

Witnessing the Journey: A Spiritual Awakening

by

Ana Celeste MacLeod
B.A. CYC., University of Victoria, 2018

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

School of Child & Youth Care

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Abstract

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Indigenous adoptee scholars across Turtle Island and beyond have done good work in coming to understand their identity through community connection, culture, education and practice. A plethora of research has guided young Indigenous interracial adoptees on their journey, yet there are few stories focused on the experiences of interracial Maya adoptees reconnecting to their culture in KKKanada. Currently there is limited research documenting Maya adoptees experiences of displacement and cultural reclamation in KKKanadian adoption studies. Research must make more space for these stories and the stories of local Indigenous communities supporting them. In this story (thesis), through engagement with current literature and ten research questions, I explored what it meant to live as an interracial adoptee in West Coast Indigenous communities. An Indigenous Youth Storywork methodology was applied to bring meaning to relationships I have with diverse Indigenous Old Ones, mentors and Knowledge Keepers and their influence on my journey as a Maya adoptee returning to my culture. My personal story was developed and analyzed using an Indigenous decolonial framework and Indigenous Arts-based methods. This storying journey sheds light on the intricate intersections of interracial adoption, specifically for Maya Indigenous Youth who currently live in KKKanada. The intention of this Youth Storywork research work is to create space for

Indigenous, Interracial, Transracial and Maya adoptees in Child and Youth Care, Social Work and Counselling Psychology education, policy and practice.

Keywords: *Interracial Adoptees, Maya, Indigenous Youth Storywork Methodology, Indigenous Decolonial Frameworks, Indigenous Arts-Based Methods*

Throughout this thesis I am going to capitalize Indigenous Youth Storywork, Storywork and Youth Storywork to highlight the transformative process of coming to know and create my own methodology. I will use Indigenous Youth Storywork, Storywork and Youth Storywork interchangeably throughout this document.

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Terminology



Snuneymuxw First Nation, July 2019

Old One shared a teaching with me about tummy mother and heart mother, I have been given permission to share these definitions throughout my storying thesis. Maltiox for The Story Blanket and teaching (cultural teachings, April 2020).

Tummy Mother: birth mother

Tummy Father: birth father

Heart mother: adoptive mother

Heart Father: adoptive father

Gem Mother: My gem mother honoured me with naming gifts I received along my journey. She calls them cultural gems which includes both human and non-human relations, hence why I call her gem mother.

KKKanada: Throughout my journey I have seen Indigenous folx post on social media platforms and in music referring to the Canadian State as KKKanada. Prior to colonization KKKanada was spelt Kanada. The Snotty Nose Rez Kids who are Haisla rappers have a song titled KKKanada. See link for song lyrics in references (Snotty Nose Rez Kids, 2017). To honour my Indigenous Youth Storywork Methodology I will be using KKKanada to further decolonize my work (cultural teachings, February 2020).

K'iche (One of many Mayan Indigenous languages): Maltiox = Thank You

*You use Mayan when referring to the many languages spoken by various Maya groups and Maya when referring to people, places and culture.

Español (Spanish): Gracias = Thank you & Te Amo Mamá = I love you Momma

SENĆOFEN (One of many Coast Salish languages): HÍSŪKĒ = Thank You

Old Ones: One of my Old Ones from STÁUTW First Nation gifted me this teaching about being called “Old One” not an “Elder”. Throughout the story I will be using the terminology Old One to honour my SIAM SELWÁN’s (Respected Elder) teaching (cultural teachings, September 2018).

Indigenous: My own definition that honours cultural teachings shared with me, of Indigenous is anyone from Turtle Island and beyond that has a connection to their Indigenous roots, regardless of being displaced from their communities and cultures (cultural teachings, September 2017).

Status: Cultural teachings shared with me about what “Status” means is Indigenous people who belong to an Indigenous band, who are registered legally under the Indian Act and in this definition, status members are considered wards of the state (cultural teachings, September 2018).

NDN: originally means Native Indian. But to challenge colonial systems I use NDN (meaning Native/Indigenous) to disrupt colonial spaces.

NON- NDN: means white or non-native folx. Like KKKanada “NDN” and “NON-NDN” are commonly used on social media platforms such as Instagram.

Womxn: I use an x in womxn to honour and reclaim womanhood without the power of “men” in my identity.

Folx & Latinx: I use folx and Latinx to honour diverse identities including transgender and non-binary people.

Kin: Throughout my journey of connecting with diverse Indigenous folx some people who I call family prefer to be called kin instead of sister, aunty/auntie, brother or uncle.

Non-human relations: can include land, ocean, lakes, rivers, plants, rocks and animals.

Up Island: known as northern place on Vancouver Island, British Columbia, KKKanada. Term used by folx who live on Vancouver Island.

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I acknowledge with great respect and humility the Lək'əḡən peoples whose ancestral homelands I work, live, play and grow on, including Songhees, Xwsepsum (Esquimalt) and W̱SÁNEĆ Nations whose relationships with this land remain unbroken to this day. I will go beyond a land acknowledgement and commit to Indigenous governance and self-determination in my personal, professional and academic worlds.

I want to acknowledge the ones that came before me (my ancestors), the ones with me (my Old Ones, family and mentors) and those who will come after me (my children, grandchildren and great children). To my dear Auntie May Sam HÍSW̱KE for your story, beauty and love. I am honoured to have met you through the community work I do and the connections I have with some of your family members. I raise my hands to my Aunty SIEMTINO and my Uncle Max Henry Jr. for being patient with me while you both share your teachings and ceremonies with me. My Gem Mother I will hold your teachings, energy and blessings close to my heart for the rest of my life. Your natural beauty ignites embers in my spirit. To my mentor Carey Newman for your creative ideas, support and teachings.

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Finally, to my co-supervisors Chief of STÁUTW First Nation Dr. XEMFOLTW, Nick Claxton and Dr. Kundoqk, Jacquie Green for walking with me on this difficult journey. Your love, feedback and support came from a place of respect and honesty. I truly would have not completed this storying thesis if it was not for you both. Jacquie, you are a blessing. We made it, Maltiox!

Dedication

This story is dedicated to my beautiful tummy mother *Maria Magdalena Molina Miranda*.

You gave me the gift to be here in this world. I know I have never met you, but I believe our paths will cross one day. Every time I see an eagle fly above me; I know you are with me mama. When I look at the eagle I see you. I know you are always in my heart and spirit. I believe that my deep connection to my Maya blood has come from your ancestors. Maltiox for giving birth to me and believing in me. I pray for you each and every day that you are safe, loved and that you and our family are healthy. Te Amo Mama.

I also want to acknowledge the many inspiring Indigenous youth, families and communities who I have worked with in my counselling practice. Maltiox for sharing your stories with me. All of you will always hold a special place in my heart. To the Maya, Indigenous Interracial and Transracial adoptee children, youth and their families whose voices are still being silenced. I see you and I hear you. You are strong, you are resilient, and you are all powerful.

Ana on Lək'wəḡən lands, June 2019



Protocol Disclaimer: As part of the diverse Indigenous cultural protocols and teachings that have been shared with me, honouring and naming both my supervisory and examining committee, Old Ones, Knowledge Keepers and my mentors are important to decolonizing my thesis.

As a commitment to decolonizing my work I acknowledge and raise my hands to:

Dr. Sohki Aski Esquao, Jeannine Carriere, **External Examiner**
School of Social Work

Dr. Naadli, Todd Ormiston, **Chair of Oral Defence Ceremony**
School of Social Work

This is me; This is who I am

Poem by Ana Celeste MacLeod

Ana Celeste MacLeod, July 2019, Photo Credit (PC): Toonasa Luggi



*Adopted, **Loved**, Acknowledged and Wanted,*

*Indigenous, **Violence**, Strong and Taunted.*

*Resilient, **Young**, Privileged, and Confused,*

*Stressed, **Creator**, Spirit and Abused.*

*Knowledge Seeker, **Passionate**, Body and Mind,*

*Truth, **Story**, Trust and Kind.*

*Broken, **Sad**, Scared and Rejected,*

*Honoured, **Ceremony**, Old Ones and Accepted.*

*Empathetic, **Calm**, Family and Friends,*

*I **finally** see my brothers, sisters and community through **a** clearer lens.*

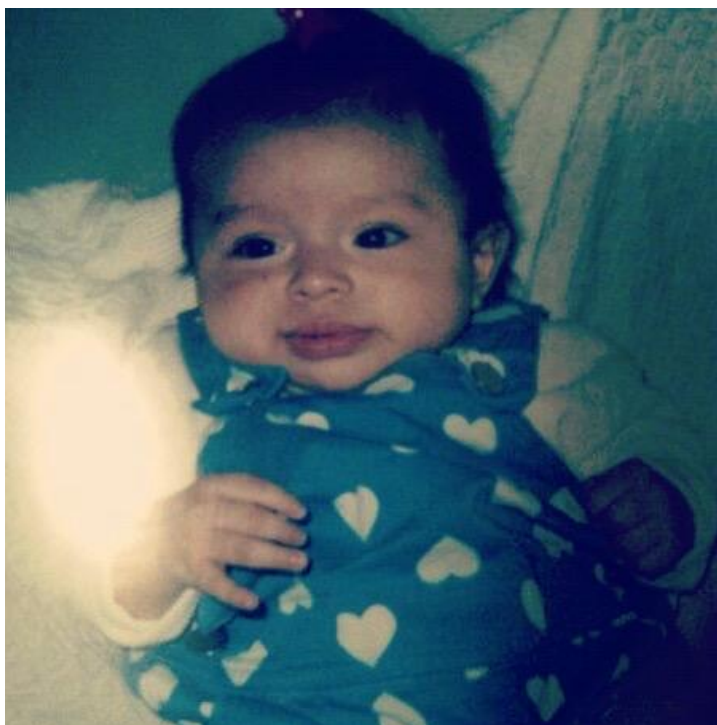
*My **name** was Maria Celeste Molina Miranda,*

*But **now** my name is Ana Celeste MacLeod,*

*And **I** must put my worries to a rest.*

The Start of My Journey

Baby Ana, six months old, 1996



My Storywork (thesis) seeks to delay my story of living in two worlds. Although I was the only one researched in this story I had support from diverse Indigenous Old Ones, Knowledge Keepers and mentors. To honour an Indigenous Youth Storywork methodology, storying will be woven in and out of this thesis. A teaching that was shared with me by a Coast Salish Knowledge Keeper was to always introduce myself at the beginning of my work (cultural teachings, September 2016). My name is Ana Celeste MacLeod, and I was adopted from Guatemala City when I was six-months old. I am 24 years young. I identify as a Maya Indigenous Youth. My tummy mother was born in San Juan Opico, El Salvador and my birth father's origins are unknown but most likely from Guatemala City, Guatemala. My heart mother and heart father are of Scottish and English ancestry. At six-months-old I came to Nexwlélexm on Skwxwú7mesh territories and lived there until I was eight years old. I have lived on

Xwsepsum and Songhees land of the Lək̓ʷəŋən speaking peoples since I was eight years old. I walk with great humility in being raised in an upper-middle class white privileged family. I am going to situate my story by first answering ‘Where am I From?’ and how I came to understand my Indigenous roots.

My Tummy Mother and I

In January 2020 I asked my heart mother to give me documentation related to my adoption. I spent several weeks reading through all documentation that was shared with me. I have reviewed the documentation in relation to how it has helped me understand my Indigeneity. Documentation includes social work reports, my original birth certificate, adoption court papers and written instructions from my foster mother on what my daily routine was when I was six-months old. According to the social worker report my tummy mother was approximately 16 years old when she had my first brother, 18 when she had my second brother and 19 when she gave birth to me. Recently, a teaching was shared with me by Old One who is from STÁUTW First Nation, that there is no half-brother and half-sister in our culture, and so with this teaching, I have two brothers (cultural teachings, July 2020).

My Tummy Mother at 19 years old, 1995



I was told by my heart mother that the reason why I was put up for adoption was because my tummy mother decided that she was unable to care for me due to poverty and already caring for her two young babies. My biological fathers name was not mentioned in social work papers given to me.

In a document from the social worker connected to my adoption case, one of the paragraphs noted that my biological father 'mistreated her (my tummy mother) even though she was pregnant' and left her as soon as she became pregnant. If all documentation is correct, I have two brothers. I was born in General San Juan de Dios Hospital in Guatemala City on December 31st, 1995 at 8:20 pm weighing six pounds eight ounces. According to a DNA test result that the adoption lawyer asked for, my tummy mothers DNA blood matched my DNA blood, this test concluded that my tummy mother is in fact my biological mother. Three days after I was born, I was put into the care of my foster mother and her family. I was with my foster family for six-months before my heart mother adopted me and brought me to KKKanada. My heart mother, shared with me that my foster family was middle class, fed me well and kept me safe. Before I was adopted my name was Maria Celeste Molina Miranda. I had a very similar name to my tummy mother. Her name is Maria Magdalena Molina Miranda. It took a couple of years for me to switch from a Guatemalan citizen to a Canadian citizen. I currently do not have Guatemalan citizenship. I am curious and have only done minimal research on what it would take to become a Guatemalan citizen.

Due to both the global COVID-19 pandemic and corruption with the United States of America (USA) and Guatemalan governments right now, it is not the time to apply for citizenship. When I came to KKKanada my heart mother changed my name to Ana Celeste MacLeod (keeping my middle name). Ana is spelt with one n because that is the Español way to spell it. I am still unsure if I want to change my name to include the name I was given at birth. I want to honour all my names, but that would be one long name. Over the last several months I have been thinking what it would look like if I switched my first name back to my name given at birth. I care for both my heart family and tummy family, so it is a difficult decision to make. I

still have not made any direct action in changing my name, but I will continue to consider it throughout my Storywork.

My Heart Mother and I

As part of researching myself I was in conversation with my heart mother about my adoption and her life story. My heart mother was supportive of my story (this thesis) and is always wanting to learn more about my adoption story too. Throughout the last several months we discussed topics such as racism, whiteness, Indigenous healing, trauma and the concept of family. My heart mother and I discussed the history of adoption and colonization. We recognized that my story is different. The conversations we had together were challenging, rewarding and emotional. A few months before I came to KKKanada my heart mother fell in love with my heart father and he said he wanted to raise a child with my heart mother. They waited until I was six years old so I could be part of their wedding. At my heart parents wedding, I was gifted a gold locket; inside the gold locket was a picture of my heart mother and heart father.

My Hearth Mother and I, 2018



Although the locket necklace is a little too small for me now, I keep it in my jewelry box close to my bedside table in my room. Prior to my heart mother meeting my heart father, she was single during the time she put in her adoption application. The entire adoption process took approximately two years and cost thousands of dollars. I was shocked when I found out about the complexities and frustrated at the colonial system when I knew how much money I was ‘worth’.

I know adoption is costly because of lawyers, paperwork and social workers, but the amount of money paid is outrageous. I have continued to do research on the adoption system and the cost of lawyers. Although the world has changed since I was adopted in 1996, prices of international adoption are still up in the thousands of dollars. I do not feel like I have two fathers as I have little information on my tummy father; however access or knowledge of my tummy father may change, but if it is true that my tummy father 'was bad' then I am challenged whether I want further information on my tummy father, or it might be that getting access to his information is un-realistic. I do not know where he lives, I do not have a name for him, and I do not even know if he is still alive.

My Gem Mother and I

In the fall of 2018, I was invited by one of my mentors, who is a professor in the University of Victoria (UVIC) Child and Youth Care (CYC) program, to attend an annual general meeting with Antidote an Indigenous and Multiracial girls and womxn network. This non-profit organization was co-founded in the early 2000's by Dr. Joanne Lee¹ and Dr. Sandrina de Finney². The Multiracial president at the time was a Cultural Urban Planner who is of Indian background. I remember her asking me if she can give me a hug. Since that hug, although we spent the 2019 year with little communication due to our own health and wellness journeys we have built a strong mother daughter relationship. For me, I have my tummy mother, heart mother and now I have my Gem mother. Towards the end of 2019 we reconnected and spend hours on the phone and text messaging. In the last few month my Gem mother has shared her Buddhist teachings that align with my Indigenous framework. In the last few months I experienced lateral violence due to multiple diverse Indigenous womxn challenging and misinterpreting my

¹ <https://www.antidotenetwork.org/about-us/history/>

² <https://www.uvic.ca/hsd/cyc/people/home/faculty/profiles/de-finney-sandrina.php>

adoption story. At one point I was told that I have no knowledge about diverse Indigenous communities, families, ceremonies, protocols and teachings. My Gem mother taught me that I need to let go of gossip. She told me that those who know my truth will continue to walk alongside me and those who are not meant to be in my life will gently walk away. She also told me that because I am young, many folx will continue to challenge who I am, where I come from and why I am doing what I am doing. I started to get in my head and thought that maybe I am not Indigenous; I should just quit my identity journey. I had many moments while writing this thesis where I wanted to give up on completing this research work. I am extremely honoured to work alongside my Gem mother as co-presidents of Antidote. I would not be where I am today if it was not for my Gem mother. With my Gem mothers encouragement I use my heart and my nourished spirit to continue writing my story. I am thankful for my three mother figures who are in my life and hold me up high while I grapple with understanding my Indigenous roots.

