

Grannies, Aunties, Mothers and Daughters, All the Skeletons are Out:
A Story of Truth and Healing

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is a bridge to healing

Between my grandmothers who have gone on before me

And me and my daughter

I've been told that I have a keen ability to expose and look at both sides of the story. No matter how ugly the truth may look I am likely to name it, voice it and admit it. This thesis looks at both sides of an Aboriginal adoption and reconnecting story. By both sides I do not mean the sides of the government and First Nations people. I will not give the government such pleasure to voice their opinion to my story. I will tell the sides of the stories of women who have been affected by the adoption scoops. The women, connected through genetics and sisterhood, all have similar roots but different stories. Different stories with different truths.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

I am a mother. I became a mother at the age of 19 years old. I remember when I was pregnant with my first child. I did not know the sex of my first child, but my husband at that time was convinced it would be a girl. My adoptive family also wanted a little girl, because for them it would be their first granddaughter. My natural mother did not know where I was or that I was even alive so it is my assumption she had no desires on what gender her grandchild should be. I was prepared for a girl, because a name was picked out. If my first child was a girl, she would be called Rachel.

I remember the moment I was told "it's a girl" and how my initial reaction was "Oh no, it's payback time...What goes around comes around." and with this thought I prayed silently "Please God, don't make her like me."

In that split second of my daughter's birth, my teenage years flashed through my mind. I remembered how my mom and dad were so confused with me. The fights we would have, how my mission in life was to do what I wanted and not get caught. To me, it was a game. A game where I would try and stay two feet ahead of my parents, and where the number one rule was that I was never to walk beside them. I was not like my siblings, and I was the family hell-raiser. I remember how I would sit by my parent's bedroom door, eavesdropping on their conversations. I would hear their arguments

about what they should do with me. I can remember hearing my mother's tears and their prayers. This one time, they were at their wit's end and the topic I overheard them talking about, was whether they should send me away to a group home where other defiant Christian kids go. For what felt like an eternity, they debated: Would they send me to Salem Acres or not? My mother was ready to pack my bags and send me off. I remember how shocked I was that it was my dad who said, "No, when we adopted her we said we would raise her. We didn't say we would send her away."

As a teenager I consciously knew that I made life hard for my parents, but I really didn't care. I had no difficulties breaking curfew, stealing from them, coming home under the influence and practicing other antisocial behaviours that put me at risk.

Now that I was a parent, I didn't want my own child to treat me the way I treated my parents- mainly because I didn't know how I would handle such conflict. So my first step in making sure Rachel would not be like me, was to pray.

I was adopted as a young child and although my adoption was common knowledge in the family, it was also a taboo subject. My adoption was kept secret from my parent's friends and from the church we attended, although I remember a chosen few were sometimes told of our family secret.

I also recall that our family secret always seemed to be used as an explanation and rationalization for my behaviour.

Another taboo subject in our home was that fact I am Aboriginal. I am First Nations. I descend from the original keepers of this land. I am Indian. I was never told of my Indian status until I was 18 years old. In fact, I was only told about my Indian status 18 months before Rachel's birth.

When I look at this life circumstance, I cannot help but think how messed up it was. The casual onlooker may think that this is no big deal and may believe that I should only assimilate and be thankful for the blessed life that was bestowed on me. The inner turmoil that existed in me about having no identity was huge.

I was angry, and it was this anger that ate me up inside. The anger controlled me and at the age of 19 years, I was a mother, a wife and slightly introspective. I was fearful my daughter would turn out like me and I had no clue what it meant to be Aboriginal.

Rachel is 17 years old now. In three weeks she will be 18 years old. Over the last 17 years, I have worked at analyzing my secrets and have given my secrets a voice. That voice now speaks wisdom. What I am able to pass on, is this:

To be born Aboriginal and adopted into a non-Aboriginal family, means to be disconnected from roots and identity. This, in itself, means that it

is almost a given that Aboriginal adoptees will no doubt need to heal, to grieve, let go of control at some point in their lives and eventually trust. And, when an Aboriginal adoptee becomes a parent, there will be a time to determine how Aboriginal identity will be passed on and nurtured in the next generation.

Impetus of Study

Rachel's early teen years have not been like mine. Rachel has not come home drunk, she has not gone AWOL, she is not defiant and angry. She has not displayed any of the bad behaviours associated with anti-social and rebellious youth. Rachel has graduated high school and is now entering her first year of university. Rachel recently won the award for having the highest mark in Grade 12 calculus and she also won the Spirit of Youth Award. This award is given to the student who demonstrates resiliency and transcendence in overcoming life's circumstances. Rachel's teachers know she is a child of divorce, but do they know she is Aboriginal? What did they think she had transcended? Do they know she is of mixed ancestry?

When Rachel was in high school, I told her many times to go see her guidance counselor about applying for Aboriginal scholarships and bursaries to help pay her future tuition costs. Whenever I checked in with her, to see if she had followed through on this suggestion, her response was always "oops", "not yet" or "do I have to?" In my daughter's life, I have dropped

seeds about her Aboriginal identity, but because I have not been the full-time caregiver I have not been able to do this on a consistent basis. Rachel's father is of German/Polish ancestry and he has not taken the time to nurture the Aboriginal side of his daughter's identity.

So my daughter has entered a new phase of life. She has moved away from home and has started university. As she enters this new phase of life, I pray once again "Please Creator, don't make her how I was."

The reason I pray this prayer is because I went through two adolescent stages, one in my teen years and the other in my twenties. My adolescent twenties began when I started university and when I began receiving educational funding from my First Nation. My daughter is now starting university and is now also receiving educational funding from our First Nation.

For myself, the receipt of educational funding forced me to acknowledge that I belonged to an Indian Band and community. Many tears and trials have happened in my trying to make sense of what it means to be an Indian Band community member. It is my hope and prayer that Rachel doesn't need to go through these same tears and trials.

I recognize that the catalyst for my tears and trials has been my own search for Aboriginal identity. In the darkest pits of my development, I have cried many times "I wish I never knew I was Indian, because when I didn't

know I was Indian, I was never poor. I was never ridiculed by community and I was never caught between two worlds." Sometimes being Indian has been a curse rather than a prideful joy. In my search for Aboriginal identity I have asked many questions, such as: "What is the big deal about Aboriginal children adopted into non-Aboriginal homes? Why care that Indian children are adopted into non-Aboriginal homes? Why is my adoption experience different from someone who is not of Aboriginal ancestry? How is the identity of an Aboriginal person impacted by adoption? How is the identity of a second-generation adoption scoop person created?" and "How will the off-spring of Aboriginal adoptees celebrate their Aboriginal identity?"

Wondering about and caring for my children has contributed vastly to this thesis study. My daughter comes from a line of Ktunaxa women who are mothers, but who have never raised their daughters themselves. For five generations, the women in my family have never raised one or more of their daughters under the same roof for an extended period of time. Rachel was raised by her grandmother Lucille and her father, Bryan. I was raised by Bernie and Monica Daniels. My mother Gina was raised by a group of nuns. Gina's mother Mary Theresa was also raised primarily by the nuns. This pattern of bringing children into the world only to have them raised by someone else began in 1892. For over 120 years, the women in my family have not raised their daughters. If I am blessed with a granddaughter by my

daughter Rachel, I silently hope she is able to be raised in the same home as my daughter Rachel. As a result of my hope, I want the words in this thesis to somehow provide my daughter with wisdom and insight that may prepare her more adequately for being a mother: a mother who can celebrate her Aboriginal identity, contribute to the development of a healthy and happy seventh generation and care for and comfort her child each new day.

The impetus of this thesis study comes from my desire to give my daughter some insights that may help her avoid the trials that are sometimes involved in coming to terms with an Aboriginal identity. I hope that the teachings within this thesis project will teach my own daughter and other persons of mixed ancestry, whose parents are a part of the 1960's adoption scoop era, that Aboriginal bloodlines are a part of their heritage and that that is okay.

In this thesis study, I will explore stories of women in my family. I will focus mainly on my biological mother and an auntie related to me through my biological father. I will also use my own story as research. The data collected within these stories will be translated into teachings that will be shared with the reader as lessons: lessons that I have learned and turned into teachings.

