations of BC. He is both a carver and master drum maker who has made almost 1500 drums to date. Bill is a Longhouse Dancer, a Sundancer, Ghost Dancer and is a leader of many ceremonies. He has also been acknowledged by the Lakota as a Heyoka Medicine Man. Bill has worked in drug and alcohol treatment centers and has run Inipi lodges and other ceremonies in several Prisons throughout southwestern BC. I have known Bill to devote his life to travelling to wherever the people most need medicine and prayers. Bill travelled with Knowledge Holder Ron Desjarlais from Alberta to our home (mine and David's) in Prince George BC to give the following interview.

*Bill, please go ahead and introduce yourself.*

*Bill:* My name is Bill Bertschy. I'm from the Coast Salish tribe of the Sliammon Band. I carry about three names. I carry a name Oukcha Hotsuk Myo Myo. Translation is "You're Always Lost in the Fog" or "You are Lost in the Fog." And then I carry Standing Bear, Chief Standing Bear and then I also carry Chief Thunderbird Man. So I carry them three names. So the Spirits of the world that's what they know me by, the different um tribes. Like the Lakota know me as Standing Bear, the Cree know me as Chief Thunderbird Man and my reserve knows me as Oukcha Hotsusk Myo Myo ... I really don't know anything, 'cause the more you're around, the more opens up, so you really don't have an understanding of nothing. That's the way the Spirit works, 'cause not all of us can carry Spirit, because it's so big and so open and everything. We all get these little fractions. I don't know anything 'cause the fractions are still coming, and one day they'll all be pieced together, hopefully ... I'm a common man. I can't speak for all Natives. I can only speak of my perceptions of what we are doing here today and what we are going to try to accomplish on getting some words out.

*I wonder if you could talk a bit about hunting and perhaps, in relation to that, a bit about your perspectives of life and death?*

*Bill:* Life and death – there's really no such thing as death. Right now we are just a spiritual-being trying to be human. Chief White Cloud, he always had t-shirts like that or a hat, or something like that, all the time. Ya know, it's like "Ya, I'm just a spiritual being trying to be human." That's a hard thing. How do we *be* human properly? How do we *be* human in the natural world ... So there is no such thing as death in the natural world – the natural order of things – the spiritual laws. The spiritual laws are the ones that ya need to learn. When it comes to animals and stuff and we go out hunting, they're here, they're here

to help us maintain our lives and maintain our humanness. They'll give their – they'll sacrifice themselves. They'll sacrifice themselves for the better good of things, just like a Sundancer or a Ghost Dancer. We sacrifice ourselves, ya know, for the better good.

The old Elders they say, when you're out with the Caribou and stuff, their song is “grumfff, grumff, grumfff” and that song when they're grunting and walking – we call it a song – and the song is “We're here to feed the people, we're here to clothe the people.” But you gotta listen to it, ya know you gotta listen to 'em. And they're sing'in a song. And the bear he'll sing a song to ya know. They'll chatter their teeth at you and they'll growl at you, they'll leave marks for you on trees and stuff. So you gotta wake up to things. Ya know, okay “I'm here, I'm here to help the people.” It's just like a Sundancer, a Sundancer will sacrifice; no food; no water; pierce, ya know; pray in the hot sun; suffer. We're sacrificin' ourselves. We're in the spiritual world. We're in the natural world. And that's all the animals, they're there too ya know. The plants, they sacrifice themselves, they come back every year. Every year they come back out to help the people.

When you hunt you do it in honour. Like sometimes I'll do Sweat Lodges before I hunt. We'll always pray and put Tobacco out before we hunt. A lot of times – aw I don't even call it hunting – I just, I go out there. I've gone out there with a gun and just sat against a tree and took a nap and when I wake up, there's the deer or the bear or whatever I was after. Ya know I don't go out chasing things and think I have to track it. No, I pray hard and I ask for it ya know – ask for it to help the people – and they come and they sacrifice themselves. And that's the natural spiritual order, the natural spiritual world.

Ya know the world we live in is so fast. To me, if you ever see a highway and you see the heat waves coming off it and its shimmering like that, back and forth, as you're driving down the road, that's the natural world. That's the way I see the world all the time. It's that

shimmering, that's the spirit world. The one world Creator made for us and that's the world we all need to get back to – to where we can talk with the animals, and they talk to us and we understand them and we're not separated. That's the sad part, we separate ourselves so much from the natural world; from the spiritual world; the spirit world, ya know. We have to learn to overcome that.

A Bear'll give his life, a Deer'll give it's life, Caribou give their lives, Moose, birds, ya know. We think we need to try and control it or we think we need to try and hoard it, when we don't. There's enough for everybody. There's enough for everything. That's the way the world was created. We stepped away from that, the abundance of it. Ya sit and listen, like there's that Raven<sup>43</sup> out there talking now ... That's the natural world ya know. A Bear will come up, eat with you, sit with you ya know all of it. Sasquatches, Buffalo will come up, whatever, ya know, step away from fear, step away from control, step away from ego and all of it will fall into place for you cause that's what life is ...

Hunting became different because it became a sport. I'm not for it, I'm not against it. It's just a big ball of wax that has to be sorted out in a different way. Ya know I don't know how to do it. I know that if you sit and talk with them [the animals], they know, they know how to help but you gotta be willing and open to accept that help. That's what it's about. I have two tattoos. One's a lightning bolt coming in, ones a lightning bolt going out. The one coming in is so I can receive and this ones so I can give. And that's the difficult part for me cause I got my giving one first, so I was always giving. And it was difficult for me to open up to get the one to receive things ya know cause its hard. It's hard to learn to receive. It's

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<sup>43</sup> It was interesting that Bill commented about listening to the Raven/Crow speaking outside, during his interview, as these are the same birds (nested in our yard) who passed on teachings to me throughout the writing of this thesis, something Bill knew nothing about.

hard to learn to receive. Ya, that animals gonna come and *give* its life to you. It's gonna help you. It's gonna nurture you. It's gonna give you your needs or, your wants met, ya know its gonna meet em. So, it's a way – it's a way of life. It's not a culture, it's not a hunting trip. It's a way of life that we're all here, and we need to learn to give and receive ...

When you go out hunting and the separation of, what's substance and what's ceremony. Life is a ceremony, it's all ceremony. There shouldn't be no separation when you're hunting ya know it's to feed the people it's to nourish yourself and that's a ceremony ya know. It's between you and that animal; you and the Creator; you and Mother Earth ya know. Even, the DNA of that animal is going back into Mother Earth ya know. The bones and the scraps and, to use the language even your shit, the DNA of that animal is going back into the earth. So it's not going far ya know. Fish, you can find their DNA in the trees along the creeks and streams and stuff ya know. They've swam up stream and died ya know ... When we're in ceremonies life is – I don't know how to differentiate ceremony and a way of life – like hunting is a way of life also. It's a natural way of life ya know. Ceremonies is a natural way of life, it *should* be ya know. We shouldn't separate how we hunt cause it's all there to feed the people, it's a natural thing ...

*I wonder if you could talk a bit about the role of ceremony in Indigenous ways of knowing and being in the world?*

*Bill:* Ceremony is a way of life, it's not a culture and it should be a way of life for all, not only Native people, ya know. I had an Elder when I was eight years old. His name was Charlie and he started to teach me stuff. He was a good man and he got killed and I got away from the way of life for a while. But then I came back. It's a way of life, it will change people's lives, it will help people. It helps people, grounds people, gives them a different way to look at the world and try to comprehend things. It does make you stronger 'cause you

go into the lodges and they're hot and you work your way through all that. You go to the river and you do your dips in the winter and its cold, so it toughens you up there and makes people be able to handle the coldness more. You learn to pray to the Creator. You learn to forgive yourself. You learn – you learn a way of life that's supposed to *be* a way of life. You learn the Spirits you learn the spirit world, you learn your Vision Quest, your Chanupa your pipe, you learn Medicine Wheel, Sundancing, Ghost dancing ya know, you learn all ways ... there's so much of it.

It's just a journey, and um you pick up little bits here and there and pretty soon it makes you who you are. You don't make you who you are. All the ceremonies all the journeys that's what makes you who you are. So you pick up things like the Eagle Fan, the Pipe, all these things to help you on your journey; they're tools and they help you walk, ya know. It's like the fan, the curvature electricity runs through it from there to there. So people, they get their – electricity starts going sideways like this on them. Then you take a fan, dust 'em down with an Eagle Fan and touch 'em and bring it down. Makes that electricity run straight back up and down in their bodies. So it helps them heal up a little bit. Ya know a fan isn't just for looks, it's for doctoring, it's for help, its – they're good.

It's not us, the people, that's doing it, it's all the medicines around us that we learn. We have to learn to use the medicines again. And that's what ceremonies are and that's what coming into this way of life is, it's learning ... I'm a West Coast Longhouse Dancer in Chilliwack. I'm a Sundancer. I'm a Ghost Dancer and I become other dancers with other tribes. So there's a lot – a lot to learn. You're not gonna learn it all, you're gonna be part of it, and that's about where ceremonies will help people – ya know always help. If you have the strength and the want to change your life, its' just a path that you can take ... In the culture's there's always different roles for everybody. On the West Coast in the Longhouse,

you'll have Blackface Dancers, and you'll have Redface Dancers. And the Blackface Dancers, they get all the Spirits off the salt water. And the Redface Dancers, they get all their Spirits off the creeks, the mountains, the streams, the trees. We're the holy men, we're the doctors in the Longhouse. We're the Longhouse doctors, that's what these tattoos are. They're – the red, it took me 38 days and 38 nights of being blindfolded in a Longhouse to earn my red tattoos.

Then in different cultures you'll have what they call Spiritual Clowns. They're called Heyoka's or Contrare's. And our role is ... to not take ourselves seriously, and not have other people take ourselves so seriously; try to get out of ego as much as possible because ego is wow, that's hard. I get caught up in it too a lot, so I got to stop myself and tear it down. But being Heyoka, you got these different gifts. Not all of us carry the same gifts ... We can split the sky, some of us can make storms go around us. We have a good strong relationship with thunder and lightning, and the Thunderbird Thunder Beings. That's how the Cree gave me the name Chief Thunderbird Man.

We're here to – kind of – to teach the people on what not to do, instead of trying to teach the people what to do, we're backwards. Okay, don't do this, just because we're doing it this way is trying to show you that you shouldn't do it this way. It's another part of sacrifice ... but we're going to make fun of it. We're going to make fun of the seriousness of it just to show you that it's not really as serious as we make it in our own mind. We're going to take the seriousness out of it by clowning around. There is three of us over at a nephew's funeral about a year-and-a-half ago and they had to separate the three of us because we was disrupting the funeral. It was February and we're outside the funeral hall having snowball fights and stuff. Everybody's crying and everything else, we're running around cars

throwing snowballs at each other. Yes, death did leave a big hole in their lives, but then also celebrate their life, have fun. They [the departed] don't want us to mourn and cry.

And being a Heyoka is a hard job, it's difficult because [people] don't understand us ... That's backwards thinking and people don't understand that. They say it's backwards thinking, we say it's kind of the right way of thinking. And they just can't bend their mind around the way we think, it's a different way of thinking. I can't say it's right and I can't say it's wrong, all I can say is it just is. And that's Heyoka's we'll do that; we'll help you suffer; we'll help you suffer more. You think you've suffered now, come and hang out with us, we'll get you suffering real good. That's about all I can really say about a Heyoka. Unless you're around us – you got to come – you just can't come and meet one and say “Oh yeah, I know Heyoka's.” No, you got to come and be around us like four, five, six, seven, eight years, then you'll have a glimpse of us. That's about it, all my relations.

*Could you talk a bit about Indigenous perspectives and relationships with the land?*

*Bill:* When it comes to the world and the plants and the animals, as we say, all our relations. When we say ‘all our relations’ it means the Ones-that-Crawl, the Ones-that-Swim, the Ones-that-Fly the Rooted Nation the Star Nation, the Four Leggeds like the Buffalo, Deer and the other Two-Leggeds ... ya know. So, our relationship is, when we say all our relations, we are connected to all that, the Rocks, the Grass, the Air, the Water. Water is life. Always go out on the land ... And that's what it is, the relationship with the land – we've gotten away from it.

Ummm... we've adopted too many words like wild. There's no such thing as wild, ya know, were all connected, ya know if anything's wild it's us humans, us two-leggeds. We're the wild ones. We are the worst – the worst part of the planet – the two leggeds are. And our relationship, it has to heal ourselves so that we can sit there and start looking at the planet in

a different way. We gotta heal ourselves so that we can have that relationship. To have the understanding that everything has a spirit, even the smallest speck of dust has a spirit and uh if your patient enough, and calm enough and open enough, everything will talk to you, everything will show you a spirit. But you gotta calm yourself and you gotta get out of this “faster, faster” world. You’re not gonna get there by sitting somewhere and saying you’re spiritual.

You gotta get out on the land, you gotta feel the trees, you gotta feel the grass, you gotta rub that bark, ya know. You gotta go out and talk to the Bears, talk to the Sasquatches, listen to the Birds, they’ll talk all the time. You got little Birds ya know – we call ‘em the Creator Birds – they will come check on ya, the Ravens, the Eagles. I have so many stories with animals, learning to be connected with them ... It’s those moments that you see and ya cherish and you have. That’s part of the connection, ya know. I’ve had Bears come up kiss me ... I got Bears at my Sweat Lodge drinking out of my water buckets. That’s the connection, we gotta put that fear away. We gotta put that fear of things away, ya know. There’s no such thing as wild. We gotta – you gotta do things to help Mother Earth, we gotta do things to help each other.

Whenever I cross back and forth over the Rockies I’ll stop at the top of the headwaters of the rivers and I put Tobacco and feed em ... and say prayers. Them prayers they go down like, on this side they go down to the Fraser River, on the other side they go Saskatchewan River and then clear down the Great Lakes and such and then out to the ocean that way ... We’re so stuck in our little world that we don’t have our connection anymore, and we’re stuck in the little man made world where we have no understanding unless you get out there. So that’s, ya know, the biggest thing is getting back out on the land, getting back out there in nature, and it will heal you. It’ll heal you up – it will help. There’s a lot of energy out there

in the world. More energy in the forest and stuff but we're drowning it out by the "faster, faster, faster." Our connections, we have to get back connected to it. When we're on the land we're in our natural world, we're in our natural way of [how] things should be ...

They'll [Sasquatch] get your attention ... when you're open – when you're ready – they come and talk to you and come and sit with ya. They're quite knowledgeable. They're just like the Bear, the Bear medicine ya know. Anything a Bear eats you can eat, anything a Sasquatch eats you can eat ya know. A Bear will get sick, he'll go eat things to heal himself up and a Sasquatch will do the same thing. So if you get in there with them they'll teach you a lot of different things. Which plants to eat, which ones not to eat. How to make your bed out in the forest, how to survive – not really survive but how to be natural. I gotta always catch my words because I get them confused with the European way of thinking I guess.

That was like my grandmother, my grandmother sat there and, I'd do things and stuff and one day she slapped me, and I go "what are you doin' that for" and she said "you gotta start learning to think like an Indian." I go "what do ya mean." She goes "just shut up and start thinking like an Indian." Cause I was trying to do a carving and she wanted a pole with four bears on top. And I made them bears just beautiful, she just threw it outside in the yard and said "try again" so I carved another pole with the four bears and I had the four bears standing out in different directions and she looks at it and she throws it out in the yard. The third one I go there – I got the four bears standing up with their backs against each other looking out. She throws that one out in the yard she goes "you gotta start thinking like an Indian" and she slapped me and it hurt my feelings, ya know. I'm doing my best.

So I'm walking back to the house thinking and thinking and thinking and then it hit me that we have plaques on the West Coast ... they're carved into a plaque – they're flat. So, I

had to learn to think like an Indian to make flat plaqued bears around my pole. So that kinda woke me up on how to try and *think* in a different way ya know ...

*I know you get calls to help people who are ready to cross over. I wonder if you could share a bit about the role songs and drumming plays in this process?*

*Bill:* When we have our drums and stuff in life, and crossing over, and everything and we have that connection. Like I explained with the drum, ya know the drum's round cause it represents the earth, the strings on the back represent all the people of the world holding hands. And the drums, the first thing you hear ya know is Mother Earths heartbeat and it's also your mother's heartbeat, when you first come back in this world as a human. And you'll sit there "patum, patum, patum, patum" of your mothers heartbeat. And that drum it always takes you back, it'll always calm you – the sound of that drum. We do have different songs. Ya know our songs, we have animal songs, we have Sasquatch songs, Bear songs, Eagle songs, Buffalo songs, ya know, all sorts of songs that connects us back to the animals.

And our songs – our songs help us carry our true language because the words in our songs never change. They are always the same word in our songs so that helps carry our language. Getting back to the way European people think ... they say "okay if you don't know your language you're not a distinct society anymore." But if you know your songs, you're still a distinct society no matter what the government says, ya know. So the songs are very important – to drum to sing to have that connection.

And when you go to someone that's passing over – from their humanness back into the spirit world – It calms that humanness down enough in 'em to make that transition fairly simple, fairly easy for them. They're no longer scared of death like we're taught in this world now. Ya know... don't eat that its gonna kill you ... don't do that its bad for you ya know ... everything's bad for you ... Nobody's *living* anymore. Nobody's living anymore

because we're all scared of death and death is just a process. Everything's gonna die. We shouldn't be scared of it.

What we gonna try and prolong life for? Why? Ya know, Creator gave us so much time on this world whether you try to prolong it or not, ya know. When your time's up your times gonna be up, no matter what you do. Like one person sat there and said okay, Creator only gave you so many heartbeats in your life, so go out there and run them extra miles, go out there and do all that cardio exercise and burn up all them heartbeats that the Creator gave you. Ya know. Think about it. Enjoy life. Enjoy that one little heartbeat just like the drum ya know. That's what you're here for is to enjoy it, not to try and control it or outlive it. Come back to the natural world.

When you drum and sing to people that are passing over, ya know it takes em back and they remember, and it calms em ... It's difficult ... Lots of people struggle and fight. But when you have someone close to you – we say – when someone's close to you and passes away and the day of the funeral and stuff, watch the weather. If it's a nice day or a clear day you know they're at peace and they're not fight'in it. But if its stormy, and wintery, and windy, and rainy they're fight'in it. So put Tobacco out and pray for them and watch; that sky it'll clear up; the rain will slow down; the wind will quit. And that's helping *them* and helping *you* become part of the natural process of life and death ... It's good to drum and sing. Like I've explained it earlier, I get what they call Indian sick. When I'm not around the drumming and singing I actually get sick. That's what always heals me up, to come around the drumming and the singing and the Lakota songs and the other songs.

