

Healing the Way Home:
An Autoethnographic Exploration of the Importance of Homecoming for a Haida Adoptee
by

Treena Decker

B.S.W., University of Victoria, 2017

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We acknowledge and respect the Ləkʷəŋən (Songhees and Esquimalt) Peoples on whose territory the university stands, and the Ləkʷəŋən and W̱SÁNEĆ Peoples whose historical relationships with the land continue to this day.

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Healing the Way Home

Abstract

A vision to walk on a healing homecoming, community building journey with other Haida adoptees, their families, and communities, became a solo journey through the COVID 19 pandemic. Building relationship became a self-transformational process. Coming of age without connection to Indigenous community or culture, I sought to identify and highlight themes and narratives along my homecoming journey as a Haida adoptee that would help ease the way home for others. To acknowledge and address existing power imbalances, a complimentary, theoretical framework was used that blends anti-oppressive and feminist theories, and understands people are experts in their own lived experience. Through this journey, I explored a variety of methodologies designed to embrace Indigenous ways of knowing and being while embracing oral traditions. Knowledge gathering combined storytelling and arts-based research techniques using both performative inquiry and Ethnotheatre were used to create a path to interact with the data through performance and witnessing. I sought to answer the research question; How do Haida birth families and communities create successful adoptee homecoming experiences? My findings were that adoptee homecoming can be complex, messy and that it was essential for my own healing that I find my way home to self before the work of building relationships with my Haida family and community could continue

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Dedication

This research gathering journey would not have been possible without the support of the village(s) it has taken to raise this child. For all the people who have walked on this journey with me, I hold so much gratitude to each of you for gift of your presence, guidance, love, and support. There are a few people that I want to ensure that I take a moment to acknowledge by name.

To my parents and siblings (adoptive and biological): Thank you for the gifts of knowledge that I carry with me always from everything we have shared together (DNA, stories, tears, laughter, etc.). I am on this healing path because of all of you and I know that I bring a better version of myself to the world having tended to those parts of myself that needed to be seen and heard. I am grateful for every conversation that has brought me to this work and look forward to many more as we continue to heal the way home together.

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For other Haida adoptees: I hope your journey home is guided by kindness and that your fear, while understandable, doesn’t stop you. I am grateful for the gift of the advice that I received when I sat with the Hereditary Chiefs Council. They suggested that if I am ever afraid of making a mistake to start the conversation by saying that “I am new and just learning” and be open to learning even through mistakes.

Healing the Way Home

Motivation

During the height of the sixties scoop, it is estimated that over 20,000 Indigenous infants and children were taken from their Indigenous families and adopted or fostered into transracial families where they grew up way from culture (Sinclair, 2009, 2016; Wright Cardinal, 2016, 2017). These children are now adults who are middle aged and older and may be now trying to reconnect to their roots as part of their healing journey. Connection to the land and to culture is essential to holistic well-being for Indigenous people (Anderson, 2001; Archibald, 2008; Baskin, 2016; Carrière, 2008; Collison, 2017; Davidson & Davidson, 2018; Gosek, 2017; Hatch, 2017; Horn-Miller, 2016; Kovach, 2009; Krmpotich, 2010; R. Morriseau, *personal communication*, March 6, 2019; Pedri-Spade, 2016; Russell, 2012; Sinclair, et al. 2009; Wilson, 2008). For those who grew up without being able to connect to ceremony and culture finding their way home can be fraught with pain, awkwardness, and experiences of lateral violence. To minimize these negative experiences for others, and heal them for myself, my initial thesis research as proposed was to engage with Haida Nation adoptees, to serve as a witness to their lived experiences with reconnection, and to weave our shared experiences together to create a gentler path home for those who have not yet experienced reconnection. I sought to answer the research question of how Haida birth families and communities can create successful homecoming experiences for adoptees. Originally envisioned to be a community building, healing journey with other adoptees, this journey transformed due to COVID 19 restrictions. This knowledge gathering journey also recognized that Indigenous research must meet the needs of the community involved, so after discussions with the Council of the Haida Nation Research Committee the scope of my

knowledge gathering journey changed to minimize the impact on Haida birth family members and/or communities and provide direction for adoptees. I embarked on a personal healing and renewed homecoming journey for myself as a Haida adoptee, using an ethnographic approach that I hope may ease the way home for others in the future. This thesis paper includes a companion paper to the script that is included in my Methodology section and contains references to both the original proposed methodology, the impact of the changed approach, and the end results of the knowledge gathering.

Finding Our Common Language

For the purposes of moving together on this knowledge journey, I want to make sure that we are speaking a common language to create a shared understanding of how we will walk together, and forge our relationship through this paper (Adams, et. al. 2015; Graham, 2017). To create our shared understanding, several terms are defined below, and I also invite you to understand that I will use storytelling to acknowledge our relationality with each other and with the knowledge shared (Adams, et. al., 2015, Wilson and Hughes, 2019).

- The term knowledge gathering journey will be used interchangeably with research and is my preferred term as it reflects the nature and intent of the journey.
- First Nations, Indigenous and Aboriginal will be used interchangeably to acknowledge those who identify as being of Indigenous heritage, and includes:
 - status and non-status 'Indians'
 - Inuit
 - Metis, and/or

- those of mixed Indigenous heritage
- The term settler will refer to those who are not Indigenous to Canada as described above.
- It is important to note that for the purpose of this knowledge gathering the terms birth and biological will be used interchangeably to describe those who are genetically connected through DNA.
- This research will reference the term Indigenous Community in reference to the community that the biological family of the adoptee is connected to or with.
- The term “Sixties Scoop” will define the time during the 1960’s to the 1980’s when Indigenous children were being removed from their families in large numbers and placed into primarily white foster homes or adoptive families.
- Transracial or Transnational adoption will be used interchangeably to identify adoptions where children of Indigenous heritage were placed into non-Indigenous settler homes of primarily white, middle-class families.
- Closed adoption will be used to describe adoptions where birth records and related information was sealed by the government and withheld from members of the triad (adoptee, birth parents and adoptive parents).
- The term pretendian is defined in the report produced by the National Indigenous Identity Forum (NIFF) as “[a] person who falsely claims to have Indigenous ancestry, who fakes an Indigenous identity, or who digs up an old ancestor from hundreds of years ago to proclaim themselves as Indigenous” (NIFF, 2022, 4). The term race-

shifting is used to indicate someone who's racial identity shifts to benefit them in some way.

- The term homecoming is used to identify the journey of reconnection to birth family and the community from which those families come from; for the purposes of this knowledge gathering journey, it also includes Haida culture and ceremony.

Sharing myself with you

To ensure transparency and to approach this research in a good way, with a good heart, it is essential to share my social location, as well as situate my knowledge and lived experience as the entry point for sharing my research journey. I am a CIS gendered, woman of mixed Haida and settler heritage. I was adopted at birth and raised without connection to Haida culture and community. I am white passing, have a post secondary education and am able-bodied. I recognize the privilege that I experienced because of this positionality. My hope was to enhance my connection with my Haida birth family, my ancestors, my Haida community of Skidegate, and with myself because of this research (Kovach, 2009; Wilson, 2008). I acknowledge the responsibility I had to honour my ancestors, my communities, and all these relationships while engaging in all aspects of this research. I bring my own voice as both an insider and an outsider to the topic (Anderson, 2001; Cargo, et al., 2011; Carrière, 2008; Kovach, 2009; Zhao, 2016). I am insider as an Indigenous adoptee raised in a white, middle-class home and an outsider because I walk in both worlds without having full connection to either. This precarious positionality created the potential for engaging in this work with two-eyed seeing (Marshall, Marshall, & Bartlett, 2012, 2015) both helped and hindered my journey. As an Indigenous researcher, it was imperative that I started with my relationship to self (Anderson, 2001; Baskin, 2005, 2016; Cargo, et al., 2011; Carrière, 2008,

2010; Collison, 2017; Davidson & Davidson, 2018; Episkenew, 2009; Hatch, 2017; Hayden Taylor, 1998, 2010; Horn-Miller (2015); Gomes, Young Leon & Brown, 2013; Gosek, 2017; Kovach, 2009; McIntosh, 1988; Wilson, 2008). My English name is Treena Decker. I was adopted by Matriarch Margaret Adkins into the Yahlgulaanas Clan in 2017, and was honoured with the Haida name Yahlskaanii, which translates to Raven's Auntie or the Big Auntie who looks after everyone including Raven. I was born on May 6, 1970, to a 19-year-old woman of settler heritage who had spent the last trimester of her pregnancy at an unwed mother's home. My birth father was 18 years old and of mixed Haida and settler heritage. Together, they decided that they were not ready to have a child and so I was surrendered for adoption at birth.

My adoptive parents are of settler heritage; they were in their early thirties and had a biological child who was two and a half years old when I was born. I grew up experiencing privilege as a white-passing child in their middle-class home. From my adoptive parents I learned compassion, generosity, the importance of connecting to nature and the gift of embracing my creativity. From my extended family and society, I learned unintended lessons about what it meant to be adopted and Indigenous in a society that continues to engage in Eurocentric supremacy myths. It has taken personal soul searching to discover that I had recently started to engage in only telling my biological social location story, which is only half of my lived experience. The omission of my story of privilege may have been an attempt to "fit in" better with my birth family. Whatever the reason, I have now stopped because it hurts my heart. My adoptive family and lived experiences have nurtured my spirit and connected me to the values which guide everything that I do. My desire to belong and fit in is echoed by other adoptees (Carrière, 2008, 2010; Haenga-Collins & Gibbs, 2015; Hatch, 2017;

Kranstuber & Koenig Kellas, 2011; Landers, Danes, & White Hawk, 2015; Sinclair, 2009; Wright Cardinal, 2016, 2017) and was the driving passion behind the research I engaged in for my thesis.

Kim Anderson (2001) speaks about how her mixed heritage gave her an opportunity to walk in two worlds. While I agree with her comments in theory, I walk on the margin of both worlds without having solid footing in either. My lived experience having light skin and green eyes and having been raised by an educated, middle class professional white couple provided me with privileges that I continue to explore and decipher meaning from. On the surface, I looked the part and was able to quiet the narratives that whispered my identity. When I was a small child, my parents told me that I was Haida, but they were unable to connect me to culture or explain what it meant to be Indigenous. It was considered in my best interest to be raised without culture, or connection to it, by the authorities of that time. At one point my adoptive mother was cautioned by social workers to stop asking questions when she probed them for information to be able to give to me. She was eventually successful in obtaining a one-page document of non-identifying information that she was able to share with me. I carried this document with me as a map to my identity and I used it to search the faces of every stranger I met for connection. I was grateful to blend in with my white-passing looks, when I heard negative things about “Indians” that included negative stereotypes such as narratives about the wild Indians in “Apache Pass”, which I later found out was a racist reference to a make-shift crosswalk between two bars in Prince Rupert.

As a young mother, I wanted to share my genetic story with my healthcare professionals and my children, so I decided to search for my birth parents. What I discovered was so much more than medical information. My relationships with my birth parents and

extended families are fragile at times but I am hopeful that as I heal myself, I can weave myself more completely into these relationships without fear. My connection to Haida culture, ceremony, and values make my worldview more colourful, vibrant, and liveable. This journey home continues to be an emotional one full of sorrow, joy, shame, hope, and healing. I am hopeful that by embracing my gifts, sharing them with others on this research journey, gathering knowledge and medicine for my bundle, that I am also lighting my way home through building connection.

As an adoptee, I was aware of my alternative story prior to understanding its significance. I have never known a time when I did not have more questions than answers about who I am. This knowledge gathering journey sought to explore and understand how other adoptees have navigated their own journeys home to knowing self when cultural and familial connections to knowledge were disrupted through closed adoption policies. While there is no one size fits all approach to learning identity, there must be ways to ease the shame and awkwardness that many adoptees experience when they cannot see the pathways to connect with the knowledge or how to navigate identity gatekeepers. This uncertainty and fear may be amplified for adoptees through lived experiences steeped in feelings of abandonment and rejection, internalized racism, shame, challenges reconnecting to biological family members and/or lateral violence when trying to reconnect. I was curious to explore what made, or would have made, the journey home to self successful for adoptees rediscovering their roots. In the interest of interconnectedness, I also sought to discover what knowledge or resources adoptees felt may have eased their journey for them. In the interest of best practices for Indigenous adoptee reconnection I wanted to explore what unanticipated barriers they encountered that might be helpful for others to know about. As re-storying does not happen in

a vacuum, I was curious to connect with Indigenous communities and hear what advice matriarchs or knowledge keepers may offer adoptees, as well as discover what opportunities may exist within communities for Indigenous adults to reconnect to culture without shame.

Relevant Literature

In preparing for my original knowledge gathering journey, I used the University of Victoria library as well as the Google Scholar database to explore existing research using the terms ‘Canada’, ‘sixties scoop’, ‘Indigenous’, ‘Aboriginal’, ‘First Nations’, ‘Indian’, ‘transracial adoption’, ‘adoption’, ‘culture’, ‘Haida’ and ‘community’. As an eternal student, I continue to explore every opportunity to gain a better understanding about the experiences of other adoptees and continue to read and explore research on this topic. To gather information about Transracial adoptions, I explored the current trends within that knowledge and the opportunities to fill gaps in existing knowledge collections to benefit disconnected Indigenous people who walk between worlds (Anderson, 2001; Hatch, 2017; Sinclair, 2009 & 2016; Wright Cardinal, 2016 & 2017). It was interesting for me to discover that many of the research articles that populated my searches focussed on the damage that has been done to the identity creation of an Indigenous adoptee identity as a result of not having connection to culture or Indigenous role models (Anderson, 2001; Becker-Green, 2009; Bertsch & Bidgood, 2010; Carrière, 2008, 2010; Hatch, 2017; Haenga-Collins & Gibbs, 2015; Kovach, 2009; Kranstuber & Koenig Kellas, 2011; Landers, et al. 2015; Sinclair, 2009 & 2016; Wright Cardinal, 2016 & 2017). It wasn’t until I sat with my grief and loss long enough, after reading this research, that I realized that this focus on damage somehow implied that as an adoptee I was broken, or less than, which runs counter to creating alternative narratives for adoptees (Kranstuber & Koenig Kellas, 2011; Tuck, 2009).