This thesis is about three Indigenous women whose stories have been formed by colonization. I must assert that colonization is not over within

Canada. The colonization process that ravaged my community in 1850 continues today. The post-colonial period has not begun for me, for the women in my family or for the daughter I raise. In fact, the ravages of colonization can be recognized in the behaviours and experiences of all Aboriginal people. No Aboriginal person is unscathed by assimilation or acculturation. The spectrum of ravage is so diverse. For example, for some the perils include multiple losses, violence, abuse and residential schools. For others, it may mean a happy and content family life, but growing up with no Native identity.

The stories within this thesis are real experiences, told by three colonized women. The stories vary as to the levels of trauma and all contain a distinct feeling of sadness and pain. These stories are told and are re-interpreted as lessons for the next generation. Often within Indian Country, the term "the next generation" is used. In my opinion, it has become an expression that is a culturally pan-Indian idiom. But when I write the phrase "the next generation", I am being literal, because the stories within this thesis, re-visioned into lessons, are written specifically for one granddaughter, niece and daughter of Ktunaxa lineage. This thesis is for Rachel.

Although you, the reader, may not be the audience for whom this thesis is written, I urge you not to disregard this written discourse of shared knowledge. The lessons shared within this thesis are universal, simple and

thought-provoking. In addition, the topic of second generation mixed ancestry Aboriginal identity is explored from a First Nations perspective and is finally given a voice in an honoring way.

CHAPTER 2

UNDERSTANDING MY JOURNEY THROUGH THE LITERATURE

As I begin writing this literature review, Christmas is coming. As I stare out my window and see the snowflake-filled clouds, I find myself wondering if Jean Chretien's son will be coming home to the house of our former Prime Minister. Jean Chretien's son and I have something in common. We are both adoption scoopers, raised as Canadians, away from our Native communities and we both have reunited with our communities in adulthood.

As I stare aimlessly out the window I also wonder if Jean Chretien is a grandpa yet. Has his adopted Native son fathered a grandchild? And if so, how is that child being raised? Is he being raised as a little Indian? Or is he being raised as a little half-breed? Or is he being raised as a neo-colonial Indian? Or is he being raised as a little white child who 'tans real good' in the summer? Is this child being raised on-reserve? Off-reserve? And if Michel Chretien has not given Jean Chretien a grandchild, what measures will be taken to help form the Aboriginal identity of this second generation adoption-scoop baby? I also wonder will Jean and his wife love this grandchild as their own blood and, if so, where does this love come from? I do not ask these questions mockingly or with disrespect. I merely ask these questions to show the complexities of Native identity within people who are adopted into non-

Aboriginal families and within the children who are offspring of adoption-scoop Indians.

I find it absurd, yet humorous that my Indian Status went with me and that proof of my Indian-ness went into my adoption file. When I was adopted, and I am convinced it was an oversight by a new social worker, my Indian Status stayed with me. Ironically, in my mother's family, I am the only 'true' Status Indian, while my mother and her other two children, born after me, are Bill C-31 Indians. So in my world, the true, identified Status Indian never set foot onto our reserve until the 1990's, whereas my siblings and mother, who grew up in the territory and within the Ktunaxa culture, only had their Indian Status reinstated after the implementation of Bill C-31, in 1985. On our Akisqnuk Band registry, my name appears before the name of my mother and siblings. There are now offspring to classify. My children are still registered as Status Indians. My brother's son is still a Status Indian, but only because his mother is a Status Indian. My sister's son and daughter, who are Ktunaxa, are no longer classified as Status Indians because their mother married a Scottish man. Bill C-31 does not allow for my niece and nephew to be registered with the government. I guess my niece and nephew could be called non-Status Indians but, in some circles, this term seems reserved for those who were originally not classified by the Indian Agent.

The language and understanding of the definition of Status and non-Status Indian identities has been imposed onto First Nations, through colonial practices enforced by the Canadian government legislation.

Colonial practices use tools of oppression to break down Aboriginal identity. During the 1960's, the cross-cultural adoption of Aboriginal children to non-Aboriginal parents was an oppressive tool that tore many Aboriginal nations apart, broke up Aboriginal families and kept many individuals separated from their homeland and community. My experience of being adopted has had its own implications, which have been consciously passed down to my children. The following literature review will explore these implications, as well as other repercussions and realities of cross-cultural adoption. As well, because the issue of Aboriginal adoption impacts Aboriginal identity, the topic of identity will also be explored.

Commonness and casualness of adoption

In this day and age living through adoption and foster care experiences are common. So common it appears that the commonness and casualness of adoption, trauma as well as anger, and grief and loss issues related to adoption are not fully recognized, respected or discussed. Jinkerson (1994) an Aboriginal adoptee of Cree ancestry states "I was raised with the myth that adoption is a normal process. Accepting this, I learned to block out most of my feelings that came up surrounding the issue of my adoption" (13).

Additionally, Aboriginal feminist writer, activist and scholar Lee Maracle (1996) writes:

Some of the proponents of traditionalism advocate the internal apprehension of our children. Of course the funds to carry out both the apprehension and the fostering out of these children will come from the government and go through this leadership. (38)

Lee Maracle (1996) also states:

If the elite would bother to look up the word "apprehension" in the dictionary, they would realize that it means "terror." Where in our traditions, laws or values was the terrorizing of children acceptable? The other meaning of apprehension is tantamount to kidnapping. Where in our traditions, laws or values was kidnapping of a woman's children ever acceptable. (p. 38)

Both Aboriginal writers, Maracle (1996) and Jinkerson (1994), who appear to be trailblazers in the exposing of child welfare practices as non-traditional and abnormal, discuss the impacts and realities of adoption, dispelling any myths that adoption is a normal process, or an Aboriginal way of practice.

Furthermore, Rummig (1996) in her article titled "Adoption Psychology" believes that the lack of knowledge and validation of the adoption experience help perpetuate symptoms of low self-esteem, lack of trust and dissociation. Rummig, a non-Aboriginal person, is passionate in discussing how the normalization of the adoption process keeps the confused

world of the adoptee isolated and identifies that adoption trauma training is needed for all helping professionals.

More recently Ojibway writer Shandra Spears (2003) writes:

Transracial adoption of Native children is more complex than anyone who has not lived through the experience can imagine. I have lived through it. Apart from the obvious disconnection from Native community and birth relatives, transracially adopted First Nations children face specific challenges, which we continue to face throughout the course of our adult lives. (p. 81)

Jinkerson(1994), Maracle (1996), Rummig (1996) and Spears (2003) all discuss the ramifications of adopting out Aboriginal children and each in their own way, describe how it is not natural and has political, spiritual, emotional and intellectual consequences..

Additionally, Aboriginal children who have come into contact with the dominant society's child welfare policies and procedures has been automatically placed into a place of "other" and "less than". Spears (2003) states:

Transracial adoptions do not solve racial problems when one group in society maintains a position of political, economic, military and cultural dominance over others groups. Within the framework of institutional racism and colonization, members of the dominant group are able to misuse their powers, which they have done in so many ways and for so many years, that it becomes normal for them. In this position, how can a single, isolated Native child help but feel her or his peril. (p. 82)

Aboriginal adoptions: a matter of genocide

As previously mentioned, my writing on this thesis topic comes from asking, "What is the big deal about Aboriginal children adopted into non-Aboriginal homes? Why care that Indian children are adopted into non-Aboriginal homes? Why is my adoption experience different from someone who is not of Aboriginal ancestry? How is the identity of an Aboriginal person impacted by adoption? How will the offspring of Aboriginal adoptees celebrate their Aboriginal identity?"

My asking these rhetorical questions has led me to examine and accept how the tearing apart of Aboriginal communities is an act of genocide. The United Nations Genocide Convention states:

ARTICLE II: In the present convention, genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group, as such:
Killing members of the group;
Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;
forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.
(Chrisjohn, 1997, p. 150)

Fournier and Crey (1997) quote McKenzie and Hudson in stating "the child welfare system was part of a deliberate assault on Native society designed to make changes in Native people (84)." It was designed to

deliberately inflict, on Aboriginal people, conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction, in whole or in part. By putting Aboriginal children into a system where abandonment, rejection, grief and loss become aspects of personality, it is sure that a generation of dysfunction will prevail. When a generation of dysfunction is created, a sense of cultural pride is deconstructed because of self-killing through suicides, slow killing of the self through alcoholism and drug abuse, and the forcing of Aboriginal people into becoming assimilated Canadians, as are all other Canadians. Mental harm also becomes a factor for the generation of adoptees by the way many have low self esteem, lack of identity, racism which is not validated and, for some, the abuse perpetuated by caregivers within the false caverns of a "safe" home. The deliberate assault on Native people through child welfare practices contributes to the loss of Native pride and supports Duncan Campbell Scott's words of 1907: "We must rid of the Indian problem." It is my belief, that by creating and having a generation of Aboriginal people who cannot identify as Indian, the Indian problem is decreasing.