*If you had one message you would like to share what would it be?*

*Bill:* My message ... to the governments and corporations? Stop creating fear; stop creating wars. You can have greed and take all you think you need to take but in the end its

worthless. You destroy something, its destroyed ... Like I said, in the early 90's, all the people came out, oh you gotta drink bottled water ... ya know they're all running around drinking all this fancy water and stuff. I said "quit buying water – quit buying that water" ya know. People thought I was crazy, I said "no – it's the *in* thing – quit it" and they haven't. And now ya know, wars gonna break out over water and our waters polluted, ya know. And they're still selling lots of water. Water is a natural gift. Water is a gift from the Creator. Water is a gift from Mother Earth. Water is what sustains us ...

Quit taking things and not taking care of it. Take care of it, it's there for you ya know ... Resources like oil okay, you say quit drilling for oil because that's the lubrication of Mother Earth. That's what – that's what helps all the rocks and everything slide more gently. You take all that oil out, and it's the balance of the earth too. Cause if you get a tire and a rim, you gotta put a weight on it to balance that tire so it runs down the road right. So you got Mother Earth here, and you've taken this weight offa her from oil, its gonna cause her to wobble. So they're takin all the stuff out, the fluids out of her. And she's gonna wobble, we're not gonna have no choice, so we have to learn to put that back somehow.

We gotta learn, that money is not God, gold is not real. We gotta quit put'in values on things that – material things that in the end doesn't mean noth'in. Yes, we do need some tools, but we should use them as tools like cars, airplanes ya know, not for "oh I've got a plane ya know" or "I've got 10 cars ya know." We don't need that. We need to quit, we need to quit the greed and we need to quit thinking we should be prosperous or have lots, ya know. The governments are just a corporation, they're no longer governments, they're just corporations. They should smarten up somehow. Should get back to a natural world instead of trying to figure out how to destroy it. That's about it. Just to quit. There's other options for us to do things.

### 3.1.5 Mildred Martin and Yvonne Pierrero



**Figure 5:** Knowledge Holders Mildred Martin & Yvonne Pierrero.

Mildred Martin is a Nak'azdli Dakelh (Carrier) First Nation residential school survivor from the Fort St James area of BC, Canada. Mildred has 12 children, 28 grandchildren, 47 great grandchildren and 4 great, great grandchildren. When Mildred returned home after residential school she entered back into a world of hunting, trapping and living off the land. Today Mildred is a master traditional hide tanner. Her work making beaded moccasins, pouches and vests from her brain-tanned hides is well-known and sought after. Mildred has also played an essential role in revitalizing the Dakelh language. Mildred and her daughter Yvonne, also a cherished Knowledge Holder in the community, have through the Carrier Linguistic Society also assisted in creating many Dakelh publications. It was such an honour to have both Yvonne and Mildred present for Mildred's interview that I couldn't help but include some of Yvonne's important insights in this thesis as well. As such, I have also included some of Yvonne's comments within the body of Mildred's interview.

*Please go ahead and introduce yourself.*

*Mildred:* My name is Mildred Martin. I am a member of the Nak'azdli Whut'en in the Lusilyoo [Frog] clan. I am 90 years old and one of the last truly fluent speakers of the Nak'azdli dialect of the Dakelh Carrier language and a residential school survivor ... In the early 1970s, our community realized we were losing our fluent speakers, so we form[ed] a committee and began the important role of revitalizing the language. I took courses to develop curriculum. Prior to this, our language was taught orally. As a committee we published a dictionary and many books to teach our Dakelh dialect in classrooms (I taught in elementary [schools] for 13 years). The committee, of which I am still an active member, has over 100 publications. I am also a leader of our prayer hymn sessions in our community. I am also very involved in our Balhats [Potlatch] ... system as a member of the Lusilyoo clan. The Balhats system is our traditional governing system. I am also in our Elder society. In the past I served as president for five years.

*Yvonne:* I am Yvonne Pierrero. I am the daughter of Mildred Prince Martin Nak'azdli Whut'en and the late Frank Martin Tl'azt'en Nation. I am of the Lusilyoo clan. I am 64 years of age and have two adult children ... my maternal grandfather is the late Benoit Prince. His first marriage, he had eight children. My first language was the Dakelh language also as my mother mentioned ... that was the first language that was spoken in my home. Both my mom and dad spoke it fluently and prior to entering school, that's the language which I knew ... [I attended Lejac Residential School from grades 5-8] and ... after grade 12, I married and continued to live in Prince George.

Although I was away from my family and my home for all those years, I did not lose my culture or my traditions. I always went home to my parents with my children after I had them and taught them my culture and traditions also. We used to take them up for the

summer every year [to] my mom and dad's and harvest our fish, [berries] and do our hunting. And that's how I maintained my language. When I'm around my family ... we speak as much of our Dakelh language as possible to keep our fluency up ... I live my language and traditions every day ... Although I live in the city, my husband and I go out and harvest our berries in the Fall. We pick Huckleberries, Blueberries, Saskatoons, and Soapberries. I bring Salmon home here and I can it and smoke it ... so as much as possible, I still do live it on a daily basis. It's still embedded in me and I will never lose that.

*Mildred:* At the age of seven, I was sent to Lejac Residential School at Fraser Lake, which is about [a] two hour drive away ... I missed my parents and my siblings very much. When I arrived there, I didn't speak or understand English ... I only spoke fluent Dakelh, my Carrier language ... I returned to Lejac each year from September to June until I was 16 years old and completed my grade seven ... I also learned to crochet, spin wool, darn socks, knit mittens, socks and sweaters. I also learned all the Dakelh Carrier prayers and hymns [at the residential school].

The first fall I was discharged from school, my parents took me out to the trap line at the Nation Lakes. They taught me to trap, hunt, fish. We trapped Beaver, Martin, Fox, Lynx, Squirrels, and many other animals. We hunted Moose, Deer and Bear. We fished Salmon, Char, Whitefish, and King Lingcod. In December, we had to return home to Nak'azdli, Fort Saint James, for the winter and spring and summer. I also went out with my mom to harvest plants for traditional medicines. Some of the plants we harvest[ed] were new Cow Parsnip roots, Devils Club, Diaper Moss, Kinnikinnick leaves and stems and Beaver castor. Everything in the forest was used for medicine. We didn't have doctors in our communities at that time. At the end of summer we would harvest our winter food.

My mom also taught me a lot as a young child. I would sit quietly, watch her sew, do bead work, embroidery work. As an older child I learn as I help her tan Moose hides. With the hides, we sew, beaded, embroidered many items such as moccasins, mukluks, wrap around moccasins, gloves and bags. My dad trapped to provide for his large family and other community members. In those days there was no pensions or government assistance or many jobs.

*Why do you think this kind of relationship with the land is so important?*

*Mildred:* Our relationship to the land was so important as it provided for us. If we took anything, we give things, and just took what we needed, and also parts of what we took. If, for example, we took a Moose, we ate all the meat, organs, nose, tongue, and intestines. We rendered the brain and kept it to rub on the hide during [the] process of tanning it. The bones were cut as scraping tools. Their hair was used for hair tufting artwork. The hide was tanned for clothing items. If we weren't going to distribute it right away, we would smoke it for storage. Living close to nature was our culture and tradition. We lived this daily. It kept our bodies nourished and strong. It was hard work. There were no vehicles, so we had long treks to [get to] our trap lines. Sometimes on snow shoes carrying our packs, sometimes we [camped] because a trip was more than one day of walking ... We only take what we need from the land and waters. The governments and large corporations need to learn this by listening to us and not be greedy and take it all at once. Now the land and waters are being contaminated, and we cannot use it like we used to. All the resources are being stripped from the land and water and destroying it quickly.

*Yyonne:* I think it's so important for us to maintain our language and culture because it is who we are. It is our identity. Our languages and culture is connected to the land because everything we do, we eat, comes from the land whether it's the medicines or the strength the

food gives us, the fish we take from the water, the resources we take and we only take it as we need it. We have no greed. If we look after the land and have the real connection with the land, it will always provide for us. So we have to be careful how much we take. We always share. I teach all these classes so I can share that culture and tradition with anyone who is interested, whether they are Dakelh or not because I feel that connection is so important. And the respect for the land and for other people is why I share. That [is how] they get a better understanding of who I am and what my identity is. I follow the protocol of gifting the first item I ever make. I always give it away, thanking the Creator for teaching me, for giving me the ability to learn how to do that. I also – when I’m given the hide to tan – I always take a piece of it and make something for the hunter. For example, when we were gifted a raw Deer hide and Moose hide for our tanning class, when we completed the tanning process, I cut a piece out of each and I made a bullet pouch, and I gifted it back to the hunters, thanking [them] for donating that hide to us.

*Mildred, what was it like working the trap line with your family when you were young?*

*Mildred:* ... We traveled by boat, and we went around the lake ... the land right there with us. And what we did was we fix poles, and we tie our snares on top of the pole, and we bend it down, and down. There’s a lake and we cut down some branches from back there, and we just pile it along the shore towards the lake. We make pile later. Then we make a little hole there to hold the pole comes down. We put a snare there. We set a snare not too big and not too small to catch Fox, Lynx, Wolf, something like that. When it goes through that hole at night and you catch it. We did that along the lake ... It’s quite a ways. I don’t know how many miles it is. We did that all day long until evening time, late in the evening. We kept doing that. We just went ahead and did everything.

I was young, but I still learn, and I learn a lot, and I was fast. David was fast. He never went to school. My dad kept him at home to learn trapping. They taught me lots and fast, I just watching and I went right along with them. You do this, you do that, you set that snare. You set that snare different places. Traps, if there's a place for traps out in the bush there, we set some traps there for Martin or Mink or anything like that. I learned lots and fast. I was good at it. Once we start catching the animals we were happy. We caught lots. We went right through to the end of the lake. [On the other] side of the lake my dad had another cabin. We ended up there for the night.

My first catch I remember was a big, large Mink. So big, holy cats. My brother David, "That's a big one," he said, "it's the biggest I've ever seen." ... That was my first catch, I was so proud of it. We caught lots of Foxes. Fox all over, you know ... Caught some Lynx, Wolf, but mostly Fox. Then my brother he had the western end of the lake there at that cabin there. Next morning he run up the mountain just about halfway up the mountain there. He set another line of traps by himself, and he came out another place there. There's another river running out. It was fun, and those boys. We had a little stove right in the boat. We cooked right there in the boat. We had no time to build fires or anything. Tea, hot water was always boiling there for hot tea ... By the end, in December when we went home ... Once we catch something, in the evening time, the first thing they told me was you have to skin your own catch. We're not going to help you ... We'll teach you how to do it. I learned fast. It was nothing for me. I did all that. I skinned my own catch. We all sat [in] our own places in the cabin, and we'd skin evening time, and we'd get our stretchers the right size, and stretch it out and leave it there for the night until it's dry. Then we'd turn it around, all that ...

Yeah, my dad gave me a little short 22 about that long. Before we went out on the trap line he gave me a little 22 about that long, and he told me here. You use this. Learn how to

shoot ... I took it. My mother gave me a little case to put it in. My mother and I, one time when we were going down a trail, she told me there was two squirrels chasing each other. "Go shoot them. See how well you shoot." "Sure," I tell her. I shoot way up in the tree. I shot at one right through the head. Fell down. I grabbed it and I gave it to her, and she just looked at me and there was one more and I shot it down too for her ...

She was smart. My mother was a really good trapper; hunter. She does everything a man does. Just following her tracks showed me everything. Even since I was small, I was about three years old, I was just sitting there with her. I watch her do her work; bead work. Whatever she does ... everything, I was just watching her. I don't know how I got that. She does with different threads embroidering. How she does it, I just keep watching her. I admired her work, how she does her own baby clothes. Everything, she was just so good at it. I don't know how I just sit there, and I like watching her. I guess that's where I got everything. It went in my head, so I learned. I wish kids would learn that way sometimes. They're always TV, TV – watching TV these days. They can't learn nothin' else.

Yeah, yeah. Some of the kids now they take them out from school to go out in the bush or around the lake to do things in the cultural way, instead of going to school they teach them things. Some man or woman with them and teaching them. They're doing all that now. It's good. They say the kids are more happier out there rather than sitting in the school all the time. That's another culture stuff they do ... this time of September they had fishing. They do salmon with them, with the children. Class by class, they bring them out on the boat ... There's a guy that sets the nets with them in the evening, and in the morning they come pick them up and take out the nets, and show them how it's done, everything. They take out the fish out of the nets, and all everything.

They teach them all that, and cleaning the fish ... The kids have to do that. It's something good. They like that too. They do that every year. There's so much things that the kids could learn. There's a lot of younger people that go out in the bush, and they learn how to do this medicine. There's a lot of them learning now this and that, different things they're learning. It's so important, you know. All our medicines are right there, right in front of us in the bush wherever we go. We know what it is, you know. You've got to learn what it is and what it's for. How to pick it in all that. It's very important.

I learned that from my mother too. My husband was, when he was diagnosed with cancer, I send my son Marvin. He took Marvin with him, and they went out to our cabin, to our trap line ... and I told him, and I told Marvin both of them just what to get, the five different things I mentioned for them to pick. They pick[ed] lots of it and [I told them] "make sure you pray and use Tobacco to pay for it." They brought back lots of it. I went outside when they came back, and I just sort it out, and I took some out of each kind. Just so much what I going to use, and clean it, and wash it, and chop it up, and put it in a big pot and boil it about two hours. When it was done, I strain it and cool it off. I put some in a glass for him. When it was cool enough, I gave it to him, and I told him try [to drink it]. See how you feel. How it feels for you. He drank enough. "Holy cats," he said "It just went right to where I got that cancer [was]." Said he could feel it going right to that spot where his cancer. Told him it might help you. Just keep praying. Every time you pray, you take it. You pray with it ...

Yeah, certain things you have to use for certain sickness, different things. The Devils Club was another one thing I seen for myself. Was an old lady with us that time. My husband was always hurting his knee. He twisted his knee. It swells right up. That old lady told us, "Get me some Devils Club. Gather some Devils Club for me." We went out. It was by the bush by the lake. We went out, and we got some for her. She showed us how to do it.

Just put it on the fire ... and she scrape off the thorns real fast and clean it. Then she scrape off the bark, all the bark she took out, and she threw it in a pot of boiling water. She heat it up, and then she took it out.

She took it out, and she rub some grease – I think it was Bear grease or something. She rub Frank's knee with it. She put on a cloth on his knee, and she throw all that stuff, real hot, she threw it on him. She wrap it up and said, "Leave it overnight." Next morning, all the swelling went down. It was good. Devils Club is very powerful. One thing my mother told us. She warned us against it. Said, "You boil it. You don't drink it. It burns your stomach. It's too powerful." That's one thing she said ...

*Yvonne, what was it like growing up with your mom?*

*Yvonne:* As a child of Mildred and Frank, I was very fortunate to have such talented and beautiful parents. They taught me and my siblings everything. As my mom did, as a young child, I used to sit and watch her sew. And one day when I felt I was ready, I must have been about six years old, my mom was busy sewing and beading, and I picked up a needle and thread and one of her pieces of hide, and I started beading. Before long she saw what I was doing and asked me to have a look at it, so I showed it to her, and she says, "Oh you're doing very well. You just have to tack the beads down, every second bead, not every fifth bead so that it's more secure."

So watching and then learning from her, my mom reminded me of a story, a very [precious] story I had of my dad ... where he was sitting in the middle of the living room, making a fishnet. I sat there for about an hour ... I always sat quietly and watched my parents with what they did, how they did it and that's how I learned. He was going to have a little break so he said, "Would you like to try it?" ... I said I was [honoured] because my dad's a perfectionist, but I did try it and he showed me ... how to actually lengthen the loop

because his hand was bigger than mine. And, I sat there for about an hour and he watched me, and he let me do it, so I guess I did a good job. Just all the different traditions and cultural activities they did. Me and my siblings were always there helping them. You would have never known there were 12 children in the household. My parents taught us very well and as adults we are, I can honestly say, we all did very well from their learning ... My parents were very, very hard workers, and they taught us to be that way too. You take anyone of my siblings and they're exactly how my mom and dad are.

*Mildred, do you have any other hunting stories you'd like to share?*

*Mildred:* During our trapping season there around the lake, we always run into Moose. Oh, we had fun. Everybody shooting at that Moose. Really didn't overdo it, you know. We just take what we want, which kind of Moose we want. We just take one Moose. Bring it back to the cabin, hang it up, and we use it for food. Make sure we only took one. We don't get greedy. Now everybody's just shooting. Hardly any Moose left. In those days, there was so much Moose. Nice Moose all the time. Now can't see any Moose anymore. It's another thing that's really bad, getting bad for people ...

The other thing that I think, is turning back to the land is probably no longer possible. There's no forest that are left in our areas. They're all logged off. Animals are diminishing. Plants are ... polluted. We can't live off the land like we did when ... I was younger even. I mean we go out to my dad's trap line, and we go there for the beauty and quiet and the forest behind them is all cut down. There's no trees left there [for trapping]. The world is just so different when my mother was younger. It's harder for us to say that our younger generation should go back to the land and its resources. It's just not possible anymore ...

*I can't imagine how devastating that must be to go from living off the land, in such a beautiful way, to witnessing the same land literally disappearing before you.*

*Mildred:* Yeah it's true. What everyone is saying is really true, because everything is getting contaminated, like the waters. We cannot get very healthy fish these days and stuff like that. Then the water itself is undrinkable. We are to buy our water to drink for drinking. Everything, our medicines, the forest, our berries, everything is contaminated ...

*Mildred, I know you've had some political involvement in protecting the land. Would you like to share a bit about that?*

*Mildred:* Well ... the government people had to come'n have meeting with us and there was a meeting about the gas line. We're all against putting the gas line close to our community. We were, right from the start we said, "No we didn't want anything to do with the gas line around our community." Of course we've seen a lot of pictures ahead of time about what was happening up north, about where the gas line went through and gas field and all that ... We seen the bodies of the dead Moose just close by ... The whole community ... went against it. They said no and we don't want all our berries to be contaminated and all our medicines and stuff like that. All our livelihood is right there. We don't want no gas line around.

Government send people to our community ... to see what we wanted ... When my turn came up they tell me to speak up and I went up there ... I told them about how we didn't want the gas line to come through ... I told them I've been ... on a bus full of people to Alberta, Calgary. We went down there this summer before. I was with them ... They were on the street singing and drumming and right in front of the government building. They asked that government to come out and speak to the people about the gas line. He wouldn't come out for them. They all spoke, but it was outside the office. They kept singing and drumming and do this and that and dancing. Everybody spoke. Nobody listened to them.