My Indigenous Roots

Throughout my childhood I was given multiple opportunities to travel around the world and be a part of a competitive swim team. I grew up with Black Indigenous People of Colour (BIPOC) children and families. I always knew I was adopted. There was never a day where I was told I was adopted. I figured it out by connecting with family friends who were also adopted from Guatemala. Two of my heart mothers' good friends also adopted children from Guatemala, so I was raised with them too. When I was little, my heart family read books to me on adoption. In the last couple of years I have asked my heart mother if I was ever told I was adopted. My heart mother and heart father never sat me down to tell me I was adopted. As both my heart mother and I would agree 'I just knew'.

As a child I do not remember being given any opportunities to explore my Indigeneity. I vaguely remember being gifted a book by Cree playwright Tomson Highway when I was quite young. Also, my heart father read this children's book titled *STORM BOY* illustrated and written by writer and artist Paul Owen Lewis (Lewis, 1995) to me almost every night for several years. The book was about traditions of Haida, Tlingit and other Indigenous folx of the Pacific Northwest Coast. *STORM BOY* was one of my heart fathers favourite books to read to me. Another experience about coming to recognize my Indigeneity that I reflect on is that recently my heart mother told me a story of when her and I were at a side stand where a man was selling fruit. The man's side stand was on Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh lands. He asked my heart mother if I had 'status' and my heart mother said I was from Guatemala, the man proceeded to give us the 'status' discount on the local fruit we bought. Although my heart mother and I never discussed this experience when it happened, we both recall the experience now and realize that other folx saw Indigeneity in me.

The experience of just knowing I was adopted, but not really having opportunities to truly explore my Indigeneity has been challenging and shaped why I am so cautious of identifying as Indigenous today. Challenges I have had with identifying as Indigenous has to do with how I was raised. I have never been back to Guatemala. I do not even know what Indigenous community I am from or even if I am from a specific Indigenous community. I grew up around folx born in many places and who were connected to many different cultures. But I never understood what being Maya meant or how I was supposed to be Maya. I did not even know I had Indigenous blood in me when I was younger. Throughout the last six years, I have begun to learn about colonial history of Indigenous folx on Turtle Island. I am cautious with identifying as Indigenous because my DNA results states I am Ladino which includes both Indigenous and Spanish roots.

In Guatemala there continues to be violence between Latinx and Maya folx. Many diverse Indigenous folx from Turtle Island and beyond have told me I am Indigenous. I am **JUST** starting to feel confident in identifying as Maya. For the first 20 years of my life I was raised in NON-NDN culture. In the last four years, I have been honoured to learn from diverse Indigenous Old Ones, Knowledge Keepers and mentors who have shared with me their connection to the Creator, land and ceremony.

My heart mother told me I refused to take the ‘Indigenous’ social studies when I was in high school. Indigenous social studies was offered to any student who was interested in learning about the history of Indigenous folx. Students who identified as Indigenous, received priority over NON-NDN students to register in the class. At the time I did not consider myself an Indigenous student. I remember this experience clearly. I really had little interest in learning about Indigenous culture and folx. I barely understood what it meant to be Indigenous.



Ana being Sassy, 2000

During my high school years, I remember being surrounded by folx from all around the world including Indigenous folx. I do not recall any conversations about me being Indigenous or let alone what that even meant. It was not until my third year of university in the Bachelor of CYC program at UVIC that I started considering my connection to being Indigenous. Dr. Sandrina de Finney³ an Indigenous scholar and I had a

³ <https://www.uvic.ca/hsd/cyc/people/home/faculty/profiles/de-finney-sandrina.php>.

meeting one day, and she shared, “you are Indigenous, I can see it in you”.

Shortly after Dr. de Finney shared her observation of me, Dr. Jeffrey Ansloos⁴ a Nehiyaw Cree scholar and professor said the same thing. I was stuck.

After these two meetings I started asking myself quite a few questions. Of course, I had some sort of idea I was Indigenous, but what does that mean? I do not have First Nations status. I apply for some funding but not all. Does just looking Indigenous actually make me Indigenous, or do I need to have a piece of paperwork signed by the Guatemalan government that says I am ‘Indigena’? My DNA results (original DNA results requested from the KKKanadian lawyer at the time of my adoption) do not say I am ‘Indigena’ it says I am ‘Ladino’ but my 23andMe (DNA result testing kit information taken in October 2019) says I am 45% Native American and 35% Español and Portuguese. Still what does that even mean? Does DNA matter or is it just some colonial construct? Several years later I asked my heart mother what it said on my adoption documentation about me being Indigenous. On my DNA test results it says I am Ladino which means I am part Español and part ‘Indigena’ and because it does not say I am ‘Indigena’ on my documentation does that mean I am not Indigenous? Does DNA testing **really** matter? Okay, but I am only part Indigenous not all, still is it appropriate for me to identify as Indigenous? I continued to ask myself these questions throughout this storying thesis. It has been about three years since I have started my journey of exploring Indigenous identity. In the last year, I have started to acknowledge that I am Maya from Guatemala City and San Juan Opico, although I do not know exactly what community I am from. I have no information about my tummy father, but I do know according to the social worker documentation, that my tummy mother was from San Juan Opico, El Salvador and left her country about two and a half years prior to when I was born.

⁴ https://www.oise.utoronto.ca/aphd/Home/Faculty_and_Staff/Faculty/528140/Jeffrey_Ansloos.html

There is no specific agency name or social worker who speaks about me in the adoption process. Documentation only says, 'social report' and 'social background of the child'. So, what's the point of telling you my story? Well, I realize(d) I need(ed) to understand the complexity of my story and research myself and my identity before I can do good, ethical research and work alongside Indigenous communities locally and globally. My story started with me understanding my identity and then shifted to me being proud of identifying as Indigenous. My research seeks to further understand what it feels like to be living in a territory that is not mine.

Ana engaging in ceremony, July 2019, PC: Uncle H



In this research, I am here to share my story, my compassion for the folx in my life and to truly be proud of who I am and where I come from that will strengthen and inform research methods, protocols and relationships with diverse Indigenous folx living in many spaces among Turtle Island and beyond.

Understanding My Indigenous Identity through Literature



Mix of Ana's Adoption Documentation, 1995

The literature review will be broken into two sections. The first section will cover Interracial Adoption and Reclaiming Indigenous Identity. I specifically focused on research related to the history of Guatemala and to Maya Indigenous youth living in KKKanada and USA. But, I want to honour the many Indigenous adoptee scholars who have done extensive research on transnational and Indigenous adoption in KKKanada and beyond. I understand that Indigenous scholars such as Dr. Sandrina de Finney (as cited in de Finney & di Tomasso, 2015), Dr. Todd Ormiston (2012), Dr. Cindy Blackstock (as cited in Bennett et al., 2005; as cited in Blackstock et al., 2007a; 2007b) and Dr. Jeannine Carriere (as cited in Carriere & Scarth, 2007; as cited in Carriere & Richardson, 2009; 2013) have put their heart and spirit into bringing Indigenous adoption literature to academia. For example, Dr. Cindy Blackstock (as cited in Bennett et al., 2005; as cited in Blackstock et al., 2007a; 2007b) has done an immense amount of research work on Residential Schools, The Child Welfare System and Reconciliation.

In the second section I will speak about Indigenous Youth Storywork, Indigenous Arts-Based Methods and My Tree of Life Framework.

Defining Interracial and Transnational Adoption

Lee (2003) & Isaacs (1994) define transracial adoption (interracial adoption) as a child of a different racial/ethnicity other than their adoptive parents. Transnational adoption (also known as International or Inter-country adoption) is when an individual or legal couple adopts a child from another country than their own (Government of Canada, 2016). I am both an interracial and transnational adoptee.

I was born in Guatemala City. My heart parents are from settler English and Scottish ancestry. They were born on Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh territories and currently live on Lək̓ʷəŋən lands. I am of one race (Maya) and my heart parents are of another (Settler/White).

The History of Interracial and Transnational Adoption

During the late 1960's and 1970's interracial (transracial) and transnational adoption literature was researched primarily from social work and sociology fields (Lee, 2003). In the last ten years, recent literature on interracial (transracial) and transnational adoption has been researched from social work, psychology and immigrant and refugee fields (Bunkers et al., 2009; Gibbons et al., 2015; Gresham et al., 2004; Lee, 2003). Maya adoption literature is more specifically focused on NON-NDN folx who currently reside in the USA adopting children from Guatemala (Bunkers et al., 2009; Gibbons et al., 2015; Gresham et al., 2004). Other literature is focused on stories of adoptees who identify as Black, Korean and Chinese who have grown up in NON-NDN families in USA (Dubinsky, 2008; Isaacs, 1994). In the USA there are studies focused on Latinx and Maya stories about being adopted during the civil war. Other than the Indigenous scholars listed above, there is also extensive adoption research work created by Indigenous scholars including Thistle's (2019) #1 National Best Seller book *From the Ashes* that

explores his journey of addiction, homeless, identity and adoption. The Yellowhead Tribal Services Agency (YTSA) in Alberta has been successful in braiding customary Indigenous adoption practices with provincial adoption laws and regulations (INFOCOM Managements, 1994- 2004). Keewatin's (2004) Master's thesis explores custom adoption through ceremony, connection to Old ones and Knowledge Keepers. Keewatin (2004) also reviewed the development of the Custom Adoption Program at YTSA. Also, *Aski Awasis/Children of the Earth: First Peoples Speaking on Adoption* (2013) is an edited book by Tam and Carriere that documents former adoptees experiences of living in NON-NDN families and highlight how crucial it is to understand identity in their birth communities and cultures.

For my Youth Storywork, Dubinsky (2008) states that interracial adoption began when the civil war started in Guatemala during the early 1960's. I am excited that my research can further add to international adoption studies among Maya adoptees.

Ana with late dog Polly at eight years old, 2004



The Civil War and Adoption

The 36 year-long civil war in Guatemala began in the 1960's and ended with peace accords in 1996 (PBS, 2011). I was born in 1995 during the ending of the civil war. Over 200,000 people were killed during the war, specifically, the Maya peoples were targeted the most (PBS, 2011). Violence against Maya peoples is still prevalent in Guatemalan today (PBS, 2011). For Maya people, there is not a specific day when interracial and transnational adoption began, but what we know of is that transracial and transnational adoption started in the USA in the 1950's (Schuster Institute for Investigative Journalism, 2012). Guatemala has a history that includes "a US-backed coup, a genocidal civil war, human rights catastrophes and horrific poverty and health statistics" (Dubinsky, 2008, p. 341). Noonan (2007) emphasizes how important it is to recognize violent relationships between the USA government and Guatemalan government during the civil war. Noonan (2007) describes the relationship between the USA and Guatemala as a "conflict-based relationship [that] set the stage for much of the adoption-related anxiety between the USA and Guatemalan citizens" (p. 302). The literature concludes there is a toxic relationship between the USA and Guatemalan governments that had substantial effects on Guatemalan babies being adopted to American NON- NDN folx. During the early 1980's at the height of the civil war, Guatemalan children were adopted by foreigners in massive numbers (Campbell, 2000). Campbell (2000) says that "thousands of children had been orphaned and displaced as the military carried out a scorched earth policy of wiping out Maya villages which had harboured leftwing guerrillas" (para. 14). Then in 1996 shortly after the peace agreement was created the civil war ended. During the civil war, the kidnap narrative was created.

The civil war ended shortly after I was born. As I have been reflecting on my adoption story I caught myself forgetting I was born during a violent, horrific and traumatic time in Guatemala. But I am reminded daily of the love and support I am surrounded by in my family and community.

The Kidnap Narrative

Starting in the 1950's there was this idea to save Guatemalan children who were living in poverty, experiencing violence in their families or to rescue Guatemalan children and babies who were living in orphanages (Briggs, 2003). Briggs also mentions that to “ ‘adopt’ a child was to participate in foreign policy [in the USA]” (Briggs, 2003, p. 181). There was this narrative created by society and government personnel that Guatemalan babies needed to be adopted or else they would die; to adopt was to participate in a colonial process. Reflecting on my story of being adopted, and in conversation with my heart mother, we are learning and understanding how colonial laws and policies informed practices for my (our) adoption to be completed. Although at the time of my adoption my heart mother did not understand that she was engaging with colonial adoption laws and policies, we (my heart mother and I) have continued to discuss this topic together and her and I have honoured this piece of my journey. Between 1979 and 1983 many Guatemalan children were kidnapped (McConahay, 2000, as cited in Noonan, 2007). Throughout those five years approximately 438 Guatemalan children were adopted by USA families (McConahay, 2000, as cited in Noonan, 2007).

Another narrative that began in the mid-1990's was that “transnational adoption practices [in Guatemala] fueled organ theft rumours and the lynching of suspected baby-snatchers” (Dubinsky, 2008, p. 340; Noonan, 2007). Dubinsky (2008) also highlights that transnational adoption was threatening to Guatemalan womxn and children during this period. It was not until the early 1990's when reports started circulating “that some Guatemalan adoptions involved intermediaries who were buying, defrauding, coercing, and kidnapping babies for the purposes of adoption” (Gibbons et al., 2015; Schuster Institute for Investigative Journalism, 2012, para. 8). Knowing that these actions were taking place in 1998, the USA Embassy began “requiring DNA

testing of a birthparent and the relinquished child, to determine whether the person signing the child away was in fact the child's mother" (Gibbons et al., 2015; Schuster Institute for Investigative Journalism, 2012, para. 8). Literature stated that many of the social and institutional barriers of why families were unable to care for their children during the 90's are due to crime and gang violence, abuse and neglect, corruption of government and poverty (Ataiants et al., 2018; Boehner et al., 2014). In spite of these challenges, there were also parents who were able to care for their children in a healthy and safe way. Campbell (2000) states that legal adoptions were considered an "exception rather than the rule in Guatemala" during the 90's (para. 10). Schuster Institute for Investigative Journalism (2012) reported that according to Guatemala's National Commission for the Search for Missing Children in 2003, over 1,084 cases of missing children were documented. These children were most likely taken for sex work, labour or had been abducted; over 500 of the reported cases were babies under one year old (Schuster Institute for Investigative Journalism, 2012).

Although the literature is focused on deeply disturbing cases, Dubinsky (2008) mentions that it is important to consider that "children carry enormous cultural weight, and if we recognized this then we might find our way out of the kidnap/rescue impasse" (p. 342). The kidnap narrative continued in Guatemala in the late 1990's which resulted in transnational adoption being banned in the early 2000's (Bunkers et al., 2009).

Although the Kidnap Narrative literature is not my experience of being adopted I believe it is important research to consider. As far as what was shared with me from my heart mother and documentation papers, my adoption was a legal and consensual adoption. I have never spoken to my tummy mother in my life. I do have questions of whether she truly consented to my adoption or if she was forced because she did not have access to appropriate resources (ie. housing opportunities for low-income single young mothers).

The Hague Convention and Adoption

Research states that on October 25, 2001 the British Columbia Central Authority placed a ban on adoptions from Guatemala due to reports of child trafficking (Ministry of Children and Family Development, 2013).

The Ministry of Children and Family Development (2013) describes the reasoning for the ban as:

In July 2003 the Government of Canada, with the unanimous support of the provinces/territories raised an objection to Guatemala's accession to the Hague Convention, thereby allowing the Government of Guatemala sufficient time to incorporate the standards and requirements of the Convention into its adoption procedures (The Netherlands, Germany and Spain also objected to Guatemala's accession). Once these measures are put in place, the Government of Canada will review its objection with a view to having it withdrawn. The Canadian Embassy in Guatemala reports that the conditions which led to the suspension of adoptions in 2001 continue to exist, and issues of child trafficking continue to arise. Given that Canada has raised an objection to Guatemala's accession to the Convention, Article 44.3 of the Hague Convention prevents the facilitation of intercountry adoptions between the acceding state (i.e. Guatemala) and the Contracting state (i.e. Canada). Until the Guatemalan adoption authorities have a fully functioning Convention process in place, the moratorium on adoptions remains in effect (pg. 2).