In the Province of Manitoba for example, there is an Aboriginal Identity Field disclosure form handed out to all K-12 students at the beginning of the school year. My children are a part of this process and each year they bring the form home. It was through their own curiosity that they asked me what the form was for and what they should do with it. I must

mention that my children live day to day with their father; they do not reside with me. When my children asked me about this form, I gladly educated them on why this form was important for them to complete. I told them that they should be proud of who they are and where they come from. So it was through my encouragement and my own awareness of my Aboriginal identity, that I was able to encourage my children in their own recognition of identity. Their non-Aboriginal father saw no need for his mixed ancestry children to fill this form out. Because of this experience, I cannot help but wonder how many other Aboriginal children have a similar experience and how many Aboriginal voices are silenced, because of not knowing. I also recognize that neither the federal government, provincial governments nor First Nation communities encourage the practice of seeking out children and adults of the Adoption scoops, welcoming them home and encouraging them to self identify. There has never been a funded private investigation agency contracted to find the ones who were adopted out. I assume that no attempts to bring Aboriginal adoptees back would mean that the federal government would have more Status Indians to be accountable to. Spears (2003) writes:

If Native children grow up as Canadians, we will presumably cease to be part of an "Indian problem." White adoptive parents are co-opted into this assimilation process by their urgent need to parent. (p. 82)

Furthermore, one only has to look at the history of Aboriginal children who were adopted out into non-Aboriginal homes to recognize how Native cultures are in jeopardy of having fewer adult members with a proud Native identity. Berlin's (1978) article "Anglo-Adoptions of Native Americans: Repercussions in Adolescence" points out that Aboriginal children who are adopted out into non-Aboriginal homes fare quite well as children, but when they are older they are at high risk because they do not fit into the white world or the Indian world. Berlin (1978) quotes Topper (1974) in stating:

Then, at age 18 when foster care is terminated, the adolescent found that, to the world, he was still Indian discriminated against employment and higher education. Unfortunately, attempts to return to his tribe were devastating. Many of the adolescents lost an understanding of their Native language and had no memory or comprehension of the tribal history, culture, customs, and strivings. They became strangers among their own people. The adolescent could not make it either among his people as an anglicized Indian, nor could he make it as an Indian in the white world where he had no family supports and nothing to hang onto or one to return to. Further, the adolescent crime, drug abuse, suicide, and alcoholism, important problems on the reservation, were found to be more pervasive for the Indian child brought up in white foster homes. (p. 388)

Spears(2003) adds:

I was robbed of a political, historical, spiritual, linguistic and cultural base which could have given me a great sense of self-esteem and strength. This position also acknowledges that a large proportion of Native people who ended up homeless, incarcerated, addicted or psychologically scarred were products of this "better life." Native people who remained connected to community and culture didn't come over to our house for dinner. I never heard my language spoken, and I was never given accurate information about my culture. I grew up within an ideology that said I did not exist, because Native people

did not exist, except as mascots or objects of desire. Through this process of symbolic annihilation, I ceased to exist as a Native person within my own mind. (p. 83)

The court system believes that love and security will suffice in the upbringing of an adopted Aboriginal child. Jinkerson (1994) adds "The day the courts accepted my adoptive parents' application to make me their own they publicly acknowledged my Native identity, culture and heritage as unimportant (14)."

How does an Indian child learn to love their Indian-ness when the people raising them are the colonizers? Johnson (1976) cites Chimezie in stating "the danger of assimilation, which implies that the child will take on the values and attitudes of the hated oppressor, cutting himself off from his ethnic peers and rejecting his historical past" (243). To be born of Native heritage is a political statement of its own. To be raised with the values of the oppressor, while living in a body that is filled with Aboriginal blood ties, creates an internal self-hatred that is perpetuated by racism. For many Aboriginal children who were adopted out as children into non-Aboriginal homes this self-hatred is so internalized it is unrecognizable. Supernault (1995) states:

It is our differences that give us identity.
It is our pride that gives us strength and
It is our understanding that gives us unity. (page number?)

In keeping with Supernault's words, most adopted Aboriginal children will recognize they are different, but how is it they will learn the identity, the pride, the strength and most importantly the unity, which is suppressed in their identity?

I cannot stress enough how, being born Native is a political statement. To be raised with the values of the oppressor, while living in a body that is filled with Aboriginal blood ties, means that at some point a decision will need to be made on whether to discontinue or continue Aboriginal identity.

Spears (2003) writes:

I was already part white and lived surrounded by white colleagues and relatives. How much further could I step away from "Nativity" - by marrying a white person and investing in a white middle-class Canadian way of life? Wouldn't that be simpler and less painful? How could my children return from that even greater distance. (p. 83)

For the writer of this thesis, the decision was made at one time to invest in the white middle-class Canadian way of life. With this decision, I created the great distance that exists in the return for my children to their community.

Analysis of Family Unit Members

Adoption does not occur in isolation. The impacts of adoption affect and impact the family unit in varying degrees. Family units include both the biological and adoptive family members. Recognition of differing perceptions

validates the circumstances and uniqueness of each member. The family unit members to be explored within this literature review are the adopted child, the adoptive mother, and the biological mother.

The Native mother

The Native mother within Canada has colonial structures such as race, economics and church institutions imposed upon her. These structures, in a Native woman's reality, are named racism, poverty, and imposed religion. To live a life where the structural impositions create your reality often results in feelings of apathy or, at times, guilt.

Therefore, the Native mother who gives her child away, or has a child taken away, is often left to live her life within the systematic structures, to battle internal and external feelings of misunderstanding and guilt. I have often heard many white women praise themselves for the strength they had in giving their child up for adoption. They are also quick to pat themselves on their backs and tell me how their reunification process has been one of joy. This pride and arrogance often sickens me, because their experience was not tangled up with racism, poverty imposed because of the setting up of a reserve system and Indian Act, apathy caused through residential schools and religion imposed upon them by the colonizer.

Adoption is viewed by the mainstream as a window of opportunity that provides a First Nations child with superior life opportunities that they may not have had with their First Nations parents on- or off-reserve. Susan Miller Havens (1996) describes the adoption process as "the birth mother, without support to raise her child, trusts that another family can and will accept the responsibility. The adopted family builds a family so the adopted child may acquire a secure situation in which to grow" (273). Miller-Havens fails to acknowledge a critical analysis that incorporates race, cultural identity and traditional teachings.

In a Native woman's reality, how is a mother's decision-making process regarding relinquishment and adoption influenced by stigmas and beliefs surrounding Native life and poverty? Beatrice Culleton (1983) writes a story called "In Search of April Raintree." Although Culleton's writing is fiction, she realistically and poignantly describes the tragic and sad realities of urban Aboriginal life. Within her autobiographical fictional writing, the author describes a little speech given by one of the social workers within the story. The speech is titled the Native girl's syndrome:

...and you girls are headed in that direction. It starts out with the fighting, the running away, and the lies. Next comes the accusations that everyone in the world is against you. There are the sullen uncooperative silences, the feeling sorry for yourselves. And when you go on your own, you get pregnant right away or you can't find or keep jobs. So you'll start with alcohol and drugs. From there, you get into shoplifting and prostitution and in and out of jails. You'll live with

men who will abuse you. And on it goes. You'll end up like your parents, living off society...you're going the same route as many others Native girls. If you don't smarten up, you'll end up in the same place they do. Skid row! (p. 67)

The remarks within this story eloquently describe the racism towards Native women and the derogatory expectations placed upon Native women. It is recognizable how the influence of colonization has created a reality where Native women are no longer respected as the life-bearers of once sovereign and strong Nations.