Knowledge gathering efforts suggest that Indigenous people in Canada, New Zealand and the United States have all had similar experiences with transracial adoption as a tool of colonization (Becker-Green, 2009; Bertsch & Bidgood, 2010; Carrière, 2008; Haenga-Collins & Gibbs, 2015; Landers et al., 2015; Sinclair, 2009; Wright Cardinal, 2016, & 2017). I found myself most connected to the knowledge gathering done by researchers who were also Indigenous adoptees in Canada. They shared that their experiences with the journey home were often enhanced by the act of engaging in research (Carrière, 2008, 2010; Hatch, 2017; Sinclair, 2009; Wright Cardinal 2016 & 2017). Indigenous storytelling methodology was a notable trend in this research. It included the use of sharing circles, interviews, and qualitative methodology to gather the lived experience of adoptees struggling with identity formation, experiences of internalized racism and a lack of sense of belonging (Becker-Green, 2009; Bertsch & Bidgood, 2010; Carrière, 2008, 2010; Haenga-Collins & Gibbs, 2015; Hatch, 2017; Sinclair, 2009; Wright Cardinal, 2016 & 2017). I am filled with gratitude for the work of Indigenous researchers who have shown a clear link for between identity formation in Indigenous people to a sense of belonging, connection to culture, the land and kinship. The research I have explored has led the way for changes to adoption policies for Indigenous children requiring connection to culture and ceremony and will ease the path home for future generations of Indigenous children. However, there are a considerable number of adult Indigenous adoptees for whom a path home to themselves would support healing. This knowledge gathering aimed to create a homecoming guide for those who are struggling to find the way.

Why is Homecoming Important?

The exact number of Indigenous people in Canada disconnected from culture due to transracial foster placements and/or adoptions is unknown. Yet, 60's Scoop statistics indicate there are many who have similar lived experience (Sinclair, 2016; Wright Cardinal, 2016 & 2017). For Indigenous people, connections to Indigenous ways of knowing and being through culture, ceremony and the land are all essential for identity development (Anderson, 2001; Baskin, 2016; Carrière, 2008 & 2010; Hatch, 2015; Hayden Taylor, 1998 & 2010; Horn-Miller, 2016; Krmpotich, 2010; Maiter, 2015; Pedri-Spade, 2016; Russell, 2012; Sinclair, 2009; Thomas, 2015; Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2012; Wilson, 2008; Wright Cardinal, 2016 & 2017). The knowledge gathered focussed primarily on ways adoptees can overcome barriers to accessing the knowledge held in their spirits and bodies by connecting to community and culture. Continuing the Haida homecoming work of Hatch (2017), I wanted to find opportunities to witness the stories of Haida people who were born between 1960 and 1980 and whose stories include experiences related to closed transracial adoptions. While this research is specific to adoptee stories gathered and woven into opportunities for successful homecomings, there may be ripple effects for Indigenous people disconnected from culture through other acts of colonization that resulted in urbanization, trauma, and other forms of disconnection from identity development. The methodology and design of this qualitative knowledge exchange includes a combination of talking circles as well as presentation of the results through oral tradition, storytelling and witnessing which are all considered essential parts of acknowledging and validating Indigenous experience(s) (Anderson, 2001; Baskin, 2005 & 2015; Bertsch & Bidgood, 2010; Kovach, 2009; Pedri-Spade, 2016; Sinclair, Hart, & Bruyere; 2009; Thomas, 2015; Wilson, 2008).

Current Adoption Policy and Practice for Indigenous Children in British Columbia:

While there are undoubtedly many opportunities for ongoing improvements within adoption policies and practices for Indigenous children within British Columbia, I would be remiss if I didn't spend some time reflecting on how much work has been done to try to ensure that Indigenous adoptees have ongoing connection to culture. Several documents reflect the work that has been done to reconcile and move towards healing some of the damage created by adoption practices that were steeped in colonization. British Columbia's Adoption Act has been amended to include specific language regarding ensuring 'cultural continuity...development of the child's Indigenous cultural identity...preservation of the child's connections to the child's Indigenous community... (and) plans... in accordance with the customs and traditions of the child's Indigenous community" (King's Printer, N.D.). These changes to adoption practices recognize the important work that Indigenous communities and agencies have undertaken to restore "severed connections" (de Finney & di Tomasso, 2015) and minimize cultural disruptions for adoptees while acknowledging the right of Indigenous communities to care for their children (Hahn & Sinha, 2018). As of 2018, British Columbia was one of only two provinces/ territories in Canada which engages in actively trying to ensure that Indigenous communities and/or relevant organizations are being notified and engaged in conversations related to placement or ensuring that adoption does not affect a child's Indigenous rights and that their cultural/ ethnic identity is protected (Hahn, Sinha, 2018).

As early as 2008, Haida Child and Family Services had entered into protocol agreements with first Vancouver Aboriginal Child Services Society (VACFSS) and then directly with the Ministry for Child and Family Development (MCFD) to ensure that Haida

children “would have the right to receive guidance and encouragement to maintain their cultural heritage; their kinship ties and attachment to their extended family should be preserved...” (Haida Child and Family Services Society, 2015).

How I approach my work

My approach to social work practice finds its foundation in a blend of Indigenous and feminist frameworks that recognize that individuals are shaped through reciprocal relationships with culture, the world we live in, power structures, and social interactions. To be authentic and approach my research in a good way, I could not separate my perspective from who I am as a social work practitioner, how I walk in the world, and my intent as a knowledge gatherer. I believe strongly in anti-oppressive approaches to this work. As a feminist, I have always sought to acknowledge, identify, and deconstruct how patriarchy, power and privilege impact the lives of those I walk with (Potts & Brown, 2015; Moosa-Mitha, 2015). I strive to take whatever steps I can to address power imbalances within my therapeutic relationships and recognize folks as experts within their own lived experience. As an Indigenous practitioner I am aware of the importance of interconnectedness (Baskin, 2015; Kovach, 2009; Wilson, 2008). How I walk in the world impacts other people and I, in turn, am impacted by how others walk in the world. “Gina ‘waadluxan gud ad kwaagiida. Interconnectedness. Everything depends on everything else” (Council of the Haida Nation, N.D.). It is important for me to walk with integrity. My knowledge gathering journey reflects the importance of relationality. This relationality includes the relationship with those who have shared in my knowledge journey, my communities, those who may be impacted by my knowledge journey, my blended families, and our ancestors. Indigenous research methods acknowledge that importance of reciprocity between researchers and those sharing their

knowledge. This act of reciprocity for Indigenous researchers includes a commitment to engage in knowledge gathering that makes things better, rather than damaging Indigenous communities, as they have often been harmed by research conducted through non-Indigenous perspectives (Tuck, 2009; Wilson, 2008). Indigenous research methodology indicates that it is imperative that any knowledge gathering fills a gap in knowledge that will improve the lives of Indigenous people and communities as a primary goal of the research (Baskin, 2005, 2016; Kovach 2009; Wilson 2008, Wilson & Hughes, 2019). With this research I hope that the knowledge gathered and shared will benefit Indigenous adoptees, their adoptive and biological families, and the Indigenous communities that they are connected to. Reconciliation for Indigenous adoptees may be found in shedding colonization, taking off masks, removing secrets, and finding the strength in our voices to tell our own unique stories as a “sincere indication and acknowledgement of the injustices and harms experienced by Aboriginal people and the need for continued healing” (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2016; Wilson & Hughes, 2019).

The Original Research Concept

In the beginning of this research journey, I had the intent of supporting Haida adoptees to share their own narratives using Ethnotheatre as a means of breathing life into knowledge gathered. Ethnotheatre weaves stories, data, reflections, and interviews into a script that was to be performed and interacted with as a play. (Bleuer, Chin, & Sakamoto, 2018; Pedri-Spade, 2016; Saldaña, 2016). In the original thesis concept, I planned to witness stories and weave them together in a way that honours the relationships between storyteller and listener while highlighting the important act of witnessing (Archibald, 2008; Collison, 2017; Davidson & Davidson, 2018; Kovach, 2009; Pedri-Spade, 2016; Thomas, 2015; Wilson 2008). My

knowledge gathering journey would primarily use Indigenous storytelling methodology (Archibald, 2008; Baskin, 2005; Collison, 2017; Echo-Hawk, 2017; Kovach, 2009; Pedri-Spade, 2016; Wilson, 2008) and qualitative arts-based methods that acknowledge power dynamics at play within the act of gathering knowledge (Lavallée, 2009; Moosa-Mitha, 2015; Potts & Brown, 2015; Wilson, 2008). I intended to reconnect with existing relationships and build new relationships with Haida communities in the region through connecting in a variety of ways including in person, through written communications, social media and virtual ‘meetings’ through software such as skype, zoom, Facetime, or other software identified by communities or community members. I planned to spend time building relationships with Haida knowledge holders/ Elders in the region to communicate intent, enhance transparency and gain an understanding of what knowledge would benefit Haida people and communities if gathered (Carrière, 2008a; Hatch, 2017; Kovach, 2009; Lavallée, 2009; Sinclair, 2009; Wilson, 2008; Wright Cardinal, 2016 & 2017). In the initial concept, these connections were to be made prior to recruiting adoptees to share their stories, which was to be done mostly through word of mouth, social media and with the requested support of Indigenous communities to honour the Indigenous values of interconnectedness and relationality. What ensued however through the factors named in my abstract, was more of a personal journey using an ethnographic approach and returning to self as a Haida adoptee.

Once I arrived at this decision there were several tasks that ensued such as consulting with my thesis supervisor, revisiting my Ethics application, and moving onward toward a personal journey enacted through a play intended to be performed later. Rather than compiling these narratives into a paper, I explored my experiences and feelings on this knowledge gathering journey by weaving common themes and responses into a dynamic

Ethnotheatre script that is meant to be performed in front of an audience (Salvatore, 2018) with this accompanying written paper to ensure that the research journey is documented and captured. Ethnotheatre is the process of taking research and transforming it into a performance piece that captures the words of knowledge sharers and transforms the audience (Bleuer, Chin, & Sakamoto, 2018; Saldaña, 2016; Salvatore, 2018). Within Indigenous oral tradition, the act of witnessing ensures that the stories will be shared with others who did not witness the initial storytelling directly. Within Haida tradition, members of the opposite clan who are hosting an event are invited as official witnesses to ensure accuracy when people are communicating about events which are held to ‘make things right’ (B. Wilson, personal communication, June 21, 2024). Hunt (2018) states, “(W)itnessing, then, might be understood as a methodology in which we are obligated, through a set of relational responsibilities to ensure frameworks of representation allow for the lives that we have witnessed to be made visible” (p.284). The use of Ethnotheatre and witnessing provides an opportunity for stories to be told without shame, have it witnessed allows these stories to be seen, and identity to be reclaimed by the person whose story is being shared. This powerful tool for storytelling relies on the care with which the stories are held and communicated within the research process.

Why Theatre?

Since I was a little girl, I have loved the transformative nature of the theatre. I can remember going to watch plays with my adoptive mother from a very young age and being spellbound with the magic of what I was witnessing on stage. She would laugh when I would ask if we could go and get our programs autographed by the performers at the community theatre after the show but would take my hand and lead me backstage where I would get a chance to meet the performers. As I got older, my love for the theatre continued and I found

that I had just as much love for performing as I did for witnessing the work of others. I have been involved in community theatre in some aspect for approximately 35 years, as a performer, director, stage manager, producer, and facilitator for children's theatre. I remember fondly, the first time I experienced the ability to use theatre as a catalyst for change. It was about 25 years ago, during a locally organized International Women's Day Monologue Event in Prince Rupert. Several women who were involved in my community theatre group decided to create a theatre project and we invited women to write and perform monologues that were connected to their experiences as women. The women involved met regularly to explore their monologue topics, to discuss common lived experiences for women, and hold space for difference. In these times of togetherness, members of our group were transformed. Our performance space became a healing centre for both performers and audience members alike as conversations rippled out long after the lights went down, the applause faded, and the props were gathered up. This is the power of theatre.

Methodology: Before the Trickster Transformation (Part I)

As I previously described, in the initial knowledge gathering proposal, I had proposed to conduct knowledge gathering by acting as a witness to individuals telling their narratives of adoption and reconnection with culture. I wanted to seek out Haida adoptees who had reconnected to their Haida community and engage in conversations about their experiences through one-on-one conversations or facilitating storytelling circles where possible if enough adoptees are available in Prince Rupert, Masset, or Skidegate for circles to be held. Conversations with adoptees were to be shaped by questions regarding their homecoming experiences to determine: How they would describe their homecoming experience? What would have enhanced homecoming for them? What knowledge they would like to share with

their birth family about homecoming? What knowledge they would like to share with their Haida community about homecoming? What words of wisdom do they wish that they had at the start of their homecoming journey that may help other Haida adoptees map the healing journey home? To acknowledge my own lack of knowledge regarding protocols, I hoped to build on existing connections and create new relationships with knowledge holders and Elders in any community where research was being done for guidance that ensures that any knowledge is gathered in a good way and with a good heart (Anderson, 2001; Baskin, 2005 & 2016; Kovach, 2009; Lavallée, 2009; Pedri-Spade, 2016; Thomas, 2015; Wilson, 2008). The knowledge gathering was to include one-on-one interviews along with storytelling/sharing circles that would allow space for healing for storytellers (Baskin, 2005 & 2016; Echo-Hawk, 2017; Kovach, 2009; Lavallée, 2009; Wilson, 2008). I had hoped to spend time engaging in knowledge gathering on the traditional territory of my ancestors, on Haida Gwaii, in the spirit of reconciliation and healing that is connected by returning home to the land (Collison, 2017; Davidson & Davidson, 2018; Hayden Taylor, 1998 & 2010; Hatch, 2017; Horn-Miller, 2016; Krmpotich, 2010; Russell, 2012). However, COVID 19 protocols and the required changes to my methodology meant that that in-person sharing/ healing circles with adoptees, birth families, community members, and knowledge holders/ Elders were out. Instead, I explored alternative ways to connect with knowledge holders/ Elders, my birth family, and community members within the new scope of the ethnographic homecoming story. Technology allowed the one-on-one conversations to occur on the phone, or through video messaging technologies such as Skype, Zoom, or Facetime. I needed to explore new ways to acknowledge cultural and ceremonial traditions of the territory they are being hosted on, for example clearing the room through song, engaging in protocols such as cedar brushing, having an Elder act as a witness, and try to find ways to incorporate this into the revised methodology. Incorporating the Haida

values of “respect... responsibility... interconnectedness...balance...seeking wise counsel... giving and receiving” (Council of the Haida Nation, n.d.) and community protocols using a collaborative approach within the confines of remote connection using technology was important to engage in this knowledge gathering (Baskin, 2005; Echo-Hawk, 2017; Lavallée, 2009). To record my own knowledge gathering journey, I took notes during conversations, journaled my feelings after interactions and meetings, and then analyzed my journals and notes using emotion coding for use within research exploration using theatre as outlined by Norris (2018). Norris suggests sorting research into categories that include information that is important for future works, “scene ideas... themes/metaphors/ issues... external research... songs/ props/ costumes... potential titles... rehearsed scenes... keepers... (and) guiding principles...” (p.290-291).