We went home and that was about a year after, they came over to Fort St. James and I told them about what happened ... I tell him ... “We meant it when we said we don’t want the gas line” ... We said, “No, no is our answer.” We don’t want it and couldn’t the government even try to understand why we we’re saying no. “Try to understand us. We’re saying no, it’s for the future of our children, our grandchildren and great grandchildren. The future of our children that we are saying no. We know what’s going to happen.” Government is going to regret it someday, you’ll see it ... What’s going to happen if there’s an earthquake? Just picture it in your mind. What's going to happen? Earthquake, or some other things happening in this world. There’s lots of ways that it could break down and crack and spill the oil all over ... “I’m saying it for my children in the future. I’m saying it for the whole BC. I’m not thinking of myself; I’ll be gone then ... I’m thinking ahead for what I’m saying,” I told him. “That’s for the future of our children that we’re speaking up. Sooner or later you’ll regret it and you’ll remember our words,” I told him ... I was just shouting at them. I told them “I’m saying it for the whole BC, for all of my people. Native people are saying no all over. Couldn’t you even try to listen what we’re saying?” ... You just don’t ask and you don’t whisper about it. You just got to tell ‘em what you want and what you want it for. What it’s all about, everything. You got to bring out everything. I’m not scared to talk government, is not the first time ...

*What would you tell the Prime Minister of Canada if you could have his ear today?*

*Mildred:* Trudeau that young guy? I have a lot to tell him. I wish I ... I am always wishing I meet Trudeau someday sooner, or later. I’ll tell him about the pipeline and there’s so much things that I want to mention to him in person, because there’s so much things that he’s changed around since he got in as a president ... Prime minister ... The first thing he did to us, what I didn’t like was, he bringing in people from Europe into our land. Taking up our

land. We're losing our land you know ... That's the worst thing I don't like ... That's what worries me the most. Another thing is drugs. It seems like they're enjoying opening up the drugs for people. It's another thing they're encouraging the people to take drugs ... All the things, sometimes I stay awake at night and I think about all these things that's happening.

*Yvonne:* If I had a meeting with Prime Minister Trudeau today, what I would say to him is to look after the First Nation's People of Canada before you jump to helping people of other countries. The Native people in Canada – many of them in isolated communities – live like people of third world countries, and before he starts handing out resources and assistance to other countries, he should look after the people of Canada first.

*Mildred:* He thinks he's helping the people. Look at our young children here. Some of them don't even have homes ... It's what worries me so much sometimes. He should go around more, to every community and take a good look for himself ... what he's doing to the Native people, because this land belongs to the Native people ... What do we get for it? What do they give us for it? Instead our own children are starving. Most of them have nothing to eat. Nowhere to stay. No homes to go to. That's what I don't like to see. I wish he would come around one of these days and [I] take him by the ears and drag him around. Look at this, look at that. Look at what's happening. Look at them. I tell him that ... Listen to us and do what we want and do what we say. I tell him, and don't let it come in one ear and come out the other. You listen ... Trudeau, if he comes, I just wish I meet him before I die. I know I'm not going live a very long time. I don't care what I say, or what I do...

*Is there anything else you feel is important to speak about today?*

*Yvonne:* I know my family is very committed to the revitalization of our language. Since the early 70s, starting with my mom and throughout the years all my sisters have been very involved in all the publications of the Carrier Linguistic Society. We work very hard, we

share it with other communities. All the publications we have is in the Nak'azdli dialect [and] we shared with other communities of other dialects. And what they do is they translate it into their own dialects, and so we not only share with our community members, but other surrounding communities. And I am so proud to say all my sisters are Carrier Language and Culture teachers, and teach in the school system. Again, we work very hard to keep our language alive.

*If you had one message you'd like to share with the world what would it be?*

*Mildred:* In order to actively participate in healing past wounds, society needs to be educated on our culture and traditions. If we are going to move forward, there needs to be better communication. I would like to leave everyone a message. Respect each other. If we do this, we will move forward together. Also respect the land, the waters, and the resources and it will provide for you forever.

### 3.1.6 Ron Desjarlais



**Figure 6:** Knowledge Holder Ron Desjarlais.

Ron Desjarlais, also known as Old Man Rock, is half Cree and half Ojibwe and is from the O'Chiese First Nation living in Alberta, Canada. Cree and Ojibwe are also Ron's first two languages. Ron first introduces himself in Cree and then in Ojibwe before roughly translating his introduction into the English version shown in the text below. Ron grew up very traditionally. He never went to school or officially learned to read or write the English language. Ron is also a leader of Sundance, Chicken Dance, Inipi lodges and a number of other ceremonies. It was a great honour and surprise to have Ron agree to participate in this project as I had just been introduced to him through Bill Bertschy. This interview was the one exception where I had not previously developed a trusted relationship with a participating Knowledge Holder. Instead, Bill Bertschy informed me that Ron was someone I needed to speak with for this project and he arranged to travel with Ron to our home in Prince George to do the interviews together.

*Ron, please go ahead and introduce yourself.*

*Ron:* My name is Ron Desjarlais. My spiritual name is Old Man Rock ... I the Old Man Rock and all these knowledges I'm sharing with you; telling you these predictions and counseling in the past and all these I'm sharing with you today, I'm sharing with the world, I guess to understand what these stories all about. To be able to understand who we're working for. Why are we here? The Creator. Mother Earth. The Grandfathers in four directions. And all the ceremonies and that's why I'm here I guess. That's why we're all here. Then I'll say miigwech again. Miigwech means thank you in Ojibwe language. And Cree is ay-hay ...

I come from Alberta, O'Chiese First Nation. [I'm] one of the Elders there. I grew up with mom and dad. They were very culturally, spiritually medicine people. After when they died, that's when I took over their trail especially my dad with all the ceremonies. He used to be helping people all over the place and [I] help them with prayers and his knowledge of knowing all the different ceremonies. After when he's gone, that's when I took over. I'm not a perfect person. I was on lots of drinking in my young days, but I got off that. I'm on a good road now and work for the Creator ...

*How did you find your way back to, as you say this "good road"?*

*Ron:* Very easily. I went to the ceremony way. I work the Creator, and I be able to put these stuff away very easily. Anybody can do it. These people, they're struggling about their bad habits. All they have to do is turn onto the spiritually, all the ceremonies and go to them, and they can be easily cured. They don't need to go to a dry-out center to be cleared. We do ceremonies like Sundance, Chicken Dance, Ghost Dance, Peace Pipe Singing, and Trade Dance, and all those different ceremonies. Of course, the Sweat Lodge, that helps lots eh.

*I wonder if you could talk a bit about the connections between land, health and ceremony?*

*Ron:* I'll start in the beginning with our Mother Earth. You see, it was a great flood. I don't know how many thousands of years ago. We got a brother, spiritual brother, it's all the brothers, all human beings and source animals, that's your brother. Anyhow, after the flood there, he had to collect all these animals and he got them on this raft. After 40 days, he sent one of these animals. The one can swim. There's all different kind of animals that can swim good, like say an Otter, Mink, there's a Duck can swim really good. All these different animals, Beaver, they can swim underneath the water for long time. Anyhow, each time he send these animals to go get the earth down below because the water is above it. Each time these animals came up the water [they] drowned ...

Finally, he sent a Muskrat down. For a long time, the Muskrat was gone underneath the water. Anyhow, Muskrat finally appeared above the water, but he was drowned. Anyhow, he took the Muskrat and he had to open his hands. The Muskrat had little grains of sand; earth on his fingers. He brought the Muskrat to life, this spiritual big brother, I call him. He brought him alive, so he put this sand together and mud and the earth, and he blowed on it four times. Anyhow, he got the Wolf, the spiritual Wolf, to go around. Here a spiritual Wolf went around, in the meantime all these animals, different animals, went on the land. Anyway, he came back. "So how was it, brother?" The Wolf said "It's pretty small, brother." He blowed on the earth again four times, so he sent him out again.

He came back pretty early again. "So how is it brother?" He said, "Pretty small, brother." Again, a third time, he blowed on it again. The Wolf went and gone a little longer this time. He came back, the Wolf, "So how was it, brother?" He said, "Pretty small. Not going to be enough room for human beings." Anyhow, he blowed on it again, this is fourth time. Blowed on it again, so he sent this Wolf. Then he waited, waited, waited, this big brother, spiritual brother. Waited, waited, waited. Pretty soon, he was a Moss. He sat there for so

long, the Moss was grown over him. Then one day there, he sees the Wolf come, real old Wolf. It was crippled, this Wolf, just come and crawl. That's the Wolf he sent out eh. "How is it brother?" He said, "Brother, it's big enough. Tell the earth is here. Mother Earth, tell it's here and the human being will never get full." That's this island eh I'm talking about. This island was pure and there was nothing here disturbing ... [the] medicine. Everything we use on this earth was pure, like water. Everything was clean.

Then finally, I guess our brothers, White, came across the water. Before they came across the water, Eagle took that leaf across to go show the brother White across the water. The Eagle took that leaf across. That's how they know ... They were scared to go out, but then the Eagle show them the way. They came here, and today, our Mother Earth, it's not pure like it used to be. See, us human beings, everything what we do with Mother Earth, like medicines and stuff like that, we trade. We trade Tobacco. Even ceremony poles when we go get – we trade, we give tobacco. Everything we do with Tobacco. That's how we do, us humans beings, down there where I come from.

But, you know like ah, our land down there now our people, their water, it's not pure. And ah, I traveled down there all over in Alberta and our relatives – different nations – they got there poorly, the way their water is – water's really bad. There was prediction a 100 years, 200 years ago – said down the road, do you want to buy water? And it's here, ya know, we buy water now. When the brother White came here, he borrowed six inch of dirt so he can have a crop, grain. He borrowed that, but he didn't borrowed what's under the ground. We never gave him that either. And he never borrowed the trees, we never give him that either. All these things he does here in this land, ruining our Mother Earth, and um he never borrowed that. He didn't buy that either. He just took it like that. Therefore, our Mother Earth is suffering. And that's how come there's so many earthquakes are here, and

so many tornadoes. That is because they're being punished. The punishment is right here in front of his face and he can't see it.

That's how I know these things. The Elders in the past before me, five generations ago. O'Chiese, where I come from, that's why they call the reserve O'Chiese eh. He was pure man. He was a like spiritual man, spiritual leader. And his belief was this land, that's where he was put on. This was our land. That's why he protect this land. He was a peaceful man. He never fought to anybody. When the time back, back in 1885, rebellion down Saskatchewan there, he never fought that. And he came to west and took us down there, took the people down there down to west where we are.

And like he's seen residential school, the grandfathers [Ancestor Spirits] show him that. And uhh English ya know, they show him that. They show him everything, like it's going to be one language down the road. It's there, where we are. The kids don't understand their language. And uhh he protected these ceremonies to go a long ways. And down there where I come from, it's a pretty strong ceremonies. Yeah, pretty strong. It's still there, but I don't know how long it's going to go down the road. Hopefully a generation after me, it will still continue with teaching kids ya know about the ceremonies. Hopefully it continues. That's how I can explain to your Mother Earth, she was pure one time, but now she's not. She's contaminated. And uhh whoever's seeing this, hopefully understand, you know, try to not to hurt Mother Earth anymore.

*I wonder if you could share a bit about hunting and the role hunting plays in your culture?*

*Ron:* It's kind of looking pretty bad now. Like I said, the animals are disappearing. We use these animals for ceremonies, offerings to the grandfathers. That's what we use like traditional food, but now it's getting hard. Like I said, the animals are disappearing. Now what're we going to use for ceremonies with the food, traditional food? Moose is one of

them. Ducks, fish. All these animals were used for ceremonies, and they're disappearing. That's getting pretty bad up there. That was predicted like I said, 200 years ago and said, "If anybody going to survive these hard times are coming, anybody's got Sweetgrass and a Pipe, he might survive because these things are used for prayers." The grandfathers might listen to you and help you out that way, if anybody going to survive.

These people who live in the cities and that, hopefully they grab the mind, go back to their people and the reserves because that was prediction too, that one. Don't live in the cities. That predicted a couple hundred years ago, whatever. These Elders in the past, they can see a long ways. They were powerful. Us here, we're not powerful no more. We're a pitiful people right now. We don't know nothin'. These things I'm sharing with you, these are passed on predictions. That's what I'm sharing with you ... It's not me, I don't make those. You do the prayers and hopefully you get something. Ceremony, too, for survival eh, what you eat every day eh? And that goes together. Ceremony and survival. You pray for the animals.

*Are there hunting songs that you sing?*

*Ron:* Yes. You can use a drum or you can use rattle. And there's a certain Spirit you ask to help you out with rattle or a drum – the drum is so they can hear – when you hit the drum, it beats up in the spiritual world. You can hear it down there, the drum beat there. And also the rattle. You can hear in spiritual world. There's certain Grandfathers you ask for that kind of help. That's surviving and the ceremonies ... The songs you know ... you sing ceremony songs and they heal you. Yeah. And we forgot that one part there about being sick and die like diseases and stuff like that.

Today's disease ... years back there was no such thing as sugar diabetes. Because when you go hunting and that's pure and the meat you boil or however way you cook it. Like

fried, boil. That's Indigenous people usually boil it. That's the best way. But anyhow, you eat that in the supper. In the morning you eat that again. And if anything left over you eat that dinnertime and then you finish that pot. And is that coincidence? Today we go to the store. Everything it's about money. Like chickens. You give them the needle so they lay their eggs faster. They grow fast. Same with this little, little steers and stuff like that. You give them the needle. They grow faster so we eat that and – down there, where I'm from, most Elders are small and the kids they're tall. They're big because all that probing food with the needle like hamburgers and stuff like that. They eat that when they're young so they grow bigger. See that's where all the sickness come from. Diabetes and that. Like years ago the farmers the way they used to harvest it's all pure. Today they got chemicals down there, they go put in the fields and that's where we get our sickness too.

*Have you experienced animals gifting themselves to the hunt?*

*Ron:* Definitely, yes. Like the animals, you ask the spiritual world about these things, and definitely the animals [too] because they're the spirit children; like the animals; like us. We're the Creator's children; same thing. Definitely, when you ask for these things, you have to give offering to give it back to the animals. I guess when you say to white people, ya know they don't understand that because that wasn't given to them, ya know these animals. They come from across the water. These animals were put onto this earth for human beings on this island, I'm talking about [North America]. That's why they don't know that. Then again, there's other white people and buddies of mine, they understand these things; knowledges I know because we share these knowledges eh. Yeah. They understand, a lot of them, but lots of them don't understand, like I said.

It's not a coincidence, ... the white people here, because the Creator sent an Eagle across to show the white people to come here to come and live with us. You're here now. We got

to love each other. Ya know we got to work together. You got to be able to understand why I'm protecting these things. You got to understand me; why I'm protecting water; why I'm protecting animals; why I'm protecting the trees. Underground; our Mother Earth; why I'm protecting that. You got to be able to understand me. That's why I say we're here; we got to live together; we got to work together. I guess that's a message I can send to the white world.

*What do you think we need to do to heal the wounds of the past?*

*Ron:* I guess what I can say to residential [school] people [survivors], you have to go to the Creator, go to the Mother Earth, go to four directions and the Grandfathers. Ask them to help you ... Sure, they did very wrong when they took you away from your mom, your dad and they put you in up there; try to take you away; your identity; who you are as a human being. And uhhh they took your language away. They took your ceremonies away. All these things was given to us in this earth as human beings to use. They took all that away from you. Now, you got to go to ceremonies. There's lot of people, the ones that went to residential school now, they try to come back, but they lack of knowledge ... it's missing piece there, and they don't know. They have to go where the people didn't go to residential school, to show them the way and the ceremonies. That's where they have to go ...

I mentioned my great, great, great, great, great, grandfather O'Chiese – he's seen all that. That man, he was – I might as well say – just like a god. He was so powerful, spiritually powerful because he was with the animals for four years and he was lost when he was a little kid. The ladies went got like Saskatoons and Chokecherries and all that, but ... the dog was following [with] this young man lay'in in – ya know the two trees tied to the dog [travois]. And they see a Buffalo and the dogs went chase after the Buffalo. When the dog came back, he was gone. So he was missing for four years. And he turned into animal, like a little

Buffalo. After when he got all his powers, then the Buffalo brought him back to the tribe where he was. And he was a Buffalo, but he had turn back into human being [after] four nights.

He's seen all these, this O'Chiese, this great, great-grandfather. Anyhow, he's seen all this. Like when he first got his power there, after when they brought him back, they [the Ancestors] said, "Grandson, look up there." He looks up there, there's a jet go by and airplanes go by. "Hey grandson, look over there now," so he's seen the train tracks. "Look over there, grandson." Now the highway goes back and forth. "Look down here on the ground, grandfather." He looks in the ground. There's these pipelines, telephone lines, everything what's underneath the ground. When the white man finished these things set up in this land, and just beyond that, [the Ancestors told him] it's going to be hard times.

I can't tell you the hard times because I don't know myself. Possibility, what's happening now? We got no animals. Maybe that's one of the hard times. Our kids losing their language, as human beings. Maybe that's one of them. A lot of things. A lot of things can be hard times. Maybe a lot of people lost their ceremonies. They should come back ceremony way. Maybe that's one of the hard times. I can't tell you because I don't know myself, but all I know it's going to be hard times. All I know, hang on to the Buffalo, Sweetgrass, and your Pipe and your Ceremonies. Hang onto them. Go to them because that is law. When they first put us on this earth, "Here, I give you this. This is my law. This ceremony is my law. Work for me." That's what he said, so we have to work for them. Same time when we work for him, we're preparing our spirit to go to heaven. We open our road. That's what the Elders said too. Prepare your journey. They mean you prepare for your journey. You work for Creator and you work for Mother Earth, grandfathers from four directions. That's how you prepare your road ...

*If you had one message to share with the world what would it be?*

*Ron:* Try to see what I'm talking about ... the message, I guess, don't hurt our Mother Earth no more and try to be understand our Mother Earth. We're hurting our Mother Earth. Try to understand. And anything you take, you got to make an offering, even when you go hunting. Like today's animals even, they're disappearing. Like Moose, like all these animals we was given to us to survive with. They're slowly disappearing. The fish are disappearing because of contamination of water ... It's all about the money. It's all about the money. Everybody's got to make money and get rich fast. And that's where they don't care what they do. You ruin our water. You ruin our rivers, and whatever they're doing, like drilling holes and coal and gold. All them things. Ya know and uhh they're ruining Mother Earth. Tar sands for instance. Now we know the water getting to mercury, the fish getting sick. People getting sick, get cancer. It's all come from there. The message is, I guess, we gotta – let's sit down and think what you're doing here to Mother Earth ... And they should try to look at it different way to try to save Mother Earth. Save our water. Save our trees. Save everything. Let's go back to the pure. It's pretty hard, we did a lot of damage already. But we can try to look at different ways so to save it.