In 1967, at the time of my adoption into a non-Aboriginal family, Indian life was hopeless and filled with much apathy. The residential school era was entering its sixth generation, leaving generations of Ktunaxa people without parenting, nurturing or relationship building skills. In David Fanshel's (1972) book, *Far from the reservation: The transracial adoption of American Indian children*, a speech spoken by President Lyndon Johnson is cited. In this speech Lyndon Johnson graphically portrays the dismal condition of the "Forgotten Americans." Although President Johnson is describing conditions of First Nations people within the United States the correlation to the Canadian Indian life is similar and merited. On a policy and structural level, one cannot help but also wonder if speeches and thought similar to Lyndon Johnson's were used as justification for adopting out

Aboriginal children. It must also be noted that the creation of an American/Canadian border is not the creation of the Indigenous people.

President Johnson's speech was delivered on March 6, 1968. At the time of this speech, I was eleven months old and I had already been in foster care for two months.

There are about 600 000 Indians in America today. Some 400 000 live on or near reservations in 25 states. The remaining 200 000 have moved to our cities and towns. The most striking fact about American Indians today is their tragic plight.

Fifty thousand Indian families live in unsanitary dilapidated dwellings: many in huts, shanties, even abandoned automobiles.

The unemployment rate among Indians is nearly 40 percent – more than ten times the national average.

Fifty percent of Indian school children – double the national average – drop out before completing high school.

Indian literacy rates are among the lowest in the nation; the rates of sickness and poverty are among the highest.

Thousands of Indians who have migrated into the cities find themselves untrained for jobs and unprepared for urban life.

The average age of death of an American Indian today is 44 years; for all other Americans, it is 65.

Among other grim facts revealed by this message are the following:

Ten percent of American Indians over the age 14 have had no schooling at all; nearly 60 percent have less than an eight grade education (p. 23).

As I read through President Johnson's speech, I cannot help but realize that it is no wonder that my mother gave me up for adoption. I cannot help but think that my mother must have internalized this oppression so badly, that she thought that my life would only be filled with opportunities of success if and only if, I were raised with non-Indians.

In reviewing the literature it is also recognized that the giving away of a child is sometimes the result of the child being illegitimate, a bastard or a product of fornication or adulterous sex. The definition of these terms has been supported through the teachings of the Bible, organized religion and overzealous church groups. For many women, adoption seemed liked a moral act to perform after having committed a sinful deed.

The adoptive parents

I sit and try to imagine what it would have been like to be my parents in 1967. I refer to Bernie and Monica Daniels as my parents. Mostly, this is out of habit. Because they raised me for 15 years of my formative life, they are the ones I still call mom and dad. My parents were recent immigrants, to Canada in 1967. They had only been in Canada for two years when they decided to adopt a little girl. For most of my life, I was angry with my parents and I despised and hated and their intentions. But as I reflect on their decision, I cannot help but recognize their generosity. The generosity they had to take a stranger's child into their home and raise that child as their

own, is unfathomable to me. It has taken many years of healing to get to the point I am at right now. I know I am not done my journey, but with the tools I have, I recognize how the structures of race, poverty and capitalism impacted, and still impact on, our parent / child relationship.

I am assuming my parents adopted me because they had love to give and that they wanted a little girl to complete their family. This portion of the literature review will reflect how my parent's need to love was undermined by politics of race, ideology and fear. The passages in this portion of the thesis will reflect how adoptive parents of Aboriginal children were essentially deceived into a relationship, without resources and means to help with the process of building respect across Nations.

Within the realm of adoption, one mother gives birth while another mother raises the child. Cross-cultural adoption between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples does not take into account that Aboriginal children are born Indian. Being born Indian means that the person will always be Indian, no matter where they are raised. Blood knowledge is carried through the child's genetic make up and stays with the child where ever they go in life (living sources: Solomon, 2005; Cyr, 2005). Being an adoptee and from speaking to other adoptees, I have often heard and experienced how being an Aboriginal child raised in a non-Aboriginal home is similar to being a square peg forced into a round hole. Because the Aboriginal child has a different

genetic make-up and cultural history, they just don't fit. After years of being forced to 'fit', it is no wonder that mixed and unresolved feelings of loss and anger are perpetuated within the child, especially towards the adoptive parents. Komissaroff (1992), in the article 'The Angry Adoptee' eloquently describes that adoptive parents are often left to work with the adopted child's anger; "many adoptive parents go away believing that they just can't win. There is no way that you can get it right, and good intentions count for nothing. Feeling doomed to failure anyway, some simply throw up their hands in despair, and forget the whole thing" (1). It appears that adoptive parents were not given the resources for dealing with the child's anger, and that they were literally 'thrown into' new experiences. Adoptive parents were unaware of what they were getting into. Oleson (2003) summarizes it perfectly when she states:

We did not realize that we were entering uncharted waters in the area of trans-racial adoptions. We had no idea that anyone would accuse us of cultural genocide. We did not realize that our son would come with burdens we could not carry for him. We did not know that society would see our son as "red on the outside and white on the inside" or what this label would do to him. (p.10)

Between the 1970's and 2003 Mavis Oleson, a non-Native woman and adoptive mother of a Native child, came to realize the impacts of the decision to adopt. In her writings she describes how, in the sixties and seventies, it appears that the social worker took advantage of the naïve parent wanting to

do well. She asks, and I ask, where were those social workers when the realities of trans-racial adoption began to set in?

Mavis Oleson and her adopted Native son Dallas Williams co-wrote the book 'Living in Limbo'. In this book, Oleson describes her experience of being a non-Aboriginal woman adopting a Native child. Oleson (2003) describes in her writing that when she decided to adopt a Native child, she never prayed about the situation. She writes:

I just assumed that God would want us to adopt a child from the AIM program. It was a good thing to do. It gave us the opportunity to take action on behalf of a child in need and to share the family with which we had been blessed. Let me be clear. I am not saying God would not have wanted us to adopt Dallas. Rather I am saying that I entered this new family relationship without the benefit of God's supreme wisdom through the Holy Spirit because I did not ask for it. (p. 8)

AIM is an adoption program that existed in Saskatchewan, Canada and it stands for Adopt Indian Metis Children. The program began April 1, 1967, 23 days before the birth of the writer of this project.

Oleson appears to be a woman who lives a life that is faith-based. Many people who live faith-based lives have beliefs that revolve around God and God's will. Many faith-based beliefs are also embedded in values that are not selfish or sinful. The policy and procedures revolving around adoption law are not faith-based. Adoption laws are created by man, and separate the mind and heart. It is ironic that Oleson approached adoption

with good intentions while the government approached adoption with the intent to assimilate. These two paradigms are at opposite ends of practice; the two are not similar in any way. Oleson states "that I entered this new family relationship without the benefit of God's supreme wisdom" (8). Upon further exploration it is easy to see how she also entered this new family relationship without the benefit of knowing the Canadian government's true intent. If Oleson and other adoptive parents had known the government's true intention, would they have carried on raising Aboriginal children so disconnected from their culture? Would parents have asked for more support so they would not have raised these children in such a disjointed manner? Ultimately, it appears that non-Aboriginal parents did buy into the assimilation process, because they automatically raised Aboriginal children as non-Aboriginal citizens.

Oleson (2003) writes in her book on how she herself came with baggage resulting from having grown up in an abusive and alcoholic home. Oleson describes how her childhood experiences taught her that if she does good, peace will exist in the home and she will be accepted and not rejected (14). Oleson then goes on to describe that when the angry adopted Aboriginal child grows up and begins to reject the adopted parent, this action can re-trigger the adoptive parent's own past. The re-triggering of personal childhood trauma can then cause the parent to parent in a way that hurts the

present parent/child relationship. In my search of the literature and within my own social work practice, I have not seen any counseling services available to help adoptive parents work through their past problems.

Parents come with a power that can be used to help aid the child in the formation of thoughts and values. Adoptive parents, in some sort of unconscious manner seem to be given a larger sense of power: there exists the unspoken duty of savior. It is like the adoptive parents saved the unwanted child. In a white, privileged society like Canada, this unspoken duty of savior is increased, especially when the adopted child is a child of color. Oleson (2003) exposes her deep-seated racism in raising a Native child.