I had created an initial outline of the methods that I envisioned using for the collaborative, healing circle version of gathering of this important knowledge. I outlined what I anticipated the process to look like prior to engaging on my path as a knowledge gatherer and intended to work collaboratively with those involved to create guidelines. I understood that to engage in this research in a good way that my timelines would likely be increased, and my methodology may be changed to honour relationality and interconnectedness (Kovac, 2009; Wilson, 2009; Wilson & Hughes, 2019). I did not anticipate how true this statement would be. Existing research suggested that in order to best serve the knowledge needs of Indigenous adoptees entering healing through reconnection to culture it was essential to involve them in defining what those needs are and how they would best be met (Allen, 2013; Baskin, 2005 & 2015; Echo-Hawk, 2017; Hatch, 2017; Kovach, 2009; Lavallée, 2009; Pedri-Spade, 2016; Thomas, 2015; Tuck, 2009; Wilson, 2008). During the initial sharing circle(s), I

expected that I would facilitate discussions about what topics were important for us to explore and how many circles should be held to create healing around these themes. This collaborative approach would have addressed the need for reciprocity and accountability to those who share and the communities within Indigenous research (Baskin, 2005; Echo-Hawk, 2017; Kovach, 2009). As part of relationality, collaboration is an essential part for negotiating and navigating many of the ethical considerations of the knowledge gathering and play building Ethnotheatre process.

Ethical Considerations

This knowledge gathering process had many moving parts that required additional work be explored throughout the process in conjunction with my thesis supervisor, Dr. Jeannine Carrière. These ethical considerations included determining how to minimize the impact of physical distance, technological limitations, as well as seeking research funding sources to allow for the purchase of knowledge sharing gift and travel related expenses so that conversations can happen face to face. I took a directed studies course with Dr. Billie Allan to explore some of the ethical considerations regarding consent, permissions, and protocols of storytelling as part of my commitment to gain a better understanding of Indigenous storytelling methodology in preparation for my thesis work. I anticipated that this knowledge would help me shape my consent documents and project descriptions. I applied for an ethics approval certificate from the *University of Victoria's Human Research Ethics Board* (University of Victoria, 2018), and was aware that the Council of the Haida Nation requires researchers to adhere to Haida Values and submit a research application to the council prior to engaging in research with Haida people. This application appears as an appendix to this proposal and was submitted following approval by the University of Victoria Human

Research Ethics Board as the Council of the Haida Nation required ethics approval documentation as part of the application. As originally envisioned, those who shared their own stories would have had the ability to negotiate consent using questions suggested by Saldaña. These considerations had included exploring what participants wished for the audience to learn as witnesses to the stories included in the performance, thoughts, or ideas that participants felt would enhance the performance, as well as navigating any parts of their stories that participants wished to be excluded from the script. Further to these talking points, as initially envisioned, it was also important to include a discussion about how any concerns by participants would be addressed early in the play building process of this knowledge gathering project (Saldaña, 2016) however, as an ethnographic, Ethnotheatre script that uses emotion coding to create characters based on my own lived experiences, consent did not have to be negotiated in this same way.

All documentation related to this research has been converted to an electronic format (either scanned or recorded electronically), password protected and stored on an external hard drive in a fireproof lockbox. Consideration was made regarding the ethics of gift giving in exchange for knowledge sharing which is sometimes frowned upon within Eurocentric research standards. In Indigenous communities the act of gift giving is a common practice that acknowledges the gifts of knowledge that you have been given to hold with care and respect (M.Adkins, *personal communication*, 2016; B. Allan, *personal communication*, 2019; Baskin, 2016; P. Collison, *personal communication*, 2018; Kovach, 2009; L. Smith, *personal communication*, 2016; Wilson, 2008). My partner and I grew ceremonial tobacco in anticipation of my thesis work, and I used artwork that I had created for a course during my BSW that explored my worldview to create thank you cards which I had printed at a local

print shop. The ceremonial tobacco was dried, tied into red fabric pouches, and gifted with a card to anyone who shared knowledge with me on this journey. Those who will be invited to act as official witnesses for my thesis defense, as well as any performances of “Healing the Way Home” will also receive a gift to acknowledge my appreciation of the act of their witnessing.

I am still sitting with my feelings related to potential performance rights related to the Ethnotheatre script that was formed from my knowledge gathering journey. I’m not sure that anyone else would want to perform it in the future but more importantly, I am not sure how I would feel about someone else besides me performing my story. I suspect that is something that I can consider if a request is made in the future, however, Haida songs may only be performed by those of Haida ancestry or with permission from the Haida Nation. The intellectual property of the accompanying thesis document that describes the journey of gathering the research and creating the collective Ethnotheatre representation of the knowledge gathering remains with myself to be submitted to the University of Victoria as part of my Master of Social Work Indigenous Specialization Degree requirement at my thesis defense. The Ethnotheatre script blends together stories from my lived experience and weaves emotion coding throughout as part of my knowledge gathering experience. I had intended to be able to perform and videotape the performance prior to my thesis defense, however the knowledge gathering experience and necessary healing work did not allow enough time for that to occur. As of now, I anticipate reading the script as part of my thesis defense. After discussions with the creators of *“Weaving Reconciliation Our Way”* (2019), I believe that part of the ethical consideration regarding performance needs to include the consideration that witnessing needs to always be a formal part of the performance any time that knowledge is

performed. To formalize the process, at least one official witness is invited to relay back to the audience after the performance what they will be sharing back with others (to Elders or their community) from the research (R. Morriseau, personal communication, March 6, 2019). This formalization of the reciprocal act of witnessing ensures that my story and the knowledge shared does not go silent when the lights of the theatre dim which is an active part of reconciliation and re-claiming for Indigenous research (Wilson & Hughes, 2019).

Limitations

This knowledge gathering journey holds limitations because of the nature and scope of the research as it was originally envisioned which became even more limited by COVID 19 restrictions. In addition, the use of qualitative methods also limits the number of voices that can be captured due to time considerations. The initial research concept anticipated a small number of Indigenous Adoptees participating in the knowledge gathering/ sharing circles. A lack of gender diversity from knowledge sharers was noted in the literature review studies and this was anticipated to be replicated within this knowledge gathering effort as female Indigenous adoptees were more likely to volunteer to share their experiences in most of the studies (Carrière, 2008; Haenga-Collins & Gibbs, 2015; Kranstuber & Koenig Kellas, 2011; Landers, et al., 2015; Wright Cardinal, 2016 & 2017). The only exception to this gender bias was found in the study that specifically sought out Indigenous Veterans who were also adoptees (Abdulwasi, et al., 2016) although I understand that there may be other research that the researcher can explore as well (J. Carrière, personal communication, October 2019). As I had done throughout my post secondary education to date, I intended to continue working full time throughout while gathering knowledge for this thesis work which increased the timeline required for completion. Despite these potential challenges, I was committed to collaborating

on a dynamic piece of learning that connects the lived experiences of Indigenous adoptees to the hearts of their communities and potentially to a much broader audience.

Healing the Way Home; The Results. A Journey in Progress

Methodology: Trickster Transformations (Part II)

I finalized my thesis proposal in January of 2020 while on vacation with my (adopted) Dad and Stepmom in Australia. Up until that time, COVID 19 had been an issue that other countries seemed to be struggling with, but Canada had not yet been impacted by. But as infections began to soar globally, I watched as countries began to start taking more strident measures to try to reduce the number of cases first nationally, then provincially, and finally, locally. Like many other thesis students, I found myself going back to the drawing board, integrating COVID 19 protocols into my methodology, and attempting to turn my visions of collaborative, healing circles into hybrid circles utilizing technology. In hindsight, perhaps I should have put my research on pause as the changes required were about finding ways to recreate community in ways that allowed isolation which was the exact opposite of what I was hoping to engage in which, was research that was all about coming together, finding community, in ways that identified pathways for cultural connection, identity, and healing. The proposed changes to methodology also meant some changes to how information would be collected and requiring my thesis materials to be re-envisioned and resubmitted to the University of Victoria's Ethics Committee for approval which was granted. Once my amended thesis proposal had ethics approval, I proceeded to apply to the Council of the Haida Nation for approval to conduct my research in a good way. As the proposed research intended to explore the Homecoming experience for Haida Adoptees who had been raised away from community and culture, I felt it was necessary for me to ensure that my research would be

beneficial to the Haida people. I was invited to meet with the Chair of the CHN research committee and research coordinator about my proposed research and it was decided that there was too much potential for harm if I were to interview Haida adoptees or Haida birth parents where adoption experiences involved trauma and they were not willing to grant approval for my thesis research as proposed. They told me that they understood the importance of the homecoming journey.

I felt disheartened by the decision even though on a logical level I knew the lack of approval for my research request was coming from a place of compassion for Haida birth families, especially birth mothers. Emotionally, I felt a profound sense of injustice which I notice is something that surfaces often in conversations about adoption. I notice what seems like a lack of consideration for adoptees within decision making processes and prioritization for other members of the adoption triad. I thought about going back to my thesis supervisor at this point and telling her that I was not able to continue with my research and request a transfer to the program-based completion program instead. In retrospect, that may have been a lot quicker and might have created a lot less pain for me and those closest to me for the duration of my thesis work but I also would have learned less about myself in the process. Instead of letting go of my hope to engage in my research work, I gave myself a moment or two to breathe and sent an email back to the CHN chair and research coordinator asking if they would consider supporting my research if I changed the focus to an Autoethnographic approach which focussed only on how I could strengthen my own connection to my Haida roots as a Haida adoptee with a somewhat fragile relationship with my Haida birth relatives which was what I was hoping to have as an outcome for my original proposed thesis work. The response was that they would entertain that revised proposal and so I spent some time

exploring and revising methodology yet again. I sent a one-page summary of the proposed changes to the CHN committee who approved this new project. My thesis work was starting to feel like an exercise in policy and ethics reviews and revisions as I approached the UVIC ethics committee once again with the proposed change to an arts-based autoethnography and was approved.

Once I had been given the green light to start exploring this new pathway to homecoming from a very personal perspective, I realized that there were a lot of feelings coming up for me that I would need to attend to along the way so I reached out to First Nations Health Authority for some counselling support which I felt would be beneficial to help me navigate some of my journey. I reached out to the CHN research committee who suggested that I connect with Haida Child and Family so that was my first point of contact. It seemed a great place to start, after all they were doing this very ‘connection to culture and community’ work with children who were currently in the child welfare system and as I’m fond of saying, “I’m just a grown-up child”.

Pathfinding:

I reached out to Haida Child and Family and explained who I was, and the research work that I was engaged in, and they directed me to speak with the cultural advisor on the team. I had several conversations with different members of the team at Haida Child and Family. As far as the current members of the team were aware, I was the first Haida adoptee who had ever reached out to them as an adult seeking the same supports that they would offer Haida children who were in care or being placed for adoption. I wondered if there might be an opportunity for a pathfinding program for people like me trying to reconnect with their Haida roots in the future and I am hopeful that this may happen. The team at Haida Child and

Family were as helpful as they could be and directed me to a few Haida knowledge keepers as well as the Haida Matriarchs through the CHN for guidance. Often, this journey felt like I was making one step forward and then sixteen steps back. I would feel like I had made a connection with someone who seemed like they were eager to support me on my knowledge journey and I would feel excited but generally it was short-lived enthusiasm. I yearned for a “happily-ever-after” conclusion for my homecoming and kept putting the writing on hold with the hopes perhaps some challenges would resolve themselves with enough time and attempts at connection. I acknowledge there is still a sense of injustice connected to not being able to give that little person inside the type of homecoming that was envisioned within the original research concept that was proposed in the original research concept with the healing and witnessing circles. She needs that validation and to be seen but this isn’t the end of her story.

Further Limitations:

With the necessary change to an autoethnographic research approach this knowledge gathering became a single focus based only on a very time limited, attempted reconnection with my Haida community. Additionally, this research was also limited by COVID 19 required restrictions, physical distance to community, being an ‘outsider’ with limited connections within the community, people’s preference for sitting down in person for discussions, as well as a myriad of life changes that contributed to challenges with knowledge gathering and paying attention to my need for periods of reflection and self-care (Cooper & Lilyea, 2022). I also feel it is important for me to note that the changes to the methodology meant all aspects of this research that were originally intended to support the creation of community building through connection by bringing people together for storytelling and

healing were abandoned. I have reflected upon how the required methodology changes intensified and amplified my feelings of fear and disconnection.

