

"No More Kiyams"

Métis women break the silence of child sexual abuse

by

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ABSTRACT

“No more kiyams” Métis women break the silence of child sexual abuse, is a glimpse into the lives of four Métis women who were raised in an Aboriginal community and who speak to the effects and the obstacles of trying to heal from an abuse that affects not only them, but also their families and communities.

As Métis people, the women in this thesis bring to light, the generational abuses that affect the healing process. They give a picture of how healing is a very personal journey but at the same time a collective process. Rose, Betsy, Angela and Rena provide us with insight into why healing from child sexual abuse needs to address a cultural perspective. Rose became a victim of a respected elderly uncle. Betsy and Angela’s fathers were their abusers. For Rena it was her stepfather, grandfather, and cousins; how does one send all those significant people to jail? In addition, remain a ‘part’ of family and community. The Métis are raised to be very proud and loyal to family and community. We do not heal alone.

This work is about honouring individual strength and gifts in order to heal. It speaks to healing that is not in isolation from identity as a Métis or in isolation from one’s community. This thesis is about acknowledging the strengths of Métis women by giving voice to their stories, their dreams, and their lives.

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IN HONOUR

September 2004, I am sitting in my log home in Paddle Prairie. My world is full of richness, which gives meaning, purpose and direction to my life. My girls are healthy, living their lives with their partners; my grandbabies are beautiful, Janae and Tiarayne. And Sam continues to be amazing.

Alone you are alone but me I am rich with family, friends and communities. I am honoured.

My brother, Chilawee, passed away twenty-two years ago this past March. On September 2004, my family met Chilawee's son.

Darren, I welcome you into our world, here in our home community of Paddle Prairie. Feels like you were always here have you really been away for 24 years? Our history flows thru our blood bringing yesterday into today.

Welcome to a people rich with proud roots that we continue to nurture and consciously teach. Welcome to a family that has endured pain and suffering. Welcome to many practical jokers, musicians and many kids. Welcome.

My brother would be very proud of the young man that came home to visit. I told Darren "you are not only coming to meet a family but also a community" the whole community knew he was coming.

One of the community members at the Settlement office asked my mom if it was okay to put a welcome in the monthly community newsletter; welcoming Darren to the community. My heart felt good when I heard that.

In addition, I would like to acknowledge my uncle who I know died with a heavy heart. Here we go back three generations from my grandchildren. Whatever happened? Whatever happened? Our history flows thru our blood bringing yesterday into today. Let us die in peace. Let us live. Let us live.

It is the end of the day. I need firewood. I need. I need.

With honour to you all,

Lauralyn Houle

A PRAYER

Today I make an offering to the old people,
my grandmothers and grandfathers of generations past.

I am here before you to sit and to be still so that I may hear your message so that I will
come to know the way.

There is a saying, 'put your own house in order first'.

These words have lived in my mind over the years as I have journeyed down the 'red
road'.

But it has not been until now --in the act of doing this research--that I began to
understand the full impact of the commitment and the responsibility this knowledge has
on an individual -- in this case myself.

With humble understanding I begin to share my journey and the lives of four incredible
young women

through the trials of child sexual abuse

and how we have come to know and understand those trials in our lives.

A Prayer, February 21, 1998

CHAPTER ONE STEPPING OUT – SPEAKING UP

Just so's you're sure sweetheart and ready to be healed cause
wholeness is no trifling matter. A lot of weight when you're well.
(Bambara, 1980, p.10)

It takes much strength to walk away from a childhood that rips at the core of your spirit. Child sexual abuse does just that. It shakes you to the core of your being. To 'walk away' means that you have survived; how you walk away is the focus of this thesis. How does an individual heal from child sexual abuse? What constitutes healing for a Métis woman? The women in this study answered these questions from a place of unquestionable strength. I have come to understand their strengths can be their way out of their childhood abuses. The women in the following stories are women who stepped forward and spoke of their pain, their hopes, their struggles, and their dreams for themselves and for those in their lives.

This thesis shows us that one's strength begins the healing and nourishes the ability to critique the self, to look closely at oneself and to think the thoughts and questions that lead us through our pain. Healing is active; it does not happen in isolation, but it does start with inner glimpses and moments of knowing that help to move a person. Recognizing and acknowledging these moments depends on the individual.

This insight, the ability to see how things are related and connected in one's life, is a strength that survivors of childhood sexual abuse need to recognize as a way out of their darkness. It is through the women's stories and my own journey away from child sexual abuse that I have come to recognize the 'need' to accept strengths as a way of healing, understanding that 'knowing' and 'accepting' are two separate paths.

Healing begins with each individual and becomes an individual walk. We may

do similar things to heal ourselves, but we each start with our own inner voice (a knowing) that gives us direction and guidance. Through these women's words you will see how important 'listening to yourselves' becomes during healing. Listening in this form is not a new phenomenon. It is ancient teachings that show us to listen to our bodies. This friend of mine once told me that an elder told her, we need to listen to our bodies because our bodies will tell us what we need in our lives. Healing and listening therefore become the journey away from owning the effects of child sexual abuse.

In March 1998, I attended the "International Summit of Sexually Exploited Youths" open forum in Victoria, B.C. One of the conference planners, a young woman, spoke of the participants of the summit as young people whose candles may not have been lit. Her words hit me with such force. This thesis is about lighting the candles of the women I interviewed and other women in communities who may read this work. It is about lighting the candles of young women who were sexually exploited as children. It is about giving back light and life to a dark and cold reality.

Another reminder I had during this powerful presentation of the youth was that we are talking about children. The women in this thesis were children who were exploited as young as two years old. As the writer and you as the reader we need to continue to remember that these women were just babies when their candles were blown out. This is another reason the strength of these women needs to be acknowledged and written for them to see and for others who are searching for ways to heal.

The women interviewed for this research project are living proof that wisdom does not start at 'fifty -plus' but that it starts with the will to survive. Enduring child sexual abuse is an act of becoming wise. The saying is, 'one is old beyond their years.'

“We have focused on symptoms of pathology and almost ignored resiliency, strengths, and healthy adaptive coping styles.” (Middleton-Moz, 1992, p.157) The women in this project were from twenty-two to twenty-five years old. The wisdom in their insights, however, seems to be a lifetime of living and experiencing.

The wisdom the women display is again one of the reasons that I chose to look at “NO MORE KIYAMS”-Métis women break the silence of child sexual abuse. These women are young, and, maybe, just maybe, they can learn to call on their wisdom to move forward to heal from their childhood experiences. Kiyam is a Cree word meaning “never mind, leave it alone (Cardinal, 1998).” When one stands to tell their story they’re breaking the pattern of kiyam. When we are given opportunities to share our stories we can come to know a part of us that brought us through those childhood years. And when we come to know this part of us we can begin to stand taller and restore ourselves as strong women.

How we come to know this I believe is through sharing our story in safe and comfortable surroundings. In this thesis we are all Métis women. We are all connected to a Métis community during our childhood years. Our stories intertwine with our life experiences and also with the experiences of growing up and living within a community context. Through our own healing journey we need to bridge our personal realities to our community realities. Yes, it is important in healing to acknowledge our individualness but to also be aware of our connection to the collective.

When we tell our story of child sexual abuse--as Métis women-- we not only talk about our own pain and struggles but also we bring to light the pain of community denial and/or healing. We do not become separate from our surroundings, our environment, our

families, or our communities.

This thesis speaks to the healing from child sexual abuse within a cultural context of honoring family and community. How does one honor that way of being? It is said that when people are ready to face themselves, a teacher will appear. I believe this to be true because that has been my experience. However, we need to understand the 'responsibility' placed on the individual at this critical time. This is the individualness, the walking one's path and becoming aware of one's direction. But individual healing does not happen in isolation from family and community. From my personal experiences of listening to the women, their choice to heal or not to heal is directly tied to family and/or community.

The stories the four women shared with me show the strength of the women as survivors of a devastating childhood invasion, child sexual abuse. These invasions often lead women to places of no return: alcohol and drug abuse, prostitution, jail, suicide--a life of misery and pain for themselves and others in their lives. I am not saying that these women are not strong; rather, maybe they did not have the capacity to recognize what they had was strength. And so the experiences toughened them. They then lived out the pain and shame they internalized. I would never want anyone to assume they were less than anyone else. But something moves some women to face themselves and their experiences while others are moved to run, hide and suffer for what was done to them.

This thesis is about examining the strengths of women who were chosen and/or choose to walk a different road in spite of childhood invasions. The women I talked to may not agree with me--but through their spoken words I want to show the paths they did choose are strong and powerful, in spite of their experiences. We need to recognize

ourselves as strong women. 'No More Kiyams,' for our own survival and for those to follow whom we are teaching to break the patterns of destruction.

I remember as a child thinking there has to be another way to live. I thought this with no disrespect to my parents, but with honor and humility. I recognized they gave me what they did in spite of the many hidden and buried secrets they themselves may have carried in their lives. I want to believe that parents want something better for their children. It is how this something better is perceived that paths are chosen and directed. My dream from the time I remember as a young girl was of a place where people talked to one another--heart talks--a place where people wanted to know each other from the inside.

The spirit of a child becomes infected in many ways when child sexual abuse invades the process of developing a healthy view of the self and the world around them. I write about the strengths of the women who courageously told me their stories, about their will to survive in spite of these infections. I need to show the women that they have these strengths, that they own them, that the strengths are real. I know I have only words to give back and the rest is up to them to believe. But when someone you know is telling you that you are strong, the hope is that you will feel stronger and more alive. This is why we must talk to one another and must find ways of reaching out to one another. This thesis is my way at this time.

A METIS WOMAN

It is important for me to speak to who I am in relation to this thesis. An academic goes to graduate school to challenge herself, her learning, and her experiences. I went to graduate school to speak to who I am, how I learn and to give meaning to my

experiences. I went in search of a place to tear down the walls that continue to hide us as a people from our own ways of knowing and knowledge. I went to open that which I knew, where others in the classroom setting had to listen. I know that just because I am speaking in the classroom doesn't necessarily mean I am being heard. I know this reality of speaking and not being heard as one of my truths, a lesson I had to learn over and over.

The most important teaching for me was realizing that I needed to speak, and I am walking away stronger because of this. I challenged myself to say what many of us as a people struggle with--to speak our truth in spite of history and ourselves. At the risk of sounding like I am speaking for all Métis people, please know that I speak from where I have come and what I have known to be experiences I have felt many Métis people live out, not only in the classroom, but wherever else we may be.

As I contemplate sitting to write 'up' my thesis, I have many questions and doubts. Who do I think I am? What gives me the right to do such research? And how do I do what is right and still complete the requirements of a Master's program? What is right of course are the 'subjects' of the research--the women--and the impact of the research on the women and on the community. The realization of the writing of this project has brought forth all my reservations, concerns and misgivings of doing research on human subjects. Of course, as a Métis person I am speaking from that perspective. And of course, these words are my words, my thoughts, and my feelings of non-Aboriginal people doing research on Aboriginal people. Now here I find myself in a position that I once questioned and very much doubted of the non-Aboriginal scholar. Do I have any more right or any more obligation than the next scholar doing research work in a thesis program?

As a Métis scholar, I believe I only have myself to turn to. If not for the answers to these questions, at the very least to find a comfortable stance from which to continue my research work and therefore take my place among my colleagues in the academic world. But more important than this academic recognition is the need to know I can go home and feel like I belong and fit in there.

Therefore I turn to myself to seek resolution. Who am I? I am a Métis woman raised in an Aboriginal community. I am a mother of two young Métis women. I am a daughter, a sister, an auntie, a niece, and a cousin to many Métis women and men, young and old. I am a friend. That is who I am and how I fit into the community.

How that relates to my research is the reason I am questioning my own motives. Having worked and studied in the 'social services' field for the past eighteen years, I feel I have paid my dues. I can acknowledge and validate my own experiences through this research and I can be a reliable standpoint from which to reach out into the Aboriginal community to do research. Without answering my questions directly, I am trying to justify that what I am doing is ethical and right for the women I have been interviewing and for the Métis community.

This thesis is about; speaking our truths, not only in the classroom but also in our communities. So I invite you not only into a world of academia in this thesis, but also into that sacred place within me as I share with you my story and the stories of four other incredible young women and our lived experiences of child sexual abuse.

As I turn away from the research for a minute and look into the world from which I have come, the world where my daughters and their families will evolve, I stand very strong in my 'right' to bring to light the stories of the women. I understand the need for

healing that we as Métis people, individuals, and communities must address, so that future generations can live their lives not always having to carry with them the struggles and the pain of history. Instead they may go forward with the strength of the people. And so my writing begins.

Throughout this work I have integrated my own story of child sexual abuse. My story is integrated in italics and inserted in places where I have felt I have something that needs to be said. I have told my journey through the eye of poetry, story, and the realization that I have come to know and understand as my healing journey over the years.

I am not separate from the women; I am one of them. To do honor to the stories of the women and to Métis people in general, I need to start by sharing some aspects of my own journey. It is out of respect and honor for the women I interviewed that I start with myself. I did not ask to receive their stories without sharing my own pain, struggles, questions--my own hiding and healing from child sexual abuse.

THE JOURNEY

I started this thesis with a prayer. This prayer puts my work into context for myself and for you the reader. I am carrying a message and I want to be clear from the start that I bring this message to you in the humblest of ways that I can at this time in my life. In chapter one, I acknowledge myself in relation to this research, my doubts, my concerns and I also answer for myself why I embarked on this journey. I end this chapter with three short stories about my own ways, beliefs and values.

Chapter two is the "Literature Review." It is in fact an attempt to teach the women in this study and other women who may read this work that we are strong people

and it is time we stopped denying ourselves, our incredible strength, and start honoring our paths. I believe this chapter is a teaching chapter because it looks at our history as a people, and brings to light how our identities are formed with the influence of history. I also examine the effects of child sexual abuse and the impact on adult life and I bring this home to Métis women and the communities. This chapter also speaks to acknowledging one's strengths as way of healing. In essence, this chapter is a way of teaching through connecting past and present facts and experiences.

Chapter three is my road map of how this work occurred and unfolded--the thinking and the reasoning. Chapter four tells our stories; it is a summary of past experiences. Chapter four gives voice to the women and their realities of how child sexual abuse affected their adult lives. Their words speak for themselves. I was merely the pen in their hands. Chapter five documents the strengths, the gifts, and the hope of healing. Again the women's voices speak, sharing courageously with us how they have walked away from child sexual abuse and continue to live their lives.

Chapter six is my chapter. It is my attempt to understand the process and the teachings of this research project. My realities I faced as the researcher and a subject of the project are articulated. This chapter is my attempt to claim my own space and to break "No More Kiyams" for myself. It is a meeting place at the crossroads, a place where the ability to choose can become a reality. The thesis ends with the summary of the road traveled and with questions that remain unanswered. Questions that may never be answered.

I invite you to take this work and find a quiet spot that brings you comfort (with a pot of coffee or tea and a notebook). The stories may be hard for you to hear because

of your own journey or the journey of a family member or friend or because you will know the reality the women in this work have lived. Please do what you need to do to take care of yourself.

SHARING THROUGH STORY-TELLING

Years ago my girls brought me an African violet that bloomed purple flowers. For years it had these beautiful purple flowers no matter what the season. That little potted plant moved from many homes over the years, but still it bloomed. The blooms have stopped now for a few months. It is sad. I can see and feel the sadness. I wonder how it knows to be sad in the midst of what I am working on. I wait for the day the purple flowers will return.

I bought my sister this little plant once with a beautiful red flower. I thought maybe if she could learn how to take care of that little plant and if the plant bloomed those beautiful red flowers, maybe, just maybe, my sister would recognize and learn how to nourish and allow herself to blossom. I often think about that little plant when I think of my sister.

When I was young, I always used to think of myself in terms of a tree. I would think of a tree and how strong its roots must be to have a healthy trunk and grow branches that grow other branches. I wanted to have roots like that tree. I wanted to know how to weather the seasons. I wanted to grow healthy branches that reached out. I wanted to know how to let go of those branches that I no longer needed. I wanted to be strong but not tough. I wanted to know what kind of tree I was and how I fit in with the others around me. I wanted to have a purpose and to know that I was fulfilling that purpose.

I still think of myself in terms of being a tree and I am still learning how to be a strong healthy tree, a tree that welcomes the different seasons and withstands what the seasons have to offer. I would be a tree that knows when to shed the old and welcome the new, a tree that has strong roots, strong enough to weather the changes and to be anyway. I am still learning about trees and their ways of being in the world.

I wonder am I a tree that flowers. And if I am, will I know when to bloom? And I wonder, too, what color my flowers would be. Would people stop to touch me and wonder at my beauty? Or would I be a nuisance to those well-kept manicured fenced-in yards. Maybe I'll grow out in the wild and only by chance will be seen. But I think no matter where I may be I will have strong, strong roots that will grow a strong, strong trunk, and my branches will be many and grow in all directions. And maybe someday there will be a child who will look up at me and wonder what it would be like to be a tree.

CHAPTER TWO THE TEACHINGS

they have these high walls

to keep us out

and these high hedges

to keep us out

can't see in

don't want to see out

don't want to see

sometimes I wonder

who I am

when they look at me

sometimes I wonder who I am

when they see me

The purpose of a literature review is to look closely at textual information in order to gain insight into the area of your research. Turning to the literature on child sexual abuse and healing has left me disappointed. As a Métis woman the literature did not speak to my experience and realities. Therefore, because the literature did not address the effects among Métis women, or speak to healing among Métis women, I was compelled to turn to literature that gave meaning and validated the Métis experience. I know that the responsibility I have is to give this research a place in the textual knowledge as additional insight and/or confirming existing literature.

The other equal responsibility I have is to the Métis women, the communities, and myself. To honor and bring honor to the women that shared their stories. And so as I try to bring these two worlds together, I have many ways to consider. And still in the end I am not an objective writer or thinker. Nor do I want to be. I am immersed in trying to find ways to communicate a different way of counseling/healing, thinking and doing. I have been at this place since I started having that conversation with others in the counseling field. I know my disappointment in not being heard is that I have not had the words to communicate what it is I am trying to say. This literature review is my attempt to find those words with the help of those other researchers and writers who have gone before me. It is my attempt to give knowledge to Métis women, the Aboriginal communities, and all those who are trying to find a way out of their experience of child sexual abuse. It is my expectation that through this literature review you find a place to start.

This chapter, then, is a teaching. Drawing on those before me I will teach Métis women that, yes, we really are a strong, proud, breed of people living with generational

abuses passed on by family, community and the society we live in today.

Few discoveries take place entirely in a vacuum. While many people might like to take full credit for their new visions, the fact is we are always indebted to the past, to those thinkers who have set the stage for whatever it may be that we have come upon (Flach, 1988, pix).

It is my responsibility today to make use of the strong voices of the past to help bring to light the strength of the Métis women in this study. The strongest resistance we have is to get well, so that we as Métis women can begin to use our strengths and gifts to direct our lives and so we as Métis women can begin to pave the road for those to come.

This chapter is not about blame; rather it is about, acceptance. It is not only about the past and the pain; it is about the present and hope. It is not about resentment and anger; it is about living and forgiving. It is not about aloneness, but about wholeness. It is speaking "No More Kiyams." It is not okay; we are not going to leave it alone. We are speaking and our voice is one of honoring who we are as traditional people, Métis people.

This literature review is a way of looking beyond the traditional child abuse section of the books into sections that address the interconnectedness of Métis people. It is my attempt to bring together a holistic view in order to address healing and to move forward. This chapter is about reclaiming, resisting and rebuilding.

The journey through the literature will be a glimpse into the holistic and interconnectedness of Métis people within a community context. We identify ourselves according to our roots. Therefore if we are to understand the extent to just what "No More Kiyams" means I need to show the interconnectedness of the Métis. This view of the literature I believe lays the foundation of how we as Métis people need to think of healing.

We turn to the literature that speaks to healing from a holistic Aboriginal view. This literature review is my attempt to bring together the 'other' material written by Indigenous people that can be useful in coming to terms with addressing child sexual abuse from a Métis perspective.

ROOTS & IDENTITY

In seeking to understand and make sense of the lives of the women, the culture of Métis people must be woven into the lives they have constructed. Culture brings forth history, which impacts our identity formation. Understanding the impact of history in identity formation and how that identity affects a person's decisions is essential in addressing generational healing. To understand where one is at, one must primarily understand where they have come from.