In May 1993 KKKanada signed the Hague Convention on the Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption (HCCH, 1951-2020). The USA signed and became a member of the same Hague Convention in 1994 (Jennings, 2012). In December 2007 Guatemala created the Consejo Nacional de Adopciones that was required by the Hague Convention (Jennings, 2012). In May 2008 Guatemala banned all international adoption applications until they reviewed all ongoing adoption cases (Jennings, 2012). Although KKKanada began intercountry adoption in the early 1840's, as of April 2020 Guatemala, has still not signed onto the Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption (Crook, 2020; HCCH, 1951-2020). Currently, Guatemala is not allowing any country to adopt from their country period. Therefore, according to the Government of Canada (2016) all

provinces and territories have suspended adoptions between Guatemala and KKKanada. The USA is not able to adopt children from Guatemala either. Much of the literature speaks to the relationship, between interracial adoption, war and violence between Guatemala and the United States but there is limited research on adoption, war and violence between Guatemala and KKKanada (Fulton, 1995).

The Hague Convention, The Consejo Nacional de Adopciones and The Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption are important written documents to attempt to keep our young ones protected from illegal transracial and transnational adoptions. The ban on adoption from Guatemala to British Columbia began six-years after I was adopted. I wonder if I would be in KKKanada today if I was younger and born in the early 2000's?

So, What? Considerations for Further Research

Adoption studies focused on identity, belonging, interracial adoption and the Child Welfare system will continue to grow in years to come. For example, Dr. Sarah Wright Cardinal's (2016) research focuses on the sixties scoop, custom adoption and Indigenous folk in KKKanada. Carriere & Scarth (2007) and Richard (2004) speak about Indigenous children being adopted into NON-NDN families and the impact this adoption experience will have on the adoptee, parent and their community. Also, de Finney and di Tomasso (2015) discuss the importance of adoptees yearning for a sense of belonging after being moved in and out of several foster homes. There is also emerging literature and stories of adoptee's who identify as BIPOC reclaiming and reconnecting to their identities (Dubinsky, 2008; Isaacs, 1994). I appreciate that several Indigenous adoptee scholars have created adoption literature that has influenced my research work as a Transracial and International Maya Indigenous adoptee. I hope that my thesis

story can bring to light that there still is a lack of adoption research specifically on how Maya Indigenous adoptees are reclaiming and reconnecting to their Indigenous identities while being displaced from their home communities in KKKanada.

Reclaiming and Reconnecting to Our Indigenous Identities

Based on the diverse Indigenous cultural teachings shared with me, reclaiming Indigenous identity can be defined as someone who identifies as Indigenous (allowing the person to define their Indigeneity) or a BIPOC reclaiming their roots through reconnecting to their ancestors, stories, land, language and ceremonies (cultural teachings, June 2017). Gehl (2017, as cited in Marley, 2017) says that “Indigenous ways of knowing really embraces subjectivity, experience and personal truth” (para. 12). When you are removed from your home community and put into a family of a different race, reclaiming Indigenous ways of knowing and identity can be much more complex. Carriere & Richardson (2009) highlights the importance of kinship and connectedness among Indigenous adoptees’. For far too long adoptees continue to search for a place of home (Carriere & Richardson, 2009). In my Storywork, I continue to wonder where home is for me and how I have come to understand what home means to me. Mila (2019a) who is a transracial Korean adoptee says that “for while it is true that adoption erases DNA and history one child at a time, it is also true that DNA and history can be and will be reclaimed one adult at a time” (para. 21). When I think about my own identity as a young Indigenous youth, DNA does not matter to me. I do not want to reclaim my identity when I am an adult, I want to reconnect and reclaim my Indigenous roots right now. What matters to me is that we need to reclaim and reconnect through our ways and not the western way, because for decades we as Indigenous folx have been told that speaking our language and participating in ceremony is a crime and against colonial law (cultural teachings, February 2020).

Reclaiming and Reconnecting to Indigenous identity literature continues to be created by well-respected Indigenous scholars across Turtle Island and beyond. For example, Lyman (2017) speaks about her experience of transracial adoption from a Haudenosaunee perspective. Also, Turner (2010) discusses in her doctoral dissertation ‘re-searching’ her identity and Métis family story. Another piece of research work I appreciate is in Dr. Naadli, Ormiston’s (2012) PhD Dissertation where he says he has been on a journey of “coming to know” (p.3). Dr. Ormiston (2012) acknowledges that he lives in both western and Indigenous worlds as an adoptee and will continue to be on a learning journey of honouring his Tlingit language, culture and teachings. I want to continue to raise my hands to these Indigenous adoptee scholars specifically Dr. Ormiston for sharing your story as it has encouraged me to share mine.

This next section seeks to discuss whiteness, colonization and identity, ceremony and identity, Creator, land, being an Indigenous womxn in relation to reclaiming and reconnecting to our Indigenous blood and areas for further research. While I continue to seek and understand identity in relation to all living things, I also understand in my Storywork, as an adoptee raised in a NON-NDN family I have continued to recognize some privileges I have inherited including my colonized mind.

Whiteness and Colonization

Alfred and Corntassel (2005) state “Indigeness is an identity constructed, shaped and lived in the politicised context of contemporary colonialism” (p. 597). We must recognize that our Indigeneity is often seen through a colonized lens. Lawrence (2003) and Lucas (2018) highlights that we were taught as Indigenous folx to be ashamed of our identity which stems from ideas and concepts by colonization and white supremacy. For example, Alfred and Corntassel (2005) notes that many “Aboriginals” (in KKKanada) or “Native Americans” (in the

USA) continue to “identify themselves solely by their political-legal relation with the state rather than connection to their cultural ties and a specific Indigenous community, culture or homeland” (p. 599). Another piece of literature that is significant to recognize is that many Indigenous and multiracial adoptees have inherited whiteness and colonization without a choice. Mila (2019b) was adopted into a NON-NDN family and discusses the concept of being colonized through adoption and whiteness as savior and oppressor. Cardinal (2016) who is from Treaty 8 Territory located in the Northwest Territories, identifies as a transracial adoptee herself. She mentions in her research that transracial adoption of Indigenous children is cultural genocide. Richardson (2006) mentions in her work on Métis identity, that we are trying “to balance [the] need for safety and inclusion with a need to live as cultural beings in European Canada” (p.56). Richardson (2006) continues to speak about how Métis identity can be challenging in the “context of oppression and Métis resistance” (p. 57). We as adoptees need to reclaim our identities with the understanding of the impacts of oppression, colonization and racism (Alfred & Cornthassel, 2005). Macdonald (2016, as cited in Fundira, 2016) and Sinclair (2007) highlight that it is important to have racial mirrors as a multiracial adoptee growing up in a NON-NDN family. Macdonald (2016, as cited in Fundira, 2016) says that it is important for adoptees to be given the opportunity to see other BIPOC folx who are connected to their ceremonies and ways of knowing, doing and being. In a research project of young Indigenous folxs in KKKanada reclaiming their identity, they said it is critical to have positive role models from their family and community to support and give them guidance along their journey of coming to know their identity (Brown et al., 2007, as cited in Krieg, 2016). Sinclair (2007) speaks about the “damaged self-esteem” and identity confusion among Indigenous KKKanadian adoptees (p. 69). Although Indigenous and multiracial adoptees may be growing up in a NON-NDN family it is important

for them to have positive role models who are BIPOC to help support their reconnection to their identity.

Xwsepsum Lands, National Indigenous Peoples Day, June 2019



As Leroy Little Bear (2000) puts it so eloquently “colonization left a heritage of jagged worldviews among Indigenous peoples” (p. 84). Sinclair (2007) who has done extensive research on transnational and Indigenous adoptions, writes about how difficult it is to develop a cultural identity when raised in a different cultural context. Indigenous folk continue to reclaim and reconnect to their identities through strong families, community, connection to the land, to languages and through storytelling and spirituality (Anderson, 2000, as cited in Alfred & Corntassel, 2005).

Ceremony

Spirit Plate for my ancestors, August 2020



There is minimal research of Maya adoptees connecting to diverse Indigenous ceremonies and folk across Turtle Island and beyond. But there was one story about a Guatemalan adoptee feeling connected to the Mi'kmaw peoples in the Maritimes; the Mi'kmaw folk treated him like a cousin (Tattrie, 2020). Self-discovery is a part of reclaiming and reconnecting to our identity especially through certain Indigenous

ceremonies and protocols that vary from nation to nation and community to community (Krieg, 2016).

Natalie (as cited in St-Denis & Walsh, 2016) says that part of exploring her Indigenous identity involved connecting and engaging in ceremony with Blackfoot and Cree Elders. She goes on to describe that by being engaged in sweat lodges, face painting ceremonies and pipe ceremonies helped to strengthen her identity and feel both connected to the Creator and community. Dr. Maggie Kovach speaks about being adopted, self-locating and her deep connection to the sky and land of Treaty 4 territory located in Southern Saskatchewan (Kovach et al., 2013). As both an educator and social worker, Natalie (as cited in, St-Denis & Walsh, 2016) speaks about the importance of direct experiences of ceremony and lifelong relationships she has had that helped her to continue to decolonize her mind, body, heart and spirit. Cardinal (2016) says that reclaiming Indigenous identity is as an act of decolonization. Literature concludes that sometimes, but not always, if an individual is not connected to ceremony, land, the Creator and on a journey of decolonizing their mind, heart and spirit they cannot properly reclaim and reconnect to their identity. For my Storywork, it is important for me to hear, listen and learn from those who have a genuine desire to care and love me on my journey.

Creator and Land

Part of ceremony and connection to the Creator is connection to the land. Leroy Little Bear (2000) notes that “relationships result from interactions with all of creation” (p.79). We are all related, human and non-human relations, including land, rocks, ocean (bodies of water like lakes and Statlo’s (river in Hul’q’umi’num), animals and plants. A Pueblo Elder (2007, as cited in Greenwood & Leeuw, 2007) describes the land “as the place that holds our memories and the bones of our people... [land] is the place that made us” (p.5). We know that one of our main

teachers is the land itself. “What does it mean to understand “land”- as a system of reciprocal social relations and ethical practices- as a framework for decolonial critique?” (Wildcat et al., 2014, p. II).

Ana connecting to land with her dog Mick, August 2014, Pacheedat lands (Mystic beach), 2019, PC: Julia Marshall



We know that teachings we are taught come from the land and our ancestors. In Krieg’s (2016) literature they discuss the importance of relearning how valuable our Indigenous womxn are in relation to our teachings and our ceremonies. Carriere (as cited in, Kovach et al., 2013) a Métis adoptee herself says “in order to write about connectedness, I had to experience it myself and come to truly understand what it means to me as an

adoptee” (p. 494). By connecting and grounding with the land we connect to our relations that allow us to see the power of reclaiming our identities as strong Indigenous womxn.

Being an Indigenous Warrior Womxn



Ana on Snuneymuxw lands at Vancouver Island University for an Indigenous Youth Symposium, July 2019, PC: Toonasa Luggi

Deranger (as cited in Bioneers, 2015) speaks about reclaiming Indigenous identities in modern day society, they discuss how womxn are leading the way and are keepers of the water in regard to land defending and solidarity actions across KKKanada

and beyond. We need the power of Indigenous womxn. In a western society, Indigenous womxn are defined by their “ethnic, class, and gender identities [that] have determined Indigenous women’s struggles; these women have opted to incorporate themselves into the broader struggle of their own communities” (Hernández Castillo, 2010, pp. 541-542). BIPOC womxn are often perceived as less than NON-NDN folx and are continuing to face racism and colonization daily.

It is difficult to reclaim our identities when we are viewed from a certain perspective. We reclaim and are powerful when we sing, connect to the land, connect to the Creator and connect to our Old Ones. Further research is needed to understand our identities as Indigenous womxn by having our rights recognized, by continuing to support our communities on the front lines and by acknowledging that we as Indigenous folx see culture as part of law (Deranger, 2015, as cited in Bioneers, 2015; Bear, 2000).

Further Research Needed

Lawrence (2003) defines decolonization as deconstructing and reshaping how we understand our Indigenous identities. Decolonizing ourselves, our minds and our hearts is a lifelong journey for both Indigenous and NON-NDN folx (Fiedeldey-Van Dijk, 2019). Fiedeldey-Van Dijk (2019), Little Bear (2000) and Young (2003) state in their research work that learning our language is critical to reclaiming and reconnecting to our identities. In this, is it okay to reclaim and connect to an Indigenous language that is not mine? Māori scholar Cuthers (2018) speak about the importance of sharing stories of who we are to the younger and future generation. It would be beneficial to our society to have further research that speaks to displaced Maya Indigenous adoptees stories of reclaiming their Indigenous identities too.

All My Relations

Research findings indicate that Indigenous scholars have reframed, reclaimed, renamed and Indigenized the research process (Steinhauer, 2002, p. 70). Wilson (2008) discussed four stages of developing an Indigenous paradigm. The third stage is creating an Indigenous framework and in the fourth stage is when Indigenous scholars should be honouring their ways of knowing, doing and being by conducting their own research (Wilson, 2008). According to Wilson (2008) my Storying journey seeks to be between both the third and fourth stage. There is literature by Indigenous scholars who highlighted that the “researcher” is not separate from the “research” (Peters, 2013; Smith et al., 2016). Thomas and Green (2007) eloquently define *all my relations* by saying:

that no matter where Indigenous peoples live, they/we do make connections with each other and nurture relationships and traditional teachings interchangeably. For this reason, much of our work is based in the communities we live in. Our work is closely linked to the issues of our community and we work hard to pay attention to what our community members tell us. Fostering these relationships is important for our learning, for our teaching, for our practice, and for our communities (p. 88-89).

When I think about my own story as being both the ‘researcher’ and ‘researched’ I think about all relationships, teachings and cultural gems that have been created and shared with me from multiple and diverse Indigenous folx and communities. As a young Indigenous warrior womxn I am empowered by the words of Thomas and Green, two Indigenous warrior womxn scholars, and the good work they continue to do in community and academia.

Ana at Stz'uminus Statlo, August 2020, PC: Sister Kai'a Hill



Teachings, Cultural Gems and Protocols

In brainstorming how I have come to create my ‘Tree of Life Framework’ I mapped out all kinships I created and the shared knowledge influencing how I have come to understand my identity. You can see in this image the outline of part of my body. This image was taken on unceded lands of the Ləkʷəŋən speaking peoples. An Indigenous paradigm considers human and non-human relations as part of our framework which is one of the core teachings I have received from diverse Indigenous folk, mentors and family. I have asked each Old One and Knowledge Keeper if I can share some of their teachings, stories and land base learning in my research. They each have given consent for me to share and they said they will continue to guide my journey of connecting to the land.

My Circle Framework on Ləkʷəŋən lands, June 2020



Note. There is a small error in My Circle Framework image. The authors are Kirkness and Barnhardt (2001), not Bernard. I did not want to retake this photo as I believe it resembles my connection to land and the sun in the moment. My art is what comes to my mind right away and is not meant to be ‘perfect’ in spelling and other small errors. I have been taught by my mentors that art is what you make of it and art is not like writing a paper, there are no such things as errors in our art.

Cultural Gems Gifted to Ana, August 2020



Cultural protocols around gifting vary from Indigenous nation and family. A teaching shared with me by many Coast Salish Old Ones and mentors is that when you gift or receive a cultural gem the person gifting and sharing knowledge will be specific about whether it can become

public knowledge or stay a sacred teaching (cultural teachings, June 2017).

Cultural gems can include stories, songs, dances, drum songs, various ceremonies, and a deep spiritual connection to the land.

The Land

Hart (2010) mentions that part of understanding and creating our Indigenous methodologies is by connecting to the land and water relations. The other day I went to T'Souke lands and spent the day outside. I sometimes forget that part of this work is not just the writing piece, but the reflecting piece of actually grounding myself with the ocean breeze, an eagle flying around me and the beautiful sun. The ceremony for my research story took place on the land. The art created on the land and my voice fed mother earth and all the human and non-human relations in my life. I need to be grounded when I am doing this writing work. I took some pictures of the beautiful water out in Scia'new. Although I did not write anything down on

paper it was in my head. I was getting excited to head home and write a bit more of my journey. I forget that I do not always need to be going so fast in life. This work takes time, energy and love. I was reminded while spending some time on the land that I need to slow down. I had wished I had brought a change of clothes with me that day because although the water was cold I could feel my spirit itching to go for a cold bath. It is in these times when I am on the land and around ‘all living things’ where I reconnect(ed) with myself. During my ‘break from writing’ and as I was on the land, I felt more fire in my spirit to keep on going, to connecting and getting to truly know who I am and learning to understand why and how I am becoming a strong Indigenous womxn.

The Four R’s+

The four R’s (Respect, Relevance, Reciprocity and Responsibility) are deeply roots in diverse traditional Indigenous teachings and frameworks from communities and families across Turtle Island and beyond. Recently when I was on a phone call with my mentor he reminded me that although the Four R’s may be discussed by Kirkness and Barnhardt (2001) they are not the creators of this sacred knowledge (cultural teachings, December 2020). He shared with me that in his culture the four R’s are part of his teachings, practices and protocols (cultural teachings, December 2020). I would like to add Resilience, Reconciliation, Resurgence, Revitalization and Reconnecting to my four R’s that also aligns with The Seven Secrets.