New research path

I struggled to compile the results from my research as they are very different than the outcomes that I wanted to be able to report from this research. I kept self-observations, fieldnotes, and drawings in a couple of notebooks and based on common themes, I decided to use emotion coding to continue my analysis. The emotion coding became the basis for the characters who appear in the play which captures much of my self-discovery work. In many ways the results include as many opportunities for more self-reflection as they do answers, and I am learning to find a sense of peace within this place of not knowing which feels like huge growth for someone who often feels discomfort in not knowing. One of the unanticipated results of the time I spent exploring my connection to my Haida roots was an observation that I had been guilty of prioritizing one piece of my identity over another throughout my life depending on the circumstances. As I began my journey to connect with my Haida roots, I tucked away my settler heritage in the same way that I had learned to fly under the radar of white privilege as a child and young adult. I found myself engaged in an unintentional act of identity camouflage which as I became aware of made me feel profoundly sad. I found myself grieving the loss of the ability to embrace all the pieces of my being without experiencing feelings of guilt, shame, or a identifying this internal need to prioritize one part to prove my worth. Pierce (2017) spoke about having a “spectral” relationship with tribal belonging and this resonated with me on many levels I feel as though I have had a spectral relationship with many parts of myself and often experienced deep feelings of injustice throughout my homecoming research. I became immobilized by grief and anger

particularly in connection to the politics of identity policing as more and more prominent Indigenous people were being outed as pretendians or race-shifters (Good, 2023, Kolopenuk, 2023; Teillet, 2022). Several high-profile Canadians have had their Indigenous heritage called into question in a very public manner since I started my thesis work; Filmmaker Michelle Latimer in 2020, Professor Carrie Bourassa in 2021, UBC Professor Allard and Lawyer Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond in 2022, and most recently, singer/ songwriter Buffy Sainte-Marie, in 2023. I found myself raging against identity gatekeeping and self-proclaimed Indigenous identity experts who seemed to be quoted everywhere I turned. Pierce (2017) speaks about the importance of seeking ‘ways of being and becoming that are true to the multiple communities to which I belong, to those whom I claim, and those who claim me’ (p.68) which resonated deeply for me as I feel that for a long time, I felt compelled to choose between those communities. I continue to grapple with finding the right tools for processing some of the strong emotions that sometimes take me by surprise when I least expect it that are related to this ongoing struggle to allow my identity to be seen and validated not only by others but by myself as well.

The biggest knowledge that I am carrying with me and holding with care because of this exploration of who I am is that when I allow myself to walk with authenticity all parts of my identity need to be seen and celebrated. I haven’t been in atonement and have identified adaptive strategies and emotion regulation tools that I have relied on to make me feel better when my world felt emotionally unsafe in a time when I didn’t have the tools to understand what I needed to ask for support. My identity doesn’t only exist within the knowledge that my ancestors have shared with me within my body, nor does it exist only within the knowledges of my lived experience growing up within my adoptive family with their combined DNA and

lived experience knowledges, nor does it exist in the vacuum of this homecoming story. As I spend time with my anger, I have come to recognize that underneath my anger, resides fear, shame, and grief. I was trying so hard to make connections with birth family members with whom I had no shared lived experiences and reaching out makes me fear further rejection. I tried to be patient and follow the guidance of the Hereditary Chiefs and Elders who gently nudged me back towards my birth family for guidance and opportunities for connecting to my Haida community and roots. When I spent time in Skidegate and sat with some of my relatives and explained what I was trying to do, they seemed genuinely excited for me and were eager to offer suggestions. I found that once everyone was back to walking on their own paths, facilitating connections was more difficult because it wasn't as easy as calling someone over to the table to have coffee or to meet at the longhouse. Requests for contact information so that I could follow up remotely would often be followed by deafening silence and would cause me to retreat, re-engage in counselling and self-care. My schemas related to fear of rejection, being unworthy, and having 'imposter' syndrome were amplified by Drew Hayden Taylor's words "(t)he concept of how important family is to First Nations communities, that's usually the first thing that does in a pretendian — the lack of real, substantial family connections" (in Lewis, 2023). Unfortunately, this cycle of hopefulness, eager curiosity and excitement followed by fear, shame, anger, and grief, became very familiar responses throughout this thesis journey and would be followed by periods of rest and introspection about the need to continue this journey. The more time I spent reflecting on this identity dance, the more intrigued I became by my own adaptive behaviours that had allowed me to navigate challenges that had presented themselves along the way without much complaint, continuing to help others where I could, and adjusting my path when necessary. This following Ethnotheatre script blends together common themes, emotional coding, reflections,

and Indigenous storytelling pieces of my knowledge gathering journey. It will be followed by a brief discussion about my reflections on the journey of writing the script, and my thoughts on implications for social work.

Healing the Way Home: An Ethnodramatic Tale of Transformation

The Script

Emotional Coding, Themes and Stories

woven together by: Yahlskaanii/ Treena Decker

MSW Student at the University of Victoria

Pre- Set: A large Bentwood style box/ bench sits stage left with an Indigenous drum sitting against it. The box is lit with ‘moonlight’. Four doors are suggested (with light/ gobos), Four easels stand in the middle of these ‘doorways. Faint sounds of nature are present and include water, ravens, and eagles under a gentle drumbeat.

The Time: The Present

The Characters:

Yahlskaanii She is older, wisdom/ knowledge holder. She is in touch with all parts of her being. She carries a medicine pouch, drum, and eagle feather.

Witnesses (to be determined) – Haida Elders invited to witness the knowledge sharing.

- Pleaser** She is chameleon-like and enmeshed with everyone. She appears confident but has a nervous energy. She carries a large purse and wears a fashionable scarf.
- Grief** She is invisible to all of them and none of the other character's talk about her except for Toad, who refers to her as 'the sad lady'. She is present in the darkness between the characters and in the sound of the wind.
- Shame** They are roughly age 12, androgenous, and wants to be invisible. They are in codependent relationships with Pleaser and Fear.
- Anger** She is fearless, sometimes careless, and she often acts as a 'protector'.
- Fear** They are ageless, androgenous, and in codependent relationships with Anger, Shame, and Pleaser. Their behavior is activated by 'abandonment', 'rejection'; and they have questions of 'worthiness'.
- Curiosity** They are ageless and excited about everything. They are driven by a thirst for knowledge, and they are curious about what drives all the others which they try to explore through holding compassionate space.
- Toad** Toad is a small child. She represents love and innocence.

(The "doors" disappear, light fades on the Bentwood Box. The gentle nature sounds fade under the increased drumbeat and sound of raven wings getting closer. Sound fades as light comes up to reveal Yahlskaanii seated on the Bentwood Box with the drum in her hands)

Yahlskaanii: Xaadaa 'laa isis. (Good people)

Dalang aa uu Hl kil 'laagang (I thank you all)

Terrace aa uu Hl náagang (I live in Terrace)

Ga yaalaas guust uu dii K'walaagang (I am of the Raven side)

Dii uu Yahlgulaanas-gaagang (I am from the Yahlgulaanas Clan)

Margaret Adkins dii aaw uu iijang. (Margaret Adkins is my mother)

Yahlskaanii/ Treena Decker hin uu dii kya'aang. (My name is Yahlskaanii/
Treena Decker)

Haw'aa. Dalang 'waadluuwaan aa uu hl dii guudangee 'laa Gusdlaang (Thank
you. You all make me very happy)

We must begin this journey together by acknowledging that we are on the
traditional territory of _____ (hopefully the Haida people; the land of my
ancestors). To ensure that this story begins with good intention and a good
heart, lets sing together and cleanse this space for both myself (the student)
and all of you who are acting as witnesses to the sharing of my knowledge
journey and tale of transformation.

*(Light change – greens/ blues; image of Gaagiixiid appears on a screen; Yahlskaanii begins
to drum & sing the traditional song. As the song finishes, the light changes and Yahlskaanii
sets the drum hide side up on the bench beside her).*

Now, we may begin. My name is Yahlskaanii/ Treena Decker. My birth father
is Gerry MacIntyre, (picture appears on the screen) he is the son of John “Bud”
MacIntyre, (picture appears on the screen) who was the son of Elsie Russ
(picture appears on the screen) daughter of Amos and Agnes Russ (picture

appears on the screen). My birth mother, Diane Douglas (picture appears on the screen) is a feisty Scottish woman but is not Haida. I was adopted into the Yahlgujanaas clan by Matriarch, Margaret Adkins (picture appears on the screen).

But as I have a dual tree of life/ knowledge, I also want to tell you that my adoptive father is Garth Decker (picture appears on the screen), my stepmother is Jennifer Forrest (picture appears on the screen), and my adoptive mother is Erdine (Goreham) Decker (picture appears on the screen). Let me introduce you to the witnesses.

(House lights up and one by one the witnesses rise in the audience as their names are shared).

Yahlskaanii: I am honoured that you have agreed to join me today to witness this healing knowledge journey. You have agreed to act as official witnesses of this event and share it with others and for this I am eternally grateful.

Witnesses: (to be determined; depending on protocol)

Yahlskaanii: Haw'aa. *(to audience)* Haw'aa is Haida for "thank you". You are also witnesses to this knowledge sharing journey and as such, you hold a great responsibility to keep this story alive, to share in the knowledge exchange and be transformed by it... *(lights fade on audience)*. Do you agree to breathe this story in and share your experience with others?

Yahlskaanii: When I started out on this thesis journey, I was hopeful that I would find a way to reconnect with parts of myself that have felt out of my reach as an adoptee.

What I have discovered is so much bigger and feels political on so many levels. The politics of identity; its an interesting concept; isn't it? Who has a right to define you? Who has the right to tell your identity story? Who has the right to 'other' you? Do you even have the right to tell your own identity story anymore without fear?

I am going to share the identity story of this little person here (*picture of baby Treena/ Yahlskaanii*). I will tell this identity story with all its complexity; it's woven with threads of love, honour, integrity, and courage.

These are important threads that will be woven together for you to witness today:

Thread #1 – Nature Vs Nurture. All the feels for the parts that make up my body and for the knowledge I carry because of the knowledge in my DNA.

My adoptive father, Garth, always told me that there were things about my nature that led him to believe that I was an old spirit. He said I was at home in old growth forests, amongst the cedars, and the moss. He said he could tell that I had a sense of serenity whenever I was somewhere that there was a connection to Haida culture as a child and tells a story about finding me sitting peacefully in a replica longhouse at the Royal BC Museum in Victoria while my brother was busy climbing totem poles.

I have always felt at home on the Coast of BC; beach combing; turning over rocks; spending time near the Pacific Ocean and in the Rain Forest.

This thread is a beautiful blend of Scottish, Welsh, English, Irish, and Haida, beauty, courage, resistance, and resilience.

The importance of the nurturing and love that I have received from my adoptive family. This thread is a beautiful blend of creativity, resistance, courage, and unconditional love.

Thread #2 – Trauma Responses– This thread blends gently into the tapestry, adding layers of depth to the fabric that are not seen on the surface but can be felt when they are pulled on. This thread includes fawn (people pleasing tendencies), shame, and fear. This thread was pulled on a lot during my knowledge gathering journey at unexpected and highly impractical times for helping a student with ADHD meet academic timelines.

Thread #3 – Injustice – I have a lot of anger these days which sometimes catches me by surprise. I am becoming more adept at understanding what triggers the reactivity for me because of my research.

- Erasure
- Identity policing – External and Internal
 - Pretendian culture
 - Lateral violence
 - Internalized racism as part of witnessed and experienced racism as a white passing person who had privilege.
- “Adoption narratives” that include:

- “Rescue” as in your “birth parents were too young and couldn’t care for you.”
- Flawed Children – “You never know what you are getting – in hushed tones” and how that creates an internalized worthiness critic who contributes to shame.
- Toys that are ‘adoptable’ for example Cabbage patch kids; you could buy and adopt them.
- “You’re adopted” as an insult that people say to family members esp. notable amongst siblings.

Thread #4- Hope, Healing, and Homecoming – This play is an Ethnodrama representation of the thesis research that I have engaged in over the past 3 years as I have “Healed my Way Home” as an adoptee of mixed settler and Haida heritage.

Now that I have attended to protocol and established what you will be witnessing today, I would like to introduce you to Pleaser. She has traditionally been the hostess for any of our collective gatherings and she does a fantastic job.

(Scene change lighting return to preset doors without Bentwood box lit. The actress moves to centre stage, back to audience, removes cedar hat and puts it along with the drum in the Bentwood box. She removes a large purse and puts over her shoulder and ties a scarf around her neck. As she turns to face the audience, the light changes to general wash.)

Pleaser Wasn't that lovely? Thank you so much Yahlskaanii. I am so very grateful to share this time with you today. As Yahlskaanii mentioned, the others call me Pleaser and they asked me if I would spend time with all of you after Yahlskaanii took care of the protocols as most of them are feeling a bit emotionally charged and they aren't sure that they will make a great impression on all of you (*she laughs*), I'm used to that, I guess. I just like everyone to be happy; (*she smiles brightly and looks around the room*) if you are happy then I am happy.

(*fixes in on one audience member and her face changes*) Oh, you don't look happy. Is there something you need? A snack? (*she produces a large bag full of a variety of snacks out of her large purse*) I have diabetic, gluten-free, vegan, full-sugar, carnivore-friendly, and 'parent trying to control hyperactive children-friendly' options? Oh dear, none of those appeal to you (*getting slightly more frantic*) ... not a snack? How about a grounding option? (*pulls out another bag from inside her purse*) fidget spinner? Small stone? Visual meditation option? Small piece of silk fabric? (*She smiles nervously and starts to self-soothe with a stone*) ... some people find stones helpful for getting back in their body when they are feeling nervous, or out of control.

(*She realizes what she has said and suddenly looks very nervous*) – not that you are nervous or out of control! I never meant to suggest that. I'm so sorry! That wasn't what I meant at all. Oh dear... (*returns to digging through her purse*) what else do I have in here? A blanket? (*Pulls out a small, neatly folded blanket inside a large Ziploc bag*) Are you warm enough? A pillow? (*Pulls out*

a blow-up travel type pillow) Do you need a nap? (She moves into the audience, covers the audience member with the blanket and gives them the pillow and heads back to the stage.)

(She stands with her back to the audience, takes a deep grounding breath before turning around and smiling brightly at them all again. She exaggerates wiping her brow and laughs).

If you're happy; I'm happy! *(She pauses and laughs again).* It really is a good thing the others asked me to go first, I'm trying to picture what might have happened if any of the triplets; Shame, Fear, or Anger had tried to ensure you were comfortable. Shame and Fear, those two really do seem to struggle enough just trying to regulate themselves and Anger seems to thrive on making people uncomfortable. Those three are nearly inseparable but they all have their ways. Curiosity would have just kept asking you "probing" *(she does air quotes)* questions until you figured out your own solution but to be honest, that might have been a bit difficult under these circumstances, right?

I'm not sure if you will get to meet our sweet little Toad, she really does seem to have become more and more shy these days, no matter how hard we try to get her to come out and play. Although, I imagine hanging out with a bunch of 'adults' isn't much fun, and everyone seems to be so busy lately. Although, I'm not sure what we are all busy doing at the end of the day. As for the newcomer, Yahlskaanii, I'm still getting to know her, she seems to have a good heart, and good intention. I think she's moving in the right direction because the triplets seem calmer when Yahlskaanii brings out her medicine bundle or

guides us into the forest for a time out. Curiosity stops asking questions, I've even seen Toad slide her hand into Yahlskaanii's, and I must admit, I find the calming energy to be such a welcome gift. I am grateful for a bit of 'down time'.