### 3.1.7 Clarence George



**Figure 7:** Knowledge Holder Clarence George.

Clarence George, also known as Tatanka Luta (Red Buffalo) or He who was Raised by the Old Ones, is Carrier First Nations living in Nak'azdli near Fort St James BC, Canada. When I got back to Prince George from Standing Rock I was contacted, on Facebook, by a young man who thanked me for standing up for the people and for the water. He didn't know where I was and I didn't know where he was. I thanked him and soon after we discovered we were both in Prince George, BC. This young man then invited me to come to an Inipi Lodge on the Nechako River. He told me I would be welcomed with open arms for the standing up for the people and the land at Standing Rock. That was when I first met Clarence. Clarence was running the Inipi Lodge and we were indeed welcomed into a wonderful community of ceremony. I started going to every Lodge I could and in between lodge rounds I would sometimes hear Clarence speaking with others about hunting. I always wanted to ask him more but didn't feel I knew him well enough to start asking those kinds of questions. It seemed, however, that Spirit kept putting me in a place to hear these stories so I finally realized that perhaps I was meant to ask Clarence to also participate in the project. So, I offered him Tobacco, explained a bit about the project and he decided to participate in the project. Clarence also gave his interview in our home (mine and David's) in Prince George, BC. The following morning, after the final interview, we all (Bill Bertschy, Ron Desjarlais, George Aslin, Rodrick Solonas, the film crew and others attending the lodge) met at the Nechako River for an Inipi Ceremony at Clarence's lodge.

*Clarence, please go ahead and introduce yourself.*

*Clarence:* My name is Clarence George ... Spirit name I was given was Tatanka Luta, which translates to Red Buffalo. I was given the name by my mentor that I followed for 17 to 20 years. His name was Alden Pompana. I had such a close relationship with this man that I adopted him in the Yuwipi ceremony as my father. He taught me the ways of life. Yuwipi, Inipi, Sundance – the good Red Road, they call it. I'm grateful to walk this Red Road. It's a beautiful way of life. Every walk you take is beautiful. Every step. I'm fortunate to find these ways ... I hail from the Carrier Nation. My biological mother is a Southern Carrier and my biological father was a Northern Carrier. I'm a Southern-Northern Carrier First Nations person. I was raised by Elders in a town called Fort St. James, BC. I know my language ... It's helped me to this day with speaking it and using it in ceremonies. They say ... when you speak your mother tongue, it has more meaning to it, so much more meaning to it. When you converse with the Old Ones, ... and I speak the mother tongue to the Old Ones, it's alive. Our language is alive ... and it just feels great to speak it.

*I wonder if you could talk a bit about hunting and the role of hunting in your culture?*

*Clarence:* I started hunting at a young age, maybe 10 years old. Me and some of my close friends that I grew up with, we'd go to school and after school we'd meet at a certain place and take our guns and go hunting. I loved hunting ... I felt so alive being in the bush. So free, like I didn't have any problems or anything ... and at that age it was a gift, in itself, being in the bush; being that close with Mother Nature. As I grew older, I started hunting more and more and I started taking young men out hunting. I remember this one story I'd like to share with you.

I took these young men out hunting along with my boys, and one of these young men came from a broken home. There was lots of problems in the home. I took him hunting with

me the one day, and I told him we're not having any luck with harvesting and the animals. We're gonna burn some spruce boughs. They call it 'Ul ceremony, and we bathe ourselves in smoke. I offered some Tobacco for the spruce boughs that we took off the tree, prayed, and asked the spruce boughs to help us. I lit it on fire and we walked through the smoke in all four directions. My boys followed suit because they'd done it before, and the troubled youth that came with us, he was quiet and withdrawn. When he walked through the smoke in all four directions, he jumped back in the vehicle and we started hunting.

The smoke is powerful. It has an effect on you where it calms your whole body from the head to toe. It just relaxes you. It makes you tired too. We started hunting, and the young boy that was withdrawn, he started talking. He says, "You know, when we started this hunt, I didn't feel good about myself. I was withdrawn. I felt hurt and I didn't feel good at all about coming hunting. But when you brought me through that smoke, it felt like it took all my worries away, all my pain away, all my sadness away, and I feel good." And that's what this little boy said. He was like 12 years old ... I knew he was gettin' connected with the bush, the forest. He was being connected like his Ancestors did long, long time ago. And when he got connected that day, I seen it in his face and when he talked. I didn't say nothin. I just let him talk and I was happy that he made that connection when I was there to witness it. It was beautiful ...

There was a group of us that hunted. I loved hunting. I always did and I always have. To this day I still love hunting, and when I do kill an animal I share it with everybody. The most beautiful feeling you can ever reward yourself is taking that animal and giving it to people who need it. Money can't buy that. Money can't buy that feeling. When you help somebody out like that, you're doing it for your own good.

Another Elder ... she worked with people with an eagle feather and holy oil and she'd pray over people. People would come from all villages. They'd come see her 'cause she is so powerful in prayer. She prayed over them. She prayed over them with this eagle feather and holy oil ... One of the teachings that she had mentioned was that you give everything you got, even your last dollar. You give it to the people that need it. She said, "I'm doing this for my own good. I'm doing this for my own good." How humbling is that? "I'm doing this for my own good." Teachings like that – I love hearing stories like that. When they say it in the Carrier language it has so much more meaning to it.<sup>44</sup> It's just full when they say it in the Carrier language. You can totally relate to it, like your heart feels it and it lifts you up ...

Animals, for example, when we do the Sundance ceremony, they tell us before we go into that arbor in the Circle of Life, they tell us to eat as much wild game as we can. Reason being is because the wild game's closer to Mother Earth than us. They have connection with Mother Earth. We don't. They're connected to Mother Earth, so when we harvest an animal, we're grateful for harvesting that animal because they're so close to Mother Earth. When we go give up our food and our water for example in the Sundance ... it helps us in our ceremony to try to have that connection like the animals do with Mother Earth. It helps us to try to connect with Mother Earth. That's what I was taught, anyway ...

... [T]here's certain things you do with the parts when you do kill an animal. For example, if we kill a bull moose, we take its heart and we cut the tip off the heart, and we cut it in four directions and we pray with the moose heart ... the tip of it, the very tip top of the tip of the heart. We cut it in four directions, and we pray with it and we put it on the tree ...

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<sup>44</sup> To clarify, I understand Clarence to be stating here how the act of gifting "everything you got" is also a gift to oneself and how to receive that teaching in the Carrier language is all the more meaningful and profound.

That was one of the things that I was taught the most in my years of hunting. Humbling. It's very humbling. So rewarding, so filling when we take an animal, 'cause we took his spirit too, and [you can] feel it. And myself, I feel it in my chest and I feel it in my throat. And [in] how I've taken its life, I've [also] taken its Spirit to feed my family. I guess that's a connection I have with hunting and harvesting an animal.

My first song I learned [while] I was out hunting. The song came to me while I was in the forest. I was 10 years into being on the Red Road. The song came to me, says you have to learn the song to help your people. It just kept on playing over and over in my head, and then the words came slowly while I was hunting by myself in my territory. Being in the forest and being connected with the land, that song came right away. The drum, like I said, the animals are closer to Mother Earth and have a connection with Mother Earth more than us human beings have. We've lost that connection a long time ago. The animals still have it ... So, like I said, when we take an animal's life, we honor that animal by using him – we use all the animal parts. We use the skin for drums and rattles. We honor the animal that way by playing our songs, our carrier songs. Honoring the animal because the animal has that connection with Mother Earth ...

Singing those songs fills your heart. It fills your soul; gives you your identity back; gives you your power back. Different songs, different meanings. I love singing the songs because they make me feel good. They make my heart happy. People cry when they sing those songs. I remember when I was a child, five-year-old boy. I used to hang out with my grandmother lots. I was grandma's boy. My grandmother hung out with five or six other grandmothers. The grandmothers would go to church every Sunday and they'd never sit on the benches in the churches. They'd all sit on the floor in the back. They'd all sit on the floor and then, they'd sing these Carrier hymn songs. And these songs are so beautiful when

they sang them. Every grandmother that was sitting on the floor were all crying from the power of these songs.

I was a little boy, and I looked up at my grandmother and I felt sad for her as she was singing these Carrier songs and crying with all the other grandmothers. I reached in my grandmother's pocket because I knew where her tissue was. I'd grab it and I'd wipe her eyes. I'd wipe her tears. I didn't know what that meant till many years later, why those grandmothers cried on the floor there. It was because of the songs. The songs are healing them and they sounded like angels singing. I was just glad I could witness that at such a young age, to see that ...

*Have you ever experienced an animal gift itself to the hunt?*

*Clarence:* It all goes back to the Carrier language again. It says when an animal gifts you, gives his life to you, it's a high honor. You have earned that right to take his life. It's like the old people say when you take an animal's life, that's sacred. The spirit that's within that animal, you're taking that spirit as well. When the bull moose stops in the road and just stares at you and waits for you to get out and allows you to take its life, it's a high honor. It all goes back to when ... you say it in the Carrier language, it has so much more meaning, so much more understanding.

That's what I have learned from that, and I've seen it a few times. My son, he got gifted a bull Moose, and I just stood there and watched. It was just like ... amazing. It's humbling, the connection that you have with an animal. It's not as strong as back in the day, like the Old People they had the connection with the land and the animals, but not today. It's being lost because of what's happening with the way the world is going now.

*What do you think we can do to come back into that relationship with the land again?*

*Clarence:* That's a tough one, Kate. We all know how the world is going nowadays, all the hurricanes, mining, clear cuts. Our Mother the Earth is hurting. She's in pain. Our Ancestors had that connection with Mother Earth, but we don't have it. I don't know if it'll ever come back. I hear a lot of stories about how the Old Ones were connected to the land, so connected, so in tuned. Now it's gone. Animals are hard to find. Fish is going. Fish is almost gone. I started hunting last year in June, just to harvest a bull Moose. I didn't get a moose till I was ... in February, a bull in February, and I hunted ... four to six days a week I was hunting, looking. Spent a lot of money on gas hunting – looking for that bull, and then when I finally did find it, it was with a cow. I had to wait for it to separate, and then when they did separate that's when I took the bull. It's tough out there for hunting now ...

*I wonder if you could talk a bit about relationships between land, health and ceremony?*

*Clarence:* Being with yourself, like for example going up on a mountain, do a four-day fast up on the mountain. Mountain's a very powerful place to do our fasts 'cause you're closer to the Creator. You have to look at yourself. You're away from everything ... no cell phones, no TV's, nobody to talk to. You're in the bush by yourself, and that's when you get in touch with yourself. You heal. Maybe you got some past traumas that you'd gone through as a child. You heal there on top of that mountain. When we go up on the mountain for four days, we stay up there. We cry, we sing. It just goes to show you how time stops when you're on top of that mountain. Time literally stops and it drags the four days. Seems like four months. There's nowhere to hide. You can't run. You stay in the circle for four days and you look at yourself. You pray. You sing. It gives you a deep understanding of oneself when you do a fast on the mountain. It's so humbling yet so healing. Lot of tears goin' in, and it's challenging as well, 'cause it rains. When it rains, you get cold. You shiver, shiver all night. You have to stay in that circle until your four days are up, and then you come down

that mountain. Just goes to show you how small you are. How weak you are, how pitiful you are. We are nothing compared to Mother Earth Great Divine. She's the boss here ...

Our ceremonies are sacred. Our ceremonies are healing. They help a lot of people who believe in ceremonies. They believe openly and honestly with an open heart it can heal. Seen some stuff in ceremonies that I can't explain. Things happen. You see things that only you have to be there yourself to see it for yourself. Then you'll fully understand what I'm talkin' about. I can't talk about what I witnessed. You have to be there yourself to see it. How ceremony makes us connected with the Creator, with the animals, Mother Earth. It's powerful. It sends a chill down your spine when you see stuff that's out there, like you're not used to seeing. Just humbling.

*How has colonialism effected your life?*

*Clarence:* Shame. I experienced shame as a kid ... A story I share with you is that when I was going to go visit my brother in Smithers from Fort St. James, BC. It was a four hour bus ride. I think I must've had to be about five years old. My parents were intoxicated. I was five years old and I jumped on the bus and I hid from my parents because my parents were intoxicated and I was ashamed of them. So, I hid in the back of the bus. I didn't want to be with them because they were severely intoxicated. That's one of the things I remember growing up as a child. Alcohol was rampant in Indian country. Seeing lots of violence. Been through a lot. Colonialism is residential schools.

I worked as a front line worker at residential schools. I worked with residential school survivors. I remember questioning this 80 year old man. It was his first time talking about his experience in residential school and he was raped by a priest. The first time in 80 years he talked about it and he cried. He started shaking and vibrating. I had to go follow him back to his house and I talked to him. He started crying and he said he'd never talked about

that ever in his life until now. It had a devastating impact on him. One lady shared her story about residential school where the nun was packing her into the convent and molesting her. And it was the first time in 40 years she'd talked about that and she literally pissed on her seat because she never talked about that before. She literally wet herself just releasing those stories. So, working as a front line worker, trying to help my people as best as I can through ceremony. When I see stuff like that, it's devastating what the Old One's been through.

*What can we do, as settler Canadians, to help support the healing of these wounds?*

*Clarence:* Come to our communities, walk in our moccasins. You'll see our pain. Live on reserve, see what it's like. What the First Nation's person goes through every day. All the destruction that's happening, alcohol, drugs. Live on the reserve for a year and you'll see our pain and how it's so hard to get away from that ... But, we're strong and resilient people man. Our Old Ones are tough. I don't know, Kate, if in my lifetime or your lifetime we'll see healing ... I just know there's lots of pain out there, overwhelming, so much. My mentor said "I fight this alcohol and drugs with culture. My enemy, my fight is with alcohol and drugs and they are my enemy. I fight them with culture." That's what my mentor used to say. So, I follow his words. I do the same. My fight is with alcohol and drugs, not the person. The way it's wrecking their life, that's my fight ...

*If you had one message you would like to share what would it be?*

*Clarence:* If Mother Earth had a voice, would you listen? That's my message. If Mother Earth had a voice, would you listen to her pain that you're putting her through? ... It all goes back to money. Money is just destroying everything. Taking all the trees, all the mining, all the pipelines. It's all about money. It's all about power. There's nothing I can say that will stop them though. They'll continue to harm Mother Earth. All goes back to, if Mother Earth had a voice, would you listen to her? ...

#### **IV. An End without End: Storying the Teachings into Life, Art & Healing**

As previously discussed, I feel it is not my place to speak for or analyse the words shared by the Knowledge Holders who have participated in this project. Their words remain most powerful on their own. Instead, I share, through reflective autoethnographic narration, my experiences engaged with the Knowledge Holders, their teachings and this project. With Mildred Martin I learned to make brain-tanned leather and moccasins; with Arthur Dick I visited the land where he grew up on Village Island; I stood on the frontlines at Standing Rock with some of the most courageous people I have come to know; I hunted a Bear in ceremony to make a drum with Bill Bertschy; I took that drum out on the land for Hanblecheya Ceremony with SherryLynne Jondreau; and I travelled through Gina Laing's territory to witness the stories she shared come to life in the land before me.

Following Indigenous epistemologies that honour the relationality of all things, this section weaves into it threads of additional but significant moments relevant to this project. I will speak about some of my experiences at Standing Rock, for instance, because they so closely follow the trajectory of this inquiry. In addition to the many profoundly positive moments shared at Standing Rock I also came away from the experience with some symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). It is through my time spent on the land, working with the animals and the teachings shared by Knowledge Holders that I continue to work through and heal from those experiences. I feel this is important to share because working through this healing process also speaks directly to the many ways Indigenous-informed relationships with land foster health, healing and wellbeing.

After returning from Standing Rock, it was hard to participate in life-as-normal because everything after seemed as if it was some watered down version of what really mattered in the world. At Standing Rock I stood on the frontlines with people willing to die to protect

the water, the land, and Indigenous sovereignty. At home I had to remember to pick up cream for my coffee. I couldn't do it. I didn't know how to function in my own world anymore. I was stuck and I couldn't find my way out of the place I had become trapped in. Although the Eye Movement Desensitization Reprocessing (EMDR) treatments I received for my PTSD symptoms were incredibly helpful,<sup>45</sup> I was still seeking something more.

I felt a calling inside me; something that needed to come out. It was a feeling in my body that was leading me. I started to follow that feeling by finishing a Deer hide that had been gifted to me by Mildred Martin. I smoked the brain-tanned hide and stayed up late through the nights, sewing, beading and singing this Deer skin into little medicine bags for some of the women I had become close with at Standing Rock. I wanted – no NEEDED – to create something that mattered. This felt real to me. It also felt as if the process touched something real in me. It felt as if these little creations could reach through the bars of the invisible cell walls that confined me so as to touch the fresh air that existed beyond the trappings of my body and the PTSD symptoms.