I am now startled by the stereotyping in my thinking that because he is Cree and Black somehow he would want to devote his life to serving his people. Did I decide how our other children should serve? No. Then why did I not give Dallas the idea that life was open for him to choose? Also, how racist is it to assume that to serve he needed to be raised in our white home. These unspoken racist assumptions hurt deeply. (42)

Oleson's honesty is amazing to witness and demonstrates how self-analysis is difficult. This difficulty may contribute to why there is so little literature that describes the difficulties of white privilege within cross-cultural adoption. The predicament of white privilege and covert racism is still struggled with in 2005, so it is no wonder that it was also struggled with in the 1960's. Covert racism and white privilege genuinely reflects how adoptive parents of

Aboriginal children were essentially deceived into a relationship that lacked the building of respect across Nations and race.

Once an Aboriginal child was adopted, there were no supports in place for when and if the cross-cultural adoption broke down. It also appears that there was no follow-up done with these families as the child entered each new stage of life. Struggles exist within cross-cultural adoptions and parents are left alone to work through difficulties on their own. Oleson (2003) describes how many adoptive families can clearly remember the moment they lost their adoptive child. She writes:

Many parents can identify the point at which they "lost" their children. This the point at which street influences, addictions, prostitution, incarceration became so influential that parents could no longer reach their children. Sometimes the attitude of the children changed. Some children were too cool to be associated with their "white" homes. Some genuinely believed that being in a white home was the source of their difficulties. Some felt their lifestyle was not the difficulty, for they believed they were truly "living" for the first time since they were adopted. These children no longer seemed to want or need the adoptive parents. (p. 162)

Adoption break downs result in multiple losses for the adopted child as well as loss for the adoptive parents and family. Many families are left confused as to where and why things have gone wrong. In adulthood, many adopted Aboriginal people create their own family which, in the end, creates a lot of questions and little opportunity to dialogue any answers.

The adopted child as a child

“Unless a child learns about the forces which shaped him, the history of his people, their values and customs, their language, he will never really know himself or his potential as a human being.”

National Indian Brotherhood, 1972

The adopted child can be recognized as the powerless Native child who struggles with Aboriginal identity loss, confusion of feelings, questions, safety, the ongoing search for mother-love and low self-esteem.

Aboriginal children who are adopted feel powerless in the sense that they do not have the ability to hold onto their Aboriginal identity, because it is others who make the decisions on how Aboriginal identity will be defined within the child's life. This imminent sense of powerlessness can cause anger.

Lawrence (2004) quotes an Aboriginal adoptee:

I have a real strong feeling, of picturing myself as a little baby, with these white people just passing me around. You know--you can look at this whole other side of it, where they were trying to find the best care for me – and that's probably all still true. But there's this feeling that I was completely powerless, cut off from my family. And the anger in me goes out to the Native community, as well as to the white community. Especially when people come up to me and tell me, “You should be this, or you should be that.” I just tell them, “Fuck you, you weren't there! I had to get through that whole time alone. I got through everything alone. If I'd killed myself, way back then – I was suicidal by the age of nine or ten – you wouldn't have even known about me. I survived. I chose to be here. I set the rules for my life. (p. 118)”

When removed from community, mother, family, history and culture there is Aboriginal identity loss. For some, Aboriginal identity lies in the ability to know who their family is, where they came from and where they are going. For the Aboriginal adoptee, this ability is missing.

For all adoptees, identity is an issue, but for an Aboriginal adoptee, the topic of identity is interlaced with genocidal intentions, assimilational practices and Canadian acculturation. For many of these adoptees, it also means living brown-skinned within a predominantly white-skinned family.

The survival of Aboriginal identity rests upon Aboriginal people. When confusion exists in an individual, the impact can be seen on a *micro* and *macro* level. Impacts are seen within the individual and it spreads into the realm of politics and community. Spears (2003) writes, in her sense making story:

I developed my sense of identity by internalizing everything around me. Having no Native women in my life, I had no way of knowing that I was a beautiful Native girl. I didn't even know that I was Native. There was no Native "mirror" that reflected my beauty; only a white mirror that reflected my difference. I compared myself to the girls around me, their small waists and cute noses. I didn't look like them, but I had no reason to believe I was supposed to look any other way. Therefore I "knew" that I was a white girl - an ugly white girl. I was a typical "ugly duckling." Having no one to tell me that I was worth protecting, I "knew" that I was worthless and bad. (p. 85)

Spears demonstrates that when a child grows up with an uncelebrated sense of identity, they live in a world of confusion. If a person lives in such

confusion, how is it they will be able to live a happy and productive life? And when they become adults, how is it they will raise happy and content children?

Children who are adopted often live in a world where the expression of feelings is often silenced because of the fear of re-abandonment and a self-imposed need to feel thankful for having a home. Komissaroff (1992) writes "the only difference between adoptee anger and any other kind of anger, is that adoptees rarely talk openly about their adoption-related anger." She states there are two reasons why this is: "First, it is bad practice to bite the hand that feeds you. Second, it makes their parents uncomfortable" (1). The dichotomy of feelings often results in a preoccupation of making sense of the world and can take away from the search for identity.

In addition, children who know they are adopted have many questions. Such as am I tall because...? Am I like them? Did they...? Komissaroff (1992) describes how adopted children lack proof of living authority to family history, roots and genetics. Adopted children cannot use their parent's experiences as catalysts of hope and normalization. For example, if an adopted child is six inches taller than their classmates, they cannot compare their height to their parents' heights at a similar age. An adopted child does not hear the comforting words "Yes, when I was your age I was taller than all the other kids, but they all caught up the next year."

Adopted children, like all other children, long to be normal, but because they lack proof on how normalcy develops within individual families, adopted children are often left with unanswered questions which often lead to further isolation and feelings of being misunderstood. To further illustrate my point: as a young teen-age girl, I began my menstruation quite young or, what I thought was young because I was only 11 years old. My breasts began to form when I was 10 and by the time I was 12 and 13, I quit growing. When I looked at my school peers, I saw them as flat-chested, they didn't have their periods yet and they were still growing. I can remember how I longed to know if this was normal. I wished I could ask my mom "So when did you quit growing? Have I really quit growing?" A part of me also longed to hear my mom say "You know, I got my period when I was young and I quit growing when I was 13 too, so don't worry about it my precious daughter, everything is good and you are okay." Instead because I did not have family history I was left alone with my questions.

As well, Sharon Jinkerson, (1994) an adoptee, asks many of the questions that I, too, have rhetorically asked, at one time or another. For example, in regards to our biological mothers and the whole adoption issue, she asks and I ask, "What does she remember? What were her feelings at the time? What were her feelings when she realized we would never see each other again? Was I a loveable baby?" Other questions I have are "What was I

wearing? Did I have a diaper bag? Did she kiss me goodbye? What did she do after I was gone? Did she think of me often?" I ask quietly within my mind and heart these many questions. Often these questions are looked at as taboo, adding to the feelings of isolation. Jinkerson (1994) and Rummig (1996) both conclude that the asking of rhetorical questions helps the adoptee to fantasize, which is normal and an aid to healing.

Unfortunately, many children who are adopted do not feel safe in the world. How safe is the world when the woman who bore you and gave you life cannot rock you to sleep at night? How safe is the world when the first bond you ever experience is severed? Sharon Jinkerson (1994) was given up for adoption as a child and she states "No matter how much I decide to deal with the issues surrounding my adoption, there at the base of my soul lies a scar which impacts every turn of my life (15)." Oh, how these words ring true for an adult who is adopted. Every single day, the uprootedness of biology, genealogy and the not-experiencing of the physical touch of one's biological mother are felt, at a heart and cellular level and further intertwined within these experiences of loss are internalized issues of mistrust, abandonment, rejection and fear within their relationships (Fournier & Crey, 1997). Another impact that many Aboriginal adult adoptees who lost contact with their natural mother experience, is the inability to love another later in life (Fournier & Crey, 1997).

Many adopted children embark on a journey looking for mother-love and for teachers. Linda Lakoe (2002) author of the book *Where courage is like a wild horse: the world of an Indian orphanage* describes her story of being removed to an orphanage at the age of nine. In Linda's journey of finding herself, she writes of how her adoptive mother prompted her to seek her biological mother. Linda Lakoe leads the reader to believe that there is always, no matter how bad the situation may seem, a mother figure in life who can make good, teach, nurture and provide a basis to understand one's own culture. Linda Lakoe's teacher of love was a non-Aboriginal mother. By the praising of her teacher Linda provides the message that children of mother-loss seek a teacher to help them make sense of the world around them.