(In a hushed tone) I want to share some things that I hope that you will keep in mind when you meet both Shame and Fear. I know that on the surface, it may be difficult to tell them apart, but they are unique. You look like an intelligent group, *(points to the person wrapped in the blanket)*, especially you, so I know that you'll be able to tell that Fear is driven by knowledge that sometimes unfortunate things happen when you aren't preparing for it; so, its better to always be prepared or to avoid scenarios where unfortunate things may happen. Our dear Shame, has internalized messages that somehow they are responsible for most of the unfortunate things that have occurred to them in their life and tell themselves all sorts of things that amplify that narrative – "You're not good enough; You're not lovable; You're too fat; You're not smart enough; You don't belong; You don't fit it; You'll never be connected, etc.". I try to tell Shame that this simply isn't true, and they seem to do better for awhile and then... well, I'll let Shame share their own experience with identity work.

(Scene change lighting. Lighting returns to preset doors without Bentwood box lit. The actress moves to centre stage, back to audience, removes the scarf from around her neck and puts it back into the large purse and places it back in the Bentwood Box. The actress pulls a

box of chocolates out of the Bentwood Box and closes the lid. As she turns to face the audience, the light changes to fuchsia)

Shame: *(caught stuffing a handful of chocolates into her mouth as the light comes up; eyes widen, slowly chews behind her hand, sits on the Bentwood Box. Clears her throat softly as she finishes chewing and begins to speak)*

Hi. Sorry about that. I haven't eaten all day; I was too nervous to eat earlier and then I realized how hungry I was.... *(fades off and looks very uncomfortable)*. *(pause)* I know that chocolate isn't the best thing to eat and that I should be eating well balanced meals 3 times a day. That would make it easier for my body. My body would thank me. Everybody tells me that; all the others... Fear, Anger, ... Pleaser is always making smoothies with green things in them and big salads with no dressing and proteins; she always knows the right things to do but chocolate sometimes just makes me feel better, ya' know? I know Pleaser wants me to tell you about how we got into this giant procrastination mess, because it really was my fault, and I should be willing to accept responsibility for it but its not an easy thing to explain. It's like eating a handful of chocolates... the logic part of me knows that my brain is telling me things that aren't logical, but my heart and my spirit feel differently, does that make sense to any of you? I think best in stories, so bare with me while I share a few please.

Picture this: you are having dinner with a couple who you are friends with and were friends with before they became a couple. During dinner you're discussing your thesis work, 'her' of the couple asked about it because she

knows about the challenges that you've had exploring adoption, your identity, and homecoming/ connection with your biological family. You've known "him" for about 25 years or so and he says to you, I never knew you were Haida until that day I saw you dancing with the group outside the theatre. He says to me, I think it's so interesting that you've spent your whole life trying to belong to your Indigenous community when I have spent my whole life running away from mine. About a week later he contacted me again regarding a creative project that he was exploring; a podcast concept about Indigenous Identity, capturing Indigenous voices on the topic. He wondered if I would be interested in being involved in his project and I said yes without hesitation. Then 'it' started... what right do you have to talk about this? Who do you think you are?

"It" always has something to say whenever I start to think the ghosts that haunt some of us have made faded into the background. Sometimes "it" whispers, sometimes "it" taunts, sometimes "it" screams...

(Shame peers out at the audience, searching for a witness to connect with and speaks directly to an audience member.)

Perhaps you've heard something familiar... a roommate deep in your psyche who reminds you of your place in the world?

(Stops talking, looks to the floor, and nods before taking another chocolate out of the package and popping it in their mouth; chews slowly, pulls at their

clothing, pulling it away from their body. Looks back up at the audience, swallows the chocolate, before clearing their throat.)

(Whispers) I know you can't hear 'it' and I'm not even sure if 'it' is real but at times like this it makes me I could become invisible, just fade into the background. I never feel pretty or thin enough to be seen. Even though I read pretty much everything I can get my hands on, I never really feel smart or articulate enough to have meaningful conversations with people. I know it's impossible to become completely invisible, but I think I've become pretty good at slipping into the shadows *(laughs slightly)* perhaps that's one of the perks of walking in two worlds when you feel too tentative and insecure to plant your feet firmly in either. Pleaser says one day I'll get there... but I just know when you look at me, if you look close enough, you can see 'it'.

(in a whisper) I'm sure it is stitched into the scar tissue that is just below the surface of my skin "unlovable", "unworthy", "dirty", "imposter", and if those weren't enough... this new one comes and goes depending on the day of the week "pretendian" ...

"It's" all enough to drive someone to...

(Shame pulls out another chocolate and shoves it in their mouth... speaks the final sentence with a mouth full.)

...put on an invisibility cloak! Or a protective layer of nature's bubble wrap as I like to call it.

Shame pats their stomach and looks down at the floor.

Grief appears – one minute ‘grey’ out – Sound of howling wind.

(Scene change lighting return to preset doors without Bentwood box lit. The actress turns around on the Bentwood Box and gets up. The actress puts the lid on the box of chocolates and puts them back in the Bentwood Box and pulls out a stack of poster board and a black marker, and a leather jacket with a pack of cigarettes and a butane lighter shaped like a revolver in the pocket. The Actress moves with purpose to centre stage, lights change, red wash)

Anger: *(Crosses stage right and looks out at the audience).*

I want to know which one of you is responsible for that. Did you say something to make that one *(shrugs towards the Bentwood Box)* feel like they weren't allowed to be here? To be seen?

(Moving slowly across the front of the stage, making eye contact with the audience...)

You know that the more that one is seen, the more that one is heard, the less they feel like they must be invisible, don't you? I mean, honestly...who was it?

(Laughing)... it probably wasn't even one of you, was it? It was probably one of US! The worst kind of betrayal... an inside job.

(Continues moving, slowly, intentionally, like a cat stalking prey while talking).

All of us are complicit in keeping that one stuck where they are. I didn't mean for it to be that way, a classic game of clue, was it "Pleaser in the kitchen with the chocolate cake"? No? Okay... how about "Fear in the bedroom with a

relationship?" No? Curiosity in the utility room with a cat/ or an uncomfortable question? Or... maybe it was me, Anger, in the living room with contempt? More than likely, it was all of us except for sweet, little, innocent Toad. They say that the personal is political and well, we are living, breathing proof of that aren't we? Would we be here, trying to find our way home together without the injustice of having our identity taken from us in the first place? Let's think about that for a second or two, shall we?

(Pulls the revolver out of the inside pocket of the jacket and holds thoughtfully running fingers over the barrel; long pause).

One minute sweet, little, innocent Toad is a baby with a full name "Elissa Barbara Douglas" and the next minute the government decides that same little person can just be erased; with their birth family reduced to a few sentences of 'non-identifying' information contained in their adoption file. Birth mother has brown hair, green eyes and freckles and was 19 years old; she had one brother and one sister; Birth Father had light brown hair and blue eyes; he had one sister and is of Haida ancestry. The government then reissues a brand-new birth certificate for this baby a year later with a whole new set of parents; sounds legitimate right?

(pulls a "cigarette" out of a pack in the pocket of the jacket, puts it in their mouth, goes to light it with the revolver, before looking back to the audience...)

I don't really smoke. I just pretend I do to irritate people into action. Did I make you want to jump in? Stop me? Smack this cigarette out of my hand? I'll

let you in on another secret (but don't tell the others...) they aren't even real cigarettes... they are made from sage... basically I use them to "go smudge myself" every time I feel unsettled or can't get myself grounded which happens more and more often. I thought as we got older, as the people around us aged, there would be less need for me to step and intervene when others were careless around Shame, Toad, Fear, and Pleaser. *(Takes a drag on the unlit cigarette and puts the revolver away, looks at the cigarette and grins out at the audience)*. Usually that's all I need; a sense of control... knowing that I could have lit it and had a deep inhale, the smoke filling my lungs before release *(mimes the action for dramatic effect and sighing happily)*. I try to play nice and let Pleaser think she's in control, but have you seen how tightly that girl is wound? We all know about "Fight" – that's me, "Flight" – that tends to be Fear's response to triggers, our little buddy Shame, gets caught in "Freeze", but Ms. Pleaser (who thinks she has it so together) ... she's our "Fawn" girl. She's so quick to jump in and try to protect the others, make sure that everyone understands their triggers and responses; especially mine because I make her nervous. She worries that I might offend people. I never worry about offending people; in fact, quite the opposite I want to make people think about how they may impact others. Let me give you some examples...

(Pulls out a piece of poster board & writes "Fatphobia/ Body shaming" in big, bold letters before putting it on the first easel.)

Several years ago, the collective "we" are standing at the dairy cooler, getting ready to reach in and get a container of cream for our morning coffee. We have

been doing all the things Shame and Pleaser want us to do around eating right, exercising, and trying to watch our weight so we're feeling good. We are smiling and along comes a woman... "Karen", who smiles at us, looks down at our abundant mid-section, before gushing "when is your baby due"?

(pause)

I'm sure Pleaser went into a full-blown panic when she realized I was stepping in... I mirrored Karen's sloppy, smile, tilted my head and gushed back...

"Oh... my 'baby' is in his 20's. I'm not pregnant, I'm just fat but thanks for your polite inquiry".

Karen stammered some half-assed apology and scurried away, and we continued our shopping. Pleaser, Shame and Fear were all activated and doing their things internally but honestly, I felt that was a kind response considering Karen's faux pas. If the world is lucky, maybe next time she'll do some fact checking before inserting her foot so eloquently into her over-sized mouth.

(pause)

*(Picks up second poster board and writes "**Societal Adoption Narratives; incl. adoption as a 'punchline'**" on it in marker, walks over and places it on the second easel.)*

Unfortunately, this one happens way too often and usually Miss Pleaser steps in before I can offer an alternative *(makes a fist and punches their other hand)* "punch" line to the "funny" *(offers air quotes and a smirk)* joke. This is the usual scenario that we have experienced throughout our life:

Version one:

Person A: We always told (insert youngest or most awkward sibling's name here) that they were adopted. It was so funny. They believed us most of their life.

Version two: (usually overheard in a group setting as an insult)

Person A: *In response to an insult.* Oh yeah? Well, you're adopted (in the same tone as You're weird or you're disgusting, etc.)

There are numerous ways these play out. I got to respond to one of these recently though let me paint the picture for you...

(takes out the pen and grabs another poster board)

I was going to be literal and play a game of Pictionary for you, but I am mindful that our art attempts may bring Shame back out to play and I want to tell this story.

Christmas Dinner, 2023 at the folk's house. We have been knee-deep in identity and grief work as part of this thesis process. The guests around the table are close friends and family and somehow the conversation lands on someone's coworker discovering that their father wasn't their "real" father.

The storyteller went on to share that the person who had made this discovery felt validated because they 'just knew' that they didn't fit in with the family they had grown up in. We were baffled at the insensitivity of this as a Christmas dinner topic at my folks' home, but the joy of the conversation didn't stop there, no, no. Others chimed in about telling their siblings they

were adopted (followed by laughter). I looked around the table and piped up and said, “I used to joke that I was adopted too, turns out it was true”. I had hoped that this would be enough to stop this line of conversation but alas, the woman beside me said loudly “I am sure that my brother must be adopted because he is horrible.”

(Long pause, letting this information sit. Anger’s hand goes to their mouth, then back down, then back to sit just below their lip, before dropping again. Looks back up at the audience obviously struggling to maintain composure.)

I took a lesson from Pleaser’s “Zen as F*ck” (Sweeney, 2018) book, took a grounding breath, calmed my inner child, turned to the woman, and said, “Why would you say that?”

She repeated, “he must be adopted because he’s so incredibly horrible”.

I said, “Well naturally because only adopted people are horrible”. She nodded and laughed to which I replied, I don’t understand why that’s funny. I stated a bit louder “I don’t understand why being adopted is a punchline”. I thought Pleaser would be proud of me because I decided that I should go regulate myself before I said something that all of us might regret at Christmas Dinner. I stood up, went to the bathroom, and splashed water on my face until I felt that I could sit back down beside my dinner companion. I think Pleaser and Shame slipped in to finish dinner because I believe there were a few extra desserts to round out the evening and no further lessons were taught although I

was told that a month later this woman brought up my behaviour as being ‘rude’. I wonder what she would have thought of my punch line.

I’m going to leave some space for the others but there is one other time when I am guaranteed to show up...

(Walks back to the Bentwood Box, picks up another poster board and writes “Identity Gatekeeping.”)

Actually, Shame, Fear and I, tag team on this one because its such a complex issue. I pop up when someone tries to make it too simple, and I recognize the injustice of that. When we were younger, I had to step in and help as we stubbornly refused to do a family tree that our grade 2 teacher thought was so important. I told her that my tree would have two trunks and one side would be blank as I didn’t know any of the information because I was adopted. The teacher said that was fine to which I loudly proclaimed no, it wasn’t and refused to do the project. I remember my parents supporting my decision to refuse to do the project. I have a couple of variations of my family tree available to me now.

(Lights dim; slide of adopted family tree appears followed by slide of biological family tree followed by a slide of tree of life tattoo with two embracing trees with the adoption triad and heart in the roots. Lights back up).

Now we wear our identity on our sleeve – literally! *(shows tattoo)*

(Walks back over to the 3rd poster board and adds “the Pretendian Problem” under Identity Gatekeeping, turns, pulls a cigarette out of the pack in their pocket and puts it in their mouth. Moves center stage and plunks themselves on the Bentwood Box.)

I can't tell you how many times this has stopped us dead in our tracks on this identity journey. It has spiralled us into silence and deep fear connected to imposter syndrome. I mean we are knee-deep in trying to find our way home; trying to make meaningful connection to our Haida roots, culture, and community and everywhere we turn someone is being 'exposed' for false claims to Indigeneity. When Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond's claims to Cree ancestry came into question we received a call from the CBC as Yahlskaanii had participated in a podcast with Rudy Kelly called "The Urbariginal" where she had discussed our healing journey related to identity. CBC wanted to know if we were interested in being involved in a follow up story regarding Turpel-Lafond. I responded by saying that my own connection with Indigenous identity is complicated and fragile and I was not interested in commenting on anyone else's connection to identity. I continue to hold this belief, but I do understand why false claims to Indigenous identity are problematic. Unfortunately, this intense scrutiny related to proving connection to Indigenous community is harmful for so many people who are disconnected from their roots for a variety of reasons that are through no fault of their own. (Eye, 2022) The lack of compassion and one size fits all skepticism that has

become part of the landscape of identity policing has definitely pushed all of our imposter buttons and coaxed Fear out more often.