The Métis emerged in North America as a distinct racial group of people, although we are part European, we were never part of the Euro ethnocentric society; and most of us can never be a integral part of it. Historically, we were definitely segregated from white society and isolated into our distinct aboriginal community. (Adams, 1995, p.93)

I have watched over the past years the challenges, obstacles, and barriers the young women in our communities face. How much of this is connected to the history of the people coupled with lived experiences? La Rocque states, "The issues of domestic violence in First Nations and Métis Communities is one that demands urgent study and action (RCAP, 1993, p.72)." I have witnessed the women in the Aboriginal community's struggle with 'identity of self.' I have listened to women try to interpret their outer experiences into their inner realities. How much of this confusion is related to childhood sexual abuse? I question because I am familiar with the 'roller coaster' ride of struggling

to identify self in the wake of all the confusion of growing up 'Métis'. I can see the unspoken stories in their actions, and in their struggles to live their lives.

History has not been kind to the Aboriginal community. The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples' report (RCAP) speaks to the realities Aboriginal people are living today.

Generations after generations of families and communities are experiencing multiple experiencing abuse, battering and/or sexual assault to a staggering degree." (p72) domestic or family violence... [T]here is growing documentation that Aboriginal female adults, adolescents and children are experiencing abuse, battering and/or sexual assault to a staggering degree. (p72)"

The time has come for us to start telling our stories and seek ways of healing. There are no statistics on the issues of sexual abuse in the Métis communities. The RCAP (1996) says that it is "more difficult to get precise statistics on Métis people; it is virtually impossible to say with any exactness the extent of sexual violence in Métis families or communities (p.73)." This research is an attempt to bring voice to the Métis people, their struggles, realities, and truths.

I set out at the start of this research to come to know how Métis women heal from child sexual abuse. What does being Métis have to do with healing, if anything? Is it even a concern of the women? The answer seems to be no, they acknowledge themselves as Métis mixed blood but what that has to do with their abuse and/or healing from child sexual abuse does not seem to occupy their time. I say this is part of the reason our healing is interrupted, even not approached. It is why we continue to choose to not heal, to hide our pain because if we heal as the literature tells us to we would be sending our abuser(s) to jail--our fathers, stepfathers, grandfathers, uncles, cousins, and neighbors. "No More Kiyams" is our way to address healing as we see it and need it in our lives.

It is with this understanding that I address the interconnectedness of healing from child sexual abuse as Métis women raised within and/or connected to an Aboriginal community. We look at identity and history of the Métis so we as child sexual abuse victims can come to know our individual way of healing and honor that path, while not having to give up whoever we are. Similarly, Sisters of the Yam is bell hooks voice ringing out to be heard from a Black woman's perspective and the recognition that healing is a political movement. When we speak of healing we need to address not only the individual responsibility, but also the collective and social responsibility of healing; "choosing wellness is an act of political resistance (1993, p.14)." Reclaiming and cleansing ones spirit from child sexual abuse is an action that will cause ripples into family and community.

"Healing occurs through testimony, through gathering together everything available to you and reconciling (1993, p.17)." hooks goes on to say that Sisters of the Yam is about reconciliation, reconciling with ourselves "that place dark and deep within us, where we were first known and loved, where the arms that held us hold us still (1993, p.17)." Those words speak to me in a way that no self-help book I have read (and I have read a few) over the years has. When I look at the women's stories and bell hooks' words I see a way of healing ourselves. I picture women 'feeling' strong by acknowledging the power of hooks' words reaching that place inside of them. As Métis people, I believe, we are a proud race, in the same way bell hooks speaks of the black people. This understanding and acknowledgement of individual strength and the fierce pride of the wholeness of Métis people as a group, a community, can be seen in the women's stories.

In Aboriginal country one always hears you need to look back and know where you've come from to be strong in where you are going. In the sharing of the women's stories, they took themselves back, back to that place of first teachings and learning, back to that place in childhood where experience is woven into the veins of history. We come forward from childhood with not only our lived realities and experiences, positive and negative, but also that which is passed on from generation's gone past, ancient teachings and ways of being and knowing. Each generation brings these teachings into their world in their own ways. These teachings are brought forward and each one of us takes what she knows and uses that in her life. When that way of being and knowing life and oneself is assaulted, with the experience of childhood sexual assault the child arrives into adulthood not trusting those ancient voices and ways.

hooks talks about reaching back to the blood that runs through our veins and pulling through strength that is ours for the taking. She says, "seem [s] like they just don't know how to draw up the powers from the deep like before (1993, p.13)." The powers from the deep are our inherent strengths. We do not know how to do this because of the years of generational abuse and the internalized racism that has kept Aboriginal and people of color in the fight and struggle for a place where one can be and belong. hooks also asserts, "internalized racism has a greater hold on the psyches of black [Aboriginal] people now than at any other moment in history (1993, p.82)." Emma La Rocque in The Colonization of a Native Woman Scholar writes:

Colonization has taken its toll on Native peoples but perhaps it has taken its greatest toll on women while all Natives experience racism, Native women suffer from sexism as well. Racism and sexism found in the colonial process have served to dramatically undermine the place and value of women in aboriginal cultures, leaving us vulnerable both within and outside our communities (1996, p.11).

The time has come for the Aboriginal women to reach back into the bloodlines, and bring forth the strength of women. Women have passed on not only the ways of survival but also those ways to flourish for themselves and the people.

THE INFLUENCE OF CULTURE

There have been countless books written on the effects on child sexual abuse. The courage to Heal by Ellen Bass and Laura Davis; I can't get over it: A handbook for trauma survivors by Aphrodite Matsakis and Outgrowing the Pain: A book for and about adults abused as children by Eliana Gil. However most of the writing and the research have not focused on the effects when race and culture is the central focus. As Brenda Daily (1988) in The Spirit Weeps points out, the historical context of the Aboriginal community must be present when we speak about abuses among Aboriginal people. But in the Métis community the layers of generational abuse and intense oppressive conditions may magnify these effects.

In the community where I grew up as a child, we did not have television, nor did we have much access to the outside world until I was in my early teens. The Métis community was 'isolated' (and I use that term only to give the picture because I do not believe that we were isolated in the way people speak of isolation). By isolation I mean in the community we did not have much contact, for any purposes, with outside communities. The women interviewed for this research project are fifteen years younger and in their communities they have had more contact with nearby towns, etc. For example, the women had access to nearby towns on a regular basis. For us as children, going to town, meant something different. It was a treat that did not happen very often.

Later years, trips to town would be just another regular part of the life of the

people. These younger generations who were sexually abused also faced the racist attitudes of the nearby townspeople at a much younger age. The women in this study, then, not only had to deal with being sexually abused at home/in their individual community, but also with the fact that they were different because of where they came from, what their last name was, and how they looked.

Therefore, the effects of child sexual abuse were combined at a young age with the effects of racism, classism, and sexism. I never had to deal with these isms the way these younger women had to at their age. I was protected from the outside attitudes until I was older; it took me longer to realize I was being discriminated against. I remember when I was fifteen I drove my parents' car downtown from my grandma's house in town. I of course did not have a license, but living in our community we learned how to drive almost when we learned how to walk. I was probably driving because my mom didn't have a license either. This summer day I was backing out onto the street from this convenience store and I backed into a woman's car. It happened so fast. She came flying out of her car screaming at me, "Why do we let these [blank-blank] Indians on our streets." I felt so guilty, so bad. It never occurred to me to be upset because of what she had called me; I was upset because I should not have been there. Middleton-Moz speaks to this as shame.

Shame is a feeling deep within our being that makes us want to hide,...
 We feel suddenly over whelmed and self-conscious. The feeling of shame is of being exposed, visible and examined by a critical other. It is the sense that the "examination" has found the self to be imperfect and unworthy in every way. We hang our heads, stoop our shoulders and curve inward as if trying to make ourselves invisible (1990, p.14).

I'll always remember her hate towards me although she did not know who I was.

The young women in this study know how to name their experiences. They know

how to get angry. They stand prouder and angrier outside of the community. I think it was the opposite for me. I stood proud inside the community and I shrugged on the outside. I did not get angry. We did not sit around after that incident in that town and discuss that woman's attitude. We probably all thought about it but no one spoke about it.

Speaking to the effects of child sexual abuse alone used to leave me feeling hopeless and helpless. Addressing the effects in connection to my adult life was a freeing experience, a healing that enabled growth. A Métis, honoring myself from Métis roots and traditions, there is no other way to heal than to also remember that healing is not separate from who I am. Who I am as a Métis woman is not separate from my family or my community (or the environment one calls home).

Middleton-Moz speaks to generational abuse, "deliberating shame and guilt are at the root of all dysfunctions in families (1990)." She goes on to say, "All these adult children have one thing in common...they grew up in shaming environments where the grief of the past was not resolved in the past and their parents in delayed grief could not healthily bond to children." From my experiences and work within Aboriginal communities it is my experience that communities are stuck in grief; not just grief from losing loved ones (although the losses seem to be insurmountable), but grief of a way of life, hope for the future, family breakdowns. The latest grieving process I feel the communities are going through is the breakdown of the community itself.

Governmental influence and interference continues to divide communities and plot one family against another. I experienced this in my own community. I address this here not to put down my community but to acknowledge, to the families and the old

timers in the communities, the struggle they have had to endure in watching their community trying to come to terms with the change that swept over them.

In 1990, the Alberta government introduced 'The Accord' to the Métis settlements in Alberta. This political movement by the government brought economic possibilities to our community and it also brought with it destruction and separation. I was away at University and when I came home for Christmas that year the effects of this movement slapped me with sadness. Families did not visit that Christmas; the spirit of the season at midnight mass was not there. People did not hang around to shake hands and acknowledge one another. For me, I was broken hearted because it always renewed me to go home and be embraced by community members. Instead, I felt the sting of different political views. Although I have tried to remain neutral over the years and speak with whomever, it is not always an easy walk. I long for that community we used to have and I am sad when I hear others say, when the money's gone we will be able to get back to how we used to be.

This movement brought internalized racism to life in the community. This evil thought process is killing the community spirit. The community once was able to pull the people together. Internalized racism stems from the systematic colonization efforts of the colonizers. Communities turn on themselves and each other as the outside world looks on and shakes its head. In the midst of all these realities, the voices of child sexual abuse victims will bring more waves to an already raging storm. The importance of breaking the silence may be lost in the battle of who is talking and to whom they are speaking. The message itself is unheard.

This mistrust in the people, the generational abuses and the ability not to deal with

one's childhood experiences showed through strong and clear in the women's sharing of their stories. The effects of child sexual abuse show its head in many different shapes and forms. It is important that these ways are acknowledged as symptoms of the abuse. Once a victim of child sexual abuse can make these connections of how they are living back to the root of where it came from they have already at this point taken a step towards healing.

In talking and thinking about political stands, movements, individuals, family, and community honoring the silence, I was torn by that fine line between being loyal to the ways we have fallen into and to speaking out. I came to understand denial as a way of life during the process of writing this work. I named it the 'pattern of denial'; it is a way of life; it becomes a way of life among a people, a family, and a community. Other people call it loyalty, preserving the family unit at any cost. Or even worse sometimes we hear it being referred to as 'our ways'; worse yet, a cultural analysis of a people. It is this pattern of denial the young women in this study show that has kept the lid on their abuse, their experiences. And for myself, though torn between being respectful and loyal, as a mother of daughters, an auntie to nieces and nephews, I know we must break that pattern of denial and honor individuals who are ready to speak. In the section that follows I start each of the women's stories with a glimpse of my own effects of child sexual abuse.

Bradshaw's work around shame speaks to some effects of sexual abuse, "Neurotic shame is the root and fuel of all compulsive/addictive behaviors (1988, p.15)." The negative experiences children face guide their lives until a conscious decision is made to acknowledge the past in whatever way works best for that individual. The hidden ghosts

that adult victims of child sexual abuse carry continue to plague their life in ways most often unknown to the survivor.

Duck, Ironstar, and Ricks speak to the interconnectedness within the Aboriginal community.

All things, all persons, and all actions and reactions are considered inextricably related, interconnected, and interdependent. This kind of thinking is critical in understanding how self is viewed. Self is always part of the whole. Self is always part of the community. Self is always part of the family because family and community are one and the same (1997, p.6).

In order to understand the complexity of healing within the Aboriginal community you must address the relationship of individual, family and community. When an individual addresses healing they are in fact speaking not only of their experiences but their family and their community.

Indeed, Bishop (1994) writes, "Unconscious pain is both individual and collective. For example, African descended people, whether they have experienced individual abuse or not, carry the memory of slavery (p.74)." Whether a person has experienced the 'abuse' or not, if it is in the 'blood' the person suffers the effects. If a community is infested with child sexual abuse, all will suffer the effects. If a person has not healed from the abuse the effects of that abuse can start a cycle of abuse within a family and/or community. Bishop (1994) states,

The personal is political with the concept of, what are the strategies children learn to protect themselves from powerlessness? They learn to be afraid, to distrust, to be watchful, and to make clear distinctions between "us" and "them," safe and dangerous. They learn that they are a part of a hierarchy which is based on deception and force. They learn to judge the situation and make the choice that faces all people who lack power whether to go along with the situation or fight (p.50).

Generational abuse affects individual, family, and community spirit. The young women in this study have not only had to fight their individual abuses but they also live with the experience of their parent's unhealed abuses and that of the communities. I believe that in order for generational abuses to stop inflicting the past onto the present we as adults need to address and deal with our pain and to consciously break that pattern that continues to pass on the ways of the past that keep our spirits broken.

Middleton-Moz says that the person needs to "learn to believe in themselves enough to risk a long journey back through the pain. This process will allow them to reclaim their discarded self and free them to live, bond and break the generational cycle of pain (1989, p.5)." Courtois (1988) did a study with women who were victims of incest.

... [Incest] refers to sexual contact with a person who would be considered an ineligible partner because of his blood and /or social ties (i.e., kin) to the subject and her family. The term encompasses, then, several categories of partners, including father, stepfather, grandfather, uncles, siblings, cousins, in-laws, and what we call 'quasifamily.' The last category includes parental and family friends (e.g., mother's sexual partner) (p.12).

So in the case of this study we all experienced incest, we all knew our abusers. The abusers are all intimately connected to our families through our extended families, our communities.

Sue Blume (1990) wrote, "Incest is possibly the most crippling experience that a child can endure. It is a violation of body, boundaries, and trust (p.xiv)." A legal, therapeutic, societal definition of child sexual abuse is,

sexual intercourse between two person's too closely related to marry legally. (What incest is really is nowhere acknowledged in the traditional application of the word. Actually, it is the most serious and most common form of child sexual abuse. Arguably, it is also the most

serious of all types of child abuse (1990, p.1).

In the Métis community the extended family reaches out into the community; one is taught to respect and honor anyone older. "If we are to understand incest, we must look not at the blood bond, but at the emotional bond between the victim and the perpetrator (p.2)." I remember years ago there was a funeral in our community. A respected community person had passed away. I had to force my younger sister to go to the funeral, out of respect. I did not know at the time that I was forcing her to go to her abuser's funeral. With permission from my sister I add this valuable piece of information to show the interconnectedness of the community.

Sue Blume also introduces a new definition of incest: "Incest can be seen as the imposition of sexually inappropriate acts, or acts with sexual overtones, by or any use of a minor child to meet the sexual or [sexual overtones, by or any use of a minor child to meet the sexual or] sexual/emotional needs of one or more persons who derive authority through ongoing emotional bonding with the child (1990, p.4)." This redefinition of incest puts the act itself on trial. For so long when a book of sexual abuse was picked up the message separated what was done to the victim by insisting the act itself was the measurement of how the victim should feel. Now with this new definition it is the victim speaking to what they know to be the results of the act of sexual abuse. However, having said that, while we have progressed in our thinking of child sexual abuse we are still naming the abuse 'a sexual act'. Clearly it is much more than this. It is in fact an act of brutality and a raping of the spirit.

Blume, in writing about long term effects describes how "time does not show the effects of incest. Although the memories go underground, the consequences of the abuse

flourish. Sometimes they are buried under other problems substance abuse, relentless rage, self destructive behavior (1990, p.15)." When a person within a Métis community tries to open their wounds to heal they are faced with effects that have been passed down from generation to generation. Not to heal and not to talk about the abuse has become the norm, and if you must, do so elsewhere.

COLLECTIVE HEALING

Middleton-Moz speaks to cumulative traumatic experiences of childhood that "may never [be] remember[ed] yet the buried feelings and emotional reactions to these experiences may direct the course of their lives (1989, p.4)." This is how we can come to understand 'generational abuse' among Aboriginal peoples. Healing, then, is more than a taking responsibility of self (which seems to be the focus of classic therapy methods). Healing is grieving and coming to terms with not only your own lived experiences but of those before you, your parents, and your grandparents. Healing as a Métis person is exposing oneself, in spite of family and community. Healing from child sexual abuse becomes a political action, a voice that stands out in the Métis community as a misplaced concept.

Moz describes "the four components necessary for the resolution of any trauma [as]: validation of the event, a supportive adult, validation of emotions and time (1989, p.15)." It was honoring to read Middleton-Moz's work around healing as a resolution to the experiences and not as a solution for the inflicted person. Therefore, coming to terms with the experience and understanding is the place one works toward. Healing is not a way out or away from the experience because for the Métis women in this study and myself, such a solution would mean separating our experiences, family, and our

community from us. A resolution then is the honoring of self and one's strengths and not discarding everything and everyone around you. I believe there is a lot to learn from this approach to healing. Healing the 'whole' person, within their environment, is important.

Ross (1996) speaks to healing layers of pain that may be buried deep within one's unconscious memories. "It is not our minds that hurt, not our intellects that experience pain, not our information storage systems that are violated. Rather, it is our hearts, our bodies and our spirits. Healing then must speak to them. Healing words must come from, draw pictures of and reach out for, the heart, and spirit first, the mind second (p.167)." Healing is not an intellectual process, but an exercise that reveals our innermost vulnerability and speaks to and honors our spirit.

In my own process of healing from child sexual abuse I have had to try and understand and justify how I choose to heal rather than deal with the abuse. I justified, mostly to myself, that I didn't tell my story in terms of events; I talked in terms of what I learned and how I could unlearn some of those ingrained messages. The books that I was reading told me I had to tell 'what' happened. I still have not. I could never come to an understanding of what it was I was to learn from this. I could never understand the therapeutic ways of having to relive the experience before one could truly be better. What I wanted to talk about was my silence and how that affected me, or the aloneness I felt in carrying my pain around, hidden like shame inside of me.

I know people who have stopped their own process of healing because they were told they HAD to tell their story in terms of what and how the abuse happened. I could never understand how therapy of child sexual abuse was so cut and dried, the format just waiting for the words.

I used to wonder which experience would I relive and how did I separate everything from those experiences? I believe that is where my understanding finally arrived. How can I separate the experiences from the learning? And even if I relived those experiences (which would take forever) what would I be doing for my spirit? Would it be helping my spirit to live? The answer to this question never did present a clear understanding of what that process would bring. But I knew that if I worked at unlearning some of the messages I took away from those abusive situations, I would be closer to cleansing my spirit and freeing myself to live my life.

Therapies kept focusing on what was wrong, what I had to do to overcome; but nothing I was reading showed me a way (besides going to therapy). No one mentioned I might have strengths I could utilize to get well. "To create a compassionate healing environment, it is important to highlight healthy survival adaptation as well as the areas creating pain in a person's life. There are two sides to almost everything (1992, p.159)." In order for healing to take place it must take into account the environment and its relationship on the individual.

Healing isn't a 24 hours a day. Efforts to heal, furthermore should not lead to pathologizing the healthy coping skills that have been creatively developed. There is nothing wrong with attaining a feeling of self-esteem from what we do or accomplish, from what we give, from our tenacity or our sense of humour. Sometimes a walk in the woods can be more beneficial on a particular day than going to a support group. Attending a comedy can sometimes be more rewarding than reading a self-help book (Middleton-Moz, 1992, p.159).

Healing is inclusive. Healing needs to address the individuality of a person and also that person's place in their world. Middleton-Moz (1992) speaks to an all-inclusive approach to healing as:

Compassionate healing involves validating the pain in our past and

recognizing that the shame and trauma of painful childhood environments was not a fantasy or our fault; focusing on defining current problem areas in our lives and healing without labeling ourselves in the process; allowing ourselves time and safety in healing; maintaining a balance in our lives as we heal the wounds of a painful past; remaining responsible for our choices today; focusing on the multitude of events and influences that shaped our lives; celebrating our strengths and resiliency; learning and modeling healthy values, traditions and rituals; and sharing our strengths and lessons compassionately and respectfully with others as we help rebuild families and communities based on mutual support for our continued growth and the healthy development of our children (1992, p.171).