The Seven Secrets

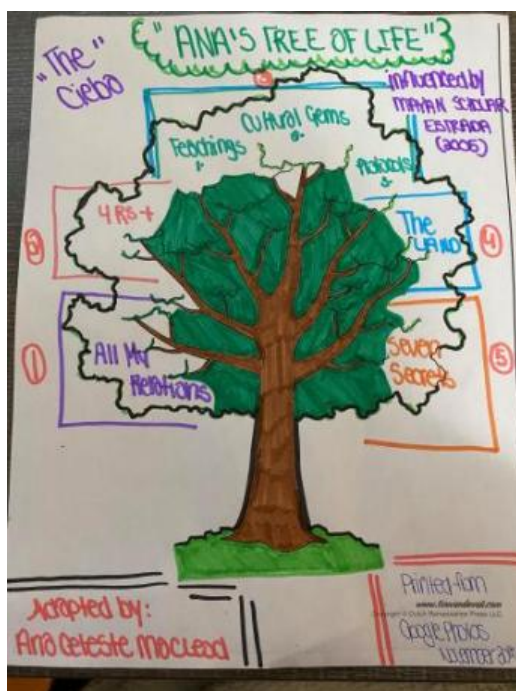
From the time I was 9 – 17 years, I learned about The Seven Secrets as a camper at the YMCA-YWCA Camp Thunderbird that is located on traditional T’Sou-ke lands. Each of the seven secrets come with a colour (red teamwork, orange sharing, yellow caring, white honesty, green respect, purple friendship, and blue responsibility) (Camp Thunderbird Staff, personal

communication, August 2015). This teaching I received is one of my branches on my Tree of Life framework.

Ana's Tree of Life

Artwork done by Ana, November 2020

So how do ceremonies, cultural gems, protocols, the land, four R's + and the



Seven Secrets all come together? According to Maya scholar Estrada (2005) the “Cieba, the tree of life” is her way of creating an Indigenous framework that reflects multiple oral storying, ceremonies and practices across Indigenous cultures both locally and globally (p. 44). As a Maya scholar myself, I have adapted my version of my Tree of Life Framework to bring together five integral branches of my Indigenous framework.

While engaging in the storying process in an academic thesis I am reminded of the seven secrets and four R's +. I hold up all my relations, the land and the teachings, cultural gems and protocols that have been shared with me throughout the last five years. I have honoured the five branches of my tree of life by engaging in making a cedar hat, a blanket and participating in a coming of age ceremony; all part of Indigenous arts-based methods. It is important to acknowledge that Indigenous methods, methodologies, teachings and ceremonial practices shared with me are **not my** teachings, they are cultural teachings shared with me from diverse Indigenous folx. My Tree of Life framework is my way of breathing, living, knowing and being

both inside and outside academia. As someone working towards a Registered Clinical Counselling certificate in British Columbia (BC), I will take my Tree of Life framework into my practice when working alongside local Coast Salish children, youth, families and communities too. The way in which I came to create Indigenous Youth Storywork is centered in my Tree of Life Framework. I will continue to adapt my framework throughout my future studies and counselling practice.

From Autoethnography to Indigenous Youth Storywork Research

According to the literature, autoethnography was developed almost three decades ago (Whitinui, 2014). In western terminology, autoethnography can be defined as researching our personal stories in order to contribute to existing knowledge (Holman Jones et al., 2013, as cited in Denzin, 2014, as cited in Lake, 2015). Autoethnography can be described as a certain approach to research that analyzes (graphy) peoples stories (auto) to help them understand a certain cultural experience (ethno) (Ellis et al., 2011; Holman Jones, 2005, as cited in Ellis et al., 2011). Similarly, research by Adriansen (2012) who calls this work, life history research, mentions that often when we tell our stories we pay attention to how the story is being told, what parts of peoples stories are shared and not being shared. Autoethnography was originally discovered and created from anthropologists and sociologists. Later in 1970's, Hayano's (1979, as cited in Whitinui, 2014) research "positioned autoethnography as somewhat different and determined by anthropologists (i.e., intimate familiarity with those who are "Native") or sociologists (i.e., who have become formally or informally socialized with a particular group of "Natives") who consistently privilege their insider-outsider status" (p. 461). Hayano's research work was the start of Indigenous Autoethnography being acknowledged in academia (1979, as cited in Whitinui, 2014).

Indigenous Autoethnography

Inspired by Hayano's (1979, as cited in Whitinui, 2014) newer definition of Indigenous autoethnography, Indigenous Māori scholar Whitinui's research highlights four characteristics of Indigenous autoethnography, which includes the "ability to protect, problem-solve, provide and heal" (p. 479). Whitinui (2014) says as Indigenous folk, it is more than just telling our stories and honouring the truth, it is about understanding and reconnecting to our social, cultural and political worlds often different from Eurowestern ways of understanding the world. As Indigenous scholars we will continue to tell our stories living in two worlds. Maskiko- Nehiyaw scholar McIvor (2010) combines both western and Indigenous storytelling frameworks in her research studies. Métis scholar Majore (2013) in his Master's thesis speaks about how Opaskwayak Cree scholar Wilson (2008) defines research as ceremony and places himself in the research process. Majore (2013) says that he appreciated how Wilson (2008) takes western terms and describes them in more of an Indigenous 'research language' way that he can relate to in relation to his research work in coming to understand his Indigenous identity. I am immersing myself in the research work of adoption studies and Indigenous Youth Storywork.

Indigenous Youth Storywork

Ana connecting to Kalaallit Nunaat in Copenhagen, Denmark, September 2015



There are multiple definitions for Storywork. For example, Plains Cree and Saulteaux scholar Sakewew p'sim iskwew defines this work as conversational methods in Indigenous research (Kovach, 2010). Sakewew p'sim iskwew focuses on a decolonizing conversational method that honours Indigenous worldviews by following particular protocols and relational practices. On the other hand, Indigenous folk in Australia refer to telling and sharing stories while honouring specific Australian Indigenous protocols such as “yarning” (Bessarab & Ng’andu, 2010, p. 38). The definition that seems fitting to my research work is what Sto: lo First Nation scholar Q’um Q’um Xieem OC (Archibald, 2008) refers to as ‘Storywork’ (p.3).

Throughout this story, my thesis, I have referred to my journey as Youth Storywork. After reviewing the work of Archibald (2008), I feel confident to continue to transform this terminology to Youth Storywork and for the remainder of this thesis story, I will continue to refer to Indigenous Youth Storywork as my methodology. Indigenous Youth Storywork methodology uses both my identity as a young Indigenous youth and Indigenous Storywork principles to analyze and tell my story of how I reconnect to my Indigeneity. The narrative method is key to self-reflection and understanding our life stories (Bainbridge, 2007). ?eh ?eh naa tuu kwiss who is a member of the Ahousaht First Nation describes Storywork with Elders as part of a decolonization process (Atleo, 2009). ?eh ?eh naa tuu kwiss says Storywork research is

grounded in seven principles created by Coast Salish Old Ones, that include reverence, respect, responsibility, reciprocity, wholism, interrelatedness and synergy (Atleo, 2009, as cited in Archibald, 2008). These seven principles will be honoured throughout my story. I raise my hands to both Q'um Q'um Xieem OC and ?eh ?eh naa tuu kwiss for sharing these ideas in the Storywork research field which in turn will strengthen the transformation of Youth Storywork in my scholarship.

Lykes & Crosby (2014) created a participatory action research project alongside Maya communities in Guatemala. Research methodologies used for this project included drawing, dramatization, storytelling and [capturing experiences through photography] “to recover the stories of war and the effects it had on the Maya communities and peoples” (Lykes & Crosby, 2014, p. 16). “Stories are unfolding lessons” (Battiste & Henderson, 2000, p. 77, as cited in Young, 2003, p. 101). Research findings indicate we must listen to our Old Ones stories to properly understand who we are. “Elders teach by telling us stories and we listeners make up our own conclusions on what the teachings or the stories mean” (Young, 2003, p. 102). As an Indigenous womxn, I have had the opportunity to take what is important to me from shared teachings and stories. These principles will guide my Youth Storywork research too.

How I Came to Define Indigenous Youth Storywork

I remember when I first started to write my literature review and I was starting to fill out my ethics application, one piece that I had trouble figuring out was my methodology and methods for my story. But, about a year ago when I wrote my second or third draft of my proposal I resonated with the Storywork methodology written by Sto: lo First Nation scholar Q'um Q'um Xieem OC (Archibald, 2008). I recall still not feeling like it fit with my research. Last year, I also was in a very different place about brainstorming my research ideas. In the first

draft of my proposal, sent to Dr. Kundoqk, Jacquie and Dr. Chief XEMFOLTW, Nick, Jacquie made a comment when I defined my methodology as ‘Storywork’. She said what about ‘Youth Storywork’. I am vocal about being a youth and I thought that adding the youth piece seemed fitting to my story. I also believed that adding the ‘Indigenous’ piece to the methodology shows how I have come from the place of being cautious of identifying as Indigenous to feeling proud to identifying as Indigenous.

At one point along my journey, I sat in front of my laptop and the rain had finally stopped pounding on the roof above me. I find the sound of rain very therapeutic both when I am writing and when I am trying to sleep. Normally I do not have my iPhone with me, but I had been checking in with my Aunty’s, Sisters and Uncles guiding and supporting this journey of mine. My sister messaged me and said as she was walking along Xwsepsum Lagoon on the lands of the Lək^wəŋən peoples, all of a sudden over 50 feathers from an eagle flying above her started falling from the sky. I paused writing this section and asked my native sister who is also adopted what she thought that meant. She said, “culture is always around us and sometimes it comes and smacks us in the face once in a while, our spirit is reaching out for it” (cultural teachings, June 2020). Indigenous Youth Storywork methodology is deeply rooted in culture especially **reconnection** to culture, which is one of many teachings shared with me. The rain began to pound on my roof again and I thought to myself it is almost time for a walk, a breath of fresh air, and connection to the land. Indigenous Youth Storywork is something I thought about and I am learning to incorporate and transform this concept as a scholarship. By combing Indigenous Youth Storywork and Indigenous Arts-Based methods I can continue to connect to culture and eventually my Maya kin.

Although there has been emerging research focused on Indigenous frameworks, methodologies and methods, in my research experience, it is important to broaden research space for digital storytelling as a research method (Cunsolo Willox et al., 2013).

Further Areas of Research

In the last ten years a new method called digital storytelling has emerged; digital storytelling is “the process of illustrating personal narratives and stories using photography, artwork, music, voice-overlay and video-clips” (Cunsolo Willox et al., 2013, p. 132). Areas for further research could include how Indigenous Youth Storywork can be inclusive of diverse methods of communicating such as music, artwork and poetry. Dirk & Mezirow (2008; 2000, as cited in Blalock & Akehi, 2018) in their research titled *Collaborative Autoethnography as a Pathway for Transformative Learning* refers to transformative learning in relation to autoethnographic research. Transformative learning happens when we honour Indigenous histories, languages, ceremonies, traditions, places and practices as part of Indigenous Youth Storywork. How do Indigenous arts based methods help to tell stories of youth voices who have often been silenced?



Brainstorming the Ceremony, July 2020

Indigenous Arts-Based Methods

For several weeks I consulted with Old Ones, Knowledge Keepers and mentors to plan how I would engage in ceremony as part of my research work, especially with COVID-19 restrictions in mind.

Ana making first Cedar Hat, August 2020, PC: Aunty J



In a study by Hammond et al. (2018) they stated that arts based methods include “photovoice, video production, drawing, music, dance, applied theatre, painting, writing and using and creating handicrafts” (p. 269). In a western context this method can be called arts-based inquiry. Several studies used arts-based inquiry during the late 1990’s and early 2000’s (Estrella & Forinash, 2007). Recently in the last six years both Indigenous and NON- NDN scholars have started to use arts based methods as a process for decolonization (Smith et al., 2016; Flicker et al., 2014).

In the last five years, projects created by Indigenous scholars used Indigenous arts-based methods. For example, in a study on HIV-prevention knowledge and Indigenous youth leadership the youth said that “art is our identity, our place, a sign of our presence on this planet” (Trépanier, 2008, p. 15, as cited in Flicker et al., 2014, p. 17). It is our way of healing and expressing ourselves through the arts. Also, Dr. Holmes et al., created a study called *Trans Youth CAN* that focused on photovoice as arts-based methodology. The study allowed trans, two spirit and gender non-conforming folx to express their experiences of safety, belonging, place and

well-being through the arts (Trans Youth CAN, 2018). Another example of an arts-based and community based is a project Kwakwaka'wakw scholar Dr. Sarah Hunt, Métis scholar Dr. Natalie Clark and diverse Indigenous youth created. The project focused on what the term 'at risk' meant to the youth. They brainstormed NDN ways to talk about their stories and identities (NIYCSHA et al., n.d.). Other literature said arts-based methods is "for representation [that] can be associated with resisting oppression and moving beyond the margins" (Yuen, 2016, p. 339).

Preparing the cedar in lukewarm water on Koksilah lands, August 2020



The work I did with the Old One in creating a blanket, participating in creating a cedar hat and ceremony alongside family is an example of resisting colonial methods.

Much of the literature focused on Indigenous wellness, health and well-being is often seen through a social justice lens (Yuen, 2016). Fanian et al's (2015) project on "building resiliency and connections through strength based creative arts programming for Indigenous youth" concludes that it is important for creative arts to be a "tool to empower and improve the health and well-being" of Indigenous youth and their communities" (p.1). Researchers of this project also mentioned there are multiple community led interventions and initiatives that use the arts alongside Indigenous youth and their communities (Fanian et al., 2015). Arts-based methods are used in remote Indigenous communities involving youth, media and images (Kral, 2010).

Cajete (1994, as cited in Lawrence, 2008) speaks about how art in Indigenous education can be transformative ceremonial learning. Art as transformative learning includes both human and non-human relations (Cajete, 1994, as cited in Lawrence, 2008). Another example of how Indigenous arts-based methods have been used, include art-voice which is similar to photovoice where participants take photos based on a specific theme and discuss their choice of photos with researchers in multiple interview sessions (Barwin et al., 2015). A specific Maya example of when Indigenous arts-based methods were used was in a study focused on Mayan language, in this, hip hop song writers collaborated with youth in Guatemala who were/are reclaiming their Maya identities through language (Bell, 2017). The study was centered in youth sharing their stories of both contemporary struggles of Mayas and the violent history between Latinx and Maya folk (Bell, 2017). The literature provides a few examples of ways in which arts-based methods have shifted to acknowledge Indigenous ways of knowing, doing and being. Martineau (2015) in his doctoral dissertation titled *Creative combat: Indigenous art, resurgence, and decolonization* states that using arts based methods has allowed us to be creative with our ways of being that have existed long before the colonial world.

What Further Research is Needed?

In the last year there have been several theatre productions at the Belfry Theatre on Lək̓ʷəŋən lands including *The Ministry of Grace* by Tara Beagan and *BUSTED UP! A YUKON STORY* by Geneviève Doyon. These two productions speak to the struggle between Indigenous and NON-NDN folk and acknowledges and uses Indigenous arts-based methods as a way to connect to land and reclaim Indigenous identities. It would be interesting to create some sort of formal education curriculum to honour these performances in an academic setting. Two of my

mentors, artist Carey Newman⁵ who is both the Creator of *The Witness Blanket* and an audain professor in the Visual Arts department at The University of Victoria; and Iroquois Mohawk artist Lindsay Delaronde⁶ both uses Indigenous arts based methods in their research. I have learned in my research, Youth Storywork, it is important to have Indigenous artists who can resist colonial practices in courses, seminars and meetings. I have learned from these artists the necessity to continue to transform and center ‘youth voice’ in further research. More research of Indigenous arts-based methods must continue to grow and be incorporated into academia and be taught by Indigenous folx who are appropriately able to continue voicing Storywork through creativity.

The Story Blanket

I remember engaging with land and water-based pedagogies last year with a group of Indigenous graduate students at UVIC. I ended up being a co-author alongside Indigenous scholars in an article titled *CENTOL TFE TENEW (together with the land): Indigenous land-based pedagogies (2020)*. In my section I wrote about how honoured I am to be reconnecting and reclaiming my Indigenous roots on territories that are not mine. I am always mindful of how I learn from diverse Indigenous families and communities about their teachings, culture and ceremonies.