Many writings on adoption describe how adoptees tend to have low self-esteem. Rummig (1996) addresses the cause of self-esteem as the result of the child failing to live up to the expectation and 'chosen status' of the adopted parents. Upon further investigation, it is recognized that low self-esteem has been a common factor among Aboriginal people because of the social structures of racism, the Indian Act and the impacts of Residential School Syndrome. To be Aboriginal in Canada places First Nation individuals in the realm of second-class citizen, resulting from the dispossession of land and culture. Research shows that it seems probable that

an adopted child runs the risk of developing a low self-esteem. If this reality is intertwined with being First Nations, it seems even more probable that developing a low self esteem is a risk. Finding literature, written from an Aboriginal perspective, that articulates Rummig's (1996) notion of living up to 'chosen status' was difficult, because most literature linked low self-esteem in Aboriginal adoptees to loss of identity and heritage and to racism.

The effect of adoption on Aboriginal individuals is huge. Lawrence (2004) cites an Aboriginal adoptee:

I don't know one adopted person that hasn't been really affected by the adoption process. Everything from prostitution to drug and alcohol abuse, to crime, to self-abuse, to attempted suicide. All of us, all of us – there's not one of us that I know of that's been adopted out that hasn't abused themselves in some way, shape, or form because of a lack of knowing who we are and where we came from. The statistics down at Aboriginal Legal Services say that 65 to 70 percent of all Aboriginal criminal offenders who come through there have been adopted out.

There was one teaching that I remember. People who work in our communities were sitting around one day, and they all said, "Who do you think are the hardest people to work with – the people from the residential school system or the people who've been adopted out?" And clearly everybody said it was the people who'd been adopted out who were the hardest to work with, Because in the residential school system – and this is not to minimize the atrocities that happened in the residential school system – you still knew you were Indian, and you were with your brothers and your sisters and your aunts and your cousins. But when you were removed, you didn't have nothing. (p. 119)"

The grown-up adopted child

The adopted child who grows into adulthood has to come to some type of rationality of their life experience and loss of identity in order to be content and happy. To come to terms with my life experience I had to explore many subjects such as: learning to believe in my own story and give it a voice, coming to terms with the fact that I was given away as opposed to apprehended by child welfare officials, how I was raised with financial privilege as opposed to in poverty, that daydreaming about a life with my biological mother was okay and that re-unification experiences between adopted children and their mothers are never comparative.

What does it mean to be born an Aboriginal person? What makes an Indianan Indian? Can you take a child off the reserve and expect him or her to be stripped of the Native identity within? Just like the stones and mountains and rivers are the bones and blood of Mother Earth and carry great wisdom and teachings of the generations past, the bones and blood of a Native child carry the wisdom and teaching of the ancestors.

Fournier and Crey (1997) quote George Littlechild stating:

To me, the dominant society tried to strip our culture, to rob our souls, but what they didn't realize is the soul cannot be robbed unless we allow it. There is always innate genetic material that couldn't be damaged; it's passed down and remains deep within us. That's why as a group we've survived. (p. 114)

Is there an innate wisdom born within each of us? Is there an entity that carries knowledge and intuitive knowing of who we are and where we come from? Leonard George (1991) states:

All living things have their place in the spectrum of life, and all living things have their role and functions. There is no confusion: genetic imprinting has made it clear to all creatures who they are and what they must do in their life. The relationships among the creatures are also clearly defined, and it is a never-ending source of wonder to observers to see how well the creatures of the forest and other environments cohabit and contribute to the well-being of their worlds. (p. 160)

The difference between the creatures and wonders of nature and human beings lies in the realms of consciousness and choice. But what are the similarities between humans and animal creatures? Do we as humans also have genetic imprints of who we are and our role within life? Do I have a genetic imprint of my Native heritage within my being? Within the Aboriginal soul and blood, are the teachings of the grandmothers and an essence of truth embedded within. Blood memory is described in Bonita Lawrence's book titled *"Real" Indians and Others: Mixed-Blood Urban Native Peoples and Indigenous Nationhood*, (2004) as:

Because of the difficult relationship I had with my parents, my adopted parents, I honestly believed that our breakdown in the adoption was so much about seeing the world from two completely different places. Because even though they raised me in their value system, I'm a really firm believer that you have blood memory, and you ...something...As a Native person you have something in there that they would never be able to relate to. And that was just always a

struggle that I had, and I just really believed that I was really different, and they would never understand me because I was Indian. (p. 199)

It is the linking of this past memory that helps many adult Aboriginal adoptees connect with their ancestral heritage.

Hurts hurt. But it hurts even more to realize that for some adoptees they were not forcibly removed from their communities. In Ernie Crey's book "Stolen from our Embrace" he writes of how Aboriginal children were apprehended from the grip of their mothers. But I was not one of those children. I was one of the Aboriginal children who were given away from our embrace. No social worker came into my mother's home to remove me from an unhealthy and unsafe environment. My mother took me into the social services office herself. My mother took me into the office and voluntarily signed me over as a ward of the court.

Knowing that I was cooperatively given over to the colonizing people makes me angry. I know it was racist policies and ideologies that kept me from being placed back in my community, but knowing the structural roots of Canadian history does not help ease all the pain and anger.

Because I was 'given away', I am sometimes lost in rage, wondering why it was that my mother was not strong enough to stand against being used as a device that serves the colonialist practice of assimilation and genocide.

Amazingly, being raised within mainstream society far from the reservation has entitled me to certain privileges. Fournier and Crey (1997) quote George Littlechild in stating:

I know a lot of adopted and fostered Aboriginal women and I've got so I can recognize their look: very well-groomed, perfect hair and make-up, well-educated and trying desperately hard to be better than the Indians their adopted parents told them they would be like if they didn't achieve. (p. 106)

I am sometimes one of those women. I grew up well-groomed, fed, upper middle-class and I was taught to work hard and get educated. Because of these privileges I often wonder how many feelings of jealousy come up within my natural mother. How jealous is she of my life of privilege? How does my life of privilege impact upon our relationship and upon my relationship with other family members? Also, how do feelings of "less than" haunt my mother? These questions are important because the process of reconnecting adoptees back to their Aboriginal communities is often mingled with fear and jealousy (Fournier & Crey, 1996).

Adult adoptees will never have their childhood experience of trauma changed. Jinkerson (1994) states "No matter how the rationale, my life has been shaped by these haunting shadows that reach back to the genesis of my being. The central cedar pole of my life which reaches up to the sky is rooted in pain and loss" (13). Jinkerson eloquently describes how the loss of

adoption is the root of her existence. It impacts all her relationships she chooses to engage in.

There is no doubt that to be adopted is to experience grief and loss. Nickman (1996) quotes Brodzinsky in stating "adoptees suffer losses that are comparable to or greater than those suffered by individuals who have experienced parental divorce or death" (258). Rummig (1996) adds that "with adoption, the child experiences a loss (like divorce or death) of an unknown person, and doesn't know why" (7). It should be recognized that grief and loss is a part of the adoption process and it is one that carries onto adulthood.

Adults who live through the adoption experience have to, to some degree, embrace contradictions. The creation of disassociation between a private and public world requires the adult who has experienced the loss of a parent to embrace contradictions. Judith Herman (1997) writes:

People in captivity become adept practitioners of the arts of altered consciousness. Through the art of disassociation, voluntary thought suppression, minimization, and sometimes-outright denial, they learn to alter an unbearable reality. Ordinary psychological language does not have a name for this complex array of mental maneuvers, at once conscious and unconscious. Perhaps, the best name for it is *doublethink*, in Orwell's definition: "*Doublethink* means the power of holding two contradictory beliefs in one's mind simultaneously, and accepting both of them. The (person) knows in which his memories must be altered; he therefore knows that he is playing tricks with reality; but by the exercise of *doublethink* he also satisfies himself that reality is not violated. The process has to be conscious, or it would not be carried out with sufficient precision, but it also has to be unconscious, or it would bring it a feeling of falsity...Even in using the

word *doublethink* it is necessary to exercise *doublethink*" The ability to hold contradictory beliefs simultaneously. (p. 87)

The concept of *doublethink* identifies and validates the complexities of adoption. It is a real-life commentary on "it was the best of times...it was the worst of times..."