In speaking to ethics that may guide the behavior of a people Ross' (1992) work among Aboriginal people finally brought him to that place of knowing behaviors of the people by understanding how to ask the questions. "I began to understand that some of my questions could only be answered by placing them within a different cultural context (p.13)." For this study I am asking the question, how does child sexual abuse affect the adult lives of Métis women? If I am connected to a community my answers are going to be from that perspective. I will not think only of myself; rather, I will think in relationship to the people in my life and around me.

Ross speaks to the 'ways' of the Aboriginal people that were disrupted by non-Aboriginal ideologies, values, and beliefs. He discusses the practices of traditional ways of dealing with life in the Aboriginal community. He speaks from a non-Aboriginal view of healing as an "intellectual analysis" as opposed to an Aboriginal view of healing as a "spiritual journey." (p.145) He goes on to say "it is our conceit that this is the only productive method of dealing with the crippling forces within us, of restoring our personal equilibrium and interpersonal harmony (p145)." We need to speak and use our own rituals to help us to heal. A "combination of intellectual and spiritual healing seems to be a potentially powerful tool (147)." Healing is about reclaiming. Speaking out is an

act of reclaiming. Indeed, “expressing one’s emotions is healing and liberating (Bishop, 1994, p.50).” The Aboriginal video that Alkali Lake produced keeps coming to mind: “Circle of Healing (1989).” For the Aboriginal individual and community these are powerful words. The communities, although silent in many ways, still have that underlying knowing that suffering is what holds the fragile community together.

In reading the literature on healing by Aboriginal and Black writers who come from a political standpoint, healing is “thinking critically and politically in order to decolonize (Adams, 1995, p.8).” bell hooks (1990) quotes Vietnamese Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hahn:

Resistance, at root, must mean more than resistance against war. It is a resistance against all kinds of things that are like war. . . . So perhaps, resistance means opposition to being invaded, occupied, assaulted and destroyed by the system. The purpose of resistance, here, is to seek the healing of yourself in order to be able to see clearly. . . I think that communities of resistance should be places where people can return to themselves more easily, where the conditions are such that they can heal themselves and recover their wholeness (p.43).

I understand this healing as a return, honoring individual and community. The words of Aboriginal and Black writers speak to the core of the historical effects of colonization, oppression, and racism.

It is my experience and understanding that in the Aboriginal community healing is not yet understood as political resistance; we have a long way to go before we are there. Of course, I believe it is important to become a political activist. But first we need to bring the healing home to heal the people so they can understand what the ‘fight’ is all about. Healing is contextual; “healing is not the curing of pathology. It is the creation of a healing context, where changes can occur that could not occur before. This context is

not limited to the therapeutic relationship; it must involve the survivors' support, interpersonal relationships, and human environment (278)." Healing does not happen in isolation (or it should not happen in isolation) from the person's life. Before Aboriginal people can begin to shift their position they must heal from where they are.

Carter and Parker (1991) did research on incest among Indians in Minnesota. Their final analysis was that as the abuse may remain a secret, the effects of the abuse turn into a lifetime of struggles. This struggle is intensified in the Aboriginal family/community because of the non-Aboriginal methods of dealing with the abusers. The process for dealing with sexual offenders' has been to lock them up. Punishment is the only answer. How does a community begin to heal itself when those we need to heal with are locked away, branded and labeled with little hope of recovery? The Alkali Lake story of abuses and healing mirrored for many Aboriginal communities their realities. When the community could look at sexual abuse, they realized they were dealing with "intergenerational histories of sexual abuse (Ross, 1992, p.153)."

The other readings I have looked at were the many healing books on the market written from within a medical model. Individual and group therapy is seen as the way out of the struggle and pain of child sexual abuse. The prescription is laid out for the abused individual. They are feeling low self-esteem, guilt, shame, etc. So they need to go to therapy once a week until they are ready for group work. It is hoped individual counseling will not last more than three sessions. It is more efficient to have people attend group counseling. In my experience, I have witnessed that many of these approaches to therapy do not always work for Métis people. The Métis community is in the midst of many unresolved years of struggles and pain. If we are to heal as Métis

people within our communities, then the environment must be a part of that healing process.

It is more acceptable today for healing to be thought of as a process and to accept that healing does not happen in isolation, separate from our daily living. "Healing is a process. It's a part of life, not life itself (Middleton-Moz,1992,p.144)." I spent quite a few years trying to fit myself into how I thought I was supposed to be and how I was supposed to heal from this way of being. It was like trying to fit a circle into a square. Sure I fit, but I stuck out, I fell through, I didn't quite match, I had blank corners. All it did was help me to feel more different. I lived quite a few years as an unhappy person after I read books of how I should be. I kept searching for that book that spoke to me, to my experiences, my thoughts, and my beliefs. In this literature review, these were the books written by Aboriginal women and people of color. These were personal stories, poetry and works of fiction; Paula Gunn Allen, Toni Cade Bambara, Marie Campbell, Connie Fife, donna I friess, Alice Walker and Iyanla Vanzant. These books address the spirit of the person. These books gave me back that discarded self who had the strength and gifts to live each day. They encouraged me to quit waiting for when I would be healed. I could begin living my life. Middleton-Moz says "Unfortunately, too often the places where we go to seek healing are also unwittingly perpetuating the isolation and lack of balance that we once felt in childhood, which were traumatizing, shaming and chaotic (1992, p.142)."

Clearly, "much as been written in recent years about the traumatic impact of child sexual abuse. Less is known about the recovery process for adult survivors (Sgroi,1989, p.111)." Still less is known about recovery and healing among the Aboriginal people and

/or community. Sgroi lists five stages of recovery:

1. Acknowledging the reality of the abuse.
2. Overcoming secondary responses to the abuse.
3. Forgiving oneself (ending self-punishment).
4. Adopting positive coping behaviors.
5. Relinquishing survivor identity. (1989, p.111)

These stages of recovery may be a hard road when the person trying to follow these stages is living in an Aboriginal community, a place where it is likely the whole community may be using coping mechanisms that are not positive. In order to follow these stages out of abuse, the individual needs support. When the people around are all in the same situation it is unlikely you will have the support you need. No one wants to hear your story or you cannot go to the local service agencies (if there are any) because either you are related or they have not dealt with their abuse or they are related to the abuser.

bell hooks (1994) speaks to healing as the ability to critically look at oneself. "Students who enter the academy unwilling to accept without question the assumptions and values held by privileged classes tend to be silenced deemed troublemakers (p.178)." She goes on to say, "no matter what ones' class, race, gender, or social standing, I shared my beliefs that without the capacity to think critically about our selves and our lives, none of us would be able to move forward, to change, to grow (p.202)." "It is not easy to name our pain, to theorize from that location (p.74)." The women in this study were theorists from a young age. Awareness as strength is being a theorizer, trying to come to terms with experiences, questioning, asking, and never accepting. bell hooks (1994) quotes Terry Eagleton from *The Significance of Theory*:

Children make the best theorists, since they have not yet been

educated into accepting our routine social practices as “natural,” and so insist on posing to those practices the most embarrassingly general and fundamental questions, regarding them with a wondering estrangement which we adults have long forgotten. Since they do not yet grasp our social practices as inevitable, they do not see why we might not do things differently (p.59).

The more information and awareness children have, the better able they will be to name their experiences. But children also need people, someone in their lives to hear their stories and to listen.

As Aboriginal people living in silent communities, our chance of theorizing becomes less of an opportunity to bring about change unless someone hears us. bell hooks writes,

I came to theory because I was hurting, the pain within me was so intense that I could not go on living. I came to theory desperate, wanting to comprehend to grasp what was happening around and within me. Most importantly, I wanted to make the hurt go away. I saw in theory then a location for healing. . .I came to theory young when I was still a child (p.159).

For Aboriginal children the conflict between self-knowledge, knowing and what they see and hear contradicts each other. This leaves the child with no standards to form trusting thoughts and reasoning. They know something is not the way it should be but no one listens.

But not all resistance as we know it comes through verbally. Actions show resistance and at times these actions can be at high costs to us. For example, we see resistance through suicides, alcohol and drug abuse, and family violence. It may be resistance turned into anger, but still it is resistance. Words not spoken turn inward. Silent resistance also comes in actions of healing in the midst of unhealthy families and community. Abstinence from alcohol and drugs is one such healing action.

I have been a resister and a theorizer. I have never thought of myself as an intellect, even now in graduate school. I believe I know the spiritual way, the way of my heart, my spirit, my body, more than I even want to know the mind. I know my mind can lead me away from myself if I do not stay strong. As I look back now on my school days I was probably labeled a slow learner. In grade twelve English my teacher said if I had a few more years of English I would be okay. But I also did not know back then that how I knew things did not fit into the English classes I took, nor did what I know fit into everyday conversations with friends. What I knew then was labeled moody, stubborn, cold, and uncaring. I went to places that no one asked about and no one talked about. I went to those places mostly alone.

Alice Walker (1997), in talking about decolonizing the spirit wrote,

And what is the result of decolonizing the spirit? It is as if one truly does possess a third eye, and this eye opens. One begins to see the world from one's own point of view; to interact with it out of one's own conscience and heart.....We begin to flow again, with and into the Universe. And out of this flowing comes the natural activism of wanting to survive, to be happy, to enjoy one another and Life, and to laugh. We begin to distinguish between the need, singly, to throw rocks at whatever is oppressing us, and the creative joy that arises when we bring our collective stones of resistance against injustice together (Walker, 1997, p.26).

This reminded me of a healing circle, the coming together to share one's pain and triumph for the betterment of the whole. I believe that as Métis people we are moving ever so slowly in that direction. The steps to the actual coming together in a circle seem to be: individuals acknowledging the need to heal and leaving their individual communities to do so; individuals reaching out and talking to others in their family about their experiences; individuals taking their experience to others in their communities, and

finally individuals coming together in a circle to share with one another. The women in this study were not all ready to come together in a circle.

From Alice Walker and bell hooks to Lee Maracle and Emma La Rocque, the words of these women are words of women coming to their own individually and collectively, women standing and speaking, resisting, returning to themselves--strong, powerful, proud women.

The healing of women is the center of the entire Aboriginal and women of color writing. It is a message to any woman who picks up these works of truths, pain, inspiration, and strength to make a difference. hooks, in an interview with Gloria Watkins states “no, not talking back, just talking to myself.” In January 1989 bell hooks speaks about the importance of speaking our pain, confronting our hurts, listening to others and our own, feeling our pain and sharing it. hooks says,

I say remember the pain because I believe true resistance begins with people confronting pain, whether it's theirs or somebody else. And wanting to do something to change it. And it's this pain that so much makes marks in daily life. Pain is a catalyst for change, for working to change (Yearning, 1990, p.215).

This is no easy road, by far, but speaking as a Métis mother I believe we do not have a choice if we want our children and their children to live healthier and happier lives. It is through the women's stories that you will hear in this thesis just how hard ‘resistance’ can be and is still today. “No More Kiyams”, no matter what, I have stopped looking the other way. The fact that we are telling our stories says we are resisting, anyway.

CHAPTER THREE A METIS WOMANS RESEARCH

I set out, at the beginning of this project, with some basic values and principles that I knew had to guide and direct this research project. The project had to conduct research that would be respectful, not exploiting. I wanted to honor the stories of the women's experiences of child sexual abuse as knowledge. The research had to be meaningful and give something back to the women and the community. In meeting academic criterion, I needed to honor myself as a Métis woman. The research had to have life, a feeling of knowing the writer and the women.

Anything that brings people closer to themselves is a ceremony. The manner in which a person seeks the self is always based on the sacred right of choice (Maracle, 1988, p.111).

This research project is about ceremony, a ceremony that will be the sharing of story. Bannerji, Carty, Dehli, Heald, and Mckenna (1991) state, "We remain loyal to different communities outside academia, communities where we feel a sense of belonging and political commitment. This too is part of the struggle: to include analyses and experiences that rarely get voiced in academia and to do so in ways that do not simply exploit women's experiences and stories as 'data' (p.5). The process that goes into a research project that honors and respects the participants starts at a different place; it starts with the researcher.

This work has brought me to another round of analysis of my own life path. When I embarked on this journey of writing a thesis I went around and around the subject of 'sexual abuse' until I realized that what I really wanted to do was to look at healing from sexual abuse. I was afraid of directly saying this is what I want to do. I was afraid of opening that door. I was afraid that I was biting off more than I could chew. I was

afraid of what the outcome would be for the women, the communities, and myself.

Did I have a right to embark on this journey? Was being a victim of child sexual abuse enough of an “in” to write a thesis on the subject? Was I being naive that I could handle this topic? How could I know if I was healed enough to tackle this undertaking? I agreed with Kirby and McKenna (1989) who wrote, “We do not want to contribute further to the public silencing of voices from the margins. Instead, we want to research in a way that creates opportunities to reclaim and rename that experience (p.64).” I needed to stop and look in the mirror and really know the person looking back at me could actually do what she said she would do.

Asking others to speak out about child sexual abuse in the Métis community is still a new phenomenon; a new experience that I know personally is still done only with those chosen few relatives and community members, mostly with people outside of one’s home community.

When we look at the effects of child sexual abuse on the adult life, we can come to know how the abuse assaulted the teachings given to the spirit of a child the teachings that were meant to provide the child with guidance and direction. These teachings can become the survival, the strengths that bring a child from the impact of sexual abuse to ownership of her own adult life. In examining these effects in this research project, I needed to honor the teachings that I have felt in my own life and to bring these gifts/strengths to the forefront of a childhood journey. Each of the women, including me, have been searching for ways out of the child sexual abuse experience, so we can live what was expected of us at the time of creation.

It was with this understanding and the seeking to come to resolution that I

dissected the childhood experiences of the women. I pulled these experiences through to their lives today to show glimpses of teachings that were assaulted by child sexual abuse. I have looked at these childhood experiences through the women's words; through the ways they have come to know or to understand this assault on their adult life. For in fact we are talking about survivors, children who survived and found strength connected to teachings that were meant to give them tools to thrive on. In some cases, these 'tools' have been used as defenses to, not thrive, but, merely to survive. And sometimes we need that too.

In the Royal Commission on Aboriginal People (1993) Ramon Cajal wrote, "Every disease has two causes. The first is pathophysiological; the second, political (p.55)." The effects the women speak to are a pathological view of child sexual abuse as they have interpreted them in their lives. But also and just as important to the facts of the effects is that in speaking out about child sexual abuse, we are in fact taking a political stand. "No More Kiyams" (leave it alone, let it be) is about women finding their voice in spite of the individual, family and community message to continue to honor the silence.

As a Métis woman speaking out and asking other young Métis women to do the same was a struggle that I faced in coming to terms with embarking on this journey. I understood speaking and giving voice to others as a political movement that not only intertwines our experiences of child sexual abuse but also our 'ways' as a people. In speaking to the young women, in the beginning they acknowledged the individual and the families' unspoken messages 'to airing their dirty laundry in public'. But, at that time I could not be sure to what extent, they understood their actions as a community and as a political movement. And again my dilemma was, in trying to speak to this, we would

not, could not know, the full effects of our actions until I was in fact done with the thesis. But taking advantage here of my age and already lived experiences of speaking out; I can already know that there will be repercussions for me the writer as an identified person in this work.

Sgroi (1989) wrote that the eighties was the decade that opened the doors on the disturbing facts of child sexual abuse (pxiv). In the Métis community, this voice has been rare. People have been finding voice to talk about alcohol and drug abuse and even family violence, but sexual abuse remains a hidden and silent issue.

Therefore, I realized I would have to do research that honored the process. I had to arrive at a comfortable place where I believed that throughout this work I would have “heart checks” to keep me on the right path. I found hope as a Métis scholar in Cora Weber-Pillwax’s Indigenous Methodology Research paper (1999). Cora acknowledges in this paper that we as indigenous scholars need to honor ourselves in our work, that in fact we are not separate from our work; we are a part. Cora’s ‘teaching’s’ provided me with a framework to honour my way of knowing and being in the world.

The Road Map

Once I found that comfortable place from where I could start. I looked to the ‘methodologies’ to see how I could fit a methodology into my research, not how I could fit my research into a methodology. Case study methodology allows the researcher to respect both who she is and the research participants.

The research methodology chosen for this study was ‘Qualitative Case Study’.

The real business of case study is particularization, not generalization. We take a particular case and come to know it well, not primarily as to how it is different from others but

what it is, what it does. There is emphasis on uniqueness, and that implies knowledge of others that the case is different from, but the first emphasis is on understanding the case itself (Stake, 1995, p.8).

This method of research could help me to get inside the women's stories and analyze not just from the head but also from the heart. The focus of a qualitative case study in this project is to seek to understand and honor the stories (case studies) of four Métis women's lived experiences of child sexual abuse. "We study a case when it itself is of very special interest. We look for the detail of interaction with its contexts (Stake, 1995, p.xi)." The investigation into the lives of these Métis women will uncover the realities of child sexual abuse and its effects on adulthood, how one heals, and the impact of culture.

Yin (1994) defines a case study as inquiry into an experience, so one may come to know the relationships between "phenomenon and context (p.13)." A case study permits the researcher to get inside the story and/or the experience and bring to light the connections. The primary focus is experience, not theory. However, Maracle (1993) argues that story is theory. "What is the point of presenting the human condition in a language separate from the human experience; passion, emotion, and character (Maracle, 1993, p.89)." By speaking your truth, your experience, theory is generated.

Theory is, "the analysis of a set of facts in their relation to one another (Webster's, 1995)." The women's stories are a set of facts and the stories will tell the relationship to each other. In fact, than theory can evolve. Britzman (1991) speaks to story-telling, "Every voice speaks to particular ways of knowing as it positions the speaker within an epistemological community (1991, p.23)." The four women and

myself definitely are Métis women and therefore share a common ground.

This research project's aim is to help open doors for individual and collective voices to speak and be heard. In using the case study approach the researcher can have 'rich data' in which to pull information that may be starting points for individual and community healing to either begin or to resolve blocks in the processes tried.

In sharing the women's stories, the research will hear 'how' child sexual abuse has infected the lives of Métis women. And by asking the women to speak of 'healing,' the research will give us information to speak to what healing is and what it means for a Métis woman. What does healing mean to the women? How have they walked the healing road? The idea of 'healing' and that Aboriginal people need to heal is generally accepted however what this looks like is still mysterious. The researcher has found that in describing the process of healing, the words often do not do justice to the journey. Maybe there is no one clear-cut way, but as Métis people we need to be able to articulate the process its complexity and understand for ourselves what works.

The holistic approach to case study in this research project recognizes what Stake (1995) said,

Issues are not simple and clean, but intricately wired to political, social, historical, and especially personal contexts. All these meanings are important in studying cases. Issues draw us toward observing, even teasing out, the problems of the case, the conflictual outpourings, the complex backgrounds of human concern. Issues help us to expand upon the moment, help us to see the instance in a more historical light, help us recognize the pervasive problems in human interaction (p.17).

For many young women from an Aboriginal community, the transition to young womanhood has not been smooth. Child sexual abuses have plagued many young women's lives. The process of sharing of their story can allow the individual to move

with their words, instead of keeping their story locked away inside. Relating their lived experience “hints at a process whereby we attribute meaning to what happens to us (Britzman, 1991, p.9).” When we can give meaning to our experiences we can begin to recognize our potential.

The researcher’s stand in a qualitative approach to studying the individual woman’s stories is to understand lived experiences through the women’s words. Merriam (1988) wrote this means, for the researcher, that the objective is to try to understand the meaning of an experience (p.16). The quality of the research then becomes twofold, in understanding the meaning of the effects on their lives, the women in this process can come to know their lives, separate from being a child of sexual abuse. Bishop (1994) writes, “In both individual and collective healing, speaking out is vital. It is the courageous act of breaking out of secrecy, privacy, and shame to contact others suffering similar pain that eventually leads to an understanding of the root causes of the pain (p.80).” Alice Walker (1997) calls this process of coming to know ourselves, a decolonizing of the spirit (p.26).