The Deer skin medicine bags freed a part of me, in their making, but I needed to make more; to create more. I have never considered myself an artist, but whatever artist lived within me was suddenly screaming to come out and be witnessed. It was then I realized I needed to be working with the Bear I had hunted for the ceremonial drum I would make with Bill Bertschy. I worked tirelessly for well over a month preparing this Bearskin. As I worked, falling into the rhythmic dance of scraping the hide, I also let myself fall into the traumatic stories that had enveloped me. At first the memories were overwhelming but I kept

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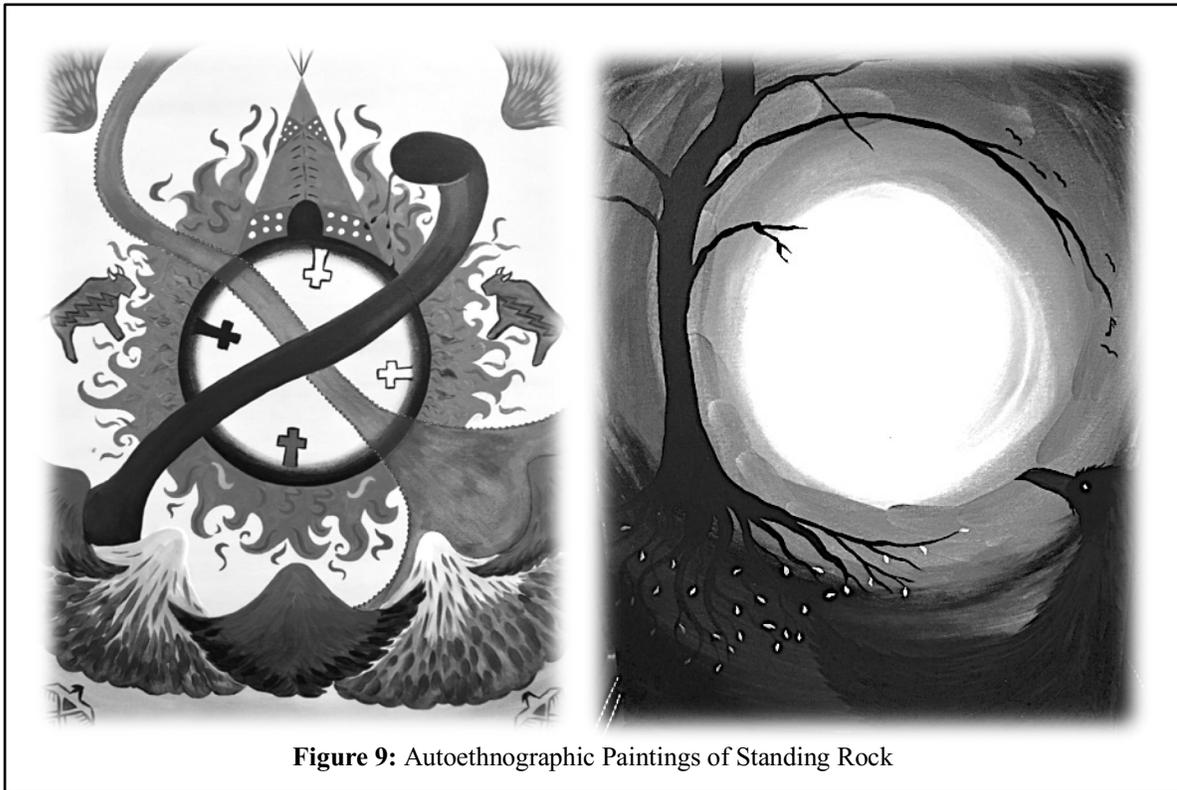
<sup>45</sup> I would like to extend a special thank you and acknowledgement to EMDR facilitator, Lauren Aldred, who very graciously donated EMDR treatments for my PTSD symptoms as her own way of supporting the Standing Rock resistance movement.

scraping through them until the movement (becoming meditative in its repetition) seemed to wash them away. Working with Bear was healing me. When my anxiety became too much to bear I went to work with Bear and he eased the stress in my body. I saved some rawhide for the drum and brain-tanned the rest of the hide to make a drum bag. It was a long physical and emotional process. There were nights I thought I would never finish the work or find my way back to a pre-trauma existence. But I did and, as I did, I continued to create.



**Figure 8:** Bear Drum Bag.

I painted autoethnographical accounts of my experiences at Standing Rock. I needle-felted little Bear effigies with Tobacco heart centers out of the hair I saved from the Bear. I made a Bearskin rattle and, when I returned from Vision Quest, I painted the land there and also made many other meaningful creations from the animal hides I had brain-tanned.



**Figure 9:** Autoethnographic Paintings of Standing Rock

Then my mom decided to weave each of her children a blanket and she wanted to make mine with the Bear's hair. I spent several weeks carding, mixing the Bear hair with natural sheep's wool (to help it hold together), and pulling the Bear hair into rovings' to prepare the wool for my mom to spin. When it was ready, we wove the blanket together; a combined creation by mother, daughter and Bear. We discussed design ideas and learned that weaving a blanket such as this provides, in itself, a wealth of teachings. As in life, there are many pathways (or designs) one might follow. This blanket seemed to have a life path (design) of its own. In predesigning the pattern we thought we wanted we found that the blanket had its own path that we needed to learn how to follow.



**Figure 10:** Bear Blanket.

When I made Bear Drum with Bill, I had to learn to let the drum be what it wanted to be and not force upon it what I thought I wanted it to be. Bear Blanket, in this same way, also had its own pattern it wanted us to find. Yet, it was not an easy process to give up control. We had to learn to connect with feelings that led to the blanket being born into its own truth. Learning to let the Spirit of the Bear come through felt much like learning how to track the Bear's life patterns across a landscape of wool. Learning to track Bear across wool, also mirrored the process of learning how to lay down higher tracks in my own life as well. To find and give those tracks the freedom to form patterns across the wool of one's life, feels, at least to me, like learning to let go of the superficial restraints which have confined me. I suspect it is the many ways in which working with Bear has helped me to reconnect with this deeper part of myself that healing through art, the animals and ceremony has had its most profound impact.

#### **4.1 Scraping Hides with Mildred Martin**

I first met Mildred, and her daughter Yvonne, during a Moose Hide Tanning course put on through the University of Northern British Columbia. She was 89 at the time and she consistently put us students to shame when it came to working on the deer and moose hides we were processing throughout the course. I think I loved her immediately. She had a quiet demeanor but was brimming at the seams with teachings and wisdoms to share. As we worked she would teach us the Dakelh names for the hides and tools we were working with. She didn't say too much but when she did everyone listened. It was like a hawk the way Mildred quietly watched everything going on around her. If you took a moment to watch her watching, you could see mountains of stories taking place behind her eyes. Often her eyes would burst into laughter watching us, giving away her secrets, while she somehow managed to keep a straight face on the outside. We learned mostly by watching her, almost trying to be like her, and then attempting to recreate her skill and mastery on the skins stretched out before us. I knew right away that this was a woman I needed to spend more time with.

After the course I made a point of going to visit Mildred at her home in Fort Saint James. I would stay for a few days at a time and help her work on her hides. There would be salmon smoking in the smokehouse in the backyard and lots of visitors coming to check in on her or wanting to purchase her moccasins or other buckskin goods. One time, one of her grandsons stopped in on his way home from a hunt with the hind quarter of a moose for Mildred. He carried the huge leg of meat in and slapped it down on the kitchen counter before wishing us a good day and slipping out the backdoor with a wave.

Our previous work had been interrupted (in a wonderful way of course) as we now needed to take care of this massive Moose leg that suddenly dominated Mildred's small kitchen. She silently looked the leg over, laid her hand across it in a manner that indicated

how we might cut it up and reached into the cupboard below to pull out a large electric reciprocating saw. Plugging it in, she pulled the lower end of the leg off the counter and told me to hold it as she pressed the blade into the moose leg between us. The blade kicked back like a bucking bronc but Mildred couldn't be thrown. Bits of blood and bone sprayed across the kitchen as the blade bounced dangerously across the surface. I prayed there would be no fingers lost and asked her if I could take over to give her a rest. She just looked up at me as if to say "why?" and with a big smile on her face got back to the job at hand. I so love this woman! And we of course had moose that night for dinner.

On another visit, Mildred and I were in her back yard fighting off the hot sun and mosquitos as we worked on a moose hide strung between a frame that leaned against the smokehouse. We were getting ready to flip the hide but it was huge and the frame, made of 2x4's, stood a good bit taller than we did. I turned to search out Mildred's grandson who was working on another project across the yard. I had wrongfully assumed that Mildred's grandson and I would do the flipping but then heard Mildred calling to me "are you ready?" She had already taken hold of the frame and was patiently waiting for me to join her. With Mildred, now in her 90's, I was concerned that moving this frame, and the hide of an entire moose stretched within it, would be a terrible strain for her. I tried to convince her to let us do it and she just shrugged me off like that was the silliest idea she'd heard in a long time. Mildred flipped that moose like a pro and we got right back to work.

I realize Mildred's strength, endurance and good health likely emanates from a lifetime of hunting, fishing, trapping and processing the meat and hides of the animals she harvests. Mildred was a Residential School Survivor but she didn't have many of the negative experiences that so many others had. I can see this in her body, her face and the faces of her children. Mildred has created a brilliantly solid family foundation, complete with a strong

sense of identity that seems to have never been stripped away by the residential school. Mildred was, of course, taken from her family during her school years but didn't experience the extent of abuse that so often ran rampant in these colonial institutions. Yes, she was indoctrinated into another religion but she was also taught how to sing the hymns in her own language. She didn't experience a complete erasure of who she was before the school and, when her school days were over, she was able to return home where she jumped right back into the life she would have had had the school never existed for her.

On another visit I sat in Mildred's living room as she shared stories of returning home from the residential school. Mildred spoke while beading baby moccasins, from her brain tanned hides, for a fundraiser. In between stories, she gave me instructions so I could help her with the work. We sat and sewed and beaded together late into the night. I remember how the smell of the smoky leather permeated my body and my mind as Mildred took me back in time with her stories; back to the snowy lakeshore where she trapped her first mink; back to the day she shot two squirrels for her mother; back to the many times she helped her mother gather medicines on the mountain for the tuberculosis treatments.

There were so many stories and as Mildred shared them my eye drifted to an old black and white photograph of her mother, on the wall behind her, who seemed to smile down on us from some place in the past as if she too was remembering these same stories. I felt my heart swell with gratitude for the opportunity to sit and share this time in the presence of these two amazing women; one sewing leather in front of me and the other, feeling just as much alive to me through the stories, looking down on us from inside the picture frame on the wall.

When I finally fell asleep that night I dreamt of misty mountains, campfires and the smell of smoky leather calling to me through the trees. In the morning it was hard to say goodbye.

I remember feeling like I could hug Mildred forever. When I arrived, I brought her Bear meat and as I prepared to leave she filled my arms with freshly smoked Salmon, a bag of beautiful black huckleberries and the little baby moccasins I made to help her in the fundraiser. I reminded her that I made them to help her but she insisted I keep them for myself. Every time I visit Mildred I always feel like I leave with so much more than I have brought. My heart couldn't have been fuller, my spirit couldn't have been happier and I can only hope that Mildred felt the same way as well.

#### **4.2 Visiting Village Island with Arthur Manuel Dick**

After a few days in Alert Bay, and having finished Art's interview at the U'mista Cultural Center, my brother and film crew packed up their things and went home. Mom and I, however, stayed on an extra night so Art could take us out on his boat to show us around the island where he had grown up as a child. Mamalilaculla (Village Island) is, according to the U'mista Cultural Society (2018a), the home of one of the largest Potlatches ever recorded to take place along the north-west coast of British Columbia. It was 1921, when Dan Cranmer hosted this Wedding Ceremony Potlatch. Even though Potlatches, at the time, had been criminalized for almost 40 years<sup>46</sup> the Kwakwaka'wakw continued to hold Potlatch celebrations in secret.

Unfortunately, Indian Agents discovered Dan Cranmer's Wedding Potlatch and, as a result, the 300 people in attendance were given a choice to either go to prison or "to surrender the physical embodiments of the encounters of their ancestors with the supernatural world" (Hawker, 2003, p. 24). To stay out of prison, participants would have to surrender their potlatch regalia and sacred items.

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<sup>46</sup> Under Canadian law and the Indian Act, potlatch celebrations remained illegal for over 60 years. The potlatch ban was first made law in 1885 and was not lifted again until 1951 (U'mista, 2018a).

Many of the sacred items, masks and regalia, confiscated from this Potlatch were, at the time, dispersed to museums and private collections around the world (Hawker, 2003). Today, after much effort, many of these items have been repatriated back to their homelands and their rightful owners. The U'mista Cultural Center is one of two centers built to house and care for these repatriated collections (U'mista, 2018b). It is believed that the masks are alive with Spirit and for that reason they are still brought out to dance in Potlatches and other ceremonies. It was nestled among the Spirits of these masks and regalia that Art shared the stories in his interview. I had the gift of sitting among masks, who have danced the history and stories of the Kwakwaka'wakw peoples for generations while Art, at the same time, shared his own stories and teachings with us. I was then gifted an introduction to the land where those same masks had danced in defiance of, and in direct resistance to, colonial rule on that fateful day in 1921 - when we visited Village Island with Art.

We headed out early in the morning. Mom and I climbed aboard Art's boat and I watched as a large grin grew across his face. Art then tells us, over the roar of the warming motor, his plans for fixing up the boat. He was excited. His hands swept through the air in large gestures, past the 2x6 board propping up the cabin ceiling and the duct tape holding in place a cracked windshield. He was showing us, with his hands, how the boat will look when it is done. Although the boat seemed utterly perfect to me as it was. Though it was perhaps the precious cargo it carried (and the destination for which I knew it would deliver us) rather than the character that beamed forth from the cracks in its seams that led me to feel this way. Either way, I could tell it was going to be an amazing day.

As we bumped our way over the waves, I watched as the town of Alert Bay seemed to shrink into a distant memory behind the wake of the boat. Farther out to sea, I stood up to feel the wind in my face and breath in the ocean air. It wasn't long before the boat was

surrounded by dolphins diving all around us. There must have been thousands of them leaping into the air, near and far. Against the rumbling of the outboard motor, Art sang loud and strong ... singing to the dolphins as they danced for us.

As we wove our way through island passages, Art pointed out where he harvests clams .... Halibut .... Red Snapper over here .... Grey Cod over there .... and Seaweed. Then, in sharing a saying the “Old People” always shared with him Art stated proudly, “When the tide is out your table is set.” It is clear how important this land is to Art. It IS his home in a very palpable sense. Mom then asked Art something I had also been thinking about: “Are there any of those horrible fish farms around here?” I know the answer to this, of course, but I had no idea they were so close to so many important harvest sites.

This is a sensitive subject for Art. He has been fighting fish farms in his territory for over 30 years. Taking a short detour, Art brought us past one of the farms. We motored slowly past the fish nets confining the Atlantic Salmon but not the foreign diseases they carry with them. Disease that was in that very moment dispersing through the waters under our boat to the wild Salmon who ARE, through their history, stories, dance and art, an embodiment of the Kwakwaka'wakw peoples themselves. We continued along quietly for a while but by the time we reached Village Island our Spirits had once again lifted.

Art told us stories of crabbing and harvesting clams along the beach lining the old village site and he spoke about the time Sasquatch gave his Aunties a good fright while digging for clams there. I could almost see the ghost of a younger Art running through the trees as he shared stories of his youth. Pointing out licorice fern (used for respiratory infections) Art gently reminded us that we were surrounded by medicine. So many stories: of Swallows playing in his hair as a child; of Crow speaking to him in Kwak'wala; of the sacred Rock used for generations to process fish and other harvests from the sea. Then, next to some old

Big House posts, Art broke into song. He was given permission, by the Mountain family, to sing their gratitude song when Spirit called for it to move through him.<sup>47</sup>

After a full day sharing stories on the land, we made our way back to the boat. My body felt as if it had been filled with a feast of stories and brilliantly fresh ocean air. It had been an amazing day and such an honour for Art to share so much of his life with us in this way. We were a little more quiet, relaxed and content as we made our way back to Alert Bay. On the way, I looked up to see a huge whale, as if in slow motion curling its body out over the water, as it prepared for a dive deep into the shadows of the ocean's depth. A beautiful end to a beautiful day. Visit the website to view a video of some of our time on the island and to hear Art share some of the stories he shared with us along the way.

### **4.3 Standing Rock**

While engaged in my degree coursework, the resistance movement at Standing Rock in North Dakota was born. The Standing Rock camps became a gathering of many Indigenous peoples and allies united in solidarity with the Sioux Nation to protect their water, sacred land and sovereignty in resistance to the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL).<sup>48</sup> I remember sitting, at the start of a new semester, in an anthropology class entitled *Religion, Ideology and Belief Systems*. I tried to listen to the professor but all I could think about was what was happening at Standing Rock. How could I sit in a classroom learning from other people's experiences when I could be, or rather should be, supporting Indigenous peoples on the front

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<sup>47</sup> Among the Kwakwaka'wakw, "... a song is considered the most treasured gift one can receive. Songs are usually passed down within families to the oldest son. No pile of blankets, no matter how high, can equal the value of a song. To receive a song is to receive great cultural wealth and gives a person high status in the community" (U'mista, 2018c).

<sup>48</sup> The Dakota Access Pipeline is a \$3.78 billion project built to transport 570,000 barrels of crude oil a day from the Bakken oil fields of North Dakota through four states to Patoka Illinois. The pipeline, 1,172 miles long, crosses through 1851 and 1868 Fort Laramie Treaty land, numerous burial grounds and sacred sites, and crosses under the Missouri River which is the main source of drinking water for the Standing Rock reservation.

lines in real time. I felt like a fake; one of the privileged who gets to sit in the safety of a university to learn one's lessons. One thing I had learned from my time with Grizzly, so many years ago, was if you want to really learn anything you have to get out and experience it yourself; you have to become vulnerable to it before you can truly know it from the inside out. The heart of the ideologies and belief systems that framed the resistance movement at Standing Rock were not lessons attainable from within the confines of a classroom.

I continued to wrestle with my inner voice calling me to Standing Rock, while another voice told me I needed to jump through these hoops at school to finish my degree. Then Crow would pipe up in the back of my mind. "What rules are you willing to break?" and I would feel myself being pulled into some unknown place that existed just beyond the boundaries of playing it safe. That same week a friend and colleague, Nicole Schafenacker, happened by with a proposition. She was also feeling the call. We spoke with our supervisors and were thrilled to find that our desire to travel to Standing Rock was met with full support and even excitement. I immediately dropped my courses and we started to pack and gather donations to bring with us to the camp.

What we experienced at Standing Rock was a thousand stories and teachings rolled into one of the most beautiful and terrible experiences one could hope to encounter. This story is but a mere peek through a window of a much larger experience. It was Oct. 27<sup>th</sup> the day we were arrested. We had been at Standing Rock for two weeks and had already formed deep bonds with many of the people there.

There were six of us camped out in Grandma Pearl's<sup>49</sup> pop-up camper at the North Treaty

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<sup>49</sup> Grandma Pearl is an Anishinaabe medicine woman who led the daily Water Ceremonies at Standing Rock (during the time we were there) in which everyone would meet at the Sacred Fire before sunrise, share Tobacco and Water together and then walk in prayer and song to the river where each individual would then, one by one, offer their prayers, Water and Tobacco to the river.

Camp. We slept fully dressed with our boots and hats on, ready to jump into action. Sources had warned us that the army of police threatening us, planned to raid our camp in the night ... but they did not come. When we woke the next day, Grandma Pearl smudged us with Sage and rubbed our faces with Bear Grease to give us strength and protection, both spiritually and from the tear gas and pepper spray that we knew we would soon face. We were determined to stand in Peace and Prayer no matter what violence the day would bring us. I could already feel the weight of that violence trying to suffocate us. The Bear Grease helped. When I looked deep into the faces of the Warrior Women that had become my family, it helped.