Rummig (1996) succinctly describes how children of adoption often "attempt to fill in gaps and create fantasies of acceptable scenarios of the circumstances of her conception, birth and relinquishment, that she can emotionally handle" (3). Adoptees eventually outgrow these fantasies although a sense of wonderment consistently exists. Miller-Havens (1996) states:

By insisting that they get on with grief resolution, some therapists are asking the adoptee to recall what they may know about the circumstances of relinquishment, to get in touch with the pain and perhaps anger over what might have been, to review the facts about their birth family, and then put whatever relationship they had with their birth family into perspective. (p. 275)

I must note that Miller-Havens is writing from a perspective that does not take into consideration the process of colonization and genocide. Miller-Havens does allude to the fact that recollection of memory is needed in order to move beyond present circumstances. Miller-Havens does not talk about the creation of fantasy, but does talk about how recollection is needed. Within

her writing, she describes how the recollection process contributes to the preliminary effort of finding identity.

Strauss (2003) in her book "Birthright" lists the five stages of reunion between adoptee and biological family as 1) Fantasy 2) First Encounters 3) The Morning After 4) Limbo 5) Reconciliation. Strauss recognizes that the Limbo stage can last for many years and differs in each reunion. Strauss also validates that the desire for re-unification is a natural one, helping to add meaning to the adoptee's world and identity.

Situations specific to Aboriginal Adoptees

Literature describing Aboriginal re-unification is lacking. In the literature that exists there are three concepts that seem to exist within the reunification process. These concepts are recognized to be horror stories, differences exposed and the existence of unprepared families and Aboriginal communities.

The Aboriginal adoptee once reunified to their community of origin often tell stories that are interlaced with hurt, differences, difficulties in getting home and staying home and cultural arrogance. Archie Roach, an Aboriginal adoptee, lost 14 years of his life on the street. At the age of 15 he left his non-Aboriginal adoptive home in search of himself. "Along the way, he discovered that both his father and his beloved sister, Gladdie, were dead; he followed the scattered clues to trace the remains of his family, and drank

himself the point of poisoning" (Davies, 1996, 3). Upon returning to their Aboriginal community of origin many Aboriginal adoptees learn of family stories that are filled with post-colonial trauma and residential school residue. Post-colonial residue is recognized in violence, sexual abuse, domestic abuse, alcoholism, drug use and abuse, suicides, death as a result of violence, family violence, nepotism, spiritual abuse, band council lateral violence, internalized racism. The list goes on.

Strauss describes the limbo stage of reunion as the time when differences are discovered. Strauss articulates that the differences are magnified. The magnified differences are even more magnified once a colonial perspective is applied to it. For example, to look at Native adoptee from an on-reserve Aboriginal perspective, one has to take into account the differences in culture, language, expression of language, boundaries, ethics, backgrounds, memories, values, religion, spirituality, beliefs, family groupings, Indian identity, education, poverty, internalized racism, racism, prosperity and historical knowledge. Published academic literature that gives strategies on how to help assist in the healing of Aboriginal adoptions and reunification process is lacking.

The literature describing the discovery of differences involved with Aboriginal adoptions is mostly found in narrative biographical or autobiographical formats. Such stories of adoption and reunification include

Stolen from our Embrace, Where courage is like a wild horse: the world of an Indian orphanage, From Manitoba to Massachusetts: The Lost Generation. With emerging technology, Internet websites such as the 'Lost Bird Society' and the 'Stolen Generations' also share stories of Aboriginal adoption and reunification. To tell stories is an Aboriginal way of healing.

Prior practices of adoption resulted in adoption records being sealed. The implementation of new laws such as the Freedom of Information and Privacy Act (1996) has resulted in many adoptees finding evidence that results in them being able to find family and communities more easily. It is thought that the sealing of adoption files was done to protect the parent from the child and to protect the child from unpleasant information. For many biological mothers the sealing of adoption files granted anonymity and in some cases the anonymity resulted in the birth of adopted children being secrets and in some cases secrets of shame. When a secret from the past is revealed it results in change and often the change results in fear or perhaps the fear of change or, perhaps both.

In Oleson's (2003) work, nine non-Aboriginal families who adopted Native children were interviewed. Three of these interviewed families expressed the common thought that reunification with the child's birth and extended family appeared to not help. Oleson (2003) writes:

Thus the experience of meeting the birth and extended families offered no panacea for the woes of our children. In a few families it led to more complications, but on the whole reunion has had neither a bad or good effect on the child's identity or personhood. Some will say it is too late, the damage was done. Some believe there were other complex issues at stake. Now these issues were being complicated further by the effects of early problems. (p. 159)

This statement in no way forms a thorough study or research project. But this statement does demonstrate that the re-unification process is troubling, for some adoptees.

Arriving home, after many years of being away, often puts the Aboriginal adoptee into a place of "less than". My own experience has often given normally good-natured relatives the opportunity to mock or make fun of my attempts to become re-acquainted with who I am, as a Ktunaxa woman. Spears (2003) supports this action when she writes:

Some men and women challenged my ethnicity in aggressive and insulting ways. I became very defensive about my fair skin, but didn't have enough confidence to really stand up for myself. Inside, part of me still felt like my Nativeness was a hoax, and I was seeing how far I could push it, but another part recognized that I had a right to pursue it and resented the discrimination I faced. (p. 88)

Spears (2003) adds:

It can be very humiliating to be a Native adoptee within our community. Community members act as though our return to our community will solve our problems. They think we should leave our childhood histories in the past and focus on behaving more like "real" Native people. After being constructed all our lives as "the problem," we return to our communities to face more of the same treatment. As recently as last year, a Native friend told me that she thinks I am

brighter than most adoptees and that's why I can understand our culture. That bigotry suggests that adoption equates stupidity. It seems unthinkable, but it exists. (p. 90)

Identity formation and conceptual framework

The tools used by the oppressor are not consistent with contentedness, passion, self-efficacy, soul development or creating a sense of worth. The tools of oppression often times create within individuals a sense of crazy-making, a playground for devil's advocates and factionalization of viewpoints. In Aboriginal adoptees it seems tools of oppression contribute to confusion of identity formation. When identity confusion exists within adoptees how can they effectively teach their own children about identity formation? If an individual has no sense of belonging how can they teach another how to belong?

Keeping people blinded from knowing the truth of Canadian history allows ignorance and identity politics to continue. The eminence of ignorance allows for shame, racism and denial to perpetuate. In order for cultural identity and pride to exist there is a need to de-construct the conscious efforts of perpetuating ignorance and identity politics.

One effort to help aid in the de-constructing process is creating a conceptual framework. Re-creating a conceptual framework would entail the learning of cultural history. People would learn how at one time there was the existence of cultural pride, pre-colonial sovereignty, spirituality, freedom and existence. (Absolon, 1999)

While learning about cultural history there also needs to be active learning about colonial history. Learning a new conceptual framework about colonial history would mean learning and knowing how the Canadian how the Canadian *Indian Act* policy has tried to dilute Aboriginal identity (Lawrence, 2004). Colonial history mean recognizing how the colonial effort to make Indians into Canadians as are all other Canadians, truly exists.

Learning the truth of colonial history includes acknowledging how the *Indian Act* controls every facet of being an Indian and how it defines who is Indian. Learning the truth of colonial history reveals how sexism and patriarchy and allowed for Indian Status women and their children to lose their status if they married non-Aboriginal men.

Colonial history encompasses how the Indian Act set up the reserve system and how the setting up of reserve systems allowed for each band and elected chiefs and councils to have a say on who can be recognized as a community member or not. Lawrence (2004) states:

Current legislation is far less invasive and controlling in everyday terms; however laws controlling "Indian" identity still shape the routes that Native communities take in their struggles for empowerment in crucial ways. (p. 43)

The setting up of the reserve system ensured that that the argument over who is Indian and who is not Indian would occur.

Adopting an anti-colonial historical framework means becoming aware how the child welfare system worked to create identity confusion among Native individuals. Seeing how the child welfare system created a sense of cultural loss is an important factor in reclaiming Aboriginal identity (Absolon, 1999; Lawrence, 2004, Crey, 1998).