This research project involved interviews with four Métis women. Kirby and McKenna (1989) speak to interviews as being a two-way conversation, where both the interviewer and the interviewee contribute (p.66). This is important for the researcher because the research is not being done on the subjects; rather, the research is being done with the women. “How you go about doing your research is inextricably linked with how you see the world (Kirby, McKenna, 1989, p.63).” I am not separate from the women. I am one of them. My experiences of child sexual abuse are interwoven through story and poetry, which I have written in italics.

As Kirby and McKenna (1989) point out, “for quality interviewing, there must exist a sense of equality between the person gathering the information and the person whose knowledge is sought (p.67).” I realize I have a role as the researcher, yes, but just as importantly I recognize my place with the women. Knowing how to be in this position will be the key to collecting valuable information from the women. Knowing when to speak and when to listen will be important to the process. I believe that my work with Aboriginal women in the past has given me the lessons of this way of reaching out to be with others in their stories. I have to remember who I am in this project; I cannot forget. “Remember that who you are has a central place in the research process because you bring your own thoughts, aspirations and feelings, and your own ethnicity, race, class, gender, sexual orientation, occupation, family background, schooling, etc., to your research (Kirby, McKenna, 1989, p.46).” I need to be accountable in recognizing that I am listening to the stories fully aware of my past life experiences. I need to remember this throughout the interviews and the analysis.

This project focuses on women between the ages of nineteen and thirty. It was always important to provide the women with a safe place to tell their story. The researcher interviewed women who were raised in a Métis community. When possible, the interviews took place within each individual woman’s home community. Stake (1995) said, “Almost always, data gathering is done on somebody’s ‘home grounds’ (p.57).” When it was more comfortable for the women, we would meet outside the community. The researcher conducted individual interviews with the women. Each woman was interviewed twice over a number of weeks. Each interview was tape recorded and the transcripts were written up for the women to approve or make changes.

The women were given their transcripts for reviewing and for their own personal journal. One of the four women had comments on correction to wording. In talking with the others, one slowly read the transcripts. It was emotionally draining and she read only when she felt she had the energy. The others chose to not read them at that time, but they did say at a later date, they would probably look at them.

The women were given an opportunity to meet the other women in the project through a talking circle. A talking circle, “can begin the process of collective healing as well, for the first step is to discover that we are not alone, not imagining it, not to blame, and there is no reason for shame (Bishop, 1994,p.51).” This opportunity for a ‘talking circle’ was presented at the onset of the research.

A talking circle is a form of healing; it can be used as a mirror of us. For the purpose of this research project, the talking circle could help to bring light to the women’s lives so they could know they are not alone in their struggle. This form of coming together can also help the women to look at the different ways one can heal. Bishop (1994) speaks to unhealed pain “like a gully carved in our thinking. Each time we see a situation that looks anything like the one that hurt us, we do not stop to think creatively, we simply react with whatever behavior might protect us, whatever behavior protected us in the past (p.51).”

Of the four women, two decided to become involved in a talking circle. The other two declined; however, they did agree to be connected with one another for support. This introduction of a talking circle at this time for the women who had just started to talk was too frightening. The notion of sharing with others, without knowing the other women, was much to frightening. They felt why put themselves in a position to be hurt and / or

laughed at or talked about. It just was not worth the chance they would have to take.

Two of the participants agreed to meet in some form of sharing and support of one another during the process. We decided to meet for supper in a restaurant that was accessible to both of them. During our meal the women talked about what was happening in their lives at that time. The conversation was not recorded for data purposes. The sharing of a meal was an opportunity to: relax, enjoy good food and conversation. The evening was surrounded with humour and heart to heart talks. The women did write a poem of survival that was integrated into the strength chapter.

The women who chose not to participate in a talking circle need to be honored for where they were at that time in their journey. The women were showing strength by being able to identify what they could and could not handle. Asking the women to share their lived experiences of child sexual abuse was not a small task for the women. The women were already risking change in their lives by sharing their stories with me. Often this process of speaking out of traumatic experiences can cause disruptions in a person's life. For example, when a child sexual abuse story is spoken it sometimes feels like the experience has been reborn. However, until the experience is voiced, in a safe and healthy manner, the effects may haunt a person's ability to live their lives to their potential and desire.

Each woman in the project was given a blanket, sage, and a journal (book) at the start of the research. The blanket is a customary gift in Aboriginal culture given as a sign of respect and honoring. The sage is a woman's smudge, for prayer and to cleanse one's spirit. The researcher with the help of Aboriginal women designed the journal given to the participants across the country, a journal that can meet the needs of the Métis woman

trying to live a balanced life. This journal can be a friend for the women to record the memories, dreams, and emotions that may surface during the project. Taking care of the women to the best of the researcher's ability was at the heart of the project.

The real identities of the women and in some cases their circumstances have been altered to protect their privacy and the privacy of their communities. Complete anonymity was provided for the women, their abusers, and their community. I wrestled with 'not naming' the women and their communities, and not giving more of a picture of their home life as children and/or the connections that the women may have had with one another or with the researcher. Instead, we had to change names and not identify their location within Canada.

I had to come to terms with what to 'name' the women; the word Aboriginal identifies and recognizes -Indian, Métis, and Inuit people of Canada in government terms. In respecting the women's identities, I had doubts in balancing identity and naming the women 'Métis'. However, keeping in mind the goal to address the Métis, I felt I would not be doing the research, the Métis community, or the women justice if I had to leave the reader questioning as to what group I was referring to. As for the women in the study, they saw themselves as a mix-blood group of people. Had I chosen to use the word Aboriginal I feel that I would be continuing practices that have oppressed Aboriginal people. Although I am a member of the Aboriginal group, I am first a Métis, a half-breed. My stance as a Métis throughout this project has been that we as Métis people have had little opportunity to name our experiences; instead, we become a part of the Aboriginal experience.

As a Métis person, I believe that we have not been in positions of power to

'name' what we see, feel, live and experience in our personal and professional lives. (Not that we have to be in a 'position' of power to speak, but in written context we as Métis people are still playing catch up with writing our words, and our ways.) This writing of a thesis for myself as a Métis person is recognition of myself in a position of power. And in doing so I need to name that and take responsibility for what I do and what I say or don't do and don't say. Confidentiality keeps people silent and it separates people.

The women in this study took a stand in living their own lives by sharing their stories. The mere sharing of their story gave them strength. There are many different stages of healing from trauma. This research project provided opportunities and choices for young women who are in the midst of a changing world. To empower the women so they can become responsible for their own well being can be a transformational experience for them and the people in their lives. This project begins to document the lives of Métis women raised in a Métis community. This research project subsequently begins to offer insight into the interconnectedness of the Métis family and community.

The data analysis was another important part of the process, just as interviewing and the writing up of transcripts. Kirby and McKenna (1989) point out, "[D]uring this time, the researcher constantly reflects on both the data and the process of analyzing it (p.128)." Listening to the stories of the women brought about my own memories and also gave me opportunities to know memories that had been stored in my physical body. This process took longer than I anticipated. And it was much more painful than I could have imagined.

Maxwell (1996) says that qualitative data needs to be listened to for connections

and themes, for coding the stories (p.78). The careful listening by the researcher at the beginning will save tremendous work if left to the end. Seeing the data analysis as a process from the start of data collection will put the researcher on alert to document ideas, thoughts, and observations. During the transcribing of the data, which became the first time the data was listened to with a critical ear, themes started to form, connections between the women's stories. At one point, I remember hearing almost the identical wording from two of the participants.

Validity and reliability are about 'truths', the research being truthful. Traditionally in research these aspects of research were conducted by examining the sameness of previous research and whether it was valid or not was determined by the number (quantity) of experiments. These research checks gave the end product a way of being accountable. Accountability is in each women's words; the sharing of 'story'. Each story stands for its own 'truth'. The women sharing their stories and their realities constitute validity and reliability because they are.

Both Stake (1995) and Merriam (1988) speak to the role of the researcher in data analysis as being the focal point. Whether or not the researcher looks for "triangulation" (Stake, 1995, p.110) ways of validation or "seeks to describe and explain the world as those in the world interpret it (Merriam, 1988, p.170)," the similarity of the women's stories was amazing, as noted elsewhere in this study. Sometimes the women have the same words to describe something. With this understanding, the uses of the women's own words used in the interpretation of the data, I believe issues of validity and reliability are addressed.

After transcribing was completed, the stories were gone over, detail by detail, for

the 'message' I felt each woman was giving in her words. Again, this process took a few months longer than planned. I guess I felt that after I did the initial interviews the process would flow. I did not anticipate the agony of listening to the women stories or the extent each story would have on my own journey. Some days all I could do was stay in bed, staring at the ceiling, waiting for the pain to somehow pass.

I ached for my own lost innocence as a child and I ached for the young women and their journey as child sexual abuse victims. I know now that when we are honoring the participants and our own journeys, we cannot always follow rigid deadlines. As Cora Weber-Pillwax states, we need "to honor the heart." The process of analysis becomes the researcher's guide to ensuring honor to all involved. Analysis is the "separation of a whole into its components for study and interpretation (Collins dictionary, 1995)." In the analysis, I was careful to continue to honor the voices of the women. Yin (1995) outlines four principles in analyzing the data for quality research.

First, your analysis should show that it relied on all the relevant evidence. Second, your analysis should include all major rival interpretations. If someone else has an alternative explanation for one or more of your findings, make this alternative into a rival. Third, your analysis should address the most significant aspect of your case study. Why go to the effort of doing a case study unless you can address the largest issue? Fourth, you should bring your prior, expert knowledge to your case study (p.124).

Following these principles, Yin points out, will ensure the research is validated.

These principles also helped to honor the individual women's voices in bringing meaning to their experiences of child sexual abuse.

The questions that I sought to explore are:

- How does child sexual abuse affect the adult lives of Métis women who were raised within an Aboriginal community?

- How does a Métis woman heal from this experience?

CHAPTER FOUR METIS WOMEN BREAKING THE SILENCE

Speaking out...

Following that hunch

Trusting to speak

But really

What they say is

Speak so we

Can hear you

So it's pleasant to our ears

They can't hear my truth

Because their truth stands

Between us... ..

In this work, I include the effects of child sexual abuse on the women because effects are a part of their story, their message. It is a part of what they have to say. It is an act of speaking out, allowing your story to become outside of yourself. Talking about the effects also shows how these women continue to live with these effects of the abuse. Their words also demonstrate the effects of the many generations before them. In a way, the effects are in their blood.

To understand the effects of child sexual abuse in this light requires a leap from a past of being lost and wandering to a place of knowing and understanding. In the analysis of the women's stories I came to 'know' the importance of examining the root of one's journey, whether the journey is from child sexual abuse or from another personal childhood trauma.

The effect of child sexual abuse carries with it many avenues of invasion and destruction. How those first years of assault on the child show up in later years is not a definite pattern. The experience of child sexual abuse becomes integrated with history, environmental factors and influences, as well as individual character.

ROSE

Rose is a twenty-five year old woman. She has struggled for years trying to break the patterns in her life that seemed to be ingrained in light of her history. To see Rose one would think she has it made. Rose is one of those distinct looking Métis women with an air about her. Only those who have had the opportunity to come to know Rose with her masks off, come to know the fragile and vulnerable woman she can be. She allows very few to come to know the person behind the walls of protection she has built up over the years.

Rose reminded me of a wanderer, a person searching for a way to come to her roots, a person afraid to look back for the fear of what she knows she must look at. Don't get me wrong, Rose has stood and fought her share of the fight of survival and she's won; otherwise she would not be here to share her story. But to understand Rose in the present, we need to know Rose in the past.

Rose grew up with many people pulling her this way and that. Some would say she had 'opportunity,' that rare gift to make it- out there. And so she tried. Rose shot out of her childhood years proving to the world that she had what it takes to make it. These are some of the strengths that she acquired along the way. But one can only go so far and do so much in a shell. Rose knows what it's like to taste it, to know how close one can come to making it, and then throw it away. She's been there at that place a few times.

Rose is a single woman with no children, waiting for the patterns to change to start her living. In the sharing of her story, I believe Rose stepped into her shell and started to look back from where she had come. Rose is one of those rare kinds of women you know when she comes into her own there will be endless possibilities. We really need women like Rose to take a stand and bring forth her gifts to share. Rose is a teacher of 'risking', of going for it. She's gone for it many times, and just the ability to do that time and time again, to pick up and try again, is an amazing teaching to pass on.

In her late teens and early twenty's Rose's child sexual abuse began to show in her actions while attending post-secondary school. In speaking to the denial of self Rose was able to give an analysis; "Like the effects of it are all the same...say like the alcoholic family . . .and the sexual abuse; they both kind of made me uh closed off and not be in touch with my feelings or like how I felt always the joker and you know to be joking, acting like nothing bothered me."

In college Rose was living the effects of the abuse; "The days that I felt okay I would walk where everyone else walked in the hallways but otherwise I would always take the back hallways. . .even go outside and use the outside doors." Rose, in the prime of her adulthood in college, was probably labeled a "snob", someone who thought she was too good for others. Who could know the inner turmoil that was actually going on?

Rose was able to identify the effects of the abuse on her self concept. "Brought down my confidence...my confidence and the way I would like to be... yeah [so instead I] closed off and not get close to people." "I could hear them saying Oh she's hot. . . I didn't feel like it at all at the time. . . And them saying Oh she knows it. . . And it was just the opposite; I just didn't have the confidence to talk to them, yeah, even to smile at

them.” No one knew the inner turmoil that was her reality.

Rose was in her twenties before she named her abusers. Taught to be worthless, less than, she protected those who stole her innocent childhood. The impact of those first lost messages carried weight in her decision/choice making in her life. “I was ashamed; I knew it was wrong. . .I never really told anyone that first time when it happened. because I was protecting the abuser. . .that first guy was baby sitting us and that was my mom's uncle.”

In later life, Rose was carrying the effects of the abuse into relationships with men, “In relationships to men I think that. . .how I like to protect men. . .to protect them, make them feel better without consideration to myself and sexually.” Rose shows us how she sought attention, acceptance, and then in later years how she learned how to build that wall for protection, strike out before they get you. “And the way that like people who are close to me like I said before like letting people run over me.” “But [now] it's me running over people to like getting hard. . . not being considerate of uh how other people feel.”

The cycle comes full circle, don't speak for yourself, and turn the tables on yourself. Rose got used to denying herself. “I would never stand up to people or if someone was making fun of me. . .I was making fun of myself I was kinda like putting myself down. Why can't I just speak out and say what I'm feeling? Why do I have such a hard time identifying what I'm feeling?”

Rose knew what brought approval from others and therefore the message into adulthood is maintaining that outer image at any cost. “I was always slim, I had modeled, I was into sports you know people told me I was attractive. . .and to get fat would be like

failing. . "I started to be bulimic. . .at the time it was I just didn't like my body I thought I was too fat or I was gaining weight or just to eat I just wanted to eat and I knew I would eat too much and I would get fat so I would just throw it up." Eating disorders, another silent cry of a lost acceptance and love of self. "I thought the other girls were more pretty and popular." "I felt ucky and ugly. . .I would eat in bed; I liked curling up and having lots of blankets around me and eating like that."

Disconnecting oneself from others was a way to not only avoid dealing with people but also avoid dealing with oneself. "Crying meant that it was like, you know, you're not supposed to cry. . . you cry and it is upsetting and like things like you cry and other people are going to be upset to see you cry and it's kind of like looking after them you know you don't want to cry in front of them you know because you are going to be. . .yeah" "I don't have no friends; I just stay at home; I don't do nothing I just. . .I was sleeping lots."

The theme that seems to follow Rose through her messages which became a part of her teachings in her developmental years are a lack of self esteem or confidence, always putting others before her own needs and wants. The pattern of denial kept Rose from ever acknowledging her true self. A lesson learned very early in life. Rose in turn learned how to show one person to the world and to safely hide herself. In the event of doing this I believe Rose hid her talents and her demons that haunted her.

hurt me

so i can hide again.

I smile this way

“my child you didn’t always smile this way.”

who said that?

You think you know me

potential lost

forgotten

pound it

drown it

smother it

try, cry to keep my smile.

“You wounded” yes!

Yes!

Down on my knees i

pray, i search. Never left, always pulled.

Digging, grasping “there will be more”

but i smile different now!

Can you see! Look at me! Tell me!

Trust, patience, scraping my skin.

Provide. Provide it?

*Written by Rose

I was raised in a Métis community in the late fifties and sixties. We identified as 'Indian's'. The word Métis was not in our vocabulary, but we knew the word half-breed. For me, living in that Métis community meant being sheltered from the outside world. The gravel roads that lead to the nearest town, then some 80 miles away, did not take us there often.

We grew up during the times when a supervisor ran the Métis Settlements and the government ran the schools. The school in our settlement went up to grade six. Either after that, you bussed to the nearest hamlet or you moved and boarded out for school. When we were growing up, my mom remembers this time they [Government Supervisor] were giving away free cases of prem. Prem is canned compressed meat I remember used to taste delicious on homemade buns. My mom recalls how everyone was happy to get this food.

We grew up with a lot of aunties and uncles and many, many cousins. My grandparents all lived within visiting distance. We grew up in the times of community gathering, Christmas concerts, and square dancing in the hall at the school, basket socials, baseball games, and grab bags at the church.

There were six of us in the family then; two more came later. But I suppose like any other Métis household, we always had a few extras around, cousins and friends of a friend who came to visit and ended up staying for a few months. Foster children were also a part of our home. To this day, I have a foster brother and sister who have remained a part of our family. I still believe that it was a wonderful place to grow up when I look back on my life.

I know there were many of those family gathering times, when grandpa would

play the fiddle and the floor would shake from his feet flying. Or there were the times at my mom's sister's place down the road, when everyone came together for a regular hoedown. After good food and visiting were done, the home made brew would come out and the guitars would be tuned up and the voices would ring of those oldie love songs. The living room floor would be cleared for dancing as we watched our parents enjoy some easier times. I remember that sometime during the evening one of our aunties would come out of the bedroom all dressed up and parade around making everyone wonder which sister it was and laugh until their sides hurt I'm sure. Then the stories would start "remember when . . ."

mom

do you remember times when the winds were calmer?

when the sky felt like one of your home made quilts?

do you remember?

does it sadden you mom

to remember?

do you remember times when i was your little girl?

do you remember my sadness?

i remember yours.

do you remember mom

if i ever asked you where

sadness goes?

BETSY

Half an hour after I met this energetic young woman she was pouring out her heart. The forcefulness of her words took my breath away. Twenty-two years old, her story spoke of a person who had already lived a lifetime. Only Betsy's was at the beginning. Betsy has 'it'; you can feel it in her walk and it sits high on her shoulders. People turn their heads when she walks into the room even if you don't want to, you would.

Betsy's the kind of person you meet and you want to take her home with you, protect her and care for her. But you know that Betsy doesn't need taking care of; you know that Betsy has this wild side to her and she has to learn how to live with it and not to run because that wild side is something that many women never find within themselves. That wild side in Betsy is a fierce pride and anger that pulls her through the day and makes her get out of bed the next day to start over. Betsy always knows how to start over. That is her gift; that is what you will see in her words; she's a fighter who is trying to learn how to fight fair--give and take, not all take or not all give.

Betsy grew up in many different places with many different scenes that went bad. But if half the women in the world who are oppressed and beat on and drugged up knew what Betsy did about surviving, we as people would be women to be reckoned with. Some of what Betsy had to say was hard to hear. She reminded me how important it is when you're trying to survive to live each day to not get caught up in tomorrow because one needs all they have to get through the day. She reminded me that we all heal in our own ways, a little at a time; after all, we are only human.

Some people may believe Betsy needs to be tamed. I say Betsy needs to honor

that wild streak in her and continue to turn heads with her presence as a woman. Betsy has a child. She is a mother who has had to make hard choices in her young life about facing herself so her child does not have to face some of the challenges Betsy faced while growing up. The pieces of her you will hear will give you a picture of a young woman with fierce pride that will bring her to a crossroads someday, and whichever way she turns, the world will come to know her.

Betsy would like nothing more than to have a, “Good life with someone; ..It doesn't feel normal to have a normal relationship.” Betsy found herself walking the same path as her mother in relationships with the men in her life. “I remember seeing my dad beating up mom... Maybe I'm just prone to that - that's the way it's supposed to be... “ I said if a guy ever hit me I'd leave him.”

Betsy's rage in trying to break away from her childhood upbringing leaves her pulled in all directions. “I remember me and my brother and my cousins we were all there and there was three girls and three guys and like we had sex.” “I don't know if being beat on all the time was why I am angry or am I angry cause they did things to me or am I angry cause that's how they did it so that's how I'm doing it.”