People were gathering in the early morning light and soon the Elders called for a Chanupa<sup>50</sup> Ceremony on the 1806 highway, already barricaded by the police. I watched an Elder in a wheelchair being helped into the central circle as the people gathered. The rest of us were called in to pray around the Elders in the center. I still see us there on the road from someplace above looking down; our bodies forming expanding circles of life in a sea of shimmering grasslands ... and just like that, I am back there ... The circle our bodies form is the medicine wheel cut from the North to the South by the highway and cut from the West to the East by the threatening pipeline.

Words of peace and prayer are shared. The air is thick. The drumming starts. Smoke rises from the Sacred Pipe. People are singing with everything they have. The energy is intense and powerful. In the prayer circle, I stand on the center line of the highway with my back to the north, the direction from which the National Guard, army tanks and hundreds of police in full riot gear approach. They have army tanks, concussion grenades and snipers. I can't see them but I can feel them like pin pricks across my back.

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<sup>50</sup> Chanupa is Lakota for Sacred Pipe. See Drysdale & Brown (1995) and Crawford & Kelley (2005 p. 936-941) to learn more about the Sacred Pipe.

The drums are beating and the singing gives me strength. I look up for a moment, across the prayer circle, and catch the eye of a young warrior facing me from the other side. His gaze extends past me and I watch as fear lays a shadow across his face as he witnesses the violence approaching us at my back. Panic ripples through the south side of the prayer circle, emanating from the people who can see what is coming. I lower my eyes and go deeper into the prayer and feel the sound of the drums move deeper into my body.

I feel as if I'm flung back through time. I see myself sitting in class, during my undergraduate degree, memorizing the dates of Indigenous resistance movements. I am learning about the development of the American Indian Movement (AIM) and learning the names of the prominent members and leaders. 1890; Wounded Knee; 1969, Alcatraz; Dennis Banks; Russel Means; 1973; Wounded Knee again. Now, standing on a highway in North Dakota, this class comes alive within me when I realize I am standing alongside many of the same AIM members I learned about in class. I can see the history pages being rewritten to include: Dennis Banks occupations in 2016: Standing Rock.<sup>51</sup> I can see future students memorizing these new dates in preparation for their own exams. I want to scream at them from someplace inside their history books "This is happening now!! This isn't history! This is STILL happening!!" What is history? Are we in it right now? Am I in the future looking to the past? Am I in the past looking into the future? I feel as if this moment simultaneously exists in all these places at once. I can't help but wonder if we will ever learn from our mistakes and the drumming pounds through every part of me.

Suddenly the ceremony is over and, although the drumming and singing has stopped, it continues to echo through my body. I realize people have stopped singing but I can still hear

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<sup>51</sup> Sadly, Dennis Banks crossed over in 2017 shortly after his involvement at Standing Rock.

a song. I try to make it out but it sounds as if it's coming from inside me, from inside the land ... I can't tell the difference. My body vibrates with the beat like a drum being played from the inside. What is this song? Where is it coming from?

An Elder is looking for ear plugs for protection from the LRAD's.<sup>52</sup> I've given mine away but have been saving cigarette filters to use in an emergency. I apologize and explain these are all I have left. He thanks me, takes the cigarette filters and puts them in his ears. I do the same and, as the sound of the outside world becomes muffled behind the filter, I am able to more clearly make out the Ancestors singing their song. They sing loud and clear now. The Ancestors. Thousands of them singing, thousands of them drumming against the inside of my body; against the inside crust of the earth. I listen to the words and recognize the song as one I know from Sundance but can't pinpoint which one.

I turn and see the police and army tanks approaching. Youth are erecting poles for a teepee in the road in front of us. They call us to bring our Tobacco prayers to its center. Over a loudspeaker I hear the police, "Move to the south and you will not be arrested. Even if we arrest you we will not hurt you." Even as I hear these words I watch people, standing in prayer, fall to the ground in cries from the pepper spray. I see police tackling youth to the ground, their batons crashing against their young bodies. People are starting to panic as violence erupts around them. I can see this fear pulling people from their prayers. Yet, when I turn again, I see the Elders plant their feet deep into the Earth as so many others start to flee. The Elders are deep in prayer and they are not going anywhere.

I feel a decision being made inside me. I cannot leave these Elders to stand and face this violence alone. That simply isn't an option. We move towards the Elders in solidarity and I

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<sup>52</sup> Long Range Acoustic Device's (LRAD's) are devices that emit loud high frequency sound. They are often used by police to disorientate people during rallies, riots and resistance movements.

feel something I've never felt before. I can taste the violence in the air like a rabid dog driven by some wild out of control force. The tanks keep pushing in towards the people. The snipers aim their rifles into the crowd. Concussion grenades explode around us. It feels as if we are one small happening away from being at the center of yet another Wounded Knee massacre. I realize in this moment that if we choose to stay and stand with the Elders that it quite literally could be our end.

Converging around the Elders I slip deeper into prayer. The Ancestors are singing so loud now I can hardly hear what's happening around me. The police grab at us; arresting anyone they can get their hands on. I feel a swath of pepper spray land across my face. I hear distant screams as if from another world ... and the drums. I put my head down and keep praying and the next thing I know the police have gone around us. Then suddenly we are surrounded and they start pulling us away one by one. I'm yanked backwards and my initial response is to hold strong to the group but then I hear an Elder beside me whisper, "don't resist." I take her advice, let my body soften and give in to the pull of the police like melting butter.

They sit us in the ditch along the side of the road, cuffed behind our backs. A woman I don't know is pushed down beside me. We talk and quickly realize we have a mutual and very dear friend in Alert Bay. Arthur Manuel Dick. My heart sours at the sound of his name! How is it that everything that has anything to do with Art is always magic? How is it that Art (in this round-about way) is somehow sitting next to me here handcuffed in a ditch in North Dakota?

I look up to see DAPL bulldozers cutting through the land in their approach to the highway. The ground their blades cut through is 1851 & 1868 Fort Laramie Treaty land; Treaty Land that was stolen back from the Sioux when Custer and his crew found gold in the

Black Hills.<sup>53</sup> This is Sacred Land that holds the bodies and the bones of many great spiritual leaders and chiefs. Stone effigies mark their graves and the sacred ceremonial land where the people have gathered in peace and prayer for so many years.<sup>54</sup>

The DAPL workers lean against the fence pointing at us and laugh. They wave a bulldozer over and I watch it push its blade into the sacred ground - right in front of the Elders who can't even hold their hands in prayer at the sight. Against their laughter, which now grows louder, I hear cries slip from the Elders as I see their bodies fall limp under the weight of witnessing this premeditated dishonouring of their people. Hope, strength and conviction threatens to sink into a place of desperation and defeat until I hear someone yell behind me, "THE BUFFALO! THE BUFFALO ARE COMING!"<sup>55</sup> We all jump up and turn to see a herd of Buffalo galloping towards us. Our spirits are lifted again as everyone starts whooping and hollering in elated cheers. Spirit is with us. The Ancestors are with us. The singing and the rhythmic beating of their drums feels as if it might literally lift us into the air.

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<sup>53</sup> In 1980, the United States Supreme Court recognized that the Fort Laramie treaty land was illegally stolen from the Sioux Nation by the United States government and subsequently awarded the Sioux Nation \$17.1 million plus 5% annual interest since 1877 and other compensations. This, at the time, amounted to over 100 million dollars in retribution costs. However, the Sioux have overwhelmingly rejected the offer because the spiritual significance and sacredness of the land is worth more to them than any amount of monetary retribution (Cornell Law School, n.d.; Justia, n.d.; Frommer, 2001).

<sup>54</sup> On the afternoon of September 2<sup>nd</sup> 2016, the Standing Rock Sioux filed for an injunction to protect a number of important Indigenous archeological sites (including numerous burial grounds and sacred stone features) that lay in the direct path of the proposed DAPL. At the time, DAPL construction was approximately 20 miles away from impacting these sites. However, less than 24 hours after the injunction was filed, DAPL moved their construction forward, in the dark of night, so as to start construction (at daybreak on September 3<sup>rd</sup>) directly through the sacred sites identified to be protected in the injunction. To see court documents of the archeological records, drawings, photographs and a description of the significance of these sights, see Standing Rock Sioux Tribe v. U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (2016a) and (2016b). After DAPL desecrated the sacred sites, the Standing Rock Sioux filed for a temporary restraining order (TRO). See Standing Rock Sioux Tribe v. U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (2016c) for the context and details of some of the damage acknowledged and described in the TRO.

<sup>55</sup> The Buffalo had been roaming freely across the hills where our the North Camp was located.

Then, I see three youth riders on horseback galloping among the Buffalo. They're being chased by militarized vehicles and the police are shooting at them. Wait ... can this really be happening? Is this a dream or am I on the set of a movie? Can I really be witnessing Indigenous youth galloping across the hills riding painted horses while being chased and shot at by police against a backdrop of charging Buffalo???. I can barely wrap my head around what is happening before me. The police on the highway start to panic. They run towards the Buffalo. One officer drops his gun, less than 20 feet away from us, and it hits the asphalt of the highway with a metallic thud that sends shivers down our spines. But, the people keep cheering and the Buffalo keep lifting us up.

Soon we are put on buses and taken to Morton County Jail in Mandan. They strip us to a single layer and write numbers on our arms with black permanent marker. #155. There are more than 140 of us crammed into what looked like five chain-link dog kennels in the basement parking area of the jail. Elders are denied medications and diabetics denied food. Over the next few hours I watch as people are dispersed to different jails. Nicole is taken to a jail in Fargo. At 2:30 am, they bring me upstairs to be strip searched, questioned and placed in Cell Block C. There are 12 of us in a block meant to hold 3. They keep the lights on and don't let us sleep. They keep calling us out individually and questioning us, "Do you feel comfortable fighting off someone who was trying to rape you?" All the girls asked say yes because they don't want to risk being thrown in solitary; separated from the comradery that has strengthened our family in Cell Block C.

They won't give us toilet paper (it is so often the little things). They won't give us our phone call. We are not even allowed to speak to a lawyer before being paraded barefoot and handcuffed into a courthouse to plead before a judge the following day. When people from camp come to bail us out, instead of being released, 20 of us are rushed into the basement,

put on a bus and shipped out to Devil's Lake Jail another 4 ½ hours away in the dead of night. During the long dark bus ride, Karen Little Wounded<sup>56</sup> shares teachings with us and tells us to be proud. She tells us that we all earned our Bravery Feathers that day.

I was in jail for 3 days and was never allowed to contact my family but, as I learned after being released, Spirit had already made the call. When we were handcuffed on the side of the road, a picture had been taken which made it onto the internet. That night one of our Sundance Chiefs received this photograph from a friend in South Dakota. The note shared how the friend's Uncle had been arrested at Standing Rock. Looking at the picture he also saw me handcuffed behind him. That is how my family found out of my arrest. I learned later, that the friend in the photo was the same Elder I had given my cigarette filters to after the Chanupa Ceremony. They may not have allowed me my phone call but with Spirit and Sacred Tobacco on our side I, apparently, didn't need to make that call after all.

In the end, we were charged with two misdemeanors and one felony charge and, facing a potential seven year sentence, we were called back to North Dakota for the hearing in December, 2017. Bill Bertschy called me before we left to tell us they would be holding a Yuwipi Ceremony<sup>57</sup> for us before we returned to the US. So, Nicole, Antonia Mills<sup>58</sup> and I arranged our plans so we could travel to the ceremony on our way down for the hearings.

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<sup>56</sup> Karen Little Wounded is a Cheyenne River Elder who was one of the founders of the North Treaty Camp at Standing Rock.

<sup>57</sup> A Yuwipi Ceremony, in its most simplest form, is a nighttime ceremony where a Yuwipi Man, wrapped in a blanket in the center of an altar, calls upon Spirits and Ancestors for help. The ceremony takes place in complete darkness and is often engaged to call for healing, advice, assistance or sometimes for finding that which is lost. For more on Yuwipi ceremonies see Crawford & Kelley (2005).

<sup>58</sup> Antonia Mills is a retired university professor of First Nations Studies who played an integral role, as an expert witness for the Gitksan and Wet'suwet'en tribes, during the landmark 1984 Supreme Court of Canada trial known as either *Delgamuukw v British Columbia* or *Delgamuukw v the Queen*. It was during these trials that Indigenous oral histories were first genuinely acknowledged and honoured in the court system. Antonia wanted to join us, when we returned to Standing Rock, to both witness and support us through the trials.

Although my felony charge had been dropped the day before we left, the morning after the Yuwipi Ceremony, Nicole learned that felony charge had been dropped as well.

On our last evening visiting with the chiefs, Bill took us for a special dinner and after we ate a drum was passed around so everyone could share a song. When it came to Bill's turn, chills tickled their way down my back as he sang. Bill was singing the song the Ancestors sang on the day we were arrested. I could hardly wait to ask him the name of the song and, when he told me, I could feel my tears start to well up. Of course it was the BUFFALO Sundance Song and NO WONDER it was the Buffalo who came to lift our spirits when we needed it the most on that fateful day in October. Later that night we were also presented with Bravery Feathers for standing as we had at Standing Rock. As the Feathers were being tied into our hair, I could hear Karen Little Wounded's voice whispering in my ear from that long dark bumpy bus ride to Devil's Lake Jail, "be proud, you all earned your Bravery Feathers today!" I couldn't have felt more humbled and honoured by this gesture.

As we headed out the next morning, Bill pulled me aside and quietly told me to go to the bank to get a handful of five dollar bills. I was to place them under the weight of a stone at various locations along the side of the highway as we made our way back north to Prince George. "The people who need it will find them" he says, and I feel such a deep gratitude sink into me for being gifted these teachings and accepted into this good Red Road.

#### **4.4 The Hunt**

Some time prior to starting this degree, I spent an afternoon with an Indigenous Elder and master drum maker. I had come to him with the hopes of gaining assistance in making a drum as a surprise gift for a shared friend. I had been told that this Elder had a gift for determining what kind of drum a person should be working with. We shared stories

throughout the day as we worked and by the end of the day he asked me when I was going to make a drum for myself. He then turned, looked me in the eye and said I should be working with a Bear drum.

I sat with this for some time, knowing if I were to have a personal drum that I would want to be a part of every aspect of its creation including the hunt. However, in remembering my time with Grizzly in the forest, I did not feel right about hunting a Grizzly for this drum. So, I started to pray about possibly hunting a Black Bear instead. I put many Tobacco prayers out while I contemplated the hunt and, after over a year had passed, I started to go out hunting with my partner David Lawless. Every time we went out, I put Tobacco down and prayed to know the right thing to do should a Bear present himself to me. I was, however, torn. I didn't want to take a Bears life, yet, I so deeply yearned to work with Bear in the form of a ceremonial drum. I felt, through my Tobacco offerings, that Spirit would direct me to follow the right path and I would know what to do when and if the time presented itself.

Every day we went out hunting for Bear, I could feel it wasn't going to happen. It's funny how the land lets you know; how it demands that you put your time out on it before you are rewarded with the gifts it has in store for you. I remember feeling relieved on these mornings because I knew I wouldn't have to face the decision of whether to pull the trigger or not. Then one morning, as we drove out to the bush, everything felt different. The land felt so alive. This was going to be the day. I offered more Tobacco and prayed if there was a Bear who was ready to cross over, and would like to be transformed into a ceremonial drum, that he present himself and I committed to humbly respect and love him in every way I could.

It wasn't long before we came across a Black Bear, and although we had stalked up close, it just didn't feel right so we sat back and watched him move away through the trees before continuing on our way. We hunted throughout the day and later in the afternoon we spotted

another Bear. Again, it didn't feel right so we did not pursue him. Nearing the end of the day I felt both a great sense of relief, as well as, a deep sadness in realizing that it looked like my creating a Bear Drum was not to be after all. We made our way back to the truck. We were going to head out to one more spot before the sun went down but, in my mind, the hunting for the day was already over. As we bumped our way along the bush road I settled myself in with the idea that hunting a Black Bear was not right for me.

Then suddenly, Dave slammed on the breaks. Standing in the middle of the road was a big Black Bear and he was staring right at me. Something inside me came alive as the blood started rushing through my body. My body was reacting to this Bear but this was not the manner I was expecting to come across him. I am not a road hunter, I'm used to being on foot or on horseback deep in the bush, yet this Bear had stirred something in me that I could not deny. He was gifting himself and he literally stopped our truck to do so.

I got out of the truck, grabbed my rifle and fumbled awkwardly with the ammunition. I moved slowly, not rushing, wanting to give this Bear every opportunity to walk away even though I could feel deep inside my body that he wasn't going to. After loading my gun, I stopped to offer more Tobacco and before I even lifted the rifle to my eye, there were tears starting to slip across the contours of my cheek. It only took one shot, placed perfectly in the vitals, for a clean and quick passing. There was no fear or panic in his eyes; he remained entirely calm and peaceful. He took a few steps and then lay down in the grass, and crossed over as if he was peacefully going down for a nap. My heart, on the other hand, was racing and tears were streaming down my face, I couldn't believe I had been honoured by this Bear in this way. I sat down with him in the grass, placed Tobacco over his body and made a promise to him that I would forever care for and honour him deeply.

As we started the skinning process, I looked up to see we had been embraced by a double rainbow reaching from the ground to the ground, on either side of us and there was an amazing feeling of peace in the land that was all encapsulating. Then, just as we finished with taking care of the Bear meat and the hide, I looked up to see the two rainbows fade softly into the blue of the then darkening evening sky.

It was this Bear who helped me to heal from the wounds endured at Standing Rock. This Bear would become the drum I would build with Bill Bertschy and it would be this drum I would turn too to find the strength to endure four days out on the land fasting for Hanblecheya under the care of SherryLynne Jondreau.

#### **4.5 Drum making with Bill Bertschy**

In April (2017), Bill came to Prince George to do a Yuwipi Ceremony and to work with me in making my Bear drum so it would be ready for my Hanblecheya Ceremony in May. Sitting together in my living room at home, I felt nervous about working on the drum. A well of emotions boiled within me. I silently wished I could be a normal person; not freaked out every time I have to talk to someone; feeling a need to be worthy of the act we were about to perform but secretly worried that I wasn't; hoping I wouldn't fail miserably at the task at hand; wanting so desperately not to disappoint Bill or Bear. My body was literally vibrating as we prepared to work Bear into drum and, although Bill didn't say anything out loud, I could feel him thinking *settle down* behind his eyes.