Grief appears – one minute ‘grey’ out – Sound of howling wind.

(Scene change lighting return to preset doors without Bentwood box lit. The actress walks back to the Bentwood Box, slips the remaining poster board and marker onto the floor beside the box, removes the leather jacket, and puts it in the Bentwood Box. The actress takes off the ballcap and puts it back in the box, removes an oversize sweater from the Bentwood Box and slips it over her head. She carries the drum & moves skittishly behind an easel, lights change; shadowy blue wash up)

(Back to audience, plays a ‘heart beat’ which speeds up, “lightens” in tone, and Fear steps out; playing in the shadows a bit.)

Fear: *(pauses, her voice catching) Hi. I’m nervous. (holding drum in one hand, pulls at the sleeves on her sweater). Is it hot in here? (Pulls at the collar of her sweater, and clears her throat. Walks over, opens the Bentwood Box, puts the drum in and pulls out Pleaser’s bag, closes the box, sits on top of it, and starts taking some of the items out. Clears her throat again. Starts looking around the room frantically.) 3 things I can see, 2 things I can hear, 1 thing I can taste. 3 things I can see, 2 things I can hear, 1 thing I can taste...oh my God, it’s not working! Its not working! Just give me a minute, I know Pleaser always keeps one or two in here for me.*

(She moves things slowly aside in the bag before pulling out a small zippered bag which she unzips cautiously. Every action is done with precision and care.

She engages in deep belly breaths and occasionally stops, closes her eyes and mouths words to herself. She reaches into the zippered bag and pulls out a prescription bottle, takes a deep breath, handles the child-proof lid with care, and cautiously shakes a pill into her hand from the bottle. She looks up at the audience, takes another deep breath and shakes a second pill into her hand before replacing the cap on the bottle. She takes another breath and pops the pills into her mouth before returning the bottle to the zippered bag. Fear takes another deep breath and closes her eyes. She returns everything to Pleaser's bag and puts it all back in the Bentwood Box and then sits down, brushing her feet nervously on the floor and pulling at her sweater.)

Pleaser always tells me that I have nothing to be afraid of, to remember that everyone is on my side. *(Fear looks nervously at the audience, eyes settling on folks in the front row, her expressions change from mild amusement to looks of concern before she bursts into wild laughter. She continues to laugh, ends up snorting, laughs at the snorting, and tries to get words out between the laughter which continues for several minutes before she is able to calm herself).* Pleaser told me that everyone was on my side but Curiosity told me to imagine all of you in your underwear and some of you were wearing some pretty risqué stuff! But you *(pointing to an audience member, laughing again)* well... I'm pretty sure you should book an appointment with your therapist to discuss what you have on! *(She giggles some more, before sighing happily and speaking directly to the audience member).* Thank you so much for that. You really did make my day. Lime, fuchsia and black are your colours! Laughter

really is good medicine but then again, so is Clonazepam especially when combined with laughter. *(Fear takes another deep grounding breath, and picks her notebook up off the ground).*

I can never remember anything. The others say it's the long term impact of stress on us. I hope they are right. I always wonder if we have a brain tumor but I worry about having an MRI or CT scan... cause all that radiation on the body, you know? That can't be good for anyone! *(She pulls at her sleeves again, tugging them down over her hands, opens her notebook).* Oh yes, Pleaser wanted me to talk to all of you about Dr. Seuss and Cabbage Patch Dolls! She said those things should be okay and I agree; they don't scare me too much anymore. *(Gets up, opens the Bentwood Box, pulls out a bag labelled 'Fearful things' holds it up to the audience, closes the box and sits back down on the box, reaching into the bag, giggling again).* I feel like Santa, reaching into his sack of presents! Pleaser wanted me to tell me about this. *(Pulls out 'Are You My Mother')*. It looks harmless enough, right? It became our childhood equivalent of "Siri" although I'm sure that our parents never knew. *(she laughs and leafs through the pages until she finds the folded up page of 'non-identifying information')* This was our mother. *(She reads from the non-identifying information).* And this was our father *(reads from the sheet again).* My mother Erdine managed to get us these scraps of information about who we were even though the Ministry kept telling her to stop asking questions she knew that she needed to have some information to give me when I started asking questions, so this became my guide and P.D. Eastman unwittingly

asked all the right questions with “Are you my mother” (Eastman, P., 1960). I started to look at every person that I thought matched the generic descriptions of my birth family contained on this page but I never felt the connection until many years later.

(Pulls out Cabbage Patch Doll, complete with it's adoption certificate). Then there was this. The Cabbage Patch Kid... I was a bit too old for them, They came out in 1983, by then I had already experienced a lot in my my life. My adoptive parents had broken up, my Dad's dad had died of a heart attack and I had been molested by my friend's dad. Shame had become a constant companion to Pleaser and I by then and Anger was about to start making themselves known. None of us could understand the concept of buying a doll with an “adoption certificate” but it was Anger who stepped in and wrote to Coleco about it. Of course, they were too busy making fistfuls of money, the dolls were impossible to find that Christmas, to ever acknowledge any potential harm that might be caused for adopted children. They never responded to my letter and until I wrote this thesis that required buying this doll as a prop, I have NEVER owned a cabbage patch doll. I guess we are making progress in our healing.

You may be asking yourself, what was I afraid of? Well the question has always been one of worth. What did it mean if you could buy ‘adoption’? What did it do to worth? To value? When we have struggled with value, worthiness, and to feel lovable for so long if there was a price tag on it, how could we make sense of it? Anger and Pleaser have always tried to step in

when worth has felt fragile. Adoption tends to lend to automatic negative thoughts related to feelings of unworthiness even though we KNOW logically that isn't true. Logically we know we are good enough, lovable enough, smart enough, but there is always that annoying inner roommate that narrates a story of inadequacy. That amplifies imposter feelings despite years of exceptional feedback from professors, clients, professionals, partners, community members, politicians. We never feel like we measure up to some imaginary goal post. This is why the Imposter syndrome connected to "Pretendian" Culture has been so challenging for us. *(Walks over to the Identity Gatekeeping poster board and underlines it with a marker on the easel and adds a star. Fear tugs nervously at her sleeves again, before moving across to the Bentwood Box, and picking up another piece of poster board, she takes a deep breath and writes something on it and crosses to an empty easel with the poster board before turning back to the audience).*

I don't usually talk about this but I want all of you to know that while we were doing this research, I felt so afraid any time any of us reached out to anyone connected to Skidegate. Everytime a voicemail went unreturned for any extended period of time or an email went unanswered, deep down I knew it was because I wasn't good enough. I knew I wasn't Haida enough to be accepted. The silence amplified my feeling of not belonging and having no community to connect to. All of us wanted this Homecoming connection to be perfect, to feel completely embraced within the community of Skidegate, where our Birthfather, Gerry, is from. *(She puts the "Fear of Abandonment/*

Rejection ” poster board up on the easel). This (points to the poster board) has stood in our way so many times. It is the button that gets pushed when any one of us gets too involved in meaning making behind other people’s behaviour and it becomes a sticky mess. I know that sometimes I’m part of the problem when I am standing in the background yelling at everyone not to even try to connect but I just don’t want us to get hurt anymore you know? (Fear goes and sits on the Bentwood Box and plays with the Cabbage Patch Doll’s hair).

(reciting) “There was a little girl with a strawberry curl, right in the middle of her forehead, and when she was good, she was very, very good... but when she was bad she was horrid.”

(Looks up at the audience) I was never horrid – I was just afraid.

Grief appears – one minute ‘grey’ out – Sound of howling wind.

(Scene change lighting return to preset doors without Bentwood box lit. The actress puts the Are You My Mother Book and the Cabbage Patch Doll back in the “Fearful Things” Bag, walks back to the Bentwood Box, opens it, puts the bag in, removes the sweater, and puts it in Bentwood Box, she reaches in and takes out a messenger bag which she wears across her body; lights change to orange)

Curiosity: Wow, there are so many questions, so many paths we could go on from here aren’t there? I do feel like I should start by defending my honour and tell you that despite the rumours, I have never even harmed a cat. In fact, cats LOVE me. (Picture of Mr. Snickasnee (Snick) and Ms. Minikin (Minxy) appear on the screen) These are the cats who have walked with us on this journey they

are named after a character in Toad's favourite book from childhood, Little Witch (Bennett, A.E., 1953). It was a whimsical story about a little witch (Minikin or Minxy) who's mother (Madam Snickasnee) was constantly turning neighborhood children into flowerpots. Minx wanted desperately to be friends with the neighborhood children and wished she could find the proper spell to transform them back into children again. The story was one of a child striving for belonging and connection and at the end of the story a secret was revealed (I won't tell you what it was in case you feel compelled to read the story yourselves). I think all of us can understand why our Sweet Toad would love that story.

(Curiosity walks over to "Fear of Abandonment/ Rejection and flips it over. She writes Belonging/ Connection on it)

In many ways, we were able to create a sense of belonging and connection to our Haida roots which we hoped would be an outcome of this research. We connected to Haida Child and Family who seemed intrigued by the thought of creating a Homecoming program for adult adoptees, we connected with a couple of family members in Skidegate who remain open to answering questions and have given us pictures of ancestors. As a result of wanting to know more about Haida culture, we have participated in Xaad Kil Nee language classes and are now part of a group of powerful women who are all Haida Scholars. We try to meet semi-regularly to discuss topics of interest and identity always seems to be at the top of the list. We feel more connected as a result of this thesis work. In addition, one by one the Hereditary Chiefs

welcomed us home at the Council of the Haida Nations Meeting we were invited to attend in September of 2022 to speak about this research work. It was so incredibly healing and we have come to realize what a gift it was to be invited to that meeting and hear myself be welcome home when spiritually we have always felt that connection to Haida Gwaii.

(Walks over and picks up the Poster Board with Bodyshaming/ Fatphobia on it and sighs. Flips it over and looks out to the audience).

If I had an easy answer to this one, we could retire early and move to Bora Bora and by ‘we’ I mean all of us, like an ‘Oprah’ gift show where you could all look under your seat and find an early retirement package but alas we live in a society where the global health and fitness industry is worth around \$5.5 trillion (Blair, 2024). That industry doesn’t want us to feel good or even neutral about our body. I have been working on convincing the others to practice self-compassion by asking them how would the relationship with our body be different if we treated ourself like we were someone we loved? How is that for a paradigm shift? Can you imagine? Wait... maybe this IS like an Oprah gift show. *(Reaches into her backpack and pulls out a Magic Wand)* I always carry this around for moments just like this! If I could wave this magic wand right now, and you create a miracle for yourself that would solve a problem; what would be different? What would this mean for you? Now before you open your eyes, I want you to imagine the next step you would need to take to move yourself towards that difference. When you open your

eyes, the memory of the miracle and next step are the gift you can take with you today.

(Curiosity writes treating myself as though I love myself; practice self-compassion on the poster board and puts it back on the easel. She walks over to Identity Gatekeeping and picks the poster board up).

Who's responsibility is this and under what circumstances? Does it change depending on who we are talking about and their capacity to define their own identity? How do we make sure that they have enough information to be able to support their decisions? Are these decisions black and white? Is there any grey area? And if there is? How is that defined and by who? Identity is such a complex issue, especially when it comes to giving voice to Indigenous issues related to identity. We've had a lot of conversations with people about our own identity. We have lived a life of privilege for sure, We are white passing, and grew up in a white, middle class home. We are educated, the body that we were born into matches our orientation and how we identify. We recognize that our path has been made easier by these things and that when we speak, generally people are polite enough to pretend to listen.

Unfortunately, we learned that being white passing was preferred early on and so we tucked our Haida roots away, protected from sight. We heard and witnessed racism directed towards Indigenous people and our invisibility and silence became both deafening and defining. As we got older Shame, Fear and Anger all knew what we had done. Pleaser tried really hard to use smoke and mirrors to make it better but 'it' was always there. We are at place now where

we are trying to get back in step with who we are at our core, walk in a way that is authentic that allows all parts of us to be seen but it is not easy because Identity Gatekeeping hasn't always been external.

Grief appears – two full minutes of ‘grey’ out – Sound of howling wind.

(Scene change lighting return to preset doors without Bentwood box lit. The actress puts Little Witch and the Magic wand back in the messenger bag, walks back to the Bentwood Box, opens it, and puts the bag in, she reaches in and takes out a superhero cape, a ‘fun’ child’s headband, and a pair of sunglasses. She puts all these items on and pulls a stuffed zombie doll out of the Bentwood Box; lights change to represent the Northern Lights and will fade to a happy, healing green tone as the scene progresses)

Toad: *(Dancing around the stage with her stuffed zombie doll and singing loudly and off-key)*

‘You are my sunshine, my only sunshine,

You make me happy when skies are grey...’

(looks solemnly at the doll and puts her sunglasses on it)

Maybe we should have sung that to the sad lady. Did you see her, Frankie? She always sounds like a storm when she’s around. The others never see her or hear her. That’s really sad, isn’t it? Someone should make her happy. Maybe it could be us, Frankie. Of course, she can’t see us right now, well she can’t see me anyway. I have my invisibility cape on, and you can only see me cause you’re wearing special goggles. *(She holds the doll up to her ear and listens, pulls the doll away and shakes her head. She points at the audience and speaks*

to the doll.) Don't worry, Frankie. They can't see us or hear us. I don't even know why they are here. Well, 'cept that guy... he's having a nap. (Toad leaps up and starts rifling through things in the Bentwood Box, pulling out Pleaser's and Curiosity's Bags, tying Pleaser's scarf around Frankie, puts Fear's sweater on, puts Anger's ballcap on sideways, and puts Yahlskaanii's medicine pouch around her neck before picking up a tissue off the ground and tucking it into her pocket.) There! It's like they are all with me, Frankie! Right here, right now!

(Skips across the stage to the first easel, pretends to read it to Frankie)

It says being an adult is BORING Frankie! Let's never grow up, okay?