Betsy chose to not live with her [daughter] because she did not know 'normal' and therefore had to silently make a decision that others would view as a mother who doesn't care enough to raise her own [child]. “Yeah that's why I don't have my [child] with me,” “At first I didn't want to change [the] diaper. I never talked to anyone about it because I was scared that they would think I was sick.”

How does one ever stand alone when they grew up in constant fear of what might happen? Betsy seemed to be still looking to someone to show acceptance. “When my

dad used to yell I would piss myself because he was just so mean." "Why do I need someone to depend on? It should be me, you know, just depending on myself."

Betsy's fear of releasing her childhood memories gave way to obvious reasons why she makes the choices that she does. "We were fighting over the cat. . .so he [dad] grabbed my cat and he took it outside and we were all watching him out the window, and he took it against his bumper and like killed it on his bumper, like smashed it about 20-30 times." " And still to this day I can't have animals and that's all I used - I used to have horses. I used to have dogs, cats; everything and I can't have animals. I love them but I can't."

Shame kept Betsy quiet. Shame kept Betsy's pain locked away so she could carefully monitor how people viewed her. "I heard a lot of bad things and I seen lots of bad things but it was just like but for some reason didn't feel like they were that bad." "I'm scared like you know people are going to turn around and find out and they are going to laugh at me."

Betsy became so good at blocking out what she had no control over that she ended up losing herself also. "She always used to get beat up [my mom] she would get beat up in the morning and I would go to school like nothing had happened and pull in honors." "So many times you just put on a front. . . you act a certain way, just because that's the way people portray you to be."

Could Betsy's blocked memories be pulling her places she does not understand? "I don't know - like it feels like there was things that happened and I just can't remember them and I don't know if I want to." "I do that - I'll just go in a rut for a while and then I - I climb out and do good for awhile and then I go in that rut and I have to think to

myself, is it because of what I went through. Like why can't I just free myself from it?"

Child sexual abuse taught Betsy not to trust and as a young woman not to know how to honor her own physical needs. "We used to sleep beside my dad and I remember that once- him doing - that - like I woke up to him like feeling me and stuff." "My grandpa - he would always like put his hands like wherever." "In relationships I'm just - I go in spurts where like I can have sex - and then I get grossed out. I just don't want to be touched and I go kinda weird."

The past plays an up front role in how Betsy survives with all her memories and experiences locked away inside of her. "There must be something wrong with my family or something cause lots of people have been charged with rape and they done stuff and people have found out things." "When I drink I get so out of hand I just drink until I am stupid."

"Doubt," played an important part in why Betsy decides to just leave things as they are. "What happened to me I'm still kinda like just accepting it that it's - I still don't feel like it was bad." "I feel weaker (talking about my problems) when I hide behind that wall and stuff I feel strong - I don't feel like I have any problems and I don't feel any different than anybody else."

The theme that follows Betsy from her childhood realities into her adult life is still fighting to accept what happened. Searching for ways to acknowledge herself and feel worthy just because she is, to not place the blame on herself and therefore stop living her life as if she is to blame for the child sexual abuse. How does Betsy fight that pattern of denial that built strong walls to protect this little girl from total destruction? Now Betsy's a young woman filled with anger, an anger that flows throughout her with a vengeance.

Betsy gets even when she drinks using her fists that become her survival against attacks of inhuman assaults on a child.

One of the effects of child sexual abuse for me was denying my womanhood. I felt unlovable and unable to love intimately. I always used to daydream and yes I admit it still is a part of my imaginary world what it would have been like had I not had this experience that altered my life forever. These words are not only my fantasy but also my reality.

*I'd been one helleva woman
had they not reached inside me
I'd been one helleva woman
had they not
had they not
reached inside of me and...
And bruised and darkened my soul
my soul
they left me lying there
with no ways to mend
no ways to mend
and so a dark soul
they used to say
a dark soul
no one knew me
not even me*

Growing up a child of incest confuses everything about your life. Even though at times child sexual abuse made me feel special. I felt like I had these secrets that made me different from the others and this difference was a special thing. Somebody liked me and so they asked for special favors from me. Other days I would not feel 'so special' I would wonder, why me? On these days from somewhere I would know that 'the special ness' I felt was not a good thing. Like so many other child sexual abuse victims come to believe I thought it was only happening to me. I believed I was the only special one around.

My identity of self was formed within the context of being used as a sexual object. Sometimes I would get candy, sometimes I would get money, sometimes a ride on the horse, and sometimes I would get stood up' for, but always it seemed I had to pay This was my identity; my concept of self was a broken spirit not knowing or recognizing what a free spirit would feel like. I could not know the impact it would have on my life. I am still learning.

ANGELA

Sometimes you think that you know someone because you've known him or her for a while. It doesn't have to be long; you can get that impression over a cup of coffee or over many years, only to find you really don't know that person at all. And it's not because they were hiding themselves from you or trying not to let you in, but because they have a rare kind of way of being strong, in spite of, themselves. When you meet these kinds of people at first, you're not sure, what it is about them, but something keeps you wondering. I think that sometimes these people are brushed aside because one doesn't always understand them at first.

Angela is one of those of women. She comes from that place of a raw kind of

quiet strength. She appears to be a loner but really, she's a thinker. She appears to be quiet, only she's waiting for her chance to speak. Angela is a twenty-five year old woman whose eyes sometimes show the thoughts that lead to a deep place of her being that she has only just begun to share. Finding one's voice is one thing; finding a place to speak that voice is another. That is how you can picture Angela, a young woman who has found her voice and is standing up ready to speak.

When I met with Angela, we were both nervous. She was nervous to share her story and I was nervous to hear. Angela reminded me of a bud on a tree and the many different stages it goes through before it becomes a leaf. Angela's organized her life to allow the process to take shape in ways that she knew she could handle both what had to become and how to continue living each day. Angela knew she had to do it this way from the time she was a little, little girl, because there was no one else to turn to. She had to figure it out on her own and she did.

I was afraid of Angela's logic, afraid of her way of thinking in steps, slowly and carefully. I was in awe at the compassion she showed for others on her way and how she held herself in spite of. Angela has learned how to walk to the beat of her own drum, to honor herself on her journey, and to recognize her voice and the power of speaking what she needs to share. I was just fortunate enough to be that person to hear her story of a remarkable journey of learning how to be true to her and also honor those around her.

Angela walked away from her childhood believing that she had to do things for herself. Angela's pattern of denial is her fierce will of independence at any cost. Learn to survive. There is a determination that has kept Angela at a very private place within herself. Angela brought with her into adulthood the need not to need anyone, to figure

things out on her own.

“The first time I could ever remember something odd in the house - when he made me touch him. I would have been three or four.” “It took me probably all those years probably to figure out who I was going to tell and when and how. How are you going to tell a person? What are you going to say and what would I have to tell them?”

Through trying to protect herself by getting away from her father, Angela's underlying vision was for healing and eventually a relationship with the man who sexually molested her, her father. “The only legal way I could get away from him was if I took him to court.” “I didn't want to tell everything cause I guess in a way I was to scared to. I didn't want to have it exposed just because cause of me and because he was my dad. And I thought if - I thought maybe- I don't know what I thought. I kinda felt sorry for him and I didn't want everybody to know everything that he did just because I thought maybe he could change. That's what I thought and maybe I didn't want to give him a bad name.”

With Angela, her secret was community knowledge because of the court case, but still even though she HAD experienced the abuse, it was obvious in the community that it may not be true. Her father was found guilty and was fined \$500.00 dollars. A community afraid to admit to its deepest and darkest secrets--and Angela caught in the web of deceit. “It really upset me that dad was telling people I was lying about it.” “Ever since that happened it still kinda makes me paranoid with some people, like new people, that come into the community or his friends or whatever - that he knows and drinks with or whatever. It makes me paranoid I know I don't have to worry. I don't care what they think, but it still it's there.”

Angela's secret even though the community may have thought they knew all of what had happened kept the truth buried. No one to turn to; everyone either related, or friends, or at the very least, neighbors. "When I was living with him he would always try and get mad at me when I would try and get mad at him." "I could maybe do it [talk] with total strangers but I wouldn't want to do it with people I know [strangers] are probably instantly more understanding; there's no connection between them and the person [abuser]. Who cares? You don't know them, they're strangers they can't hurt you."

As Angela looked back on her life and the choices she had made she began to wonder the effect that those choices had on her life. It shows here in Angela how the silence can control one's life. "One day - [friends] were over and they were their skidoing. He was drunk and he come outside and he said, 'what are these bow hunks - and he was saying are you screwing around with my daughter. And he would tell me I was screwing around with every guy. Like he would would just make me feel like a slut who didn't give a shit about myself." "Maybe I think maybe I should have talked to somebody cause I know - I know that things can happen because and you don't even know what's happening. It affects what ever - you can't even see it. I don't want to - something like that to happen. I like being in control of my life."

Angela was a prisoner in her own home. "He never let me go anywhere - he always makes me go home. He wouldn't let me go nowhere with friends." "I've dealt with so much myself growing up. I'm used to what to you say counseling myself."

Sex for Angela, with boy friends, became a forbidden place to go. How does one get past having sex with your father to enjoying the acts of lovemaking with someone

you care for? “He made me have sex with him - that's when I really - that's when I did start feeling guilty I guess for letting it go that far.” “When I was going out with - boyfriend I was building a relationship with him - Until I found out he cheated on me. Because I didn't sleep with him. I guess in a way I'm kinda scared if I don't sleep with them it won't work but I know that's not true. I know what's true and what's not true, but to make yourself believe it. - It's hard.”

For some children, no matter what they have endured, they yearn for that bond with their parents. “He used to bribe me - it seemed like almost to make me think that he wasn't doing anything wrong. That he was a good father he used to bribe me like to go places if I wanted to or buy stuff for me. But he always make promises, promises, promises but he never kept those promises.” “But the things that still bothers me is that - might always - I don't know that I'll still always want/wish - I could have that relationship with my dad as long as he's alive.”

For Angela, she protected herself against the horrors at home and because she had to protect herself, she also kept others at bay. “Who do you trust? How do you know it is safe? How do you know it is not safe? “One of his old friends used to touch me too.” “I had to drive [this guy] home one day from dad's cause they were drinking and he tried to make a move on me.” “He's always had friends that seem to do the same things.”

“It's had to make me not trust men bottom line. Or maybe even anybody who tries to get close to me cause I know I don't believe what they're saying or what they're doing is really, what they mean. Maybe they just want to do that or say that just because to get what they want.”

Angela's theme of having to look after her has brought her strength but it has also

brought her an aloneness that she didn't have to grow up with. The pattern of denial has locked Angela away, from letting go and trusting that others could be there for her. How does one come back from that place of aloneness?

I struggled with being different all my life; the abuse left me feeling like I was a freak, a rotten person, that even God couldn't love me because I allowed my relatives to sexually molest me. It felt like it must have been written on my forehead and that everyone knew what I had LET happen. And so when I experienced racism, I was naive and so clouded by the sexual abuse, that I didn't know the racism, I only understood the abuse. And so when I came to understand I was being discriminated against because I was Aboriginal, this was just another difference to come to terms with.

I grew up an angry child, from what I can remember anyway. I was moody. I was not a talker. I stood by and watched more than I participated. I grew up trying to please. I think in the event of blocking out the worst, I also blocked out the good times.

I used to have stomachaches. These attacks would hit at anytime. I would be doubled over in pain. I would have to curl up and cover myself with blankets and be really, really still, waiting for sleep to take over. I slept a lot as a child.

I never used to dwell on the notion of how my body would react to certain circumstances. I was afraid to ask what my body was remembering. I was afraid that somewhere I knew the memory. I have small flashes and a knowing that have always been with me. I knew from experience that child sexual abuse happens right under people's noses. I was always really paranoid and on guard with people in my life.

I used to have these nightmares they were these wild and scary dreams. I'd wake up sweating; my heart pounding and I'd be scared as hell. I slept with the lights on for

years. I remember my girl's having hard time waking me from these nightmares, and then a harder time trying to tell me where I was and that it was just a dream. It was just a dream.

The nights when it was close to morning and I still had not slept, I would be laying awake listening to every sound. Those nights I would go and get one of my girls to come sleep with me. They started to know that I must have had 'one of those nights' again.

I remember trying to wean myself out of sleeping with the lights on. I would just have the hall light on, then the bathroom (those night- lights never worked; it had to be a big light or else the shadows would play tricks on me). I knew when things were bad for me. The lights were on and the nightmares were back. During the writing of my thesis, some mornings I would wake up with my light on, or I would wake myself up out of a nightmare.

someday, one day

I'll wake up normal

yes, one day I am going to wake up and I'll be normal

I'll know who that girl is looking back at me

someday I'll know her

I won't have to wonder why I'm so different

one day I'll wake up normal

I'll know who that young woman is

looking back at me

someday I'll know her

I remember when I was young

then when I got older

for reason I did not understand

those townsfolk they knew I was different

they didn't want no difference in their town

amongst their normal

someday I am going to wake up and I am going to know normal

someday day I am going to wake up and know that middle aged

woman looking back at me

maybe then and only then

will I ever be able to

accept my difference as normal

RENA

If "NO MORE KIYAMS" means anything to anyone, for me it means a life for Rena and her children. Rena's the kind of person who has gotten the raw end of the deal too many times. There's innocence about her that keeps you up all night, wishing like hell that her life could have been different--and a prayer that comes in the morning light begging for strength for Rena to turn the message around and to stand up and demand her life back.

Not that Rena isn't strong or that she needs my prayers, but when you feel the innocence of a child, you automatically go to that place of mothering and you want to take away all the pain. Rena's story does that to you; her words make you sad and angry at the same time. And when she tells you what she dreams about in her quiet moments, it tears at your heart because all she's asking for is a chance to have a life and to give her children a chance.

Maybe I saw myself in Rena; maybe that's why her story disturbed my sleep. I don't know, but I do know that there isn't a day that goes by since we talked that I do not think of her and send good thoughts her way. With Rena there seems to be so many factors that come into play in her desire to have that 'good life'. Her world is built around a way of life that is her roots, but also her destruction. Rena knows this and therefore toys with the pangs of breaking loose but hanging on at the same time.

If you met Rena, you would meet a small woman who carries herself with swiftness. She may hang back and appear not to be interested but just know that she is recording your every move. And that she is thinking of all the things she would like to

know about you but can find no words. And if she leaves abruptly, just know that she gave up and went back to her world of imagination of that great conversation she would like to have, someday. The courage that Rena finds each time she stays for a few more minutes comes from a place of a fighting spirit trying to find a way out.

Rena is searching for ways to break her silence. She has been denied her voice, her need to speak the truth, in order to find her way out of her abuse. For any child sexual abuse victim that has come forward and not been believed, or worse ignored, they understand that when those significant people in their lives turn away, healing may start with that relationship and not the abuser. Rena's inner battles with facing her abuse means facing her mother's actions so many years ago.

We need to never underestimate that relationship between mother and daughter and the effects of that relationship on lives. The ingrained message that Rena received from her mother was the base from which she started all other relationships. "It's always been avoided. Like if I wanted to start talking about it like anything that bothers me to my mom she's right away, go talk to a counselor, go talk to somebody, and I can't just say to her 'but I want to talk to you'." "That's probably why I hate talking now because I've never been able to. I could sit there and think and I have, like when someone is talking when there's a group or something. I have a million of questions running through my head but I just can't say them."

The awareness and connection that Rena was able to make in the sharing of her story was incredible, for this was the first time that she had shared the result of the effects. "She just ca, calls you down in little ways and you know it hurts my feelings."

"I don't even know who I am. I always feel lost - like there's something missing."

Rena says, "I catch myself." Rena becomes aware at that moment and so she has created choices in her parenting style. "I was walking by her [my mother] and she kicked me and I sat went flying across the hallway. That's when I tried to kill myself - that time." Rena adopted parenting skills from her mother. "I catch myself – like - I can get really mean sometimes with my kids."

Rena's bottled up her pain. She turned her pain into rage and anger that she let go on those around her. "She'd [her mother] always make excuses when I tried to tell her something or say I'd want to do something about it or something; she'd make little excuses not to." "We were talking about losing it when we were fighting." I hate arguing, can't argue right away I wanna fight. I can't argue." "I can't sit there and deal with it; I have to do something else."

One day, when Rena was eleven, she went into town to see a doctor, a day she remembers as the day she stood up and cried out for help and no one could hear. Rena doesn't remember how she got to town but she does remember telling her story and the social workers calling her mother.

Rena's mother decided that day what would be her truth for Rena. Rena's mother denied her daughter an opportunity to heal, that day. After this Rena found other ways to deal with the sexual abuse, she took control of her life and gambled with the addiction world. "So I went in there and I told them I was lying and we never talked about it again, for a long time after." "I did good up to grade seven. I think after that, I just lost it and I didn't - I didn't really ever do what I wanted then." [The following year] "I went to grade seven, then, and I failed twice - grade seven and I just quit school after that. Then I went back to [school in] grade nine. Then I quit after two weeks. Then they put me in

IOP in grade ten. I started doing a lot of drugs.”

Rena did what she needed to do to protect herself; the control she took over her life gave the community something to talk about. “When I did start having sex with boys I was young. I was only thirteen.” “I shacked up when I was sixteen; it gave me comfort because I knew that someone else was in bed with me. I was safer that way.”

Child sexual abuse takes away a child's ‘normality’ forever, from that first kiss, to that first crush, to secrets with your best friend, to that first love. Child sexual abuse takes away everything natural. “You know when you talk with friends and they always talk about the first time you’ve had sex and I - well what am I going to say you know [laughing] ‘well the first time I had intercourse was when I was six years old’.” “Like there's times that I've tried to commit suicide. And even to this day, everyday, I think about it, but then I have to talk to myself, ‘you have children now if you’re dead there's nobody else that's going to watch them for you as good as you are.’ ” Sometimes I think I'm going crazy. I'm sitting there arguing with myself. Like there's little things I have to talk myself out of.”

Child sexual abuse victims are the best advocates for other victims. They know. They have been there. An unresolved child sexual abuse can show itself in many ways. “I had trusted two friends, my friends when I was younger and I told them about it. And they were telling everybody else. That's when it [community gossip] went around saying, it was my fault. [They said] I was nothing but a slut and everything. A few people back then - I can remember them saying it to my face.” “I remember quite a while ago my sister was telling she said, ‘a [male cousin] did something to me.’ And the next day he came there and I took the gun and I put a clip in it [crying] and as soon as he walked in

the door, I pointed that gun at him. I just told him to leave cause I was ready to kill him.”

What's normal? What's not? Rena lived in silence of her fears because she did not, could not say them out loud. Who would listen? What would they think? "When I could start remembering was when - I think I was six from the time I remember I know it pretty sure it has happened before that but I just [don't have the memories.]"

Rena spoke to me as a trusted older woman and as someone she knew who had been abused and had raised children of my own. "When you were first mothering your kids, like changing their pampers - do you feel like everyone's, like - the people who know you have been abused, do you feel like they're watching you to see if you do it?"

Rena's theme is not being able to communicate. Her pattern of denial locked her away inside herself. Communication has become a dream of Rena's, not a reality.

For many years I wondered (before I got angry) if I had any right in getting mad. I mean who was I to wrong these relatives with my harsh realities? Or worse yet, I would think, did I just imagine that? The mind can play terrible tricks on one's doubts.

they didn't ask or should I judge so harshly

maybe they did but I was too young to understand

maybe they did ask

and I never heard them

maybe they did ask

and I don't remember

who am I to judge so harshly

I used to have to sleep facing the door no matter what and the door had to be open. I remember my girls used to close their bedroom doors and before I went to bed, I would open them. I couldn't understand how they could sleep with the door closed like that. The shadows and the nighttime played with my restless mind. So, when the nights got the best of me, I started to look at my experience of child sexual abuse. I started to wonder how old I was when it all started. I thought, maybe if I knew how old I was, this would help me to understand what was happening to me. And so I turned to prayer.

I asked to be given a sign of how old I was. And I waited. The sign came. I must have been ready, although it didn't feel that way. I was in a training workshop and the facilitator was doing a space issue/trust demonstration. I knew as she started talking that something was going to happen. I was trying to become invisible and praying I wouldn't be picked for the role-play. Of course, I was picked. My prayers had been answered. It was too late to change my mind.