The Story Blanket was created in consultation with an Uncle and an Old One. But there was something a little bit different about connecting with the Old One who I commissioned to create The Story Blanket. At the time I commissioned the blanket, I was leaving an abusive relationship which was also during the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. It was shared with me that when you are building a relationship, asking for guidance, or asking for something

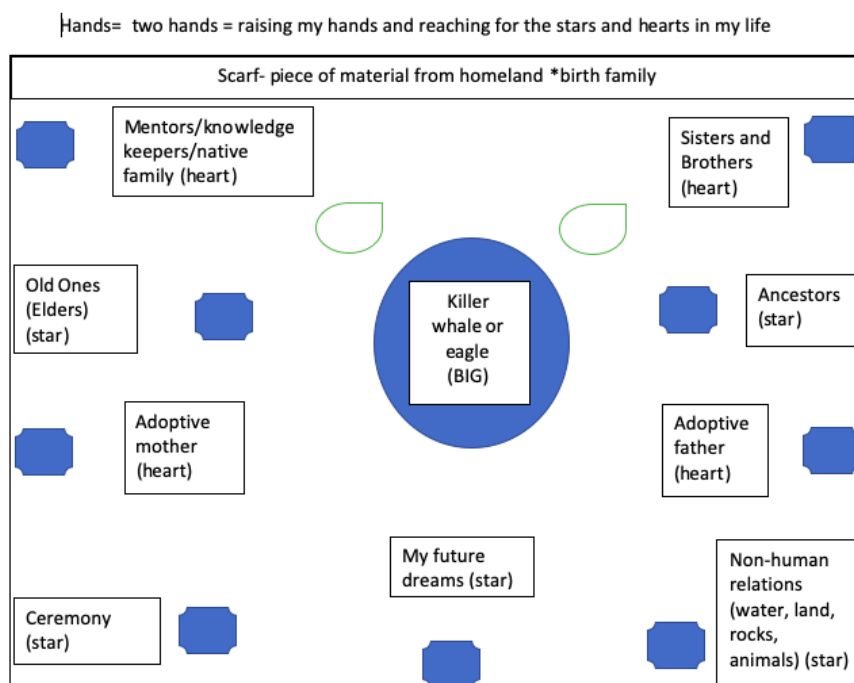
⁵ <https://www.uvic.ca/finearts/visualarts/people/faculty/profiles/cnewman.php>

⁶ <https://finearts.uvic.ca/research/?s=lindsay+delaronde>

made by an Old One you do not text, email or call, you meet in person (cultural teachings, March 2020). I was trying to be respectful in how I would approach this Old One. I had this pit in my stomach, the Old One acknowledged that we are in unique times and that email is respectful. The Old One shared who she was and where she came from, I shared who I am too.

It was not easy, but we started talking about fabrics to be used when making the blanket, the time it takes and different designs that could be used. In between my time writing, I spent several days planning out what I wanted my blanket to look like. I sent the Old One this image below.

Blanket Idea, April 2020



I want to wait to explain what the image above means in a later part of my story. I knew that it would be a dream if this was going to be made for me alongside such a dedicated Old One.

The Guatemalan Scarf, April 2020



The Old One suggested I represent my tummy mother and homelands; we attached this scarf to wrap me in my tummy mother and my Guatemalan and El Salvadorian homelands. My heart mother got me the Guatemalan scarf at a store on Tla'amin territory also known as Refuge Cove in Desolation Sound several summers ago. I never wore it, but always kept it with the other cultural gems that have been shared and gifted to me.

The Process

The Old One said that it would be best to meet in person so I can pass on the Guatemalan scarf to her and to try a blanket or shawl on. I met the Old One during the first week of July 2020. I remember walking with gratitude into her home and I could instantly feel the warm energy in her home on WSÁNEĆ territories. She put an example of a blanket around me and I felt reconnected to my roots. I felt safe, I felt protected. It was not even the blanket that was gifted to me, I felt this sense of connection; I was with another strong Indigenous womxn; she believed that I was Indigenous. One moment that stuck out to me is how curious the Old One was about my tummy mother. About two weeks later the Old One let me know that she had completed the blanket for me.

The Story Blanket, August 2020



The Old One and I agreed, and we waited to meet until the first week of August of 2020 together with an Uncle. It was then, I saw my completed blanket for the first time. It was more than I could have asked for. This is the blanket.

Being Wrapped Up

I was wrapped up in The Story blanket by an Uncle and the Old One. I felt at home. I felt like my tummy mother was truly there with me. The artwork and soulful energy that is captured in this photo makes me feel supported, strong and proud to have Indigenous blood.

When I got back from my break from my counselling healing practice and returned to the office, I showed my manager the blanket. She was filled with joy seeing how my eyes lit up when I showed her the blanket. Before I left the Old Ones home, she reminded me that my tummy mother is always holding me up. Whether she is in the spirit world, in Guatemala or El Salvador or maybe somewhere else in the world, when I wear this blanket she will be with me, my tummy mother.

I want to honour the Old One for creating The Story Blanket. So often Indigenous folk are not truly honoured and held up for their artwork. In the colonial education system sometimes artwork is not seen as a part of pedagogy and/or epistemology. Being wrapped up in a warm blanket I felt like some of the violent folk who have been in my life could not violate me anymore; I almost felt like I was wearing bullet proof gear or something. I finally felt like I had power. I could control who I could be in my life. I felt powerful **not** powerless. Although I have had some days where I have entered some dark spaces, I am finally regaining my strength again.

You know why? because I felt the warmth of my tummy mother. Her energy, spirit, heart and soul was with me right in that moment. If my relationship with one of my Uncles was not so grounded in culture and teachings I would have not had this opportunity to ask this Old One to create The Story Blanket for me. Now back to speaking about how I came to design the story blanket...

Before discussing with the Old One about what my blanket was going to look like, I was trying to figure out how to represent all the important folx in my life, how I include myself in the blanket, how to honour my tummy mother and my Indigenous roots. I went back and forth with the Old One to brainstorm what would work best. I shared with the Old One that my favorite colours were blues and purples. The Old One sent me some images of a killer whale. It was a coincidence because animals I had been connecting to in the last few months were killer whale and eagle.

The Meaning

The first two hearts represent Knowledge Keepers, mentors, Aunties, Uncles, sisters and brothers. The two stars on the blue piece of the blanket between the killer whale, represent Old Ones and ancestors. The other two stars between the hearts on the burgundy part of my blanket represent ceremony and non-human relations (water, land, rocks and animals). The two hearts at the bottom each represent my heart father and heart mother. In the middle of the blanket there is one particular star that stands out and that represents my future dreams and aspirations.

Ana wearing The Story Blanket and Cedar Hat (made by me), PC: Sister Kai'a Hill



In the image you can see my hands in silver. The silver was chosen by the Old One, but the scarf resembles my tummy mother. In the summer I had been really focused on my spiritual healing. Since I was gifted this blanket in early August 2020 I have been in a very transformative place.

I wanted to hold this piece of my journey with sacred energy. I learned what it felt like to be loved and supported. I learned how to be appreciative of the beauty of The Story Blanket. I learned that my blanket is living and breathing, just like this storying thesis.

Ana honouring black Maya Indigenous hair (with some blue to represent the ocean, rivers and other bodies of water), August 2020, PC: L



Shortly after I received the blanket I also went and got my hair cut and died my hair back to my natural black hair with blue on the end. When my hair was cut off I felt like I had let go some of the trauma and violence I have been experiencing specifically in the last year. The ceremony of making a cedar hat and being involved in a coming of age ceremony changed my life. It refueled my spirit.

A Spiritual Awakening

This particular section is the final section in my Youth Storywork thesis. I was scattered with my writing throughout the process, but this section by far changed my mind, body, spirit and heart in profound ways. In May 2019 when I decided I was going to research myself; I was trying to figure out exactly what my main focus was going to be. I knew that I wanted to honour all of the cultural gems that have been gifted and shared with me. I also wanted to continue to learn more about diverse Indigenous youths' stories, ceremonies, practices and teachings. I quickly realized that ceremonies vary per nation, community or family. Throughout the last five years I have bared witness to various ceremonies alongside Old Ones including an Indigenous Graduation ceremony at UVIC for my undergraduate degree, an Indigenous adoption ceremony, a traditional Coast Salish Indigenous wedding, many smudging ceremonies, many blanketing ceremonies, the making of regalia in ceremony, the preparation of a burn ceremony, engaging in a cedar brushing off ceremony and most importantly was part of my own coming of age ceremony.

I sat down several times with an Uncle to envision what the coming of age ceremony would look like, how it would go and what I needed to do to prepare. We discussed many different options. I shared with Uncle what was most important to me was that ceremony was led in a way that works me, for him, the Creator and my family. Uncle thought it would be a good idea for me to make a cedar hat first.

The Cedar Hat

Ana start of making Cedar Hat, August 2020, PC: Aunty J



Before the day of the ceremony I worked on my first cedar hat for two days. I wanted to actually engage in ceremony and Indigenous arts-based practices. I was thinking about making a cedar band to wear during my convocation and oral defence. I had many different ideas in my mind. A teaching that has been shared with my by many Old Ones is that that anything that is made by you for the first time you give away (cultural teachings, June 2017). I knew the exact person I was going to give it to, and I put as much love and effort into the hat as I could.

Ana almost completed first cedar hat, August 2020, PC: Aunty J



Uncle shared that throughout my time creating the hat, the cedar will tell me what is going on for me in my life. When I worked with the cedar I was thinking about my adoption. In Latchford's book (2019) she mentions that many adoptees are asked questions like "do you feel like your adoptive parents are your real parents?" or "do you know anything about your ancestors"? (p.7). These questions along with many more were running through my head over the two

days working with cedar. I thought I was going to rip the cedar, but it was not happening.

My mind was jumbled with many words, experiences and stories, both to do with my adoption, about violent men who have come and gone in my life and about being in ceremony. For the last several months I had been having nightmares due to living with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). In Duran's (2006) book he speaks about dreamtime being medicine. My dreams used to be medicine, but they had not been over the last few months. I am reminded that healing the soul takes time and part of healing is engaging in ceremonial practices. I know one day my dreams will become medicine again. I focussed on each cedar strip and I kept working by wetting the cedar, so it did not dry out.

Ana very beginning of cedar hat, August 2020, PC: Sister Kai'a Hill



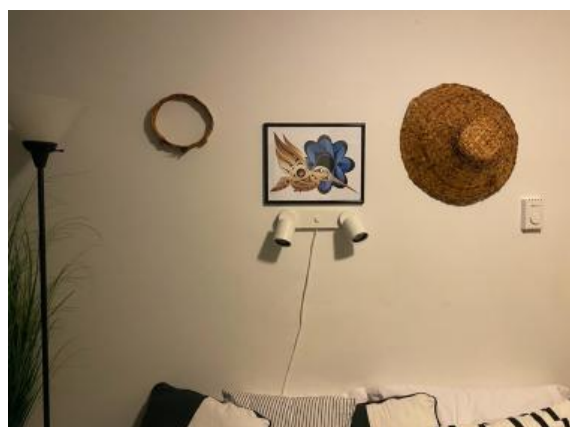
Whenever I get super focused on work whether that be reading or writing in school, I bite on the inside of my right cheek. The cedar would dry out and I had to spray it down with a hairspray bottle. I kind of felt like I was a hairdresser.

What the Cedar Taught Me

I thought about many aspects of my life and my dreams in hopes of coming to know my Indigenous identity. What I began to realize as I was nearing the completion of making my cedar hat is that if I put my mind to it, and I am supported by family and I am determined, I can

achieve my goals and dreams as a young Indigenous womxn. Another shared teaching that came to me when I was working with the cedar, was that I needed to practice self-care more often. I needed (and need to) let go of folx who were not positive in my life and I need to connect to the land at least once a week. The cedar taught me quite a bit about who I am and what areas I can continue to grow in my life and how to become stronger in my life story. This new ‘cedar process’ methodology is medicine to me. I learned how to share this practice with my sister. She was sitting right beside me making a cedar band for the inside of my hat. Working with cedar reminds me that engaging in ceremony is a part of my healing journey. I am reminded how important Indigenous cultural practices are when I am taking western pharmaceuticals. Working with cedar was tough, and I felt like I honoured some struggles I have been through recently. In my cedar making experience, there is something about holding onto cedar strips and deep breathing where I learned I was safe, I felt calm and I felt at home. Sharing the challenge of working with cedar and learning complexities of my identity are familiar. For example, starting with a sage smudge and ending with a long drive home, allowed me to truly honour teachings about the cedar hat and most importantly who I am as I start to work through what it means for me to know who I am as an Indigenous womxn who was displaced from my birth community.

Cedar Hat made by Ana on my Kanaka Maoli sisters wall, August 2020, PC: Sister Kai'a Hill



After the coming of age ceremony, the beautiful cedar hat was gifted to my sister and hangs on her wall. It was an emotional moment to be able to gift my sister with my first cedar hat, I will cherish this experience for the rest of my life.

The Coming of Age Ceremony

The day before the coming of age ceremony, I got home from Uncles late at night, I still had planning to do for the ceremony. I remember going to bed just before 1:00 am because my mind was spinning. I felt nervous, honestly I felt like it was my wedding day or something, although I am not married it felt like wedding planning. All I knew at the time was that it was going to be a new day by connecting and learning more about the land and water while being surrounded by loved ones. I was exhausted because I had very little sleep, but I was also very excited to see what the day would bring me. The day looked a lot different than I had ever imagined, but I knew that Creator was allowing what was meant to happen, happen. I drove up island (north from Lək^wəŋən on Vancouver Island in BC) with aunty, sister and my Gem mother, we got to my uncles, then made our way to the destination where the ceremony was going to happen.

We got to the destination called the Stz'uminus Statlo and I felt surrounded by NON-NDN folx. At the very beginning there were a few instances where NON-NDN folx were interrupting the ceremonial space with their dogs barking, and they were crossing paths by where the ceremony was going to take place. Uncle said they will all leave when the ceremony begins. I was so unsure and nervous; this day had finally come, and I felt anxious it was not going as planned. As I was walking in the forest smelling the trees, giving thanks to the trees and stepping on the soil in the ground and for the first time in my story experience, I started to feel connected to who I am and how I am. Throughout my whole thesis story, I have been writing and analyzing part of my journey. Although I was wearing black Nike running shoes, I could feel the bottoms of my feet sinking into the soil. If there were not so many sticks and prickles I would have walked around the forest with my shoes off, but I didn't. Maybe I will walk barefoot next time.

There is always a next time, but it may look a bit different. As I was exploring in the forest before going into the Statlo, I started to turn off all the noise around me. My sister was taking pictures of me as I was connecting to my roots literally.

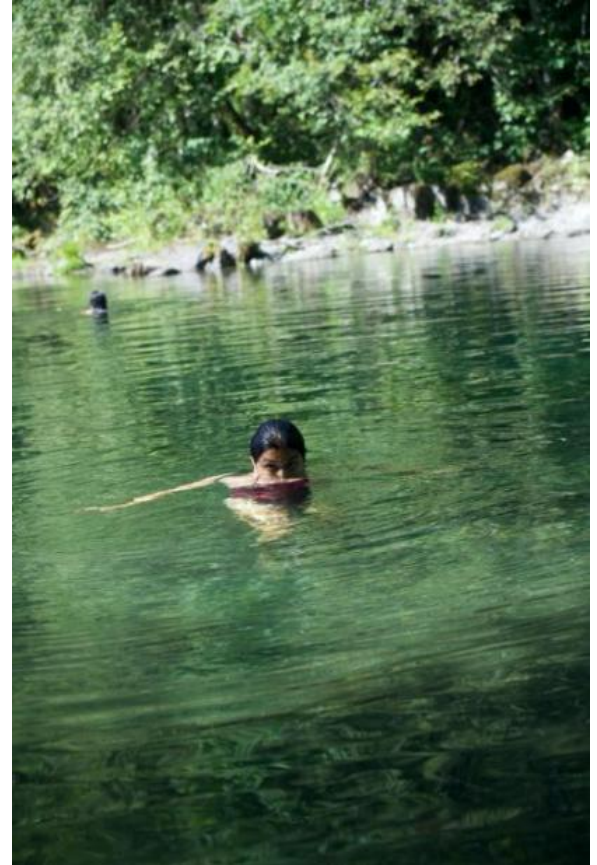
Ana connecting to the Stz'uminus land, August 2020, PC: Sister Kai'a Hill



I was connecting with both human and non-human relations and I was surrounded by trees and water. I was listening to what the land told me. I heard different animals making noises, and I also heard the sounds of the wind. Then it was time for me to get ready to go into the clear Statlo.



At the last minute I asked my sister to come in the Statlo with me. It was silent and I wailed out tears, loud and proud with both courage and strength. That part of the ceremony is sacred to me, but the moment I entered the river I knew my life was about to change. My spirit changed. I let go of trauma that has been hurting my heart, body and mind. I kept breathing. For me in the water, it was a spiritual awakening. I got out of the Statlo and honoured the cedar and land.



Stz'uminus Statlo, August 2020, PC: Sister Kai'a Hill



Poetry is significant to Indigenous Youth Storywork. This poem is called 'I am still breathing'.

There was singing and there was tears, there was drumming, and my heart became in sync with the beat of the drum. The power of tears.