I asked Bill how many drums he'd made as we lifted the hide out of the water and he tells me he has made (or helped to make) almost 1500 drums so far. This makes me feel a little better; at least one of us knows what we're doing. As we work, Bill starts to share teachings with me and the first lesson hits me pretty hard. I am a bit of a perfectionist, I like things to

be even and symmetrical but, in working with Bill, I can see that I'm going to have to face this obsession right out of the gate. He tells me this is going to be a working drum, not a wall hanging, so it isn't going to look perfect. "We need to let the drum be what it wants to be," not what we think we want it to be.

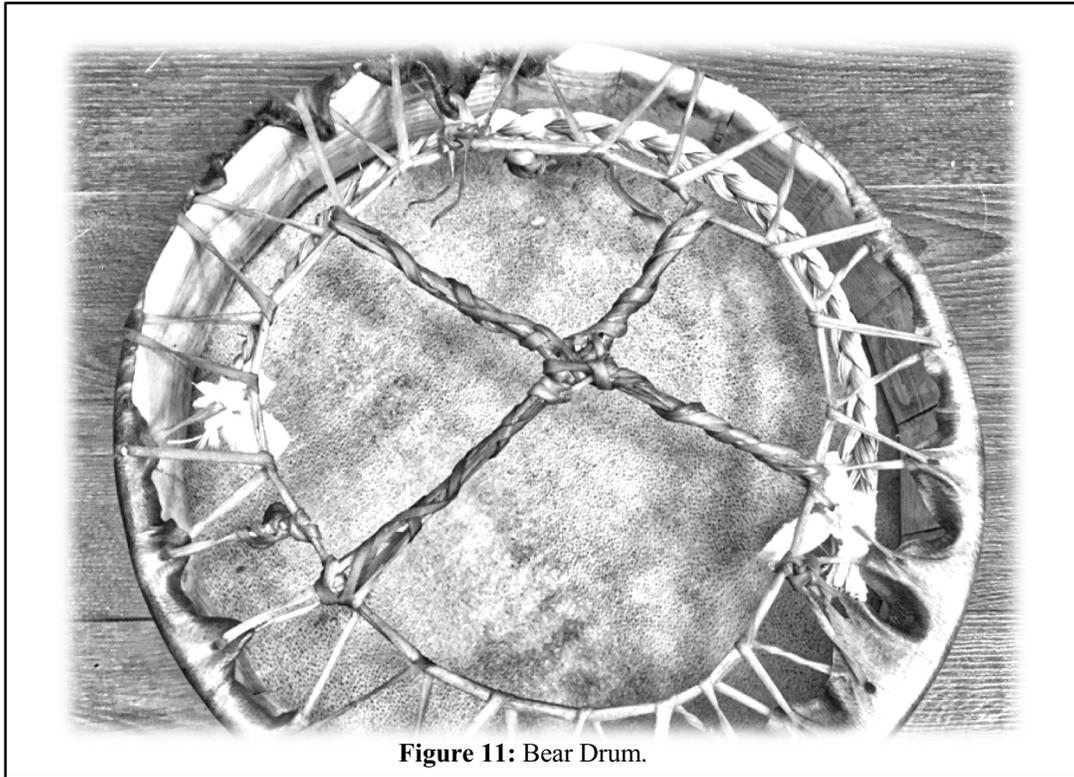
Bill tells me that we don't need to bury the process in ceremonial protocol either. This drum already knows how we are walking with it. He tells me this drum is a tool, a vessel for Spirit to move through. The protocols are tools too, vessels to help teach us how to be in our heart as we work with the medicines. "People get so wrapped up in the protocols" Bill tells me "that they lose sight of what really matters." I think about this and can see how a person could engage all the "correct" protocols but realize it would mean nothing if that person was not standing in the right place in their heart while doing so. Alternatively, a person could not engage the protocols and it wouldn't matter so long as their heart was strong and they walked in a good way. In this way, I can see how the protocols are perhaps there to help us know what it feels like to connect with the right place in our hearts, but once we are connected there, then it doesn't matter if you spin to the left or spin to the right.

Bill also tells me that we aren't going to be gentle with this drum; that it doesn't need to be babied. I think about how it is so often the most difficult experiences in life that make us the strongest; how if everything is gentle and nice, then we would never develop the courage and strength that life so often requires from us. It seems it is the hard times that push us to grow and evolve and I can see how this drum would also need to be strong to carry all the prayers that will move through it for generations (hopefully) to come. I then watch as Bill places the drum face side down on the floor, puts his feet on either side of the hoop and pulls hard on the lacing. I feel something stir within me. I'm not sure what it is but it is deep and it makes me feel alive on the inside; not in my head or even in my heart but somewhere in

some deep dark cave in my belly. Something there has been sleeping – hibernating – but now, in some beautiful way, it seems to be stirring awake. I can feel now that this drum is a part of a journey that will lead to some place yet unknown.

As we continue to work the lacing in and out of the hide, Bill shares how the center circle of rawhide represents the Earth and the lacings, that reach out from the center, represent all the people of the world holding hands. I realize this is another reason why the drum lacing shouldn't be perfectly symmetrical: because each and every person is so beautifully unique. Some are shorter, others taller, fatter, skinnier some are straight and others are all twisted up. As Bear Drum starts to take shape, I am in awe of the beauty of it all. I am so grateful to be making a drum that will work for the people and not just hang on a wall to collect dust. Bill then starts to speak of the four quadrants of the Medicine Wheel, now becoming visible across the back of this drum. He tells me there are 160 medicine wheel lessons to be learnt, 40 in each quadrant. A lifetime of learning.

Bill also shares stories, while we work, of his own Hanblecheya Ceremonies and the otherworldly landscapes he has visited. Places where time, space and Spirit are not bound to the present but rather woven also with threads of the past and moments not yet lived. I can't help but wonder what my own Hanblecheya will bring; what it will be like to just be with the land for four days; how my relationship with this Bear Drum will deepen?; what other stirrings will be woken within me? I look at Drum, now in its finished form and can't imagine it being more perfect, not a symmetrical kind of perfect but rather in its rawness that somehow feels alive and wild. I can see this drum already has a Spirit in it and a life of its own. I realize then, as I hold it before me, that this is not my Bear Drum. I do not possess it. It possesses me.



**Figure 11:** Bear Drum.

Later that night Bill honours me in a way I could not have even imagined. He gifts me his personal Prayer Pipe. Tears fall from his face as he holds his Pipe out into the space between us. He says he has been praying with this pipe for many many years and that it was gifted to him long ago from an Elder who also prayed with it for many many years. He tells me that, as far as he knows, the pipe is at least 70 years old. He tells me it is now time for me to begin working with it.

I am shocked beyond belief. How can I possibly portray my gratitude for such a gift? Tears fall from my eyes too as I awkwardly try to find the right words. I feel so unworthy of such a grand gesture, a gift filled with so many years of prayer and ceremony. I can feel the stories alive within the Pipe I now hold in my hands, the places it has been and the prayers pulled through its body and the bodies of all the people who have released them into smoke

trails, lifting to the sky. So many prayers; so many stories; so much heart. Words are not enough, what can I possibly gift Bill to show him how much this means to me?

I think of how gifting is such an integral part of walking the Red Road<sup>59</sup> and yet everything I can think of to gift Bill, in return, feels like it falls dead short of the gratitude I feel. Then, instead of thinking what I have that Bill might like, I start to think what do I have that would be hardest for me to part with? Right away I see an image form in my mind and my heart starts to break at the thought.

I have always had a fascination with collecting skulls but few of them hold the depth of meaning that the skull of this Bear holds for me. I have spent days carefully cleaning the muscle and tendons from the bone, scraping out the brain, so as to tan the hide, and boiling the skull to purify and clean it. How could I possibly gift this skull away; it literally feels like it is a part of me and to tear it away seems as if it would also tear open a terrible wound within me, leaving me raw and open. Vulnerable.

Panic starts to set in as I greedily think of all the reasons why I shouldn't gift Bear Skull away: It might not mean much (or as much) to Bill, what if he gives it away to someone else, maybe Bear wants us to stay together. Suddenly I feel that deep thing stirring inside my belly again and I realize, if I truly want to be worthy of the gift Bill has presented me, I also need to be able to do the hard things, the things that hurt. I know this is the only gift I can give Bill that can possibly portray the depth of my gratitude. A strength builds in my belly. I

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<sup>59</sup> An Indigenous Elder describes the medicine way of the Red Road as: "The holy road, the Red Road, there's a lot of responsibilities when a Native person decides to pick up the medicine way. . . . Our responsibility is to hold up the people who are here, to lift up the people who are down, and to help the people who are in need. And to provide for people, young children or whomever, with a good answer, with food, with clothing, help and with protection . . ." (Thompson, Cameron & Fuller-Thompson, 2013, p. 66).

know I need to trust in Spirit; to let Bear go where he needs to go; to set him free. I think of the journeys he will have that I could never provide him and I know I have to let him go.

It was then I realized that my gift to Bill wasn't in the Bear skull I would hand him, but rather, it was in the piece of my heart, torn free from my body, that would come with it. The teachings of the Elder (who told Clarence to always give what you have to the people)<sup>60</sup> came to me then. "I'm doing this for my own good" she had said "I'm doing this for my own good." I had heard that lesson with my head, when Clarence first shared it but now, through my time spent with Bear on the land and with Bill in making the drum, I was now coming to feel that teaching with my heart and my whole body. I remembered the hunters I had witnessed falling apart on the mountain<sup>61</sup> and, in that, how it was through the cracks of vulnerability that the Spirit in the Land was able to enter into them. Remembering this made me feel this wound in my body in a new way. It now felt like growth, like the seams of my heart had been torn so as to be able to expand into a larger fuller version of that same heart. It seems the act of gifting on the Red Road is actually about much more than the items being gifted. They, like the protocols and other ceremonial tools, perhaps become the vessels through which Spirit can move through. I have already received so many gifts from this Bear and our journey together has only just barely begun.

#### **4.6 Hanblecheya with SherryLynne Jondreau**

For four days in May (2017), I participated in a Hanblecheya ceremony (Vision Quest) under the care and direction of Knowledge Holder SherryLynne Jondreau. The experience was profound beyond any words I could possibly share on these pages. Numerous animals and birds kept me company throughout the duration of my four days fasting in the forest. I

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<sup>60</sup> See page 182 of this thesis.

<sup>61</sup> See page 50 of this thesis.

was gifted three powerful visions along with teachings from Owl, Bear, Hummingbird, Black Snake, Frog and the Happy Flappy Flier Family (a family of little brown Marsh Wrens who hatched their chicks next to my prayer circle). I slept, quite literally, in a Bears bed surrounded by trees with bark frayed by Bears sharp clawed markings. I expected to suffer for four days, without food or water, but instead my whole body and being was filled with an overwhelming sense of wellness and joy that I cannot describe with words.

I sang whole heartedly with Bear Drum into the forested landscape and prayed with the Chanupa (pipe) Bill had gifted me. There was so much going on in the forest, I didn't know which way to look for fear of missing some brilliantly joyous event. The forest and all the animals were so happy. I don't know how else to describe it. It was like some wild celebration straight out of a Walt Disney movie. I could have never imagined how the land would come alive before me or how I would be so welcomed into this world.

On the third day, right before my final vision, Owl came and sat with me, shared teachings and presented me with a gift I now carry with me in my Medicine Bundle. Again, so many gifts. How can I possibly repay the Land for these profound moments that will live in me and with me forever. Being just one small person, it seems the most powerful contribution I can make is to remind others that they can also enter into a similar relationship with the land and to remind people that there truly is a profoundly moving relationship there to be had. All we need do, is allow ourselves to believe it possible and to open our hearts to the Land with gratitude and respect.

I have chosen not to share the details of my Hanblecheya because the teachings I received were personal and sacred. They are teachings realized through a full-bodied experience of time spent on the land. As such, there are no words I can muster to do justice to the joy and knowings which entered into me during my time in the forest. The best I can do is to invite

others to seek out their own journeys and teachings on, in and with the Land and to remind people that every day is a ceremony when embraced in this relationship. Indeed, when I returned home to the cabin where I was staying after the ceremony, I was greeted by five young Owls. Every evening they came; landing all around me on the grass; sitting low in the branches of the trees around my cabin. When I went inside for the night they sat by the window, next to my bed, and when I drifted off to sleep they flew through that window and into my dreams.



**Figure 12:** Owl Visitor

#### 4.7 Visiting a Uchucklesaht Village with Daisy Georgina Laing

“Crow,” I call.

*“I need help. Every time I try and write about my time with Gina I just start to cry. This woman is such a beautiful, amazing, intelligent, strong, sweet and gentle soul and I just can’t bear to imagine the horrors she has lived through. I just don’t understand how she can have possibly grown into such an amazing person, with such an amazing capacity for forgiveness, after what she has been through. We have SO much to learn from her. I just don’t know how I can possibly portray how important what she has to offer us really is.”*

“Well,” Crow flies in landing on the branch outside my window “what is it that you feel is so important?”

*“Well, it is SO MANY things! But one of the main things is that when I hear people say “they just need to get over it” when referring to Indigenous peoples, I think of Gina. There are so many people in Canada and the US who don’t really KNOW what Indigenous people of this land have been through and it is this ignorance that continues to breed racism. I know if these people had an opportunity to sit with someone like Gina and just listen to her stories and see what an amazing person she is ... I KNOW it would be impossible for them to keep thinking the way they do. If everyone had a Gina in their lives, as I do, this world would be SUCH a better place!”*

“Sounds like this project you’re working on might help others to be able to sit and hear these stories.” States Crow.

*“Yes, I sure hope so! Because if more people could come to know the Knowledge Holders in this project, as I have come to know them, then it MUST have some kind of positive influence on them.”* I continue, “and it’s not just about learning the truth of our history. It’s also about learning about the stories that connect the people to the land as well, like the story of Winter Two Moons.”

“I don’t remember hearing about that one.” Crow questions me.

“You’re right, perhaps I should let Gina tell it here:”

*Gina:* This story is called Winter Two Moons and it was told to me by my grandmother, Iyote, Ellen Mack ... In the full moon of the season, and of the herring and clams, the baby girl was born in the place called the Hook Rock when there was two moons in the sky at the same time ... The birth happened before the very first earth shake and flood. The baby was unusual and she was special because she had four swirls of hair on the sides and the back of her head. They named her Winter Two Moons because her face was round and she was born

when there was two moons in the sky. Her mother died giving birth to her. Her father disappeared while fishing in a canal (that's the Port Alberni Canal) during the salmon season ... and no one ever knew what happened to him. They found his canoe floating in the canal. Winter Two Moons grew up happy and strong. She only knew her grandmother. Her grandmother taught her all she knew. It was foretold that Winter Two Moons would one day be remembered for all time by a sacred teller of times. No one knew how this would happen. At the end of one of the herring seasons (that was January or February) the village gathered their belongings and dismantled their houses to move to the salmon fishing site. Winter Two Moons had just had her coming of age ceremony ... Her grandmother was not well. She was unable to move with the rest of the tribe. Winter Two Moons stayed behind to care for her grandmother and to try to nurse her back to health.

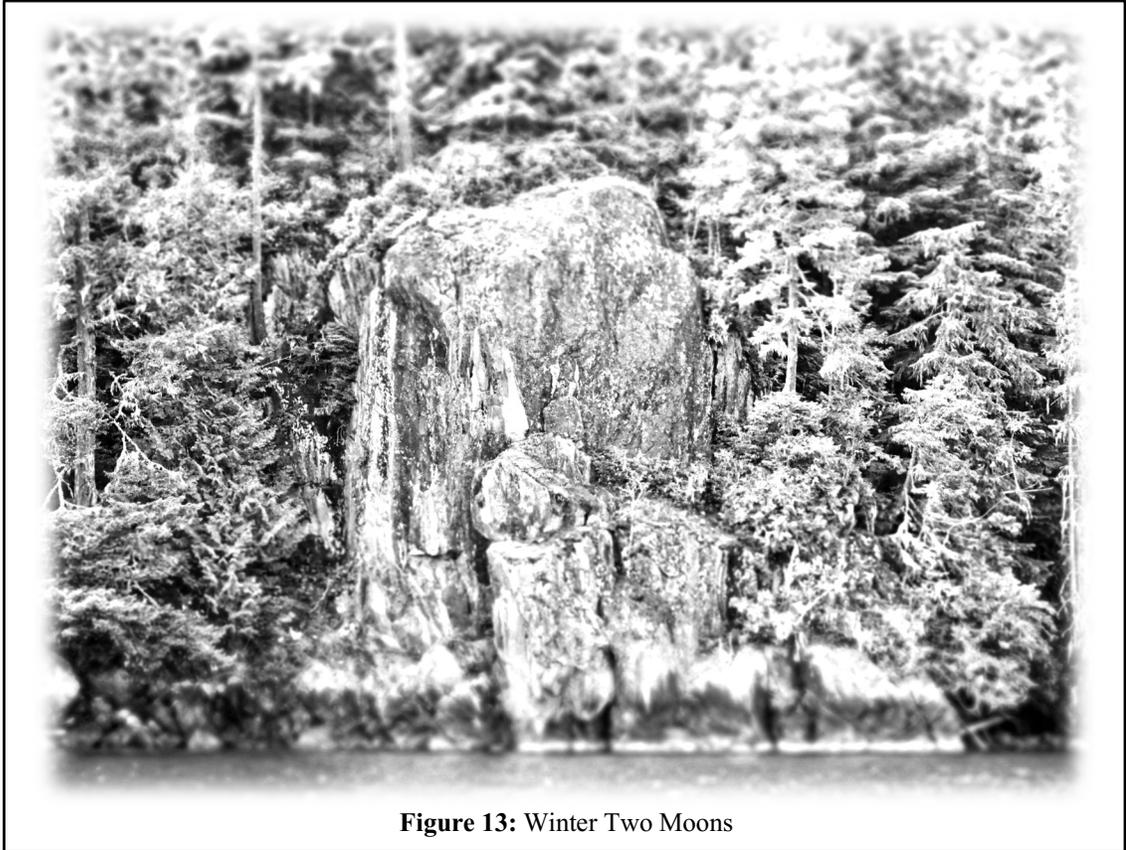
Slowly, they ran out of food, so Winter Two Moons went out to fish for halibut to feed her grandmother. Winter Two Moons was frightened because of a man named Wemaquackle (which means he was mean and miserable and angry all the time). Wemaquackle was quarrelsome and confrontational at all times. It was said that he was born that way. He fought and argued with everyone for any reason. When he saw Winter Two Moons fishing, he paddled right over to her canoe and started yelling and saying nasty things to her. He said we were not supposed to fish and that it all belonged to him, in any case.