The facilitator asked four people on each side of the room to stand up and the ones on the other side of the room had to walk towards us until we held out our hand when we felt they were invading our space. I felt like I was going to faint; I couldn't hear any voices. All I could see were these four big guys walking toward me. I couldn't run; I was glued to the spot. I'll never forget that day. I put my hand out right away but it felt like they just kept coming toward me. When the exercise was over the person walking toward me was a small woman and none of the other people looked like I saw them to be. All I wanted to do was crawl underneath my chair. I knew at that moment that I was small enough to fit under a chair.

Child sexual abuse took me away from myself to a place where it was often impossible to separate myself from the effects, to trust myself, what I knew to be true. I felt unworthy of that voice, that guidance I would feel. It scared me to think that maybe, just maybe, I was worthy enough.

*I see her sometimes
lying there
lost
broken
defeated
waiting for the end
impatiently waiting
for the end
the doubts they pile up
doubt me
doubt you
doubt life
doubt god
know though --- that voice
that tugs and teases
to believe*

THE INTERRUPTION OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

The experience of child sexual abuse appears in many different shapes and forms. There is no one set of identifying variables. However, there are similarities. How child sexual abuse appears in adult life is an individual journey. My experiences, though similar in many ways to each of the women, may look altogether different in my day-to-day reality when I speak to my story. And so the effects of child sexual abuse form a personalized story that we each tell in our own words, our own ways. What we tell of our story, we tell at that time because that is how we the victim have come to know and understand it.

We learn from these stories that child sexual abuse is a devastating stripping away of what is normal, a natural knowing for non-victim. We learn that we need to relearn those messages and actions that confined us to a small place. This awareness is the door to unlocking our cage and a step towards freedom. We learn that until we really hear another victim's story we can never say we truly understand. Because no matter what our experiences, no matter who we are or how we have healed or not healed or talked or not talked, we as individual child sexual abuse victims need to find our own ways to tell the story. Each time a victim shares their story they learn a little more about themselves and I believe just as important, they are allowing someone else to know them a little better.

Within the Métis community, this sharing of story is a political action that can pull a person in all directions. When one shares their story they are in fact, sharing a story that involves their family's story and their community history. As Métis women, we are women who have grown up with a fierce pride of 'a people' and speaking out

about child sexual abuse amongst our own is an action that causes other effects.

These effects of speaking out are again an individual journey. I cannot say that in all Métis communities a victim of child sexual abuse is silenced. However, whether supported or not, the action of speaking is still a political one. A thread that seemed to run through all the women's stories and my own was the women's reasons to speak were not vindictive; rather, they hoped for healing to happen for themselves, those around them, and for the abuse to stop for those yet to come. I believe this adds to the strength of the women. This shows us that history, which we are as a people, is not something we want to discard or lash out, but to use as we strive for wholeness, balance and togetherness.

The women's stories spoke loud and clear to just how their families, their communities and therefore their environment impacted their healing journey. Their stories teach us that healing is holistic. Healing is not and cannot be separated from our connectedness with those around us. This interconnect ness brings to light the complexity of addressing "No More Kiyams" for Métis women survivors of child sexual abuse.

CHAPTER FIVE COMING HOME

We are more than our experiences. The knowledge and strength of the women show we are more than our lived experiences. Child sexual abuse literature written by social scientists has mainly focused on pathologizing the victim. These labels and categorizing of sexual abuse experiences can keep the victims stuck and in a place where they do not listen to their own inner knowledge, the voice that can lead them away from living and reliving their childhood experiences.

I can pick up any text that outlines symptoms of any childhood dysfunction and I have all the classic symptoms of growing up in that environment. As I grew older and moved away from the safeness of my childhood community to experience other people's world ideologies my already lived experience of 'being different' was reinforced. But this time, this difference was a judgment of where I had come from and how I looked. I already did not know how to listen to my own strengths, although I could feel and know them as special guidance from a young age. But when I started to experience racism and cultural genocide too the fight was much too big for me, a fight I did not understand at the time. When I looked to textual ways out of my cage, in the self help section of the book stores, or when I sat in classrooms that continued to label rather than name my lived experiences, I had less and less hope of ever finding a way out.

Labeling my lived experiences of child sexual abuse and racism helped to keep me in a box feeling hopeless and helpless. Nowhere was I reading anything on the strengths of who I was because of my lived experiences or history. Nowhere was anyone telling me that I had the tools to survive because I had survived. I needed only to listen to the voice of teachings and follow the path. When I started to be able to name my life

experiences as external realities, I could then start to access my inner strengths, to step into my own way of being.

The women spoke to this naming even though they did not recognize and acknowledge their actions as strength. This is why I feel it is important to write about the women's strengths because they know how to name their experience and how to put it outside of themselves. And I believe they know this because their environments were different; these young women have grown up in a different time. They have knowledge of the world that was not open to me when I was young. Some would say that this worldly knowledge has not done us any good. However, as victims of child sexual abuse and as Métis women, I believe this knowledge can and has given the young women in Aboriginal communities a way to come to understand their position in the community and the world and to fight for themselves.

When we can name our lived experience we are putting it outside of ourselves and only then can we reclaim our individual strength and ways of being and knowing. This was my fight, my struggle to find ways to take my lived experiences of child sexual abuse and put them where they belong outside of myself. The strength of these young women show they are coming into this knowledge at a much younger age. The power and hope for the individual Métis woman and the community is truly a sign of us coming to take our place and to speak. What a gift these young women are giving to the generations of children to come. The vision is that one-day our children can use their strengths/gifts to have that life instead of fighting for it.

It is important for me to say that because I have taken a stand that healing is a process, I write the women's stories from what they shared with me at that point in their lives and I write and share my own story from where I am. With this understanding, the healing process can be an endless continuing story that evolves as the women and their processes do.

The women showed a strength that went beyond the survivor's known strength. Where does a show of strength come from when abuse(s) have plagued your life from the earliest of memories? Jane Middleton-Moz (1992) calls this "strength of the human spirit." (1992,p.7) This is the ability to survive when nothing seems to be on your side. This sense of strength seemed to be knowledge; a knowing that fathers of psychology say only comes with age.

The women themselves did not recognize their survival ways as a show of resilience. No one ever told them they were strong young women. This is, however, a very important understanding to look at why no one was giving these young women empowering words to support and encourage in their lives. How then did these young women acquire such a strength without the support of significant others in their growing up years?

Countless individuals grew up in environments that were traumatic and shaming. A large percentage created resilient, adaptive coping mechanisms in order to survive their pain, such as humour, compassion, altruism, tenacity, perseverance and creativity (Middleton, 1992, p.151).

As a mother when I think of my own daughters I am amazed as their mother at the support and encouragement they need to live their lives to the fullest.

So, when this support is not there where does one turn? The women turned to themselves; they became their own teachers and healers. This strength in the women

goes unrecognized and unspoken. Why? Because the significant people in their lives, who they might turn to, are women in need of support. Betsy said, “My mom was getting beaten up all the time and getting ran over. She got ran over and went to the hospital and we just went to school like nothing had happened because we were so used to it and it was nothing new.” Betsy was learning at a young age how to survive and go on with the living of her life. She, alone, had to pick herself up and go on, in spite of her surroundings.

The writing in this chapter reflects my struggle in coming to terms with honoring my strengths/gifts. Yes I know this is a chapter about ‘acknowledging’ strengths/gifts, and I am saying to the young women take your strengths, your gifts, and shout them to the world. But first I need to accept them for my own.

This is my way. I don’t mind sharing my struggles and pain so you may find ways to share your story. But to share my strengths, my gifts’. This is a more vulnerable request. This is my sacredness, my spiritual walk. This is who truly I am, not as a victim of child sexual abuse, or a stubborn closed daughter and sister, or an addicted person, or an abused wife (in another time), or as a mother (which I attached myself as)--this is me as a Métis woman--just me.

a victim of child as sexual abuse
I cried the silent cry
but I was born with a fighting spirit
and I always felt that guidance;
that voice that nudges me on
I remember the turning point
that time in my life where I accepted the guidance
where I accepted me
becoming humble is not only letting go of the all-knowing attitude
but also letting go of believing yourself to be unworthy
I had put up a good fight
to ignore
to hide
to run
to blame
to be so damn scared
of being worthy
not
worthy enough
(because I tried, just a little)
but worthy period

Can you hear my fear? Be gentle with me.

TABLE TALK

During our dinner (which was in place of the talking circle), I asked Rose and Betsy to write their thought on what healing meant to them. These are their words.

Betsy & Rose

Admitting to the ugly

letting go of dependence

substance abuse

losing control

crying out

make the noise!

Talking no secrets

accepting it all!

when you're lost and alone

and you feel no one's there

to love

support or listen

or to show they even care!

just remember this poem

and it will help remind you too

that a very special

part of me is always

there for you!

Breathing while

singing
feeling free!
setting sights
where
who I want to be
share
be brave
let your spirit fly!

Although these two young women were in the midst of speaking to their own journeys, they could see that they could feel what they needed and they had a vision of what their lives could be like. This ability to have a vision is a strong foundation to begin to move away from their childhood sexual abuse experiences into a coming into their own place.

The following stories provide us a picture of how healing can begin with acknowledging our own inner gifts/strengths. Again, through the women's words, we see thought patterns and actions that are driving forces that help them to take a stand in their lives. Throughout the stories, I have italicized the women's strengths in the text. This acknowledgement of their strengths/gifts gives a clearer picture of how they appear in the actions and thoughts of the women.

ROSE'S STRENGTHS/GIFTS

Picture Rose, in her early teens this tall, awkward, skinny girl staring down her abuser (a public figure in the community) at public gatherings. "The second time [I was

abused] I think I got more mad; I got more mad inside because I would see that guy and I would just glare at him and he would never look at me."

There's a lot to be said about this kind of action. It takes a fighting spirit, a kind of dare that there may be more to come. This has been Rose's path. Rose is one of those women who has potential. She was gifted with a great intellectual mind, a gift that continually pulled her to challenge her, in academia and in her physical being. Yes, there is a but. What do they say; the truth always comes after the but?

Her gifts have been clouded with the torment of child sexual abuse. Child sexual abuse taught Rose to forever, whatever, never ever believe in her. So, why say this when talking about her strengths? Because even though this cloud has stormed and rained on Rose's attempts to live to her potential, she still went out and she tried. That determination to live anyway is a tremendous strength. Only Rose knows how agonizing, how lonely, and just how hard that journey is to walk.

Rose's world of fighting the battle between her own inner doubts and her strength took her up and down the road of climbing off and on the roller coaster ride of standing and trying to crawl and being defeated. "I think I always knew what I was capable of. I think I always knew I was smart."

Rose excelled in everything she tried. "Even in high school I was always one of the better athletics. I was always the top of the class [in school and in college] and socially I could go to class and put on the front. I was always looking for a challenge. I was going to do this and I was going to do that."

Rose is a risk-taker. She steps forward and can make things happen. She is not afraid to try to take a project on and do her best. Others looked up to Rose because she

has that air about her, because she didn't hold back. Rose talked about her cousin telling her how she used Rose as a role model. "Rose, I always looked up to you because of your confidence and you could always walk into a room and hold your head up."

Rose said, "I could click it on when I had to." Some might say this is not strength because that is not how Rose felt inside, but actions show us our real strength.

Movement, to move, is in itself an act of resistance, resisting those inner messages that were not meant to be a part of one's being.

Rose's patterns of fighting her inner demons took her from one addiction to another, the pattern itself a circular road, but again, Rose fought the fight, determined to gain herself back. Rose's story spoke to a fierce determination to get her life on track. At a young age, Rose attended a survivors group and after that, alcohol and drug treatment program. Rose stood out in both the groups. She was young and she was determined. People could see Rose meant business. "[In the survivors group] we talked, we had this rock and we passed it around and we did paper work and identified what sexual abuse did to you and what had happened and I would look forward to going - I would. - I cried a lot there." Rose's attitude was "Okay - So I need this; I'll do it - okay, now I need this. Okay, I'll do that." "I just wanted to deal with it. Just wanted to deal with it and get it out of the way."

Although Rose's attempts at healing and having control over her addictions did not always have the end result that she wanted, the strength to attempt illustrates Rose's abundance of courage. In the Aboriginal community, attempting to make change is not always taken as a positive step. Rose had to endure a lot of joking from her friends and relatives. Only Rose knows that it was no joke. "Just the whole fight again, like not

drinking again like cousin will tease me once in a while, 'isn't it about time you quit drinking again and went straight? Isn't it about time that you do that?"

I suppose Rose always had a vision in mind. "Deep down inside ever since I was young I kinda always wanted to make a difference for something . . . I really wanted to do something or accomplish something. Really be somebody." To be able to keep one's vision in sight is a strength that requires hope. Rose not only allowed herself to dream but she also went after her dreams.

Healing to Rose means, "Dealing with shit. No inhibits. Letting go of things that inhibit you. Praying. Sharing. Being able to identify how you're feeling. Know how you feel. Emotions, feelings, and to be able to express them and not have them come out in a negative way. Not to feel defensive over them." Healing, Rose says, "shows in people's actions."

Rose did not think it was possible for healing to happen for her in her community. "Yeah I think it's possible to heal I don't know how though like I'm thinking okay I'm moving. . . I think that's good. I think I got to go away from here to heal . . . [it is] safer for me to express myself; old patterns that I'm trying to break out of that are here."

For Rose, talking to strangers was safer. Rose is a unique individual, she knows she has potential and ability, and someday Rose is going to win the fight and no more will those inner demons pull her down because she already has half the battle fought; she knows she can. She has already proven that over and over again.

BETSY'S STRENGTHS/GIFTS

Betsy carries her self well. She has that determined walk, a kind of stride that makes others take notice. She has this laugh that brightens up the room. There's a

roughness about Betsy, a kind of rough that other women crave for. Betsy, she carries her pain well.

Betsy's questions haunted me. Her questions were ways of searching to heal. She has no one around her she can turn to. Her own mother is lost in her own pain and struggles for survival. "I don't know like I want to get better but I don't know how to get better? Since I've started talking about this stuff it's almost like I want to stay at home and really . . . pray . . . and I find myself being more lost than ever right now. I don't know, I just can't find the pathway. What do I do next? Like what do you do, like does it just work its way into happening or are you supposed to . . . get really into healing and look it up and follow that straight path? And where does a person learn about it? Okay if I did all that and it still doesn't work though is it ever you know does it ever? It's like opening up all these doors and closing them again . . . sure I cry and I get it out . . . But it's still inside and I don't know if it will ever go away."

It has been said that in order to find one's self, one must not be afraid to lose one's self. Betsy's questions, even unanswered, bring awareness, bring ways of thinking, searching and seeking. This ability to examine and ask questions that may provoke action is a way for Betsy to find avenues that may lead to other questions or maybe even answers. The important thing is that Betsy is asking the questions. This means Betsy is aware that there are choices.

Betsy's strengths show through in her ways of thinking and in her actions. When she confronted one of her abusers (cousin) and his mother (auntie), "Yeah, I talked to him and I said he goes, 'Betsy I don't remember but I'm sorry, and I said (cousin), you and

me both know you can remember and you know you need help and you know no matter what I say or what I do unless you want to get help - I just mostly talked about how he should get help."

When she could not reach her cousin, Betsy called her auntie, in hopes of trying to get some help for her cousin so he would not continue to inflict abuse onto others.

"They react so dumb like my aunt . . . I told her and she is like, yeah, really just like a lost soul on the phone. I just told her there's something wrong with him and I told her exactly what he would say too . . . he is going to say he was drunk and that he doesn't remember but he does because it was hours later."

Betsy also wrote her grandmother a letter once seeking answers of the ways of her father and other relatives. "I wrote my grandmother a letter once, and it was just before she passed away. Why my dad had a sickness and like was she mean to him, did bad things happen to him? Why he would rape people? Why he would beat - on us? Why he would choose do those things? Obviously something had to happen for him to be the person that he is."

These are courageous actions. To be able to do these actions, a person must be a fighter, a resister. In these spoken words and Betsy's actions, there is not only courage but also a raw kind of compassion. As long as Betsy can step away from her own experiences and feel for others, this means she still has the capacity to feel. Betsy's compassion reaches out to those who continually violated her spirit. "My cousin, she used to stay with my grandpa and he used to always do things to her. This one time he tried doing it to me and I just pushed his hand away like I spanked his hand away and I told him that's bad grandpa, don't do that."

Even though Betsy experienced extreme abuse at the hands of her father she spoke of his funeral and her mixed emotions and dreams of making her father proud and of being a daughter to him. "I stood over his casket and - kinda - mad at him because I never got to ask him the things I wanted to ask him. And so I sat there and started asking him. And then after I felt regret because he only seen me like do bad [ly]. Like he never got to see my [child]. He never got to see me grow or anything. Him not seeing me grow to where I wanted to be in life . [Iwas] kinda asking him for things, stuff and whatever and not being able to help him when he was old." There is sorrow in Betsy' words, a sorrow that speaks to the hope Betsy must have had in for a father/daughter relationship, someday.

Betsy showed the ability to be aware. By sharing her story she was given the opportunity to not only speak to her pain but also her fears and her dreams. Betsy shows us strength of standing on your own, determined to keep searching for ways out of the turmoil. Betsy knows what she carries. What pulls her down? But... "But I don't know how to put that (my) anger to put that anger to a good way they say there ways to put it to a good way and I don't know I just haven't had anyone there to show me or confide in."

Alcohol and drug use and misuse have given Betsy many opportunities to give up. Betsy admits that her use of alcohol and drugs is not always for a social reason but more often a way to release some of her pent up emotions. "Just wanting to give up and say to hell with the world. [I] Don't want to live anymore. But I - something just makes me keep going. Cause there have been so many times where I could have [committed suicide]. [I was] doing heroin and it was just like the needle was sitting there and I just

didn't, I just, you know I didn't want to live but I didn't want to die. The biggest thing is, you know, my [child]"

Choosing to live is an act of reaching down inside of oneself to find those last few pebbles of hope. For Betsy hope was tied to her child. Betsy was afraid of parenting her child and so she reached out and shared her vulnerabilities with her child's father. "I was scared, you know, too that I was going to do things to [my child] so I talked to him [child's father] about it. I just needed that reassurance that I was doing good. And he said - he assured me cause - he said, 'Well are you going to do things to him', and I said, well I don't think so but maybe I could you know that's not normal. You're not sure you know if you're doing - and you think they're normal. But I knew really sick things. I didn't know if I was cleaning his diaper too long or maybe I was being abusive in certain things, you're just not sure."

Changing generational patterns is a conscious choice and involves an awareness of when to act. Betsy had to make hard decisions when she became a parent. In order to speak to one's vulnerabilities, one must first have to be aware of them and then courageous to find the words and speak them aloud.

Betsy went to detox when she was 19 years old. Anyone who has been close to the end of his or her rope knows the power in taking that step in reaching out. "When I went to detox - that's where I started to figure out all the problems. I was really heavy into cocaine and I was into crack really bad. Finally I said, 'okay, take me right now. I was so scared. I [had] never ever been anywhere like that before. They wanted me to go to a treatment center. We did this one thing where you have the baseball bats, the styrofoam and we had to like pretend the thing that we were hitting was someone we

hated and I just pretended that it was my dad. I just went crazy on the thing and finally I started crying and hitting it and it felt so good. They said I should ask my dad the things that he did and [that] I couldn't ever ask him. It's not like we sat around the kitchen table and talked. [I] Ask [ed] him why he touched [me] and [why he] used to beat us. Just why he did that stuff that he did to us?"

To Betsy healing is, "Kinda awareness of what your problems are and like what you find that you're lacking in, or what you do too much of. And to really get a - curb on those urges. And curb like what you're doing or what makes you go to do the things that you do as in drinking, and drugs and stuff like that. And um, healing just your mind, just at peace with yourself. Like being totally happy with yourself and everything that you do and just not having - just not being scared, no fear, no anger, no hostility. Being at peace with yourself [and] not being guilty or ashamed. Free from all those things that seems to be on people's shoulders. And if I could ever be just totally free from that I would just, I think I'd be a lot more happy." Her prescription for healing sounds like an opportunity to be herself and to share that with others. Betsy wanted to be free to live her life.

ANGELA'S STRENGTHS/GIFTS

Angela has a quiet disposition about her. She stands tall and walks with her head held high. There's an unspoken gentleness in her eyes. Angela has walked her journey for the most part alone. She shows us compassion for her own journey and those in her life. At the age of sixteen, Angela literally took steps to end her abuse. She used the law to stop what her father was doing to her. That in and of itself is strength, an act of courage. She had estimated her abuse to start when she was three years old.