The power of sacred energy. The power of three strong Indigenous womxn, one Indian womxn and one strong Indigenous man connecting for the first time all at once. Making lifelong connections. The power of connecting and shifting my focus on the beat of the drum, my heartbeat slowing down. I was freezing in my bathing suit. But there was something about the cold that continued to clear out the negative energy in my life. After honouring the land I got dressed and got into The Story Blanket that was gifted to me by an Old One and put on the cedar hat I made alongside my sister.

*Ana wearing Story Blanket with Cedar Hat on Stz'uminus Statlo, August 2020, PC:
Sister Kai'a Hill*



I would say the photos speak to the shared cultural teachings, strength I gained and the courage it took for me to let go of everything and regenerate who and how I am. I think about the recent book that came out titled *S'TENISTOLW Moving Indigenous Education Forward* (Ormiston et al., 2020) that focuses in part on land-based learning. Stz'uminus Statlo is land-based learning; it is ceremony. Since this ceremony, I have realized that being on the land is home for me. The land is home. Bathing in the ocean, river and lake is home. Screaming and crying in the woods is home. Hugging my sister is home. For the first time in a lifetime I can say that I feel home.

I got a tattoo several years ago on my right arm of a wave signifying when I retired from my swimming career. I always knew I was going to be a water baby, but I never knew it was to the extent of feeling at home when I was emersed in any body of water other than swimming. I learned water is sacred and is a powerful cultural teaching about cleansing.

Ana tattoo on Lək'əyən lands, July 2015, PC: S



A teaching Uncle shared with me was that the best gift you can receive is forgiveness (cultural teachings, August 2020). Since the ceremony, I have had folk reach out who have hurt me, who have caused me deep pain. But I forgave. I pray each and every day for those who are struggling, but my heart and my spirit cannot continue to hold their pain. The hardest part of the cultural teaching was letting go of things in my life. I let go. I have finally come to a place where I know I deserve better, and to be treated with

respect, to be honest with myself and to simply just BREATHE. For me learning diverse cultural and sacred teachings on territories that are not mine has taught me to honour, respect, learn and listen more to what is shared with me. I interpret this to be “Witnessing the Journey: A Spiritual Awakening”.

The “Oral Defence” in Ceremony

Whenever I reflect back on my experience of this storying journey I am reminded by a quote from a book titled *A Recognition of Being Reconstructing Native Womanhood* by Kim Anderson (2001). The quote is written by Chaske (as cited in Anderson, 2000) that says, “how you live your life is also ceremony” (p. 27). Throughout my storying journey I have engaged in different Indigenous Arts-Based methods that include making a regalia, a cedar hat and participating in a coming of age ceremony that honours my Indigenous Youth Storywork methodology. My plan is to have my oral defense similar to ceremony. With the continued mentorship from my Gem mother, Uncle and other Knowledge Keepers, I hope to create an oral defense ceremony engaging with cultural gems shared with me over the last several years. Cultural gems include my adoption papers, pictures of my heart mother, heart father and I, a smudge bowl, a drum, blankets, jewelry, carvings, medicine bags and various plant and herbal medicines. Cultural teachings shared with me by many diverse Old One’s and mentors say that it is disrespectful to not accept a gift especially when it is handmade. All gifts I have been given come with cultural teachings. My vision for this defense ceremony would include a land appreciation, opening song and an oral narrative of me speaking about my storying journey as well as a closing song and finalizing with sharing a meal together and gifting my family and mentors. I would set up cultural gems in a circle around me and speak about stories and values that each of the gifts taught me. I will also place a blanket where bigger cultural gems that were

gifted to me by my Uncle in the summer of 2019 will be laid; and I will also speak about The Story Blanket too. As I speak about each gift, I will slowly put them into a Guatemalan bag. The Guatemalan bag was gifted to my heart mother and is currently holding my first outfit I wore as a baby. My first outfit will be placed on top of the blanket. The Old One who created The Story Blanket shared with me will symbolize that I have come full circle, from wearing my first outfit to now wearing The Story Blanket. I shared with the Old One that I never connected my first outfit being worn as a baby to wearing The Story Blanket as a teaching to coming full circle, now it makes sense and this experience is such a beautiful teaching to receive and share in my writing (cultural teachings, June 2020).

For items too large to fit into the bag, I will place them carefully beside the bag. When I have completed speaking about each gem, I will then ask Uncle to drum and sing as I slowly begin to raise my hands to the Creator. As the singing starts to slow down I will slowly walk away, and the ceremony will close.

Weaving in the Questions

What does it mean to feel connected to a territory that is not mine?

Ah the questions. At the beginning of planning this research work I started creating questions that would guide my work. I decided it is important for me to consider what it means to feel connected to a territory that is not mine, that will never be mine. Honestly, I did not know, I did not learn, nor was I really given the opportunity to truly understand that my home on Lək^wəŋən lands is on stolen land. After reading *An Inconvenient Indian* by Thomas King (2017), I soon began to realize that I have much more to learn about the history of my people, “Out of a past, I make truth for a future” (Beth et al., as cited in King, 2012). I realize by acknowledging my past, I can make a path of truth, for my future, for my children, grandchildren and great

grandchildren. There are many folx around the world who are living on stolen land. For me, as an Indigenous womxn it feels incredibly unsettling to know I am on stolen land. It feels uncomfortable. But it **MEANS** that I can share that I am feeling uncomfortable with Aunties, Uncles and Indigenous kin from many different nations across Turtle Island and beyond. So what does it mean to live in multiple territories specifically unceded Xwsepsum (Esquimalt), Lək̓ʷəŋən (Songhees), & W̱SÁNEĆ? Well, I sure as hell do not feel proud. I feel shame and guilt at times. But I feel deep gratitude that Creator has allowed me and blessed me to be able to live on these lands. I am humbled that I am able to occupy this space, but occupying this space comes with a great deal of privilege. It also comes with great responsibility, which is one of the four R's (Respect, Relevance, Reciprocity and Responsibility) originated from teachings by many diverse Indigenous folx and communities that Kirkness and Barnhardt (2001) speak about in their scholarship. In a book titled *Storm Boy* (1995) which my heart father used to read to me when I was little, was about a boy who was lost in a storm for only a day which caused his family to worry, the family was afraid the boy would not return. For me on this journey, I feel like I continue to process questions I am asking myself, and at times, my journey feels like a storm.

How do the relationships I have with the land and water, Old Ones, mentors, teachings and ceremonies of local Coast Salish and Indigenous peoples from various nations both located in Turtle Island and beyond influence my journey of reconnecting to my Indigeneity?

Ana on Ləkʷəŋən Lands being gifted a rattle created by an Aunty, July 2020, PC:

Aunty J



Throughout my storying thesis I have constantly discussed this particular question. I would not be the strong Indigenous womxn I am today if it was not for Old Ones, Aunties, Uncles, Knowledge Keepers and their teachings and ceremonies. Throughout this journey I have had folx guide this work.

I call them my cultural advisory committee, folx who are comprised of diverse Indigenous identities and cultural teachings. While writing this story I spent some time as the Interim Trauma and Addictions counsellor with STÁUTW First Nation which ended in November 2020. During my time there, I met an Old One's from STÁUTW First Nation outside the Health Department Office, we talked for a few minutes. SELWÁN SKÁL in SENCOTEN means Elder's voices. Old Ones have supported my journey of coming back to my Indigenous identity. The Old One I was having a chat with said if I need to go for a sweat, learn more teachings or are struggling with my mental health just call him or go to his home (cultural teachings, June 2020). His words were medicine. I was able to go back into my office and deal with heavy trauma work to support the community in a good head space.

Auntie May Sam⁷ has been an honourable Old One to share teachings, medicine and her story with me. I would not be on this healing journey of coming to understand my Indigenous roots if it was not for her. Auntie May has been there for me with physical and virtual support. The first day I met Auntie May, she told me she loved me; for me, Auntie May is a local cultural teacher and Old One who I have known for a long time, with all her big heart and guidance, our relationship is a strong and loving relationship.

I go back again to the book my heart father read to me called *STORM BOY* and I remember there was a line in the book “a storm has brought me to you” (Lewis, 1995, p. 7). From these relationships and cultural teachings I learned and will continue to learn from the Creator, maybe **MULTIPLE** storms have brought me to the folx who have guided me to support me in honouring my Indigenous roots.

What does it feel like to be a Canadian citizen living on stolen Indigenous land?



*Ana on Lək̓ʷəŋən Lands, June 2015, PC:
Sister Julia Marshall*

I don't even know why I asked myself this question because it was complicated. I have already spoken about how uncomfortable it feels to be living on stolen land. But the privileges I have as a KKKanadian citizen is a big part of this question too. Throughout my writing process, I

⁷ See acknowledgements page

have taken certain breaks from writing. Sometimes after a break I did not want to write anymore. I wanted to give up during the days where my mental health was in dark places. While I was away from the computer I discussed these questions with my sisters and family.

I did not have the choice to be adopted into a white family. It is a privilege to be a KKKanadian citizen and not to be living in poverty. I wonder what my life would have been like if I was not adopted. Would I be living in poverty? Would I speak my Indigenous language? But to be a KKKanadian citizen carries heavy weight. I am not very happy with the KKKanadian state continuing to harm Indigenous folx. So it feels a little weird to be a KKKanadian citizen, a little uncomfortable. I am uncomfortable because I did not have a choice to become a KKKanadian citizen. I know it is a great privilege to have a passport and be KKKanadian. I know for a fact those feelings will never change, and I am content with these feelings. As an Indigenous healer and learner myself, I have encouraged community members I work with to be more in touch with their feelings. That is why I am asking these questions to myself. For me, being a KKKanadian citizen has allowed me to struggle in different ways than I thought.

What are experiences I have had growing up in an interracial (NON-NDN and NDN) family?

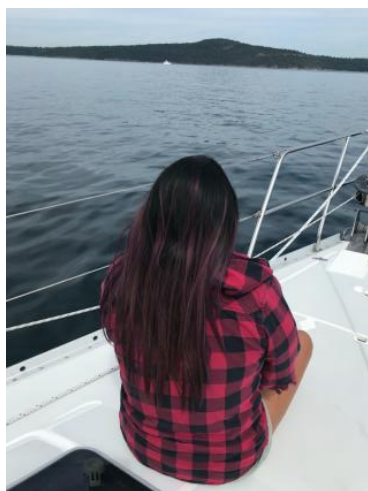
Ana competitive swimming days on WSÁNEĆ lands, 2004-2015, PC: Heart Father

Ana sailing in

WSÁNEĆ waters,

August 2019, PC:

Sister Julia Marshall



I do not like sweets too much, I am more of a savory person. If I were to describe what it has been like growing up in a white family it would be like a bag of tropical skittles. When I was growing up I was surrounded by BIPOC. But just because I spent time with BIPOC does not undermine the fact that I grew up in a white family. Growing up in a white family felt “normal”. My heart mother had the same vision for my life growing up as my tummy mother had. I have always been cared and loved for; I have never felt alone, always supported. I wonder what it would have looked like growing up with Maya ceremony, teachings and food from Guatemala and El Salvador? I wonder what it would be like if I was connected to the lands of the Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh peoples when I was living on Ne̓xw̓lélex̓m? But sometimes wondering does not get you anywhere. When I found Indigenous kinships I started to feel more at home. More like me, more like Ana. Spending time engaging in ceremony actually allowed me to realize that some NON- NDN folx will never understand what it truly feels like to be in an Indigenous body. In Newbury & Hildebrand’s (2019) small book called *Medicine* they say, “The children in my life are medicine” (p. 2). Indigenous families, children, youth and communities I have worked with in a healing setting, or family I have learned cultural teachings from include traditional medicine, land and water. So what does it feel like living in both worlds? Well it is not comfortable nor easy, but it is fine.

What does it mean to me to not have access to my own teachings?

Cultural Gems shared with me, August 2020



It sucks. I do not know the exact nation I am from; I do not know the language; I hope someday I can find more information out, but it might be tough to gather that information. The other day I watched a film called *La Llorona* (2020) directed by Guatemalan filmmaker Jayro Bustamante about the genocide of Maya people through the story of a well-known Latin American fable. The film reminded me of my people. In this film I had to take a moment to understand the extent of the genocide of my people. It feels like that part of my history and culture was taken away from me when I was adopted. I get excited thinking about all the teachings and protocols in my own culture that I could learn about while being back in my home community in Guatemala or El Salvador. Sometimes I feel different than other Indigenous folk. They ask me what my teachings are and how I bring them to KKKanada. I do not have the answer. The ‘not knowing’ reminds me of a book called *Tell Me How it Ends: An Essay in Forty Questions* by Valeria Luiselli (2017), and at the beginning of the book she said, “*there are no answers only more questions*” (p.1). My entire storying thesis resonates with this quote, especially when it has something to do with understanding my teachings and culture when in fact I have never been back to my homelands. In Guatemala there are approximately 20 different Mayan languages. I am currently doing some research on the Maya K’iche people. The Mayan language spoken by the K’iche people in Guatemala City is Kaqchikel. I hope that one day I will have an opportunity to learn a Mayan language whether that be my own or one of the many Indigenous languages in Guatemala and El Salvador. Because I do not know my language, does not mean I may never be able to learn the language. The separation from my homelands means that I have the opportunity to learn alongside folk who may be in a similar place as me. There is a piece of me that is missing. What I do know is I can continue to learn diverse Indigenous teachings throughout my Youth Storywork.

The teachings I have been gifted with are not my teachings. What does this mean to me in regard to reclaiming my Indigeneity?

Before I started to understand diverse Indigenous teachings that have been shared with me, I needed to understand that we live in “a society that is deeply separated and unequal by race” (DiAngelo, 2018, p.1). I also needed to acknowledge that I have inherited some form of whiteness and that is the gift Creator gave to me. I am incredibly honoured that my Indigenous mentors have been so generous in sharing teachings with me; by inviting me to various ceremonies, most importantly in understanding me. I can talk to my circle of Indigenous kin and not feel like I have to explain myself. Teachings that have been shared with me have empowered me to write this story; allowed me to feel my heartbeat which sounds like a drum in circle ceremony. Learning diverse teachings allows me to reconnect to my Indigenous roots while understanding displacement. I am able to begin reclaiming and reconnecting to my Indigenous roots because the folx I am surrounded by shared with me how to connect to the land, the water, my ancestors and to let go of trauma I have experienced over the last several years. Without cultural teachings that have been shared with me, I would not be able to fully articulate who I am, where I come from and why I am in this world. The most beautiful part of being gifted with sacred cultural teachings, is that I can continue to learn about myself and discover my personal and professional strengths and weaknesses. I respect each Indigenous mentor who has shared their knowledges and stories with me.

Is part of reclaiming my Indigenous identity to change/add to my name to honour my name prior to being adopted?

I have continued to wonder what my thought process was in creating these questions. I know part of it was because I wanted to challenge myself, this question was particularly hard for me. In the poem at the beginning of my thesis story I speak about my name given at birth and my

name now. My middle name at birth remains my middle name. Several months ago someone from community asked if I had a traditional name. My reaction was this was my name given at birth. So was the question why do I have a white name? More thoughts and questions came up for me, and I felt like I was going down a hole where I was trying to figure out whether I would like to change my name! I like Ana-Celeste. I like Ana-Maria-Celeste. It is not like I do not honour my name at all, but I still feel like there is great significance of my name given at birth in relation to reconnecting to my Indigenous roots. Along my journey I researched what it would look like to legally change my name. It was complicated and cost money, of course. I would have to change my name on my passport, birth certificate, drivers licence and other legal documentation. Urgh. After reading the book called *I Rigoberta Menchú, An Indian Woman in Guatemala* (Burgos-Debray, 1984) I realized how much power and strength there is in her name, a K'iche Indigenous feminist and human rights activists who lives in Guatemala. For now instead of being called Ana, I like Ana- Celeste. Do I want to go back to my name before I was adopted? But then I am not honouring my heart family? I am not sure? All I know is that this question is something I will continue to reflect on as I connect to my Indigenous roots, culture, land, water, Creator and my ancestors.

How have the relationships I have with my heart family specifically my heart mother added to the complexity of reconnecting to my Indigenous roots?