She tried to explain the circumstances surrounding her fishing but he just got more and more unreasonable. She tried to pull her halibut line quickly but was struck behind the head with the end [of his paddle] and ended up in the canal. She pleaded with him by saying her grandmother was sick and needed her. It only enraged him even more. Winter Two Moons was getting weak and started to sink beneath the waves. Before she sank for the last time, she said to him, "You wronged me and you will always, from this day forward, see my face

and everything I see belongs to my family and tribe, who are the keepers of the Thunderbird, the Uchucklesaht tribe.” That was when he reached for his war paddle and chopped her head off while she was in the water. All that remained to be seen of her were her two white feathers floating in the water that she wore in her two braids, which are placed between the two swirls on each side of her head. Wemaquackle just looked at the feathers in contempt and paddled away. He had no respect.

Meanwhile, on the shore, just below the searching bluff (which was a place where there was a watcher whose job it was to watch for people coming and going [and] to watch for the different phases of the moon) was the grandmother. She was wailing and crying because she had witnessed what had happened to her granddaughter. She collapsed on the rocks and pointed to the bluff. As she did this, the earth shook. Rocks fell and the water peaked into waves as she died. For many days after this happened, the evil man came back to fish in the same spot. Each time he became more and more nervous.

Finally, one day, he looked towards the beach where he felt like someone was staring at him. To his utter horror, there on the bluff was the face of Winter Two Moons with her two feathers looking back at him. He became so distraught and guilty that he told her family and the People of the Thunderbird what he had done to Winter Two Moons. He told them her words and they realized that as far as she could see from the bluff, were the biggest mountains that are the borders and boundaries of the tribes land. She’s still there to this day at what is now called Kawshutl, the berry place, guarding our land. Her head and white feathers are plain for all to see on the bluff ...



**Figure 13: Winter Two Moons**

...

The truck bounces back and forth as we make our way along the logging road. Dust billows in clouds before us as I lift my foot from the gas pedal to allow more room between us and the old truck bouncing along in front of us. I'm sitting with April Laing, one of Gina's daughters, and April's daughter, Parisa Laing. Gina, her husband Ron and their friend Clayton lead the way in the truck that now disappears around the corner in the dust cloud ahead of us. I am so excited to spend time with this family and to finally have a chance to meet the land I have heard so many stories about over the years.

The logging road we follow takes a steep turn over the mountain top and I see, for the first time, down to the ocean on the other side of the island. It feels like an oasis of thick, rich fertile rain forest saturated in the taste of ocean mist. The village is small and the houses are

old and in disrepair but they look beautiful settled amongst the trees along the ocean shore. Even the beach is green, covered in seaweed, and the village appears to have grown into the land, reclaimed. That night April, Parisa and myself share a mattress on the living room floor and share stories as we drift off to sleep.

The next morning we take the skiff, a perfect little boat for navigating the narrow river we follow upstream, to an area of river pools used for bathing and purification. It is stunning. Pointing to an area along the bank, April describes how her people have, for thousands of years, been buried there on platforms in the trees and how these burial sites are also a favoured destination for Sasquatch. When we return to the village, we exchange the skiff for their fishing boat. Gina shares stories of the land we pass as we make our way out to deeper waters; stories of her youth before and after residential school; stories of the sacred waterfalls, we pass, where Whale hunters would bathe, purify themselves and pray in preparation for the hunt. As Gina's words and the stories of this land pass by us in the sweet ocean air, I think about her childhood neighbour, an Elder in the village, Ella Jackson.

...

*Gina:* Every summer we would come home from residential school ... It took us like two or three weeks just to get used to each other to start playing together again like we used to before we went. Everyone changed. Everyone had changed. We tried our best to go back to the way things were but [we] never could really do that. But, every summer we'd come home. Ella would wait for us to come home from residential school and then, she would leave. She would pack her things into her canoe ... She would leave and she would paddle to Bamfield, which is about 12 miles from where we live ... She stayed there for the summer. On her way, she would get seafood. She would use a special paddle to hit oysters off of the rocks and flip her paddle under and catch it as it came up, and bring it up, and she'd eat it ...

She'd stop and pick the berries and fill her basket and take it over to Bamfield. She'd stop and pick grass. She would go over there and be gone. Then, before we went [back] to residential school, she would come back home paddling in her canoe. She would have all her supplies.

I mean, I swear, it looked like a sea monster. Grass hanging out. She'd even have firewood and stuff, like branches that she used ... She would bring them home and they would be sticking up all over the place. I swear she looked like a sea monster. We'd go and help her unload and she would use that wood for the smokehouse. She would build a fire, get it going, get three branches like this, and once the ends started burning she'd take away the ashes and just move those sticks closer and closer and closer as they burned away so the smoke went up. No heat, [just] smoke to smoke her fish.

She would come home with all kinds of canned berries and grass that she'd picked along the way for her basketry. She has some basket work in the museum here in Port Alberni. Her picture is even there. Yeah. That was one of our Elders who did what they used to do a long time ago ... She knew every safe place to pull in and have a rest, or eat, or whatever. Just to do her things and then, she'd go off again. She knew how to travel. Yeah ... she knew how to use the land to get herself where she's going safely ... I don't think anybody can do it anymore. It's really sad, really sad. Maybe I'm the last witness to it. I don't know. I hope I'm not. I really hope I'm not. It was a wonderful way of life ...

...

I think of Ella, this Elder, out in her canoe alone, passing by the same storied landscapes we were travelling so many years later; passing by Winter Two Moons who would have watched over her, protecting her, as she crossed the ocean to Bamfield. Tingles slip through my body when Gina suddenly erupts in excitement. "There she is! Do you see her?" Just

then an Eagle screeches out, circles over the trees, and comes to land directly above Winter Two Moons who, I now see, also watches over us as our boat sways with the oceans swell. “Yes! Yes I see her!” I respond looking up at the rocky bluff in awe. What a gift to witness the story of Winter Two Moons come to life before me; to have an opportunity to meet this Woman in the Land myself.

I think about the story. Not just in how it connects the Uchucklesaht peoples to their land but also in how it teaches not be greedy with the bounty the land provides. Wemaquackle had tried to keep all the fish for himself and his greed turned him into a monster capable of killing Winter Two Moons. He kept taking and taking until the earth shook. This shaking forced Wemaquackle to face what he did every day while out fishing. The earth shakes had imprinted Winter Two Moons into the rock face forever reminding him of what he had done in the name of that greed. In the end, Wemaquackle couldn’t live with what he had done so he went to the People of the Thunderbird and told them of his misdeeds. It was the land that brought him around (back to the people in this way); those two white feathers and Winter Two Moons face looking down at him from within the rocky bluff. I can’t help but wonder, how many earth shakes will it take for us to come round? Whose face will look down on us when we finally realize what we have done? Who will be left for us to turn too to tell our misdeeds?

## V. In Summary: An Open-Ended Conclusion

This project, pulling from collaborative anthropological modes and perspectives that honour both Indigenous and Western-based knowledge systems, has engaged a qualitative research design with a focus on anti-colonial decolonizing methodologies and storying through a land-based, relationship-driven, spiritually-accepting, emotionally-felt, Indigenous-informed theoretical perspective. The project explored the question: *How might human-land relationships, as developed through Indigenous-informed hunting practices and ways of knowing, facilitate health, healing, and well-being among North American Indigenous peoples?* A land-privileging methodology was used to honour the mental, physical, emotional and spiritual relationships that connect us to all other aspects of life and land. In aligning with many Indigenous land pedagogies, this theoretical perspective further recognizes the land as being a valued holder of knowledge which remains attainable through relationship and firsthand experience on the land. I engaged concepts of Indigenized ecological knowledge transfer and a mindset that employs land-based privileging interwoven and expressed through reflective land-engaged narrations and various methods of storying with, about and on the land.

Through my speaking with the Land, and other people on and about the land, this research is also a platform for Knowledge Holders to share their voices and thoughts on these important topics. In taking an anti-colonial approach, and in listening to the words shared by Indigenous peoples themselves (Graveline, 2000), I specifically chose not to analyze, objectify or intellectualize the words and teachings shared by the contributing Knowledge Holders. I leave their words to stand on their own and I also present them, in video format, on an accompanying website. I have however presented reflective autoethnographic narrations speaking about my time spent with Knowledge Holders while engaged in land-

based projects with them. In seeking a deeper understanding of my own lived experiences on the land, I have in this work, also sought to become an Indigenous ally eager to push upon the colonial boundaries that confine us all. I accept that I will have, without question, made mistakes along the way. But my hope is that any mistakes made might help to further highlight the lessons we need most of all to learn.

This project has also been a personal journey of learning in which Indigenous Knowledge Holders have instilled in me important teachings around how to be a better human being or, as Knowledge Holder Bill Bertschy questions, “How do we be human properly” (See p. 143). Finding a way for us all to be better human beings has been a significant concern for each of the contributing Knowledge Holders. The Knowledge Holders have expressed a deep concern for the manner in which colonial capitalism continues to instill, upon the people, land relationships based on greed and destruction. It is this consumerist relationship with land that we need to diverge from and, according to Bill, it is through coming back into our own relationship with land that we will find improved health and well-being from both a personal and environmental perspective (See pp. 149-151). As Knowledge Holder SherryLynne Jondreau points out, we don’t need to protect Mother Earth, we need to heal ourselves so we can learn how to be in respectful relationship with her and, when that happens, she won’t need to be protected, at least from us, any more (See pp. 128-129).

The numerous teachings shared throughout this project suggest that Indigenous hunting practices do indeed instill, in the people, important teachings in how to engage (and perhaps reengage) in a respectful relationship with Mother Earth and all our relations. This relationship is perhaps best described by the Kwak’wala word *mayaxala* which is described, by Knowledge Holder Arthur Dick, as being an expression of respect that extends far beyond an English understanding of the word. “It’s a walk of life. It’s a way of honoring every

living thing” Art explains (See p. 116). Bill, in a similar manner, describes life itself to be a ceremony (See p. 146). However, it seems that hunting, and other practices that directly provide us our sustenance, should be engaged with extra ceremonial care, respect and gratitude. As has been acknowledged consistently throughout this work, hunting is, in of itself, a ceremony that should, at minimum, always be engaged in with respect, prayer and with an offering (commonly) of Tobacco. As such, from an Indigenous perspective, it seems that hunting is more about experiencing a relationship with an all-encompassing perception of the land than it is simply about the kill.

Most of the Knowledge Holders acknowledged a phenomenon where animals on occasion gift themselves to the hunt and, in discussing this, Knowledge Holder Clarence George also describes how it is a high honour to have an animal gift themselves to you (See p. 184). Bill Bertschy builds on this concept by sharing that animals will often “...sacrifice themselves for the better good of things, just like a Sundancer or a Ghost Dancer...” also sacrifices their bodies for the better good of the people (See p. 144). Knowledge Holder Gina Laing shares how, after a successful hunt, she was taught to honour that animal by always sharing the bounty of the hunt with others (See p. 102). Clarence George speaks about the joy that comes from this act of sharing in saying, “the most beautiful feeling you can ever reward yourself is taking that animal and giving it to people who need it. Money can’t buy that. Money can’t buy that feeling. When you help somebody out like that, you’re doing it for your own good” (See p. 181).

This concept of sharing what you have as being of benefit to both the person gifted, and the person doing the gifting, was present in many teachings shared in this work. It can be seen in the act of always sharing the bounty of a hunt (See Gina, p. 102 & Clarence, p. 181); in the practice of exchanging an offering (most commonly of Tobacco) when anything is

taken from the land (See SherryLynne p. 129; Ron p. 172; Bill, p. 144; Mildred, p. 162 & Clarence, p. 181); in, as Yvonne Pierrero describes, the protocol of always gifting away the first item that you make (See p. 159); and even in Bill Bertschy instructing me to leave five dollar bills along the highway for people in need (See p. 208). These examples, I believe, stand as important teachings about how we might all be better human beings and they, most certainly, stand in direct contrast to Western settler capitalist ideologies based on individual accumulations of wealth. I believe these teachings, as instilled in Indigenous hunting practices and throughout many aspects of Indigenous ways of knowing and being in the world, indeed highlight some of the areas where the ideologies of settler capitalism have most critically fallen short.

Imperialist, capitalist, post-industrial, profit and resource-driven, settler colonialism has wreaked havoc on the First Peoples of North America and their landscapes. As SherryLynne states, colonialism almost killed her (See p. 130). Gina Laing shares how colonialism took away her identity, family, language, food and teachings and replaced this with all manners of abuse, racism and dysfunction (See pp. 108-109). To heal from these wounds Gina tells us we need to listen to the stories of what has happened so we can acknowledge the past, understand it, and so we won't ever let it happen again (See p. 108). Furthermore, to stop colonialism from continuing to directly impede Indigenous pathways to health and healing we also need to listen to the Indigenous peoples of this land about how to be in relationship with this land (See Mildred, p. 158). As SherryLynne (See p. 129) shares, we need to ourselves to heal our relationship with the land and, in doing so, we need to get back out on it (See Bill, p. 150).

In describing how colonialism has affected his life, Knowledge Holder Ron Desjarlais states that one of the problems is that today everything is about money (See p. 178). Art also

describes how he sees money and greed breaking up families in his community (See p. 120). Bill says it's the "faster, faster" lifestyle that so many people now live that keeps us from reconnecting with the land and a ceremonial way of being in the world (See p. 151). This faster lifestyle is driven by capitalist and consumerist ideologies which continue to demand, from Mother Earth, resource extraction at increasingly unsustainable rates. It is now not possible for some Indigenous peoples to return to a lifestyle that once sustained them on the land. Such is the case with Mildred Martin, as the hunting cabin and trap line where she grew up hunting, trapping and fishing with her family is now contaminated and surrounded by a clear cut. The land she would return to is quite literally gone (See p. 164).

Engaging with Indigenous hunting practices that embrace respect and gratitude is just one way to engage (or reengage) teachings that might help to reconnect people with the land in a manner that fosters healing and improved health and well-being. As Clarence shares, even just eating wild game helps one to connect to Mother Earth (See p. 182). There are also many ceremonies that foster healing, health and well-being through the strengthening of an all-encompassing relationship with land, animals, plants and Spirit. As Bill says when he talks about ceremony, "It's a way of life, it will change people's lives ... It helps people, grounds people, gives them a different way to look at the world ..." (See p. 146). Many Indigenous ceremonies, such as Inipi, Hanblecheya and Sundance, directly connect a person both physically and spiritually (as well as mentally and emotionally) to a deeper connection with the land.

Art tells us the main thing he sees missing today, in our ability to live a good life, is our connection to Spirit (See p. 121). Bill tells us that we need to learn to work with the medicines again (See p. 147). One such way of working with the medicines, that also actively connects people with the land and animals, is through drumming and singing.

However, SherryLynne reminds us that it is important to always ask the animal for permission for that drum because that "... animal would have to sacrifice his life for this drum to be here today so that it could sing the people back to their hearts" (See p. 140). In this way, "... if we respect [Mother Earth] the way she needs to be respected, she will look after all of us" (See SherryLynne, p. 128). As such, Mildred leaves us with a final message: "In order to actively participate in healing past wounds, society needs to be educated on our culture and traditions. If we are going to move forward, there needs to be better communication. I would like to leave everyone a message. Respect each other. If we do this, we will move forward together. Also respect the land, the waters, and the resources and it will provide for you forever" (See Mildred, p. 168).

I have come to know many of these teaching through living them into the stories of my own life. I was honoured to experience a Bear gift himself to me for a ceremonial drum. I also experienced the gift of gifting when I gave Bear's skull to Bill. In this, and many other experiences, I have come to learn that allowing ourselves to become vulnerable through sacrifice is perhaps one of the greatest gifts we can receive. It hurts to give away that which is most important to us. It hurts to go without food and water for days on end during ceremony. It hurts to let go of ego and make ourselves vulnerable to the land. Yet, it seems to be in the vulnerability of sacrifice that we, in fact, gain the greatest gift of all and learn, in the process, that what we once thought would hurt actually, in fact, heals. As such, the nuances of these gifts remain indescribable by words. The most important thing I can share from my own experiences, in being touched by such gifts, is that these are teachings that need to be experienced to come to truly know them.

This is one of the many reasons that the teachings shared throughout this work need to be lived in order to understand them in any kind of meaningful way. It was, for instance,

through the trauma I experienced at Standing Rock that I was able to experience the healing effects of working with Bear in transforming his skin into a ceremonial drum and it was fasting at Hanblecheya, with that drum, that connected me so profoundly to the land and animals who welcomed me into their world. It was through sharing time on the land with Knowledge Holders that I was able to experience stories, passed down through generations, come to life in the land before me.

It has been my experience, that engaging Indigenous-informed relationships with land and hunting may indeed present important and significant pathways to improved health and well-being for many Indigenous peoples or any peoples who genuinely seek to engage such teachings honourably and with respect. Through a review of literature I have learned (from a distance) of the important and sacred relationship between the land and many North American Indigenous communities. The literature also illustrates a colonial history that has significantly fractured Indigenous land relationships and, in doing so, also devastated Indigenous identity, sovereignty, health and well-being. The articles, books and reports explored speak of the horrors of residential schools and other assimilation tactics that were designed to dismantle the Indigeneity of an entire people. Despite the significant damage caused, these attempts at cultural genocide have failed.

Throughout this work I have sat with the survivors. I have listened to their stories. I have stood with them in resistance to ongoing colonial oppression. I have sat in ceremony with the Elders. I have laughed with them and I have cried with them. My heart has been broken by the stories I have heard and it has been pieced back together through ceremony and through witnessing the resiliency and incredible capacity for forgiveness in these same people. I have cried and I have laughed; I have hurt and I have healed with the people, and I can't think of any place I'd rather be. I can't think of a more important thing to be doing. In

the end, all we truly have is this land upon which we stand and each other. What will it take for us to realize how simple it really is just to be kind to each other, to Mother Earth and to all our relations.

Crow flies in and startles me from my thoughts. *“So did you figure everything out for your thesis?”* He caws.

*“Well no, not exactly. I don’t think I’ll ever figure it all out but I sure had an adventure along the way in trying”* I respond. *“Do you have any closing thoughts to share with the people Crow?”*

*“In fact, I do.”* caws Crow. *“It’s pretty simple. Tell all those humans to get out on the Land, put some Tobacco down, and say...”*

### ***Thank You***

*“Because that is where the relationship begins.”*

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