(She rips up poster board 1 and throws it in the air like confetti. Toad pirouettes towards easel number 2 and curtseys at it before picking the poster board up and reads it to Frankie).

Frankie, this one says, 'Don't bite people' – that's important I learned that one at preschool. No biting!

(Toad rips up poster board 2 and tosses it happily into the air, giggling as it floats to the floor. She and Frankie tango towards easel number 3, where she picks up the poster board and 'reads' it to Frankie before running to easel 4 and grabbing that poster board to 'read'. She rips both poster boards into confetti and throws them into the air).

One said 'Don't run with scissors' and the other said 'You've got this'. I think we do 'got this, Frankie'.

(Tangos over to the Bentwood Box and starts looking through the bags, finds makeup in Pleaser's bag and puts lipstick on (badly). Peeks into Fear's bag and takes out 'Are You My Mother', find's Little Witch and shrieks happily before pulling out the magic wand and yelling Abbra Caddabra! Opens the Bentwood Box, finds the box of chocolates and Fear's notebook. Closes the Bentwood Box and sits on top of it, settles in, opens the chocolate and the notebook, and puts Frankie in her lap.)

Frankie, I'm getting bored being invisible. *(Holding Frankie up to look at him)*
Do you think they *(points at the audience)* will like me, Frankie? Do you think I could tell them my favourite story in the whole wide world? *(Makes Frankie nod and takes off her cape. Looks out at the audience, holds the notebook in her hands like a storybook she is reading, pats Frankie on the head).*

Lean in, I want to tell you a story. It's a love story but not one of those silly, gross, kissing kind of love stories. This story does start with a girl, a girl who wanders the world and feels alone even though she is surrounded by people. That's kind of strange, isn't it? People really like this wandering girl, she is funny, kind, sweet, smart, and she's a great storyteller too so they love when she tells stories because she always makes them laugh. She always makes herself laugh too, but inside she feels disconnected, without a home.

Everywhere she goes, people make her feel welcome but there is still a piece of her that feels restless and uneasy, so she keeps telling stories and making people laugh. One day, the girl realizes that she needs to 'go home', she is missing her connection to family, culture, and community. The girl sets a

course to where her ancestors are from but struggles to feel connected to people there even though she feels connected to the land. As she learns new stories and ways of being, she realizes that she has been putting on masks with every story she has told. These masks have changed the way she has seen the world. She wants to start taking them off, but she feels afraid because she has been wearing them for so long.

One day, the girl decides that even though she is scared when she tells a story, she will take a mask off and put each one in her Bentwood Box. The girl becomes an amazing storyteller, heals herself, and find her way back to her authentic self.

Toad closes the book and kisses Frankie. She giggles and says quietly...

There's no place like home.

Lights fade to black. Actress leaves the stage.

(Scene change; light on just the Bentwood box. Actress returns to the stage, removes the cedar hat from the Bentwood box and puts it on. She then retrieves the drum from the box and starts drumming).

Yahlskaanii: We will close with the powerful and transformational Skidegate Spirit Song to honour all of those who could not be with us in person today but are with us always. *(sings the Skidegate Spirit Song; repeating the verse four times; turning a quarter of a turn at the start of each verse to acknowledge the ancestors and the four directions).*

Haw'aa for being part of the healing journey today. We have come full circle, and I would now like to invite our official witnesses to join me and share what knowledge from this journey has stood out for them and what they will take away to share with others.

(Witnesses are invited to the stage and share; the actress retrieves a gift for each witness out of the Bentwood Box as they finish speaking and offers this to them.)

Yahlskaanii: (to the audience) Haw'aa to each one of you for witnessing this part of my healing. The journey has just begun. I am looking forward to so many more gifts of knowledge. You are invited to share what you have witnessed today. I hope that it may help light the way home for others.

(All audience members will be given ceremonial tobacco as a gift to acknowledge their act of witnessing this knowledge which the performer will give to them on their way out of the theatre).

The End (of this part of homecoming)

The Set:

Large Bentwood Box (Bench Size)

4 Easels

Prop List (in Bentwood Box/ Bench):

Yahlskaanii: Drum; Medicine pouch

Pleaser: Large Tote style purse with bag of snacks; small travel style pillow, small travel style blanket, zippered bag with prescription bottle and pills; “Zen as F*ck” Journal, Lipstick, Compact

Shame: Box of chocolates

Anger: "Cigarettes" (Sage); Poster Board/ Sharpie

Fear: Notebook; “Fearful Things” Bag - “Are You My Mother Book” with “Non-Identifying Information Sheet”; Cabbage Patch Doll with adoption paper

Curiosity- Backpack/ messenger Inside is: Little Witch Book and a Magic Wand

Toad – Zombie Doll, Sunglasses

Gifts for witnesses

Costume pieces (in Bentwood Box/ Bench):

Yahlskaanii- Cedar Hat

Pleaser: Scarf

Anger: Leather Jacket & Ball Cap

Fear: Oversized sweater/ hoody? with pockets

Toad: Superhero cape

Note: Curiosity has no costume

Meaning Making

When I reflect on the process of sifting through the journals, emails, and notes that captured my knowledge gathering, I must admit to being grateful that the path was altered for me. Anger, fear, and shame kept percolating under the surface throughout this journey when I least expected it, but it wasn't until I started the work of externalizing the threads and examining them without judgment that I was able to see how they were woven together with so many other parts of my lived experience. The act of coding these responses, recognizing when they were likely to show up, and holding them with care, curiosity, and compassion became a therapeutic process. I reflected on what stories to tell, and how to tell them within unique voices that I attributed to each of the characters within the Ethnotheatre script. I attended a recent memoir writing workshop with Helen Knott, author of 'In my own Moccasins' and 'Becoming a Matriarch' while I was in the process of revisions on this thesis and there were two reflections that she offered regarding knowing what stories were okay to tell that resonated for me. They were concepts that I struggled with throughout the writing of this thesis. She shared that she often considers what has the silence of the past brought into being and considering if the story you want to share will interfere with someone else's healing journey (H. Knott, Personal Communication, March 9, 2024). I wanted to ensure that I spoke my truth in a way that honoured my journey and reflected my experiences without harming anyone else in the process. The way that adoption was handled in 1970, especially a closed adoptions involving Indigenous children were problematic on a variety of levels which have led to the policy changes that shape current adoption practice. I have tried to practice compassion with others when they can't understand and have often invalidated my feelings related to erasure.

The use of Ethnotheatre allowed me to externalize the emotions that became familiar companions along not only this knowledge gathering process but using a narrative therapy approach, I was able to externalize these emotions and examine them thoroughly. Using Michael White's Maps of Narrative Practice (2007), I explored each character deeper to try to determine when I could remember them first showing up in my life. I asked questions to determine what they looked like, when they showed up, how they interacted with each other and the outside world. Rather than judging the responses, or shutting down, I tried to just hold them with curiosity and gentleness. In taking this approach, I was able to understand how often my trauma responses layer over each other as a form of protection but that in the end, the combination of reaching out, people pleasing, becoming hurt and/or angry, and then withdrawing continues to contribute to a yearning for connection being unmet. I was able to connect specific stories from throughout my life to the emotion coding connected with the story that was told by the character through using the Ethnotheatre/ narrative approach to my knowledge exploration. I also recognized that there are so many more layered moments throughout my life that are not captured in this piece but it does reflect an accurate snapshot of what homecoming looked like for me over the past four years, the buttons that were pushed, the memories that were evoked, the trauma responses that I experienced, and the healing that occurred as I tried to navigate my way home.

The research work of connecting to my Haida roots continues and will require many more trips home, walking along the edge of the Yakoun River where my Chinaay Bud loved to fish. It is there where I feel the strength of my ancestors strongly as I walk along the moss-covered forest paths through the cedars. I am at peace when I am home; my spirit and my body know the calmness. I don't feel a need to prove my connection and I am claimed by the

spirit of the land, the air, and my ancestors. It is a place of great healing for me. I know instinctively that the more time I spend on the land, the more I will build the connections that I am yearning for with my Haida family. I discovered through my research work that the healing I thought I needed to do was because I felt disconnected from my birth family, especially my birth father and my Haida culture and community were because I was disconnected from myself. I started developing strategies at a very early age to cope with what I thought was expected of me. I was always a storyteller which meant I was very observant. I heard conversations that I likely wasn't meant to hear that included negative conversations about "Indians", as well as hushed tone conversations about the uncertainty of 'what you were going to get' with adopted children. This combination of beliefs about my value and need to prove my worth, sent my people pleasing tendencies into overdrive early on. Ironically, this kind, gentle, loving part of myself is what I value about myself most when I am balanced, and walking in an authentic way that is not driven by fear or shame. Afterall, it is what led me into the helping and healing profession and guided me on this journey.

Creating New Pathways

I had hoped that my knowledge gathering journey might help light the path home for other Haida adoptees in the future. I have been involved in some conversations with some strong Haida women about the importance of identity and belonging and the power of connection. It makes me excited to think about the possibility of reconciliation social work positions within Indigenous communities in the future where the primary tasks are connected to cultural pathfinding and connection for those who have experienced disconnection through colonization. What a gift it would be to have a person to hold your hand and walk onto a reconnection journey with someone, lighting the way and holding shame and fear with

curiosity and compassion. I am also curious about what it might be like to have a Homecoming feast for adoptees or adults returning home where they receive ‘children’s names’ as part of reclamation. There are so many possibilities that could create celebratory Homecoming experiences for people. As for me, I know my homecoming journey will continue and that I am now at a better place to be able to identify and calm my responses so that I can be open to new relationships and learning. This knowledge gathering journey has not been an easy path for me. I wanted to abandon it often along the way and I am now able to sit with this discomfort on the other side with gratitude for the journey. It was essential for me to be able to push through the pain and discomfort to be able to meet my learning edge (Kumagai, 2022). I was privileged to take an advanced facilitation training course with Julian Griggs many years ago and he gently pointed out to me that I tended to quickly shut down group conflict which he suggested that I was very skillful at doing however he encouraged me to be mindful about the opportunity for growth that happens within conflict. (J. Griggs, personal communication ~ 2007). At that time, I recognized that tension and conflict often felt like they had the potential to get out of control based on my lived experience so I worked on developing professional tools for managing and navigating conflict but I still recognize my preference to avoid tension and this continues to be an ongoing theme in my personal life although naming it allows me to own the challenge and address it.

While it would be ideal for adoptions for Haida children to follow protocols like those explored within custom adoptions (Carrière, 2015; di Tomasso & de Finney, 2015) which kept children connected to their birth family, and their communities. In addition, Elders were available to share knowledge and teachings and open custom adoptions included “returning to ceremony to honor these practices” (Carrière, 2015, p.45). I have contemplated what access

might look like for Haida children who are born and live away from Haida Gwaii if they were to enter care or be raised by people who do not have access to Haida cultural resources through their own disconnection. I am glad that the adoption act addresses the need for cultural continuity for Indigenous heritage. I have contemplated what sort of supports my adoptive family would have found helpful in being able to connect me to Haida culture from the unceded traditional territory of the Lheidli T'enneh (Prince George) where I grew up. There were several programs that I was able to participate in during my knowledge gathering journey that were only available to me away from Haida Gwaii because of COVID 19 protocols that moved many of the once in-person only resources into online formats. This allowed people like me to participate from wherever they lived. I was able to participate in a Xaad Kil Nee (beginner) language class by zoom as well as a Haida parenting class. Both resources were invaluable for me as I was learning about Haida culture as well as honouring that little disconnected Haida girl inside of me. I know that there are ongoing Xaad Kil Nee classes being offered through Simon Fraser University as well as through an Alaskan Haida language learner's group. I am grateful for the opportunity that COVID 19 protocols created that allowed these programs to be accessed remotely and I hope that they will continue to be available in this format for Haida people who want to connect to culture from away. There are also some amazing courses being offered at the Haida Heritage School through the Haida Heritage Centre at Kay Llnagaay. I wish that these courses could be offered remotely as well for those living away from home at some point in the future as often the physical distance contributes to the cultural disconnect for Haida people not living on Haida Gwaii. I went out of my way to seek out resources, to find opportunities to learn about what it means to be Haida. I think that the future for Haida adoptees and their adoptive parents who do not live on Haida Gwaii may be found within what is available to access by those of us who are living

'away' in a day and age when people are so transient but are longing for connection. I am curious whether there is an opportunity to explore Haida adoption reform work by expanding Haida child and youth focussed immersive programs such as the Rediscovery T'alaan Stl'ang camp to include regular family programs where disconnected adults or adoptive parents can learn about Haida culture alongside Haida children. Maybe when it comes to honouring Haida adoption, what is needed is time to reflect and understand that any canoe journey (Johnson, 2015) home, even those through rough waters are much smoother, when we are all looking in the same direction, paddling in unison.

Conclusion:

I wanted to have a Hollywood happy ending for this thesis journey, but I recognize that my healing journey to embracing all parts of myself with equal care and attention has just begun. This journey will include spending more time getting to know those that thrive when I am surrounded by the spirits of my Haida ancestors on Haida Gwaii. I will continue to recognize my communities, take deep breaths, and let my spirit allow me to grow and nurture the connections that I need for true belonging (Brown, 2021). This research has opened my eyes, my mind, and my heart and is guiding me home (Bryant, 2022). I am looking forward to performing my knowledge story in front of witnesses at a future date but am grateful to have been able to have woven the threads of discovering into the script that follows in the next section of this document. This is necessary for the next part of my homecoming journey; to breathe life into my story and allow those parts of myself to come out of the shadows, embrace the spotlight and be seen, witnessed, and validated. I am grateful for the part they have played in my journey and looking forward to discovering where my knowledge and

healing journey will go next. Haw'aa for witnessing this knowledge. I am grateful for our time together.

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Appendix A Council of the Haida Nation Research Permit Application

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Council of the Haida Nation Research Permit Application – October 2017

If you wish to conduct research on Haida Gwaii please complete this application prior to the start of your project.

It is important that information not be collected prior to receiving a file number. A non-refundable application fee of \$50 is required for your request to be processed. The processing of your application should not be considered an endorsement or approval of the project.

It is the responsibility of the applicant to ensure the information provided is complete and accurate. If the information provided in this application changes, such as an unexpected site visit or the addition of an interview question, please provide this information to the Council of the Haida Nation.