*Ana Indigenous Undergraduate event with Heart Mother and Heart Father,
November 2018 on WSÁNEĆ lands*



The other day my Indigenous sister said to me how appreciative she is of my heart mother. My heart mother is my rock, I tell her many deep stories, I tell her when I am in pain and when I am thriving and healing. Throughout my journey in reconnecting to my Indigenous roots, my heart mother and I have had tough discussions about adoption being created through colonial and capitalist governments. At the beginning of Rigoberta Menchú's (1984) book, she says that her story is not just hers, but the story of other poor Guatemalan Maya folk. My heart mother and I have been having further discussions about the extent of genocide of my people, the Maya people. My heart mother has **ALWAYS** supported my journey of understanding my Indigenous roots. We constantly talk about the complexities about my adoption, while also honouring the closeness of our relationship. It is hard for my heart mother to understand her whiteness, but it has been a wonderful journey walking alongside her as she begins to comprehend the power of being a white womxn in our society today. I pray each and every day for strength for both of us. I am proud and honoured to have such a courageous, creative, loving and supportive heart mother. For me, I wonder if it would be a very different journey if both my heart mother and heart father

were not so open to me discovering my Indigenous roots. Perhaps not? They are coming to understand who I am. I also recognize they may never understand pieces of my journey. Regardless, I still respect and have gratitude for both my heart mother and heart father. Even though my heart mother says she is not academic at all, she is a retired Professor. Parts of my heart mother are imbedded in my roots and blood, specifically speaking Post-Secondary education is definitely inherited from my heart mother. The dedication, determination and hard work in my education and mental wellness journey all have come from one of the most loving human beings in the world, my heart mother.

What does it mean when I know I do not and will not get the consent of my tummy mother to share her story during this research process?

This question for me came up when I applied for ethics approval through UVIC. This question comes up every day I sit down and write at the computer. I have dedicated this Indigenous Youth Storywork to one of the most beautiful people on mother earth, my tummy mother, the womxn who gave birth to me, the womxn who made the decision to put me up for adoption. My adoption was closed, so I do not have access to information about my tummy mother. But Creator has told me that she is doing well wherever she may be. I am not sure, but I do feel a sense of closeness to her. One of the teachings shared with me is that I always need to ask permission to speak about other folx, especially in an academic world (cultural teachings, September 2018). Throughout my journey in ceremony I was reminded of the gift my tummy mother gave me. It must have been hard to decide to put me up for adoption.

Honouring my tummy mother, August 2019



Sharing about tummy mother is complicated. In the timeframe of completing this master's thesis story I will not get the verbal consent from my tummy mother. I hope when I pursue a doctoral degree that I may be able to meet her or at least know she is at peace in the spirit world. I continue to pray and think of her. I miss her, I love her, I want to hug her and never let go. But I am also deeply grateful for her decision to put me up for adoption whether she truly wanted to or not. As I continue to walk along my

journey my tummy mother is with me in this stick and poke tattoo done by Panigvluk Stephanie Papik⁸.

What are the similarities between colonial history in Guatemala, El Salvador and KKKanada?

Lots of violence, racism, colonization, genocide, murder, stealing of land, food, water and our trees. The murder of thousands of Indigenous womxn, men and two-spirit folx. Capitalism. Sexualized violence, substance misuse and the horrors of the Child Welfare System. Recently when I participated in ceremony of making my first cedar hat, I linked this experience to part of my story which I refer to as weaving the questions together. Now, the similarities are the amounts of strength and intergenerational trauma that Guatemala, El Salvador and KKKanada are going through. These countries struggle but also thrive.

⁸ See acknowledgements page

Start of Ana's First Cedar Hat, August 2020



There is so much history that I briefly describe in regard to Guatemala and the genocide of thousands of Maya people. For me, I have come to know genocide and colonialism is present in all three countries. In my Youth Storywork, learning history of these three countries are about recognizing violence experienced. These countries still face murder, rape, and discrimination of Indigenous people especially our girls, womxn and two-spirit folk. With Old Ones, my generation and future generations will continue to spend

significant time healing. For me to continue to work, live and breathe in a violent and colonial world, I need culture and connection to the land, water and animals.

Lək'əḡən Land, Baby Eagle Feather, July 2020



Colonial violence must end, but we have a long ways to go. I found this baby eagle feather on Lək'əḡən lands just down the road from my home while I was walking my dog Mick. In the coming of age ceremony I participated in, a teaching I learned is that I am a juvenile eagle. It was shared with me that the eagle protects me and keeps me safe from the violence I continue to experience and as I heal from

my experiences of sexualized, physical and emotional violence from NON-NDN and NDN men. For me, similarities are that all three countries, folx and young Indigenous womxn are healing and reconnecting to traditional ways of knowing, doing and being.

Honouring Guatemala

“Where is home? For me, home is a place where I feel safe, valued, accepted, connected and loved. In a conversation I had with the lawyer who worked on my adoption, I learned more about Guatemala as home. So where is home? How do I honour Guatemala and El Salvador?”

The Lawyer

At the beginning of January 2020, I remember I was sorting through many different documentation papers, I came across documentation that listed lawyers involved in my adoption case. In my own adoption case, I learned, when you are internationally adopting, there is almost always two lawyers involved. I had a lawyer who practiced adoption law in Ontario on the traditional territories of the Anishinaabeg, Ojibway/Chippewa and Haudenosaunee folx, then I had a lawyer in Guatemala. I found names of both lawyers in the documentation I was sorting through. I asked my heart mother if she had any information about these two lawyers. Sure, enough she had the email of the KKKanadian adoption lawyer. I made the connection to the KKKanadian adoption lawyer, I introduced myself and since then we started to build a virtual relationship. As I navigate confidentiality through this Youth Storywork I will not be naming the lawyer. I will refer to each of them as KKKanadian lawyer and Guatemalan lawyer in my story. In several email exchanges, the KKKanadian lawyer recommended books I should read, magazines I could gain access to in both Español and English and workshops that may be of

interest to the work I am doing and continuing to do as an Indigenous counsellor. The KKKanadian lawyer also suggested I reach out to an individual who also adopted a child from Guatemala. Over the last several months we have had rich discussion and I have shared with the KKKanadian lawyer a draft of my proposal for this Youth Storywork research. As I was building a relationship with the KKKanadian lawyer virtually, there were many questions I wanted to ask. I was mindful of limitations due to the adoption agency not being in business anymore. I also started to ask myself how much I want to know without having the knowledge of never been to Guatemala. I am extremely honoured that the KKKanadian lawyer even responded. I thought I may have the wrong email or that she may not want to return my email. However, the KKKanadian lawyer responded in 24 hours. In this experience, I can only imagine thoughts of the lawyer, and that 24 years later, one of the adoptees she worked for reaches out to ask questions. I bring the KKKanadian lawyer up because I continue to receive support along my journey from this KKKanadian lawyer. I raise my hands to this individual for being able to offer expertise and her wonderful heart and spirit. The beautifully written emails showed that this individual cared.

Sharing Stories

I connected with the person the KKKanadian lawyer referred me to. The person responded and we emailed back and forth and also talked on the phone. It was different this time. The person I connected to was a mother to her late daughter who was also adopted from Guatemala, this mother had the same lawyers working as my family had on their case. Stories she shared were beautiful and tragic at the same time. At the end of one of our conversations, I was told the mother will do their best to find out more information about my tummy mother. I

gave this person as much information as I had and this person was going to look into it through the Guatemalan government when they were planning to go there in March of 2020.

Unfortunately, that was during the time when COVID-19 pandemic began. The mother never ended up going to Guatemala, but we are still in touch with each other. Thoughts we shared were the process we would take if I knew where my tummy mother lived and possible ways to meet her. What would I gift my tummy mother? I do not speak Español. I had a moment of panic. In some ways I am glad I will have to wait a bit longer to possibly meet my tummy family. This person and my heart mother have told me I will know when it is time to meet her. I am thankful for the ability to access modern technology, because technology allowed me to stay connect with many folx who I am just getting to know. Since January 2020 I have connected with more folx from Guatemala and El Salvador who are my kin. I feel a deep sense of connection to each person I have gotten to know whether virtual or in person. In my Youth Storywork, getting to know more folx like me has further shaped and enhanced my knowledge and life journey about my own identity.

It has been unique times because many conversations unraveling are happening through virtual platforms. I have always been someone who appreciates communicating using my voice. I also am someone who would much rather prefer face to face connection. I began learning about language terminology such as Latinx, Ladino, Latina and the relationship between Maya and Latinx folx in Guatemala. For me, learning the complex languages is fascinating because throughout many conversations with different folx I have been told that if I am Latinx although I have some Indigenous blood I am not Indigenous. But then when I am here on Lək̓ʷəŋən and WSÁNEĆ lands folx are asking me what nation I am from. Some Coast Salish folx treat me like family, and this is different in Latin America. I have been involved in group chats where other

sisters and kin are still learning about their own identity. Social media can help but, can also confuse folx who are trying to understand who they are and where they come from. I have been mindful that throughout my time that reflection on Youth Storywork via media can cause harm to someone. In conversations over the last several months, sometimes I was nervous and thought maybe I should just give up on my thesis, and other times I have been encouraged to tell my story so other youth especially those who were adopted into NON-NDN families, can begin to understand their own identity complexities and understand their Indigenous roots. I think about each person and their own stories shared with me. I feel less alone when folx are asking themselves the same questions.

Media +



REVUE Magazine, June 2020

Over the past six months I have read a magazine online called *REVUE (2020)*, watched multiple documentaries, ordered books and read books. I asked myself, “what have these resources done for me? How have they helped me to further understand my Indigenous roots?” The magazine *REVUE* is in English but published in Guatemala. The magazine offers **GLUTEN** and **DAIRY** free recipes. It allowed me to begin to learn Español and it offered the spirit of my ancestors to be seen through photos used in the magazine.

For me, documentaries are a whole other set of beans or rather let's keep it in the Maya Indigenous way a whole set of corn tortillas, beans and rice. I watched six documentaries on Amazon Prime, Netflix and Youtube. The documentaries included *Children living in the Guatemalan City dump: Children of the 4th world* (Dreamtimeent, 2011), *Finding Oscar* (Suffern & Marshall, 2016), *Rigoberta Menchu: Daughter of the Maya* (SuvanjiEFF, 2016), *500 Years: Life in Resistance* (Onis, 2017), *Guatemala: Meet the Maras* (Villarerdière, 2019) and *Guatemala Heart of the Mayan World* (Ara & Jaunsolo, 2019). Each documentary offered me further understanding of culture, poverty and how communities are resilient in Guatemala. I was emotional knowing characters in documentaries could be my relatives being assaulted, killed and I imagine their spirits are injured and torn apart. As I watched these documentaries. I also thought more about how I will never know the truth about what media portrays about my homelands unless I truly go to Guatemala and learn about history, people and culture myself. It crossed my mind that in documentaries many NON-NDN folx are involved in production which informs stories that are shared. For me, when NON-NDN folx produce such stories, colonization can continue. Although documentaries were highly educational, I would much rather live and breathe the food, culture, people, regalia and ceremony in real life. However, documentaries and magazines have allowed me to continue to consider the importance of going to Guatemala at some point, especially since I have recently connected to a Facebook group of Guatemalan adoptees who live all around the world.

When figuring out if I wanted to go to Guatemala, I reached out to a professor who had connections in USA; long story short one of their friends suggested I check out a Facebook (FB) page titled *Adoptee Voices- Next Generation Guatemala*. I added myself to this group and spent several hours reading all the comments. Folx had been posting about meeting their birth family,

the complexities of their identity particularly their Maya Indigenous roots, growing up in NON-NDN neighborhoods with NON-NDN parents and siblings, growing up with queer parents and their challenges with abandonment, intimate relationships, depression and anxiety. Some of the posts I could relate to and some I could not. The FB group I am apart of has individuals younger than me and has some members who are the same age as my heart mother. Many folx in the group are from USA, but there are some who are from KKKanada and other parts of the world. I have not felt ready to make a post in the group yet. I feel like I am learning about peoples stories by reading and liking or even loving a post. As I work through this process of Youth Storywork, I am mindful of how unsettling coming to know my identity can be. I know my heart family is vulnerable in my coming to know Youth Storywork. I think about all the folx who have supported me and by posting in the FB group about my story I feel like I would need to ask folx involved in my life if it was appropriate for me to share our experience in a FB post. For me, the diverse shared teachings I have received from aunties, uncles and sisters made me aware about who I share with, how I share and why I share my story. I am humbled and I am grateful I am in the group. I have added my Guatemalan adoptee brother and sister who are my childhood family friends in the group page. Educating myself through the media has given me a broader idea of Guatemala and my people. I know I have much more to learn. I know I have much more “research” to do to broaden my Youth Storywork.

Further Research Work

Ana on T'Souke lands and Water, May 2019, PC: LH



When I first started planning what I was going to ‘research’ for my master’s degree, I had too many ideas. One specific piece I touch on is literature on NON- NDN folx adopting BIPOC children, but more adoptions of specifically Indigenous babies. I find it interesting how I open with discussing my adoption story, write literature about interracial adoption in one of the final parts of my story and how I close with coming full circle by sharing the ‘thinking through’ of returning to Guatemala to meet my homelands and connect my identity to place.

When I think about what I could expand on from this graduate work, many ideas come up for me. The first one would be searching for further information about my tummy family, then going to Guatemala for the first time and potentially interacting with my tummy family. These two pieces were in the works before COVID-19 hit mother earth. I also realized alongside my committee that my ‘research’ was too broad and needed to be clearer and more concise. We agreed that other questions can be a PHD. By going to Guatemala, I would be curious if I would feel at ‘home’, I wonder if my experience would be the same as being on Ləkʷəŋən and W̱SÁNEĆ lands. The second idea I had for future graduate studies would be to focus on continuing to recreate and create Indigenous Youth Storywork Methodology with other Indigenous adoptees from KKKanada, Guatemala, El Salvador and USA. This research methodology would be done working alongside Indigenous folx who share similar stories as

mine. As I am currently working as a Mental Health and Addictions Counsellor with multiple Indigenous communities on the West Coast of BC, I would like to work with Indigenous youth to facilitate how youth can share their experiences of trauma, inclusive of adoption, mental health and addiction stories. As I am writing ideas down while typing, I am thinking of how these research ideas would actually turn out? One piece that is important to me, is that I continue to incorporate youth stories in all that I do. In my professional ethical practice, it is vital for me that youth I engage with make-up and/or create their own projects.

I guess what I am trying to say is that I have many ideas for working with adoptees, youth and the mental health and addictions experienced in their life. But, I do not have one specific or exact idea just yet. Just like how this storying research fell into place, I believe future stories shared with me, knowledges gifted to me and appreciation of land and territories will come to me naturally. I know the Creator has many ideas for me. I aspire to be like mentors who are guiding me through an academic setting while at the same time learning and un-learning Indigenous knowledge. Although partaking in a colonized western academic system seems unbearable, I do see myself teaching university students one day. Maybe I will be a healer (aka a ‘therapist’) for Indigenous adoptees and university students, or, maybe I can create courses on this topic? For me these ideas for future ‘research’ are not about becoming a ‘Doctor’, it is that I continue to see and hear youth’s voices silenced. I want to work with Indigenous youth to strengthen their Youth Storywork. In this Storywork (thesis), I am able to tell my story, and I hope I can inspire other youth to tell their stories. Storying can often make us vulnerable; we could be judged for sharing stories, but for me part of the work I do alongside Indigenous communities and families is making sure their voice is heard by listening to them!

Implications for Child and Youth Care (CYC) Practice

I am incredibly honoured to follow the footsteps of many Indigenous adoptee scholars in KKKanada and beyond. While I have named several Indigenous adoptee scholars I want to raise my hands to those I did not mention and the future adoptee scholars who feel encouraged to share their story like I did. This research work will influence Maya, Indigenous and transracial adoptee youth ‘coming to know’ their identity while being displaced from their home communities. Social justice work suggests that there are never folx who are voiceless but society often devalues our stories that are rich in history and culture (cultural teachings, December 2020). My adoption story will inspire counsellors and CYC practitioners to be mindful in how they engage with adoptees and their families. I anticipate that sections of my story (thesis) may be used in CYC courses on Indigenous identity, family and law. Aside, from sharing my work in course based settings, I want this research work to be shared with adoption lawyers, social workers and child welfare policy and practice. I hope that future generations of adoptees considering Post-Secondary can see how I was able to challenge and transform my story in a Euro-western colonial system by using Indigenous ways of knowing, doing and being to complete a master’s thesis.

Coming Full Circle

Ana on Ləkʷəŋən lands (Uplands Park), May 2019, PC: BA



I wake up some days having this urge to go to Guatemala. Some other days I wake up feeling terrified about the thought of going to Guatemala. Throughout my time writing this story I am reminded that sometimes the most rewarding part of my educational journey is to show and share with others what it is like to not know where home really is. When I was writing my notes before I started typing this out, the questions I wrote down for this final bit was do I want to go home? Do I already feel home? To answer both of these questions with one simple answer would be too much to ask. It is complicated. Over the last several months I wake up and I ask myself different questions related to my story.

One day I have one answer and the next day I have a different answer. I am trying to think of a way to answer these two questions in a metaphorical way. I guess I could describe it as a swimming analogy. Imagine this, as soon as you dive into the pool your mind is focused on each swimming stroke you are taking. I feel like on one side of the chlorinated pool, I want to go to Guatemala but when my head is underwater, and I am focused on my strokes, I do not want to

go to Guatemala. One particular piece I have been thinking about is this COVID-19 pandemic. I cannot even go there even if I wanted to right now, nor would I enjoy my time there during a pandemic, so why do I have to think about it right now. For me, maybe the pandemic is a message to me to think through more about returning home?