After thirteen years Angela could not wait any longer for her abuser to take the action she had hoped he would and stop the abuse he started. Ten years later Angela and I are talking--ten years since she took her father to court. She is still waiting, hoping, for the day that he will admit to the abuse and stop the lies. "If ever one day, he ever actually did help himself I wish I could be there to hear it to hear what he has to say."

Angela's willingness to hope has not faded over the years. To hope is to be willing to consider forgiveness. Angela is waiting for validation of what happened to her. For Angela, this 'admittance' means everything. "The thing that still bothers I always want/wish I could have that relationship with my dad. As long as he's alive I'll have that hope."

In the sharing of her story one could see Angela's inner turmoil of wanting to believe that someday, maybe someday, her father would help himself and of letting go so she could live her own life. "I don't know what to do. But I don't know. I don't even want to help him anymore. I don't want to waste my time. That's how I feel. That if he ever tries to help himself I might help him a little bit but . . ." Angela continues to give herself the option of being able to choose, to help her father or not, by keeping the door open for the day he reaches out.

There's a mountain of courage in Angela's words and her actions. "I would always ask him why he does it. Cause every time he tried to do anything I would get mad at him and try and get him to talk about why he does it and stuff." The courage Angela shows in her actions in trying to reach her father shows us how strong the human spirit can be.

Angela wrote to her abuser, her father. These attempts at healing show such a courageous spirit. "I wrote him letters and I told him don't you realize what you did? You must remember cause you weren't drunk all the time. And I said you must know that it's wrong and you can't do that to your children or any children and I just asked him to try and realize what he did and try to help himself."

When Angela's story came out her father's family, for the most part, did not believe her. Angela stood up to them and persisted in what she needed to do for herself. However, there is still a compassion for that family that turned away from her reality of child sexual abuse. "The family too. Well, they kind of give me, some of them give me a hard time but what can you do? Can't change their thinking. I don't know - like they all don't want to believe it. But it must of it - had to of happened in their family so I just think about that every time. They try to deny it obviously they have a problem with it." Angela is able to put her thoughts above the actions of the family and in doing so, she makes sense of their position.

Even through it all, Angela remains strong. This awareness of knowing her truth, knowing when it comes right down to it she is the only one to know her experiences as they happened to her. After all, she says, "cause I know that I am the only one that really knows what happened and how it affected like how I feel, like what my feelings are about it." Although she does acknowledge how she feels, "I really try to not let other people's thinking bother me like cause I know I can't control anybody else thinking. But that's hard too, when your family doesn't believe you. But then I think [that] well does it really matter whether they believe. But it still hurts."

Angela shows us the struggle between honoring one's self and at the same time still being able to be accepted by family. In the Métis community, the ties of family remain strong and important even if that family has violated and turned away from you.

Angela visualizes the day she confronts her father and his family. Angela's courageous thoughts can bring a surge of control over what she determines to be her day to day reality. "I've had thoughts of going to his place and spilling my guts right there in front of him someday out of the blue in hopes that I might change something. I'm scared that it won't too and it will be just another waste of my time." [Do you think it would be a waste of your time?] "Probably not (laugh) every little bit helps. And every time we go to a family [gathering] it always goes through my mind. That it would be a hell of a release if I could just go in front of them all and just tell them exactly what I think. And what I think happened to them and if I'm wrong then you tell me. But I couldn't do that (laughing)."

Angela went on to say, "It's been a long time since I've talked about it (laugh); it feels good to talk. Doesn't feel good to talk about it but it's helping me to talk about it." Although this was the first time Angela told her whole story, in the past she said, "the weird thing is I can do that with strangers...With people I know, I have a hard time." Talking to strangers is safer and much more comfortable because, I could maybe do it with total strangers but I wouldn't want to do it with people I know." I don't know. Probably [strangers] are instantly more understanding; there's no connection between them and the person [abuser]. It is not only a matter of being judged but more who has the power to hurt and humiliate you even more. "Yeah, well even if you're not [judged], who cares? You don't know them they're strangers. They can't hurt you."

Angela felt she was okay because, “I talked to myself lots” and “I got a lot of strength from somewhere. I often wondered why I wasn’t more messed up than I am now, like I think, I can be worse off.. I thought I should be messed up like emotionally or mentally or something I don’t know.” One can hear the doubts piling up in Angela. Doubt block's Angela from accepting and acknowledging her strength's.

Angela's compassion and courage of looking past her father's abuse towards her was incredible. “You know, even if he does change or whatever, the feeling I had they'll never go away how I've seen him. And I'll never trust him again.. But at least the point where he can talk, you know, talk about things. I mean he must need someone to talk to about what happened to him. He never talked to anybody.”

And to balance her words out again, Angela says, “But who knows? I don't ever like to condemn anyone for the things that they do because it's true you don't know, you don't know, really know, unless you've lived that person's life. And I feel [that] if you don't know then I'm not going to even try and judge anything with that person or whatever. Just let them be the way they are going to be and something will come out eventually.”

Angela saw growth in her healing. “I must be getting past it because I don't feel the way I used to feel like I used to feel so alone and frustrated that I couldn't talk to nobody. Scared that I would be forever depressed because of it. But I don't think I'm depressed. I question myself a lot.” This awareness of self comes from being able to critically look at one self.

During the time of our taping, between the days we met, Angela and her father came into contact with each other, and Angela noticed that something was different.

“Dad came over [to the house]. I don’t know. Something changed a little bit. Yeah I didn’t, well, you know how I was saying I like, talk to him like, what would you call it? I don’t know. Feeling kinda more angry at him. Like I didn’t think that I had to be nice to him and not work on this a little bit. But when he came over I felt more angry with him and I didn’t feel bad about it.” Story sharing can bring unknown but welcome powers that can help Angela move towards living her life without the abuse following her around.

Angela did not take the blame for the abuse, as seems to be common with victims of child sexual abuse. “I never thought, I never really ever blamed myself, cause I don’t understand what I would be blaming myself for.”

Angela’s compassion and ability to balance the abuse by her father with the rest of her life shows remarkable strength. When Angela took her father to court, she told her sister, “it’s okay. You don’t have to pick sides. It happened to me. It didn’t happen to you.” Angela says, “I don’t come down on myself a lot. I know I’m a good person.” And what she hopes for the future is, “I want to be cared about. I don’t want to be there just for the fun of it. And I don’t want to be insulted anymore. And I don’t want to be made a fool of.” What Angela is asking for is not anything out of the ordinary. She looks forward to loving and being loved.

RENA’S STRENGTH/GIFTS

Rena’s story tears at your heart. As a young single mother, she shows us glimpses of an overwhelming amount of courage. As I sat and listened to Rena, I wondered at the possibilities for her and her children, given direction and support to live her life to its fullest potential. At the age of eleven Rena found the courage to speak out,

to tell a doctor what was happening to her at home in the hands of her stepfather. “The doctor started asking me questions and then he asked me, have you ever been abused and I told him.” Rena stepped out of the pattern of denial that day and told her story.

Rena doesn't remember how she got to town that time, but the events she will never forget. Rena went alone to the doctor visit. “Probably it was my stomach, my stomach was hurting. I always had stomach problems.”

Rena's story now becomes a part of that history between Social Services and the Aboriginal community. Rena's life could have been different starting that day, had she been listened to, had a Social Worker followed their guiding principle and worked for ‘the best interest of the child’. The doctor sent Rena to Social Services. “I remember going over there;” Rena, eleven years old, told her story. [There was a] “whole bunch of us sitting in that room and they were asking me a bunch of questions. And they must have called my mom.” Rena's mother was a professional in the Aboriginal community. “I don't think I went to town with her that time but they must have called her because I was there for a while [before my mother arrived]. Then my mom was sitting in there and they asked mom, “Well, do you want to talk to her and then we went outside. There was a bunch of reasons she gave for keeping [stepfather] around. And part of it I always remember her saying, ‘well you know what it's like not having a dad around and your younger brother needs his dad’. And she told me, ‘say you're lying because you wanted me and your dad back together’. So I went in there and I told them that and we never talked about it again.”

Picture this small (because Rena is not very big even as an adult) Métis girl sitting in a room full of Social Workers telling her story. Somehow, the word, courageous, does

not give justice to the strength that Rena used that day. This kind of strength lies within Rena, for once, a long time ago as a young girl, she accessed it, only to be denied.

When Rena's truth was denied she turned to writing. "It [writing] makes me feel a little better every time." Rena found her own ways to heal, in that, when she needed to speak she wrote letters. "I'd just write letters to everybody but [then] I'd just throw them in my room, in my drawers and they never get mailed. I think I wasn't meant to send them just...[get it out]."

Writing is a tool that many therapists use for their clients to heal the past. Rena found her ways to get out her struggles through writing. This awareness to know and act upon is a strength that shows a knowing of doing what one needs to do in order to survive.

Over the years, Rena took courageous steps in healing to reach out and ask other relatives if they had experienced sexual abuse. These actions show compassion to think beyond one's self. Rena did not get any answers but little did she know how much of an act of bravery and how healing that act was for herself and her cousins. Even though they were not able to respond to her question, what Rena did was give them an opening to speak if they so chose. This opportunity to share one's story is not something that the women themselves experience; instead, if they did try to speak they were shut down.

"I've asked my cousins about it. I've asked them has grandpa ever bothered you guys."

I believe this reaching out is no less than an act of complete resistance, a political stance within ones family that gives people choice. And when we give others the gift of choice we are in fact becoming being an activist in a most vulnerable way.

Confronting her abuser was an act of bravery, a giant step in facing the abuse. “I blew up one time on him and he has that scared look in his face. Like I just freaked out. You pig! Why did you have to do that to me? I did that, like when I was younger but I never did when I was old like now. I wanna to be able to heal because I don’t know. I know my mom is never going to leave him so there is no hope of that. You know I have to start, like cause she’s my mom and I can’t really. It’s hard to leave.”

Acknowledging to one’s abuser that you know what they did is a step away from the silence. And therefore steps towards freeing oneself from the abusers control.

As a young girl, Rena had to figure out for herself the twisted methods of abusers who prey on young minds. For Rena to not only survive the child sexual abuse, but also to have to withstand the psychological abuse and not totally lose sight of herself is a sure sign of a courageous spirit. “I remember too, when we were living there we had our bedrooms downstairs. I didn’t go to school that day and [stepfather] must of never went to work. I was sleeping downstairs and all of a sudden I felt someone beside me and I woke up and he said, ‘what the hell are you doing in my bed’ and I looked around. I was like, what are you talking [about] I’m in my room not yours. You know I just kinda freaked out I walked. I ran, all the way to my grannies crying, before I wouldn’t even of thought to cause there’s bears. I wouldn’t even of thought to walk to the end of the approach [driveway]. I remember walking all the way over there. I wasn’t even scared I don’t care if the bears kill me.” Rena speaks here to the terror of what she was experiencing at home. Coming face to face with a bear would not be as scary.

Rena’s self-talk became a way for Rena to figure things out. “Sometimes I think I’m going crazy. I’m sitting there arguing with myself. I have to talk myself out of it.

Because everyday that's what I do. There's been times I've tried to commit suicide, even to this day, everyday I think about it. But then I have three [children] now if you're dead there's nobody else that's going to watch them for you as good as you are. . If all of a sudden I cracked up one day who would my kids go to? I know my mom loves [my children] but I don't think I'd want to leave - as long as she's with him."

These are words of a young mother trying to make sense out of her world so she can give her children a life. The reality of young mothers who carry the effects of child sexual abuse and at the same time determined not to pass on the abuse to their children.

Rena also made a conscious choice to not have a relationship. Some may think this is allowing one's fears to rule, but this type of decision-making involves a determination not to continue the patterns. And for Rena to think and act on this is strength that shows what her vulnerabilities are and when one can do that they are in fact changing generational patterns. Fear can be strength used to give one time to look at the whole picture. "I don't want to really, like I do want a relationship but I don't because of fear of stepfathers." Rena is giving her children a gift in this acknowledgment. Using her fear to give herself time to grow and in doing so she is giving her children opportunity to be free from experiences that invaded her young life.

This ability to critique the self, for Rena to look outside herself and see herself as a child, is awareness that therapists use to help their clients put the abuse in perspective the abuse. "I don't know I always think about that. Like why do they start having sex with? I always look at little girls (who would have been six) when that started happening all the time and I think that's so young. She's so small. Why did you know? Why did it have to happen?" Rena found this method of analyses by herself.

Rena, along with her children, seeking /searching /asking those questions that show one's unknowingness and fear. "When you were first mothering your kids, changing pampers, [did] you feel like everyone [was watching]? Like the people who know you've been abused. Do you feel like they're watching you to see if you do it? Does that come to my mind? Like they're so small. Why do that? Why put them through that? You know you wouldn't want them to be as screwed up as you are when they're older. I pray every night like I said, 'Thank-god you gave me three little [children]'. Otherwise I would be dead right now." Rena has so many questions that have run through her mind over and over again with her babies. There have been so many missed opportunities for her to be able to say them out loud. Who would listen?

Rena had not only endured the silencing sentence by her mother, but community members also shunned her. "I had trusted two friends, my friends when I was younger and I told them about it. And they were telling everybody else. And that's when, when they had told, like, their sisters or their aunties or whoever, that's when it went around saying, it was my fault, I was nothing but a slut and. - Everything."

Rena did go to a woman's group in the community for while. She went for the visiting and it was a break away from her children. She said she didn't share but it helped her to go and listen. "I just sat there and listened and thought things in my head. I just sat there and listened to everyone else's problems compared to mine. It was 'oh that happened to me' again in my own head but it was probably okay to listen." For a young girl to go, listen, and take part in a group like this is a powerful step. We learn to heal in many different ways.

Rena expressed her views on whether healing in her community is possible?

“I don’t think so no they’re [community members] all so secretive around here, it’s like a conspiracy or something. I think you have to leave or something cause, well, nobody really supports you in here and even when something does happen [ie women' group] there’s always this one person that complains about it and it has to end.”

These are awareness that will give Rena choice and at the same time provide her with guidelines towards her healing journey. She needs this because to be safe on her journey is important after all the invasions she has experienced.

FOUR STRENGTHS SPEAK TO HEALING

Time and time again, I have been given the opportunity to believe that when we are ready we will be given what we need. At the start of my research, I heard about a book called Strong at The Broken Places. I did not come across the book until I was in the final stages of writing this chapter. Stanford’s work confirmed what the women’s stories spoke to,

Since 1973 I have worked with victims and survivors of sexual violence while my work has been rewarding, I have been frustrated by the scarcity of hope that traditional psychological theories have to offer survivors of abuse. Most of the existing literature and the assumptions behind much clinical practice seem to suggest that my clients’ rough start in life had forever doomed them to be ‘damaged goods (Stanford, 1990, xiii).

The women in this research project, and it is my guess there are a lot more out there, show us that indeed they are strong at the broken places. Of the people Stanford studied she writes, “They have transformed their childhoods into adult hoods that are rich with strength, courage, compassion, wisdom, humour and impressive self-awareness (xviii).”

The women in this study have showed us their strengths; however, I have recognized four strengths that seem to be common throughout their stories: courage, awareness, hope and compassion. It is through these four strengths that I believe these

women showed their strengths. This strength could show how one's strengths/gifts could become acknowledged as a way of healing the experience of childhood sexual abuse.

Acknowledging one's own strength/gifts, coming to know them, I believe can move one from a place of victim to survivor and beyond, a place of coming into our own, or as I have come to understand it, 'coming home.'

It is possible not to be responsible for problems yet still to be responsible for it's solution. Above all. It is the sense of personal responsibility, self-awareness and belief in choices and courage that distinguishes survivors who have fared well in life in spite of the trauma of their childhoods (Stanford,1990, p.17).

I tribute my words in this next section to the *real* Rose, the *real* Betsy, the *real* Angela, and the *real* Rena. You have inspired my soul with your openness and willingness to share your story. Your stories will reach the hearts of other women; and they too will step forward to speak. And so...the journey continues.

COURAGE

“Traditionally, stories and storytelling were used ... to teach values, beliefs, morals, history, and life skills (Thomas, 2000, p.21).” It was an act of courage when eleven year old Rena got a ride to town and went and talked to the doctor. Angela stayed with her father, continuing to confront him, begging him to please be a father; until she had to decide at sixteen years old what was best for her and she took her father to court.

The ability to find ways to speak, to resist, to search, to seek when you are a child of sexual abuse, is a courageous act. Courage is “the attitude of facing and dealing with anything recognized as dangerous, difficult, or painful, instead of withdrawing from it;” (Webster's, 1996, p.318). This call to *act* must be understood from survivor moccasins and indeed be acknowledged as a place on the healing journey.

Duck, Ironstar, and Ricks in Healing the community, provide us with a description of the interconnectedness of the Aboriginal communities. This brings to light the courage it takes to stand up and speak.

The self is never separate from the whole” means there is no me or you, us or them, or this or that...The understanding of this definition of self and other is critical to understanding a principal rule for family living: “Keep the family together , no matter what.” When this rule is considered in light of the above connection between self and other, the rule for keeping the family together takes on greater significance. Keeping the family together means keeping the community together. Therefore to address the family is to address the community (1997, p.6).

Storytelling is an ancient practice that requires courage to act upon. Courage is walking the walk.

AWARENESS /AN INNER KNOWING

Awareness brings to light the moral and ethical obligation's people have to one another, to themselves and their environment. *Aware* is a “knowing or realizing; conscious; informed” and *Knowing* is “having knowledge or information.” We know the way our mothers knew and our grandmothers and so forth.

Rose, at twelve years old, stared down her abuser. She knew that what he had done to her was not right and she was going to let him know that. Betsy wrote her grandmother asking for answers that would help her to understand the family history and the connection to her own childhood inflictions.

Becoming aware and knowing can be an incredible weight to live with at any age. I remember when my girl was in grade four; she came to me in tears because in school ‘the girls’ were making fun of this other girl, who was a ‘big bone girl’. My girl had joined with the crowd and walked away from the girl who was not allowed to be a part of the ‘in-crowd’. At the young age of nine she had the responsibility of *knowing*; she was

aware. Her words that day were hard to listen to, she said, “Why do I have to *know* how that girl felt? I do not want to know I just want to be able to be like everyone else.”

Being true to your own traditional teachings is not always a easy walk but that day my girl learnt a valuable lesson in being true to yourself.

The younger one becomes *aware* the harder the path is to walk because of the interconnectedness of self, family and community. But also the younger you are the earlier you can see for yourself that there are choices to be decided on. I believe that everyone is given the opportunities, teachable moments, to increase awareness.

In the midst of writing this thesis I became a Kokum, and once again I am reminded daily of the many teachable moments in a child's life. I became conscious of 'being a teacher' when shortly after I turned twenty-one I became a mother. And then I had my second daughter less then two years later. The 'inner knowing' of mothering came from ancient teachings. I felt privileged to know.

HOPE

Hope is “a feeling that what is wanted will happen; desire accompanied by expectation” (Webster's, p.650). Angela kept that dream alive of someday her father being a 'real father' for her. Rena gave others in her family hope by standing up for them and becoming their protector. I believe that as long as one can hope then they are not selling themselves out; rather, they are acknowledging that ‘normality.’

Hope is getting out of bed everyday (or almost), continuing the struggle, not giving up or falling into hopelessness. To ‘hope’ is to believe in tomorrow; therefore making a conscious decision to do what needs to be done. I struggled with trying to

define in words how 'hope' is strength and not just a concept. Hope is a way to build bridges towards obtaining entry into providing a better life.

When I look to the women's stories I explain their storytelling as a spiritual movement. Hope gives recognition to believing in the spirit. When times are tough, and in being a mother and a Kokum I turn to viewing the glass as being half full, not half empty. In my work with Aboriginal women I have been inspired by the 'hope' that is displayed by the women in our communities. Women who 'in-spite of' continue to provide a better life for their children and grandchildren.

COMPASSION

To have compassion means that one still can hear from their heart. To be compassionate is a strength that can contribute to self-healing. As long as one can step away from their own pain and feel for others, this means they still feel. Betsy and Angela showed compassion for not only others around them (family) but also for their abusers. They looked beyond their own experiences to that of their abusers. This is a kind of healing that is inclusive it encompasses a way of thinking and being.