Upon completion of your project please provide a short overview of your experience conducting your research with recommendations to improve the process. We also request a digital copy of your completed project for our library and archives.

PLEASE NOTE:

- The use of 'Haida Nation' or 'Council of the Haida Nation' may not be used without permission.
- Approval to proceed is not an endorsement of the project and does not imply any type of partnership between the Council of the Haida Nation and applicant.

Make payment to: Secretariat of the Haida Nation

Mail payment to: Council of the
Haida Nation Box 98

Queen Charlotte,
Haida Gwaii V0T
1S0

NOTE: We are not accepting e-transfers at this time.

File number:

Date received:

1. Name of principle investigator:		
Surname: Carriere	Given name: Jeannine	
2. Name of research applicant, if different from above:		
Surname: Decker	Given name: Treena	
3. Institution or affiliation:		
University of Victoria		
Mailing address: withheld from thesis document	Work phone: withheld from thesis document	
Email: main email withheld from thesis document; tdecker@uvic.ca	Mobile phone: withheld from thesis document	
4. Project title: Healing the Way Home; How Haida birth families and communities can contribute to successful homecoming for Haida adoptees		
Area of research <i>Check the appropriate box:</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> Physical sciences <input type="checkbox"/> Biological/ecological sciences <input type="checkbox"/> Anthropology <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other social sciences <input type="checkbox"/> Humanities	<input type="checkbox"/> Policy / Governance / Law <input type="checkbox"/> Archaeology <input type="checkbox"/> Health / Medicine <input type="checkbox"/> Business <input type="checkbox"/> Engineering / Architecture <input type="checkbox"/> Other
Location of research <i>Check all that apply:</i>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Gaaw, Old Massett <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> HIGaagilda, Skidegate <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Masset <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Port Clements <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Queen Charlotte <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Sandspit <input type="checkbox"/> Fee simple land	<input type="checkbox"/> Marine <input type="checkbox"/> Intertidal <input type="checkbox"/> Gwaii Haanas <input type="checkbox"/> Other Haida Protected Area Please specify:
Start date: approximately November 2020 End date: June, 2021		
6. Project description (Please attach a one-page description of tasks to be completed on Haida Gwaii and how these will fulfill the objectives of your larger research project. See attached)		
7. Project funders (Please list all funding bodies or indicate "self-funded"): Self-funded		
8. Project budget (Please attach a one-page budget outline, including how you propose to spend money on Haida Gwaii). The principal applicant is in the process of determining the budget for this research but has attached a basic outline.		
9. Ethical considerations		
See attached		
a. Social research		
i. Will your research involve Haida citizens as subjects or informants? If yes, please answer the following questions.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO	

ii. How will you receive consent from participants in your study? (Please attach any consent form you plan to use.)

Written consent will be requested; alternatively verbal consent will be documented in response to the written document being shared with participants. See attached consent form

iii. How will participant confidentiality be maintained throughout the research process?
 All research participants will be given pseudonyms with the pseudonym code list being kept separately from the research data. The principal applicant will remove any identifying information from the final paper/ play by blending all voices together.

iv. How will your data be collected? (Please attach interview or survey guide you plan to use.)
 The principal applicant will give participants the option to engage in a talking/ healing circle format or engage in one-on-one virtual interviews by phone and/or online video chat technology.

v. How will your data be stored in the short- and long-term?
 Data will be stored on an encrypted laptop in a password protected file for the short-term and destroyed upon the successful defense of the principal applicant's thesis. In addition, all participants will be given a pseudonym with the master pseudonym list stored separately along with signed consent forms in a locked fire-resistant file box which will also be destroyed with the same timeline.

vi. How will your research be reported to the participants and CHN?
 In recognition of Indigenous oral tradition and storytelling methodology, the principal applicant plans to weave participants shared experiences into script that will be performed by the principal applicant as a one woman show. A copy of the completed script, companion paper and video of the performance will be provided to all participants and CHN.

b. Biophysical research

i. Do you expect to make a physical mark on the land or marine environments? If yes, please answer the following questions.	<input type="checkbox"/> YES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NO
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ii. Where will you collect your information? (Please attach a map with exact location(s) and identify access route(s).)
 In recognition of the current COVID 19 protection measures, the researcher intends to conduct all research through virtual talking circles using secure software. The principal applicant has received permission to use Northern Health's PEXIP video/ audio conferencing software for the duration of this research project as it is recognized by Northern health as being secure. It is anticipated that most of the research will be conducted via telephone or online meetings wherever

iii. Describe the methods you will use to collect this information.
 Virtual healing and talking circles and one-on-one interviews conducted by phone or through secure, online video/ audio software (PEXIP)

iv. Describe any potential impacts your work is likely to have on the environmental, scientific, archaeological, cultural, heritage, and spiritual values. Identify the measures you will take to mitigate these impacts.
 The principal applicant is an adoptee of Haida and mixed ancestry who would like to weave the stories witnessed through this research into a guide for other Haida adoptees raised outside of culture and community in closed adoptions. The intent of the researcher is to light the way for those seeking the path home in a way that supports healing.

c. Research with community and government organizations	
i. Do you plan to collect information from the CHN and/or other community or government organizations on Haida Gwaii? If yes, please answer the following questions.	<input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO
ii. Please identify the organizations you plan to work with for this research. The principal applicant would like to work with the Council of the Haida Nation as well as the Skidegate and Old Massett Bands to ensure that the principal applicant is approaching the research in ways that are respectful.	

iii. Have these organizations granted you consent to work with them on this project? If no, please explain. The principal applicant is in the process of making formal requests for this consent.	
iv. Will your study require any formal permit to be issued by another community or governmental organization? If yes, please attach permit or describes the steps taken to achieve this permit. No	

d. University ethics (only answer if you are affiliated with a university)	
Have you received ethics approval from your university? If yes, please attach confirmation of your approval.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO

10. Contributions to the Haida nation and Haida Gwaii
a. How do you propose this research will benefit the Haida nation? Describe all financial and in-kind benefits. The researcher anticipates the opportunity for participants to enhance their own emotional healing through sharing their experiences of homecoming with Haida adoptees and birth family members who have also walked on this journey home. Haida values recognize the importance of interconnectedness, respect, and reciprocity which the researcher believes will be connected to sharing stories of homecoming, if one participant experiences healing because of this research then it benefits all participants. The researcher herself has had mixed experiences with homecoming as a Haida adoptee. Her attempts at reconnection have sometimes been painful which has led her to strive to create research that may help light the way home for those making their way home after being disconnected through adoption or the lingering effects of colonization. The researcher believes that this research represents the Haida value of responsibility through this work "We will ensure that our heritage is passed onto future generations" (Council of the Haida Nation, n.d.)

b. How do you propose this research will help support the Haida Nation meet their policy objectives?

The principal applicant believes that this research is deeply connected with truth and reconciliation work and embraces the Haida Values outlined in the Marine Use planning documents on the CHN page. Many researchers have identified the importance of culture for Indigenous adoptees and adoption policies now ensure that culture plans exist for adoptees however there are many adults for whom this connection to culture was actively discouraged. The principal applicant feels that this research represents an opportunity to heal this harm by welcoming these children home and witnessing their stories to honour this transformation.

11. Attachments

The following attachments are included in this application (please check all that apply):

- Project description (1 page, question 6)
- Project budget (1 page, question 8)
- Individual consent form (question 9(a)(ii))
- Interview or survey guide (question 9(a)(iv))
- Location map showing research site(s) and access (Question 9(b)(ii))
- Research permits from other government organizations (Question 9(b)(iii))

THE FOLLOWING SECTION IS FOR OFFICE USE ONLY

Date of application received: _____

Date of Communications Committee meeting: _____

Date of Executive Committee meeting (if required): _____

Recommendation made to the Executive Committee by the Communications Committee:

 APPROVE RESEARCH AND ISSUE PERMISSION LETTER APPROVE RESEARCH AND ISSUE PERMISSION LETTER, PENDING THE FOLLOWING:_____
_____ DENY RESEARCH WITH THE FOLLOWING RECOMMENDATIONS FOR RE-SUBMITTING THE APPLICATION:_____

Communications Project Manager Signature: _____

Date of letter sent to applicant:

HEALING THE WAY HOME

Appendix B Methodology Revision

Healing the Way Home

Proposed Research Methodology Changes

Jan.31, 2021

Researcher: Treena Decker, MSWI Student

UVIC School of Social Work

Principle Investigator: Dr. Jeannine Carrière

Submitted to the Council of the Haida Nation (CHN) Research Committee

I am proposing some changing my research methodology considering a conversation that I had with the CHN Research Chair, Barbara Wilson and the Communications Director, Valine Brown. I am grateful for their insights into the potential re-traumatization for participants and the extremely limited opportunity to have in person supports especially during COVID restrictions. I would like to begin my offering my sincere apologies to any of the research committee members who may have had an emotional response to my proposed research and application. It has never been my intention to cause harm to Haida Birth Families, nor Haida communities, rather I had hoped to minimize additional harm for Haida adoptees who may not understand Haida protocols, community supports, and which knowledge keepers may be able to ease their Homecoming experiences. To minimize the impact on Haida birth family members and/or communities and provide direction for adoptees, I am proposing to embark on a personal healing and renewed Homecoming journey for myself using a completely ethnographic approach that I hope will ease the way home for others in the future.

HEALING THE WAY HOME

Rather than recruit Haida Birth Family members and/ or adoptees to share their stories, I am proposing that I will instead connect with Haida community resources, storytellers, Elders, and Knowledge Keepers related to understanding what it means to be Haida, gaining a better understanding of protocols, cultural connections, and engaging in Haida culture and communities. I am hoping to engage in this work in ways that respect my own birth family while also minimizing my own shame stories connected to internalized racism, feelings of disconnection/ abandonment, and fear of being unintentionally disrespectful due to my lack of knowledge of culture and protocols and would appreciate any guidance that the committee can offer me on how to do this.

I would like to gather as much knowledge as I can and weave it into an Ethnodrama to be performed by a single person (me) and will be recorded in a video format that will be submitted to UVIC and the CHN as part of my thesis journey. Any rights to performance by anyone other than the researcher will be guided by the journey and Haida Knowledge Keepers.

If this proposed direction is more in keeping with Haida values and is something that the CHN Research Committee would be willing to support, then I will approach the Human Research Ethics Board at UVIC with the proposed changes. I am grateful for your guidance and hope that I am practicing the values of ‘yahguudang’, ‘laa guu ga kanhllns’, and ‘gina k’aadang.nga gii uu tl’ k’anguudang’ (Council of the Haida Nation, n.d.).

References

Council of the Haida Nation. (n.d.). *Marine Planning Program/ Culture*. Retrieved from Council of the Haida Nation: <https://haidamarineplanning.com/issues/culture/>

Appendix C – Council of the Haida Nation Research Committee approval letters


HAIDA NATION

 504 Naamii Street
 PO Box 589 Masset
 Haida Gwaii, V0T 1M0
 250.626.5252

 1 Reservoir Road, Skidegate
 PO Box 98 Queen Charlotte
 Haida Gwaii, V0T 1S0
 250.559.4468

Treena Decker
 415 7 Avenue East,
 Prince Rupert, BC
 V8J 2J2

February 10, 2021

RE: RESEARCH PERMIT APPROVAL – 2021-002R

Dear Treena Decker,

Please accept this letter as permission for Treena Decker to conduct research on Haida Gwaii.

This research permit will be valid from **February 1, 2021 to December 31, 2021**. If these dates need to be extended, another research permit application will need to be submitted to the CHN.

Healing the Way Home will be a personal healing and renewed homecoming journey for Treena using a completely ethnographic approach that she hopes will ease the way home for others in the future. Treena will be connecting with Haida community resources, storytellers, Elders, and Knowledge Keepers related to understanding what it means to be Haida, gaining a better understanding of protocols, cultural connections, and engaging in Haida culture and communities. The information gathered will be recorded and submitted to the Council of the Haida Nation and the University of Victoria.

Approval of research projects is not an endorsement of the project. Although in-person interviews are not included in your proposed research, the Council of the Haida Nation must note: All approvals are subject to change with COVID-19 protocols and restrictions. Travel may not be permitted during your intended timeframe; isolation requirements may be in place; additional COVID-19 safety plans may be required. Follow the CHN for up-to-date information. For the safety of you, and our remote Island communities, check back before confirming your travel plans.

Signature and contact information deliberately hidden


HAIDA NATION

 504 Naanii Street
 PO Box 589 Masset
 Haida Gwaii, V0T 1M0
 250.626.5252

 1 Reservoir Road, Skidegate
 PO Box 98 Queen Charlotte
 Haida Gwaii, V0T 1S0
 250.559.4468

 Treena Decker
 [REDACTED]
 Prince Rupert, BC
 [REDACTED]

March 10, 2022

RE: RESEARCH PERMIT APPROVAL – 2021-001R Renewal

Dear Treena Decker

Please accept this letter as permission for Treena Decker to conduct research on *Healing the Way Home* on Haida Gwaii.

This research permit will be valid from March 10, 2022 to December 31, 2022. If these dates need to be extended, another research permit application will need to be submitted to the CHN.

As per your application, originally, this research was intended to gather information about the homecoming experience that may help light the way home for others. After consultation with the CHN Research Committee and others, the methodology for your research changed to focusing on "self as subject" and exploring my own homecoming and reconnection in a way that you hope will be helpful for others who struggle to navigate this difficult path home. Much of your research has already occurred in 2021 but are continuing to weave your experiences together and supplement new knowledge about community and culture through conversations with Sacred Knowledge Keepers, Elders, Community Members, and members of your birth family.

Please note: Application approval is not an endorsement of this project. All approvals are subject to change with COVID-19 protocols and restrictions. Travel may not be permitted during your intended time frame; isolation requirements may be in place; additional COVID-19 safety plans may be required. Follow the CHN for up-to-date information. For the safety of you, and our remote Island communities, check back before confirming your travel plans.

CHN is asking all visitors to sign the Haida Gwaii Pledge at haidagwaiipledge.ca to understand the protocols for respectful travel to Haida Gwaii. The CHN strongly recommends travellers be fully vaccinated at least 2 weeks prior to departure and requests that unvaccinated guests not visit Haida Gwaii at this time.

Signature and contact information deliberately hidden