Ana leaving Stz'uminus Statlo, August 2020, PC: Aunty J



I think about The Story Blanket and the Guatemalan scarf attached to it. The scarf has many different colours. If I were to describe colours I was feeling when I think about trying to define 'home', or the thought of how excited and scared I am to go to Guatemala, it would be these different purple and blues in the scarf. I guess I am not sure at all. But what I do know is whenever returning home happens, the Creator will place me home when I am ready. Learning about 'blanketing' in my story has given me the opportunity to continue to reflect on what it would mean to go to Guatemala. I get emotional, I feel frustrated, I also feel sad about the little information I know about my tummy mother and her family. I do not even know if my tummy mother would prefer to use different pronouns other than she/her. These are places that my brain

and my mind often go to when I begin digging myself into a bit of a hole; for me in these rich moments I see hope; I see strength in that I will be able to go to Guatemala one day. Who knows, I may be able to call it home? For now, as I begin to close my entire thesis journey, I see the growth and courage it took me to write each piece. I can see my voice and I can hear many voices of other folx who I dearly care for. But still, what is missing is my tummy mothers voice. When I think of Guatemala and El Salvador, I have so many questions as to where my family is. Are they in the mountains rich in corn, beans and rice? Or are they in a small shack in the dump of Guatemala City? If you have not already figured out by now in this Youth Storywork, I am an over thinker, although, my Uncle has told me to stop asking questions, step back and just learn and listen to my heart (cultural teachings, May 2020). Connection to my homelands and family is missing. I know for now my life will be as is until I continue to broaden my pathways in this Youth Storywork. My journey is life long and I hope one day I can go to Guatemala and see how I am connected to the land and how **reconnection** deepens my understanding of my Indigenous roots as a young Indigenous adoptee womxn.

My Story About Growing Up

Heart Mother, Heart Father day Ana arrived in KKKanada, 1996



Today I am sitting in my house, using a computer.

My house has a roof, electricity, fresh water, organic food and my own floor just to myself including my own bathroom, study room and my own bedroom.

The other day I took a moment to stare at my bathroom. What I saw was my tummy mothers home. She lived in a room the size of my bathroom with two boys, my brothers. I could have been in that small space too. But, I have not and never will.

Imaging the small home of my tummy mother and brother is what has been shared with me. I will never have my tummy mothers true story unless I speak to her.

My tummy mother went to court over three times which allowed her the opportunity to make sure she really wanted to put me up for adoption. Although this statement claims that official government personnel were generous with her, I will never know as I have not been told her side of the story from her personally. It seems to me, regardless, I got caught in the system but did not experience trauma during my time in the Child Welfare System. I am stumbled on this particular piece where I was told that my tummy mother went to court over three times. What a painful process that must have been for her. I would be terrified if I had to go to court to sign off on a document saying I would like to put my child up for adoption. I hope she was

supported. I am proud of my tummy mother for having the courage to go to court so I can be alive in this world today.

Whether she was aware that, I was going to be raised in a privileged family, I am not sure. But what I am sure about is that, she wanted me to be loved, to strive and to grow up feeling safe. Well tummy mother, I can tell you that all of the things you wanted are true and happening and exceeded your expectations I am sure. Why am I able to complete Post-secondary education fully financed by my parents? Well, that's because I was raised in privilege and carry privilege throughout my life. I feel deep pain and gratitude when I start to dig deep about what it means to have incredible amounts of privilege as an Indigenous womxn. However, being Indigenous has allowed me to complete this journey because I have been held up and culturally educated by Old Ones, Knowledge Keepers, mentors and family about the land I currently and will always occupy. Like other Indigenous students and scholars, I have been able to challenge the colonial education system with the support of an **all** Indigenous committee. I have had the privilege to hear stories from many Indigenous communities, youth, families and scholars who helped me to walk with respect in the world we live in.

Ana on Coast Salish waters, April 2020



Several weeks ago, I was having a discussion with my Gem mother about race and discrimination. She provided examples of experiences she has been through where she has been discriminated by another person, group of folx or an

organization. I told her that so far in my life I have never been discriminated against. We had a good discussion about it, and it made me reflect on my name. I wonder what it would be like if I was NOT a KKKanadian citizen and I had my original birth name on my passport. Would discrimination experiences change for me? I am not white passing at all. But I have traveled many times with my heart family who are NON- NDN folx. My Gem mother and I also got into a conversation about feeling protected when white folx are with us, but then sometimes not feeling protected when white folx are around us. It is always a spiral of a conversation with my Gem mother. Our conversations are rich and deep.

While I acknowledge my privilege, I also have spent some time reflecting on my tears. One of the teachings I received by many Old Ones and mentors is to honour my tears (cultural teachings, June 2017). If I am to ever cry, I need to put my tears in a tissue and to never throw them out, but to release them into a body of water (cultural teachings, June 2017). When I think about my privilege, I think about feelings of shame, guilt, anger and sadness. But, I also feel honoured and open-minded that although the system, the Child Welfare System is a colonial and racist system, my life would look different. Again, I feel so incredibly happy I am here on Ləkʷəŋən and W̱SÁNEĆ lands, but there is always a sense of unknown of what my homelands would be like and I wonder if I would feel connected in the same way I am in KKKanada.

Another piece I have been sitting with lately is that in my heart family I am the only person of colour. My cousins are married to white folx, my cousins are white, my grandmother is white. But I am not white. When I was little, my heart mother used to tell me we as a family did not see race. But of course, as a family it is essential to acknowledge race. For example, I am surrounded by white folx; I adore each relationship I have with my extended heart family. But

what I know that will never change is that I am the only person of colour in my family. How does that make me feel? Well, it makes me feel uncomfortable. But, it also makes me feel really proud. I feel like I have never been treated differently because of the colour of my skin. But I could be wrong? Sometimes it feels lonely to be the only person of colour in my extended heart family.

I remember sitting with one of my colleagues, and they asked me “Ana when or do you think you will be able to ever leave your Uplands ways⁹ behind you?” (cultural teachings, January 2019). Then a few months ago I remember speaking to one of my mentors about honouring both my whiteness and Indigenous blood (cultural teachings, May 2020). I know my privileged ways are ingrained in the work I do daily. I can see myself getting caught up in the privileged ways during the writing of this Storying thesis. I know it is part of who I am. I know it is something to not always feel guilty of, but to feel proud of too. So, at this point I feel like ways I build relationships, connections I have with Indigenous folx both locally and globally will guide me in understanding how I can manage both my white and Indigenous ways throughout my Storywork. For the last several years as I have come to understand my Indigenous roots, I talk about living in two worlds. It is not only how I physically live but how my spirit lives as well.

Owning my white ways, my privilege and my uplands ways are all part of how I am working towards understanding my Indigenous roots. All I share about my location and identity are part of me. I know I cannot discard pieces of who or how I am because being me comes up in the clothing I am wearing, where I shop, what I purchase and all that I do. I have a long journey for sure. I know that understanding my whiteness is important. Acknowledging my whiteness is

⁹ Uplands is a wealthy neighborhood located in Victoria on Ləkʷəŋən lands

essential to reconnecting to my Indigenous roots. My Old Ones, Knowledge Keepers, Uncles, Aunties and my sisters have all have helped me to further understand who I am.

Transformation

Ana Celeste MacLeod, July 2019, PC: Toonasa Luggi



A few days ago, when I was writing the piece on my white ways I heard the sound of a bird and it sounded like a baby eagle. Then, as I was writing the section above, I started to feel emotional, like crying. I looked up and all of a sudden, I saw this bird flying directly over me. I was too focused on my writing, but then a few moments later the creature came back. The bird started flying over me again. I looked up and sure enough it was a baby eagle. For a good five minutes this baby eagle was talking to me. The baby eagle would not leave my presence. The first time when I connected to eagles was in February 2020, although, I think Eagles have been around me for a long time, I just never noticed until the writing of this Youth Storywork.

During the 2020 *Missing and Murdered Indigenous girls, womxn and two-spirit peoples march* I saw multiple eagles fly above me. Since this march I have seen an eagle fly above me every week. One of my mentors from the STÁUTW First Nation shares that “in WSÁNEĆ teachings, it is sometimes said that when our spirits leave our bodies, that it can come back in birds” (cultural teachings, September 2020). In my experiences of meeting eagles, I have always felt like it was my tummy mother showing up to visit me. Of course, this was the spirit of my tummy mother, but in this experience I felt like the baby eagle represented me. The baby eagle left when I finished four pages of writing about my white ways. During this writing phase I felt like the baby eagle was protecting me. I also remember the other day, when I was reading a book called *Reclaiming Indigenous Voices and Vision* edited by Marie Battiste (as cited in Chamberlin & Battiste, 2000), I could hear commotion in a big tree in my neighbors backyard. I saw some crows and in their gawking they sounded angry. I think of crows as mean birds in the animal world; but who knows maybe they are great? I believe there is a crow’s nest in the big tree in my neighbors backyard. All of a sudden, this crow picks up the baby eagle by its talons and drops it right in front of me, less than five feet away. To me, it looked like the baby eagle I saw a week ago when I was writing the piece above; I swear it looked like an eagle. The small bird fell in the bush in my yard and then got back up and ran away. I know many birds look the same, but I swear it was a baby eagle being harassed by the crows.

For me, I reflect on this experience as an analogy as it felt like to me the baby eagle may have been abandoned or lost. The baby eagle was tired and resting in the tree and then the crows were angry and were trying to chase it away. The bird being dropped in front of me seems like a coincidence. For me through my Youth Storywork process this baby eagle represents my story. Although I have never been abandoned in my life, I do fear abandonment, with my family and

intimate relationships at times. I just paused my writing for a moment and listened to the sound of the baby eagle. I now believe the sound I heard was the baby eagle. Anyways, for my Storywork, this eagle represents me because at times I do feel lost, especially with how I speak about my identity; when I speak about who my family are and the many different family members I have from all different nations. When I saw the baby eagle fly above me a few days ago, I believe it was telling me I will be okay. My takeaway from this encounter with the baby eagle is I am strong and I am an Indigenous warrior womxn.

Stories like these, or moments like these are when I feel connected to my Indigenous roots. I used to be afraid to say I was Indigenous. I used to be challenged on who I am. I have been told I have no idea how to understand Indigenous protocols. But today, I feel rejuvenated. I am refueling. I have connected with diverse Indigenous Old Ones, mentors, Knowledge Keepers and family. Being re-connected and the act of sharing and hearing cultural teachings of Indigenous knowledge has allowed me to re-centre, re-ground and re-charge in order for me to continue on my journey of Youth Storywork.

I see ways in which I challenge myself. I have asked myself many questions. Many of them I still do not have an answer for. Am I **REALLY** Indigenous? There are many pieces of my story that are still unknown. But for now, home is with the loving, caring and honest relationships I have with diverse Indigenous folx and my white kin who have allowed me to transform from a baby eagle to a young juvenile eagle. As I said in my poem at the beginning of this thesis. This is me; This is who I am.

It is liberating to know that my story is going to be shared. At least I hope the folx who will be holding me up when I defend this thesis can pass on my story to others who may want to hear it. When I first began writing, I was trying to think who this story can be for? Why am I

writing what I am writing? This story was dedicated to my tummy mother. This story is for folx like me. This story is for folx feeling alone, lost and confused about who they are. This story is for Indigenous babies, children and youth who are currently in the Child Welfare System. This story is for womxn, men and two-spirit folx incarcerated whose identities have been stripped from them. This story is for my sisters who have been struggling to feel a sense of safety, a sense of community, a sense of comfort and connection. You are not alone. I am here with you. I raise my hands to each person who has helped me grow over the last five years. Each and every one of you are reasons why I am able to share my work in such profound and vulnerable ways. It takes courage. By no means is this the end of my journey.

Honouring my Kin

Ana and my Kanaka Maoli Sister on Cowichan lands, August 2020



It seems as though teachings have been shared and taught to me continue to shape who I am and why I am here on Lək̓ʷəŋən and W̓SANEĆ territories. The other day I was having a conversation with one of my mentors, we were having a discussion around honouring many different Indigenous nations, communities and families I have learned alongside (cultural teachings, July 2020).

The folx who have shared their life story with me, who have gifted me jewelry, who have helped me to make a drum, who have offered teachings and allowed me to share these gifts Maltiox! As I have navigated honouring many folx who are from different and diverse nations, I also recognize diverse and sacred cultural teachings and protocols. When I was speaking with an Uncle about protocols of gifting, I started writing out each person who has supported this journey and I wrote down at least 50 names. My kin, biological and non-biological I raise my hands to you with deep gratitude. Some teachings that seem to stand out for me include ways in which we hold folx accountable. Accountable of our actions, our behaviours and our voices. As I have walked through these past few years, there has been community members who have told me I am not good enough, strong enough or that I will never be Indigenous.

When I rise up, connect to the land, splash water in my face, feel pebbles between my toes, get a hug from an Old One or an Indigenous sister, I feel healthier. I have recently been prescribed medication to help manage PTSD symptoms I have had due to several abusive relationships with males. I realized that traditional healing is critical when taking western medicine too. A huge part of medicine for me is connecting to Old Ones. They teach me to be calm and they teach me to be a strong young Indigenous womxn. What Old Ones have also taught me is balance. I can be going to counselling, writing my thesis, eating healthy food,

connecting to the land and Indigenous folx and still be off balance. I have to notice when to slow down, when to pause, and most importantly when to take care.

I honour my kin, I stand with you, I see you, whether you are here with me or whether you are in the spirit world. Eagle I see you. Killer Whale family I see you. My mentor who is from STÁUTW First Nations shared with me that the Killer Whale “in WŚÁNEĆ oral history are family, with a human spirit” (cultural teachings, September 2020). For me to move forward in life, it is a commitment for me to honour my kin. I honour those who have taught me hard lessons. I honour those who I am not as close with, I honour those who our paths are on different journeys now and I honour those who I have become closer with.

Moving Forward

I often use the metaphor “I am in a canoe and sometimes throughout my journey I bump into rocks and then water comes in and I need to bail the water out, then patch the hole back up again, then continue on paddling.” I think of my writing, my story and my life as this canoe metaphor. My story is powerful for me, constantly changing and effects ways I am a sister, daughter, niece, aunty, student and healer (counsellor). My story weaves in both western and Indigenous knowledges, frameworks and methodologies. While my paper is heavily focused on Indigenous knowledge and identity, I am also unlearning and upholding western ways of thinking, doing and being. My work, my stories and my writing is political. I start with acknowledging my Indigenous roots while also owning my whiteness. Grotevant & Von Korff (2011) asks adoptees to consider “what does being adopted mean to me, and how does this fit into my understanding of myself, relationships, family and culture?” (p.585). In my Youth Storywork, I have learned about the connections with the land, water and diverse Indigenous knowledges shared with me.

What I have come to know for now, in Indigenous ways, everything is part of circle teachings. By ongoing decolonizing work of myself I am leaving some of my ‘uplands white’ ways behind and moving forward in a good way. There will always be ups and downs as part of who I am, but my life will be lived differently. I hope that my story can help others understand complexities of having privilege, identity and knowing homelands. In Majore’s (2007) autoethnography Master’s thesis he says, “I believe in order to support any person in finding their voice, I had to first find my own” (p. iii). The best way for me to find my voice is for me to tell my story, that of which I am doing right now. This is Indigenous Youth Storywork.

*Ana honouring the cedar on Stz'uminus lands,
August 2020, PC: Sister Kai'a Hill*



*Ana laughing on Lək̓ʷəŋən lands, June 2018, PC:
Sister Robyn Wilmer*



I raise my hands and honour the land, Old Ones, Knowledge Keepers, family, mentors, artists, youth and community members who have supported me on my journey of reclaiming and reconnecting to my Indigenous roots so far. Maltiox for bearing witness to my story.

Poem by Ana Celeste MacLeod, September 2020

I will not GIVE UP!

I am strong, I am fierce, I am powerful,
the fog gazed over my eyes has always been tears,
But I know that I need to stop living in fear.

My healing journey is lifelong,
and now I am going to stop making it prolonged.
My sisters, my aunties, my uncles and my Old Ones,
You all have helped me survive in this racist world,
You have given me the medicine of love and respect.

Being an Indigenous warrior womxn in this colonial world is a political statement,
The NON-NDN folx have a lot of work to do, so I will continue to be patient.

This document is living and breathing,
And now I must let my eyes rest for the remainder of the evening.



Ana and dog Mickey on Coast Salish Waters, May 2020

Ana on Lək̓ʷəŋən lands, July 2019 PC: Sister Julia Marshall



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