Compassion allows us to be human. Compassion is "sorrow for the sufferings or trouble of another or others, accompanied by an urge to help." (p.284) Sure it opens one up to be hurt but it also opens one up to give and receive from others. The compassion that spoke through the words of the women is a gift that needs nourishment and care. Compassion in the mist of child sexual violation speaks to an incredible strength.

SUMMARY

The women gave us a picture of what a fighting spirit looks like. A challenger-- someone who is cut down, again and again, but finds within those gifts that were meant to be theirs and they stand in spite of the path that has been inflicted upon them. One of the gifts the women used was humour to tell their story. They used humour as a defense to hide feelings, they used humour as a release to show their uncertainty in giving speaking to their experience, and they used humour to show their character of women who had learned to laugh anyway.

Each of the women spoke to their strengths, their gifts, in their own way. Only on rare occasion did they ever name it as strength. But more often, the strength was an action that went unidentified as a way of acknowledging progress or process in healing. As we have said, healing is active; it is movement. It triggers us to either think about something in a new way or to take action. How one moves and what those movements mean is an individual journey.

In A Recognition of Being, reconstructing native womanhood, Kim Anderson speaks to resistance, reclaiming, constructing and action as steps for Aboriginal women, rural and/or urban living, to define who they are and where they are going. In trying to understand Anderson's reconstructing of Aboriginal women, I saw it in relationship to helping women to come to terms with their strengths/gifts in providing a positive Aboriginal identity. Healing is not outside of us; healing is a chosen path; healing is inclusive of living your life. Anderson spoke with Maria Campbell,

If we are going to talk about homeland and coming home, we have to provide a place that is warm, where our children are safe and our grandchildren are safe. For me, that is where it starts. Never mind getting a drum and having a drumming ceremony. First, come home

and make porridge for the babies; the drumming and ceremonies will follow (p.162).

The power of acknowledging the strengths of women, needs to start with a clear picture of how everyday practices, like feeding the children, need to be given voice to.

This reminds me of my niece who had been away from our home community and was examining her Métis roots. One day she said to me, “Auntie, can you teach me about being a Métis woman.” I said, “Yes, of course I will.” She got all excited and said, “When can we start?” “Well,” I said trying my best to look like I was really contemplating something really abstract, “why not start right now.” Well she was so excited. We happened to be at my mom’s place and I said okay here is your first lesson. Well by now my niece is sitting on the edge of the chair waiting for her Auntie to give the key to being a Métis woman. I said, “Go help your grandmother with dishes.” My niece said, “No, Auntie. I am serious.” I said, “So am I. Now get off your butt and go help with dishes.” In listening to the women’s stories and watching my niece try to figure out what doing the dishes had to do with being Métis, I am once again amazed at how important it is that we acknowledge women’s strength/gifts in order to heal ourselves, our families and our communities.

Stanford (1990) speaks to why an abused person needs to be supported and even those tiny, tiny steps acknowledged when one is walking their journey towards ‘coming home’. “All human beings, traumatized as children or not, are ‘checkerboards of strengths and weakness.’ Perhaps with trauma the strengths are a little stronger and the weakness a little weaker.” The women in this study can be reassured that they have indeed taken steps towards acknowledging their own strengths/gifts. Healing has begun.

CHAPTER SIX MY DREAMS AND TEACHINGS

My vision with this research project was to bring to light how child sexual abuse has affected the lives of Métis women. I wanted to address healing for a Métis woman. I wanted to bring to textual knowledge how healing is interconnected to family and community. Further, I wanted to know how Métis women were healing from child sexual abuse.

The stories taught me that healing is not separate from family or community when that woman's life has been integrated and woven into the seams of the community since childhood. The teachings have been that a Métis woman healing from child sexual abuse does not walk that journey alone. It makes more sense that a Métis woman living with the effects of child sexual abuse who is searching for ways to heal, yet still belong to family and community, turns to her strengths/gifts to bring her healing into action.

From this perspective I have learned to be more hopeful when it comes to individual healing because I have come to realize I need to see Métis women from a Métis community who are trying to heal from child sexual abuse in a much broader context. I have learned to be a lot more patient and understanding, a healthier advocate of women.

I realized who we are as Métis women affects our healing journeys. I understand, without anger, the reaction of family members to my writing about child sexual abuse because in naming who I am in my work, my story, I am indirectly naming them.

There is that call to loyalty that conflicts with the need to speak out. How can one ever truly find a comfortable place, one without the other means, separation and disconnectedness from oneself? The elders say to truly live the teachings we need to be

true to ourselves but also remember we are not separate from our parents, their parents, and generations to come.

The process of writing this thesis has evolved around prayer. I have learned that without prayer the division between loyalty and speaking out becomes separate lonely roads. With prayer, the journey is guided through the rough times. I know that without prayer (which demands patience) this thesis would not reach completion in an honorable way. And maybe I would not have been able to find my way home.

The process of writing this thesis has taught me the meaning of listening. Listening is humbling one's self. Listening is the action of being honorable. To be honorable is to be virtuous. Before I could begin to sit and analyze the data, I spent a few months listening. I prayed a lot. I walked for hours and I also slept quite a bit. I had to trust that I was listening and I had to come to know that one listens in many different ways. Listening became a way of knowing the women's stories from a holistic point of view.

A way of a spiritual journey is learning the art of listening. Listening is not only hearing with your ears but with your whole being. To listen means hearing with your eyes, spirit, and heart. Listening becomes a way of being spiritual, being on your journey, and when you listen, the signs come that you are on the right path. I had a lot of signs each step of the way but the most valuable sign for me came in mid-March, the time when the thesis was forming chapters and also a time when I was questioning myself.

I had this dream: My brother Chilawee brought me a message that inspired me in my writing. My brother passed away in March 1981 around the same time of the year I had this dream. This is also the time of the year of his birthday. He would have been 37

years old. In my dream, he was talking to me about my thesis. He was telling me that he knew I would write about what I was writing about. He repeated this a couple times. I was surprised and said, "Really, you knew?" (We never talked about child sexual abuse; we never talked about anything like what I talk and write about today.) I was telling him about the work and writing about Métis women and he asked me if our sister and our cousin would be able to read it because he said they really need to read something like this and he repeated this a couple times. I was speechless. It meant so much that he would say that about these young women. It meant so much that he knew what they needed in their lives. I knew when I woke up that I would remember this dream that it was not one of those dreams one forgets. A few days later, I was telling my girl the dream and she said, "Well mom, I guess you know that you are doing the right thing, eh." The point of adding this dream to what I have been learning is that when we are open to receiving the signs, the messages come.

My work has been around guidance and prayer. I have to believe that I was given this work to do otherwise the women would not have come forward when they did. Otherwise, I would not have been ready for this place of honor that I feel has been given to me.

The process of this research project has time and time again brought me back to looking in the mirror and really coming to know who I was in relation to my child sexual abuse experiences. I always knew I was a strong person, I just never felt it in my heart, in my body, in my being before. Therefore, I used this strength as a way of staying tough. This work has softened my strengths and made me more vulnerable, more real with myself and with others.

If I have come to understand anything during the writing of this thesis, it is that family and community generational abuse is a hard reality to accept. We as child sexual abuse survivors cannot continue “Kiyam”. I have felt first-hand what this really means in terms of breaking the silence of child sexual abuse. I am first and foremost, a Métis woman, and I was raised with the value of belonging and protecting the ‘family.’ My parents and my grandparents have their identities rooted in the Métis way of life.

I cannot say exactly how my family members (in speaking about family I am referring to not only my immediate family but also my extended family) feel about my speaking out because no one has directly spoken to me. Through family members I have heard and felt the messages. How does one speak to these ‘messages’ and still remain respectful? I have been searching for ways to address ‘Kiyam’ without becoming alienated from family and community. My only conclusion has been ‘time.’ I have been patient and instead of running from family and community, I have stayed to allow those who are important to me to see that in speaking out, I still remain myself. All I can offer is not to become ‘better than’ but remain true to my identity, in spite of.

The hurt I have felt from the sting of the messages has not destroyed my persistence in addressing, “No More Kiyams.” My sister’s message has been to leave the past in the past. It is done, therefore, why continue to bring it up. I believe my mother has struggled the most. In my addressing ‘Kiyam’, my mother must feel that I will be trying to prove the wrongs she did by not protecting me as a child. As her daughter, how can I speak out without causing her to feel like she failed me? This thesis is my way of acknowledging respect for my parents. Addressing ‘Kiyam’ is honoring family and community. Addressing ‘Kiyam’ is strengthening family values and traditions.

Addressing 'Kiyam' is giving future generations an opportunity to honor the past generations and to carry the teachings of yesterday into tomorrow.

Silence and silencing generations of people do not bring honor and respect for the past or the future. One day the words to name this process came to me: 'a pattern of denial.' We as a people who have lived in surroundings that deny the realities of life, have learned how to deny that which is real, that which hurts, that which causes disruptions. Maybe by writing these words, maybe as individual and community members, we can consciously work towards a better life for ourselves so the generations to come can have a healthy spirit from which to start their lives.

Holistic healing - self, family and community - need to be addressed when Aboriginal people are trying to walk that healing journey. Healing should not be an assault on the body, mind or spirit. When I started this work, I could tell you what healing was not. It is not done in isolation. There is no formula. I could tell you that healing is a process but I couldn't explain ALL it meant to me. I did not have the words to talk about healing as a spiritual journey.

Healing is a spiritual journey. Healing is an emotional journey. Healing is a mental journey. Healing is a physical journey. I can now say this is what I have learned from the women's stories. I say this because of their individual journeys, their strengths and their wisdom. This precious gift was given to me by listening and learning from these four women. I tried to heal in isolation. I tried to heal away from my family. As I look back now what must have kept me from totally disregarding my environment was the fact that my community, my roots was in my blood.

The teachings from my 'roots' had a strong hold and I always wanted to be able to

come home at the end of the day. In other words, I could not walk a spiritual journey with only a part of myself. Yes, I learnt from Rose, Betsy, Angela and Rena that healing is inclusive of one's environment. This knowledge has softened me. I am more compassionate of where people are in their lives.

September 1996 a year and a half before I started writing I wrote these thoughts,

- I wanted to help young women to unblock barriers of various abuses so they could live their lives.
- I wanted to help young women prove to all their abusers and teachers who labeled them, put them down, who helped to strengthen their doubts of their availabilities and abilities, that they are strong.
- I wanted the women to break new ground for those yet to come.
- I wanted to see strong young women coming from a place of hope, of love for one another, and community.
- I wanted them to become responsible for the survival of a people--to carry on the communities' healthy traditions.
- I wanted them to have a chance to be all they could be.
- I wanted them to shed their ghosts.
- I wanted to give something back.
- I wanted the effects of colonization, racism, sexism, and generational abuses to be acknowledged and put into context within the young women's lives.
- I wanted something tangible; something that could be made use of.
- I wanted to tell the stories so others could hear.
- I wanted to do justice to the women, their stories, their journeys, their pain and

suffering.

- I wanted to honor Métis women in the community, the ones who have been down and gotten up again and again.
- I wanted to honor the community aspect of being Métis.

At the end of this amazing journey of gathering and writing the women's stories, I am more compassionate and patient when I think about healing. I have come to understand the many hurdles and obstacles that confront a Métis woman addressing child sexual abuse. Therefore, I am more humble.

Since hearing the women's stories I have found myself defending young women in the communities from the scorns of gossip of their actions. I defend because no one else knows what lies in their past. I defend because we are much more than our actions of today. I defend because I know that today we still live in an environment where our strengths/gifts go unnoticed.

After listening to the women's stories I have come to understand just how important it is to acknowledge strengths and gifts in order for people to take up healing. Because like Bambra says "healing is no trifling matter. A lot of weight when you're well (1980)." As a Métis woman, I understand the weight of walking a healing path and maintaining one's place in Métis roots.

AND SO...

And so . . . we come to that crossroad: a place where "those who share a common experience do not necessarily react in the same way. But if we study and discuss only the most negative outcomes, we will be blind to any other possibilities (Stanford, 1990, p.13)." Stanford (1990) speaks to what this thesis, the women's and my own story, has

been all about. The process has been guided and directed by that all mighty being, Great Spirit, God. How I know this to be true is the signs that I have felt, seen and experienced along the way: those times when the writing was difficult, the stories over took me, or I had decided I could not handle what completing this thesis would signify.

Now, at the end of this process I have no choice but to look back and feel an overwhelming sense of pride. I am proud of the women for stepping forward and speaking their experiences. I am proud of the strength they have shown in addressing No More Kiyams.

In looking back over the last few years I need to speak to my experience of honouring the process of this writing. How many years ago did I come 'home' from Victoria to put the final touches on my thesis? And then life happened. We built a log home that first summer – today I find my log cabin becoming my home. Coming home.

'Don't push river'. Today, I know that 'doing research' as an Aboriginal person means respecting without question the process. I believe that taking the time to allow my family to ask when they wanted to ask about my thesis and not pushing them to accept or respect my work has made my work honorable in the eyes of the people that I call my family. I have had family, this past summer; begin to ask more questions about my thesis. I am grateful and hopeful that time has provided me with opportunity to complete my educational requirements for a Masters degree and to remain a part of my family and the larger Aboriginal community.

Through this process what 'speaking out' means has humbled me. I have been reminded how vulnerable the actions of speaking out, standing up and taking back one's life is. I become amazed at the words in this thesis when I go back to reread. I have

come to understand the inner changes that thinking of reaching out, sharing a few moments with someone who will be there for us can mean. I am reminded, also, just how powerful this is or can be for someone who has been contained in silence.

Somewhere I believe I have read these lines or heard them from someone “let the story tell itself” and that is really, where this work has brought me. A child sexual abuse story is inclusive of everything in our lives. To heal from the experience of child sexual abuse we must begin to share our story, parts or in whole, but begin and have faith that the story will indeed tell itself.

The women in this study shared with me their stories and from their words, as you have read their stories spoke to so many journeys in their lives. Their stories came alive through their words. And I am filled with humility that I was able to give back their story in a way that will (hopefully) bring to them ways to heal where they are.

I think there is a place, here, in this writing at the end for the ‘what ifs’. I have been wondering about the ‘what ifs’ since I have listened to the women’s stories.

- What if Rose had let her abuser have the words that were rolling around inside of her when she used to see him in the community?
- What if Betsy had heard back from her grandmother about why her dad was the way he was?
- What if Angela’s father had stood up in that courthouse, acknowledged his mistakes, and honored Angela by apologizing for the pain he had put her through?
- What if when Rena went to town that day and spoke to the social worker, what if she had been heard and what if her mother had validated her story?

- What if my mom had not sent me a hundred dollars as she did when I told her about the abuse, what if she had reached out to me and we shared with one another?
- What if.

We cannot answer these questions, today. But we can learn from them. There is a powerful message in these ‘what ifs’, a message I believe that can move one away from blame and pain to understanding the impact of generational abuses. Generational abuse stops the process of healing. It keeps people divided. It keeps the lock on silence. And today, for a Métis woman, generational abuses flows through individuals and families, impacting whole communities. hooks (1990) brings to light what I cannot say,

Those who dominate and oppress us benefit most when we have nothing to give our own, when they have so taken from us our dignity our humanness that we have nothing left, no ‘homeplace’ where we can recover ourselves (hooks, 1990, p.43).

The effects of child sexual abuse in this thesis spoke to generational abuse. Because we are talking about them as ‘effects’ of the experience is a message in itself. Once victims of child sexual abuse can share this vulnerability, they can begin to piece together the whole picture, which includes accepting and acknowledging their strengths/gifts. Sharing the effects allows us to grieve, to let go, to address No More Kiyams. This thesis, the telling of story, is breaking down that door on generational abuse and coming home.

The moccasin telegraph in the Aboriginal community (word of mouth) is a powerful messenger. Somehow though, it seems to always be associated with ‘gossip’. Bad news, they say, travels like wild fire. I have come to understand this form of

communication as a powerful tool that gives people opportunity to think and to act, if they so choose. I have had so many people come up to me since I have started to write this work and ask “What is it you’re writing about?” I have been told many stories just in the asking. People want to read this work; if not for themselves, for others they know. The healing has begun. The stories are finding ways to speak.

There is a change in the wind, in the community, the women are reaching inside and gathering strength. Yes, indeed a change is coming. The women in the Aboriginal communities have been working toward standing firmly on the ground and the time is nearing that their voice will follow. I see it in my home community.

And so I sit here among my family and my community, here where once years ago I was stripped of innocence. And only now, through the listening to the other women and the retelling of my own story, do I feel a freedom. I was just thinking of this not long ago, of how something was different about me. And now I know it is that feeling that used to follow me around. I believe I referred to it as ‘the back of the bus feeling’. Anyway, I seemed to have shed it somewhere. I am not always fighting that voice that fights to keep me down. I am. I am.

When others read this thesis, my dream would be that they too would begin to tell their story in whatever ways that means. The telling of a story is not just words. It may take on many different forms of communication: a poem (as you have seen here in this work), a picture, a project that brings on healing, and a hobby. The point is that it doesn’t matter what as long as the storyteller knows the meaning of the life behind the story.

There is much, yet, to talk about. But maybe those words are for another time and place and maybe a different form of talking. I bought this book a couple weeks ago by a

black author I had not read before. I even tried not to buy it. I picked it up because of the colors and the title, Yesterday, I Cried (1998) by Iyanla Vanzant. Then I put it back on the shelf and tried to look at other books but my eyes kept going back to that book. So I gave in and bought it. Later I was asking a very good friend, mentor teacher, “Cora, how does a person come to know the difference between doubts/insecurities and intuition/spiritual guidance.” Sometimes I get so frustrated with myself for just not listening to my body. But anyway, my friend told me a story to help me to think and of course, it made sense. And I came away thinking ‘don’t push the river’. It will come. Be gentle with yourself. That is a powerful message in healing, in coming to accept one’s strengths and gifts. Be gentle with yourself. Acknowledge the little things. They will take you a long way on those days when it feels you have not learnt a thing.

Anyway, back to the book, Iyanla (I feel I can call her by her first name because she has opened her life for me to learn from) wrote this poem that has given me inspiration to be.

Yesterday, I cried.

I came home, went straight to my room, sat on the edge of my bed,
kicked off my shoes, unhooked my bra,
and I had myself a good cry.

I’m telling you,

I cried until my nose was running all over the silk blouse I got on sale.

I cried until my ears were hot.

I cried until my head was hurting so bad

that I could hardly see the soiled tissues lying on

the floor at my feet.

I want you to understand,

I had myself a really good cry yesterday.

Yesterday, I cried,

for all the days that I was too busy, or too tired, or too mad to cry.

I cried for all the days, and all the ways,

and all the times I had dishonored, disrespected, and

disconnected my Self from myself,

only to have it reflected back to me in the ways others did to me

the same things I had already done to myself.

I cried for all the things I had given, only to have them stolen;

for all the things I had asked for that had yet to show up;

for all the things I had accomplished, only to give them

away, to people in circumstances,

which left me feeling empty, battered and plain old used.

I cried because there really does come a time when the only thing left

for you to do is cry.

Yesterday, I cried.

I cried because little boys get left by their daddies;

and little girls get forgotten by their mommies;

and daddies don't know what to do, so they leave;

and mommies get left, so they get mad.

I cried because I had a little boy, and because I was a little girl, and

because I was a mommy who didn't know what to do, and
because I wanted my daddy to be there for me so badly until I ached.

Yesterday, I cried.

I cried because I hurt. I cried because I was hurt.

I cried because hurt had no place to go
except deeper into the pain that caused it in the first place,
and when it gets there, the hurt wakes you up.

I cried because it was too late. I cried because it was time.

I cried because my soul knew that I didn't know
that my soul knew everything I needed to know.

I cried a soulful cry yesterday, and it felt so good.

It felt so very, very bad.

In the midst of my crying, I felt freedom coming,

Because

Yesterday, I cried

with an agenda (Vanzant, 1998).

I want to end this work with an honor to our mothers, the women in our lives who have taken the blunt of our experiences and have had to carry that reality, somehow in their own lives. I say this knowing that not all mothers know of the realities of their daughters, nor do all mothers accept those realities, even though I have come to understand the strength of mothers in the Métis community. The women, who have tried to give something 'different' to their children. I believe that is a part of who we are: we are always trying to give the next generation a better life than our own. I am not only

speaking here for myself and the women in this thesis but also for all the other mothers out there in Aboriginal communities who have raised or are raising daughters, in spite of their own realities. And so it becomes a responsibility of the daughters to continue to break the patterns and the silences. “No More Kiyams.”

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