Other knowledge that is needed in incorporating a contextual framework is knowing the truth about the fur trade, treaties, war, disease, famine, loss of land, residential schools, political oppression, economic oppression, imposed patriarchy, racism, internalized racism and lateral violence (Absolon, 1998; Lawrence, 2004; Jamieson, 1978; Anderson, 2000).

Another factor that is needed in the development of an Aboriginal identity is the celebration of resistance and reclamation. Lawrence (2004) writes:

At present a vital aspect of decolonization for Native people is cultural reclamation - Winona LaDuke has referred to as "retraditionalization" - the recovery of one's own community's traditional practice. (LaDuke, in Caldwell 1999, 102)

Initially I struggled with writing this chapter, because I really wanted this thesis to stay away from the topic of Aboriginal identity. I resisted the topic of identity because of my own negative experiences with my reserve community (these details are entailed in epilogue, research methodology and

the oral history story). I also did not want to encompass the topic of identity because of my self-perceived notion that the topic was too large to encompass within these pages. Lastly, I did not want to deal with the issue of identity because of my ongoing feelings of inadequacy in being Indian. Doing Aboriginal research and reuniting with my Aboriginal community started me on a journey of seeking truth, living a good life for me and my children.

In exploring the topic of identity and balancing it with my feeling so inadequate, I cannot help but recognize how colonialism has impacted me. The effects of colonialism infiltrate my story and are the foundations of my story. My story is not fiction and it is filled with imposed policies and racist tactics held by a dominant group. My story includes oppression and my story includes the direct lineage to a pre-colonial group. My story now includes the existence of my own children. Within my children's stories, the same foundational roots of colonialism exist. In each of their stories, they too have a connection to a pre-colonial, sovereign Nation.

Lawrence (2004) states:

The survival of urban mixed-race Native people as Native people hinges on their ability to re-integrate their lives into the lives of their nations in ways that are beneficial both to urban and on-reserve people. (p. 259)

In order for my urban Ktunaxa children to survive as Ktunaxa, there needs to be a connection between my children and the community. How will this connection be seized and solidified? I am not able to formulate this answer in any way, but for this moment in time, this thesis will attempt to teach and will try to create within one of my children the desire to re-cultivate their own connection to their Nation community and Aboriginal identity. The re-connection with their Nation may or may not contribute to their feelings of adequacy, but re-connecting with their Nation will help our Ktunaxa Nation survive. To have my children combat the wiles of colonial history as a form of political resistance helps deconstruct the belief that power-over and dominance are acceptable. Most importantly, when my children can exclaim "I am Ktunaxa." the message is that genocide in Canada is not succeeding.

CHAPTER 3

AN ORAL HISTORY APPROACH

Introduction

Choosing a methodology for this research project was easy. As I continue on my journey of becoming comfortable with my Aboriginal identity, I have learned the value of being Aboriginal and valuing the processes and contributions Aboriginal people make. Kirby and McKenna (1989) state in their work titled *Experience, research, social change: Methods from the margins* that "methodology, theory and ideology are intertwined. How you go about research is inextricably linked with how you see the world" (63). Thus, it seems most sensible to use a methodology that centred upon orality, an Aboriginal way of doing, and the empowerment of Native women in particular.

The residential schools did a phenomenal job of taking the voices of Aboriginal people away. But the days of keeping the Indian woman bound with silence are becoming a time of the past. I did not go to the residential school, but the residue of that school system is reflected in my own life. But I will not go to my exile in silence. I will do my best to re-claim power in a society known for its inequities and injustices. Using a research method that contributes to the use of authentic voices is important to me and the

methodology I chose had to be rooted in the political nature of Aboriginal identity. To me, reclaiming power means: to tell your story to the point where you feel your story has been told enough. Your story has been told so much that exerting your story over and over is not needed because internally, you know the truth. Reclaimed power is recognized when the truth no longer needs to be validated externally, because inner knowing overrides feelings of identity awkwardness. Reclaimed power is recognized in how life can go forward and there is no need to tell people I have reclaimed my power, because they recognize it. I realize this thesis project may not clearly articulate and identify this 'reclaimed power', but I believe this research project will be a catalyst in rejuvenating reclaimed power.

For this research project, I chose to do a qualitative study. A qualitative study seemed most appropriate, because it would allow me to put more emphasis on everyday life and people: it would not require me to use numbers and charts to validate any findings. One qualitative research method that impacted me greatly is the oral history methodology. Orality is important because of the need to validate the traditional practice of my people. Prior to the introduction of colonization, Aboriginal peoples were oral people and it was through orality that history and policy and procedure were passed down from generation to generation. It was with the introduction of written history that my people's ways were slowly invalidated. By using an

oral methodology, I am contributing to the non-silencing of my people, I am encouraging the speaking of voices, and in a post-colonial way, I am validating oral history by putting stories into written form. To ensure that my research methodology was most appropriate, I needed to know what I did not want in a methodology.

First, I recognized that I did not want to use a methodology that created a sense of superiority as researcher. Superiority, or implying a sense of superiority, is not conducive to my being in the world. Aboriginal researcher and writer Smith (1999) states that, "Indigenous peoples have been, in many ways, oppressed by theory" (38). I concur with Smith's words and do not want to perpetuate a sense of superiority in my writings.

I have found that time, in Indian country, when compared to academic time, distinguishes between privilege and survival. Therefore, I wanted to use a methodology that celebrated the living within survival. Survival as a unique culture, survival against imposed foreign policy and survival against losing an Aboriginal identity that is saturated in apathy. I find that in Indian country, time is spent surviving as Indians and by the time new knowledge is learned, many suicidal deaths, child apprehensions and addictions can run rampant within a community and tear it further apart. I am an active part of my community. I see pain, dysfunction and hurt first-hand each day. I am

not able to turn a blind eye to the realities of my community. To celebrate the voices that have lived through pain and tragedy is paramount.

I also wanted to ensure that whichever methodology I chose would not reflect my bias as a researcher in a blatant way. But personal interpretation by the researcher is a fact in research. So, no matter which methodology I chose, self-interpretation would be a constant. It is not the Native way to impose my way as truth. It is the Native way to share ideas though. I spent a lot of time grappling with this thought. After many internal debates, I acknowledged that whichever methodology I chose, I musn't contribute to the furthering of academic domination. Hill Collins (1990) states "theory of all types is often presented as being so abstract that it can be appreciated only by a select few. Though often highly satisfying to academics, this definition excludes those who do not speak the language of the elites and thus reinforces social relations of domination" (xii). I wanted my methodology to be easily understood by all and not overlaid by scholastic and theoretical jargon.

Thus, using an oral history methodology seemed to be the best way to help me to be both a researcher and a participant. An oral history methodology would allow me to hear the stories of my research participants, and allow me to tell my story. This method would allow me the opportunity to learn how to respect their stories.

Oral History Methodology

Oral history methodology is an oral history account, also known as a life stories collection, intertwined with a narrative approach. An oral history approach to methodology recognizes the notion of orality, storytelling and first voice. These three recognitions are aspects of an Aboriginal way. Cruikshank (1990) states, "the persistence of stories and storytelling suggests that oral narrative is central to an Indigenous intellectual tradition and provides the core of an educational model" (340).

Using oral histories provides a group of people with the opportunity to feel important and worthy. According to Yow (1994), "In the past, only the well-to-do documented their lives. They not only had a sense of their own importance and were literate, but they also had the leisure and staff support to write. Because they were the ones who held the power, their accounts of their lives were usually consonant with accounts in official documents. Through oral history, the viewpoints of the non-elite who do not leave memoirs or have biographers are presented" (11). To capture the stories of Aboriginal women deconstructs the notion that only the privileged are entitled to records.

Traditionally the use of oral history was, in itself, a form of survival. Hart (1998) writes "an oral tradition is the passing of knowledge from one generation to the next orally (by speaking)...The skills for survival such as

hunting, building houses, making clothes, tools, medicine and religious practices were taught by telling and showing one another how to do these things. Singing, telling stories, and plays are also ways of passing knowledge through oral tradition" (1). In these late colonial times, oral history is a form of survival, in the way it allows for the continuation of culture from one generation to another and provides a sense of identity.

Using an oral history approach that enables story sharing between two Ktunaxa citizens allows for the teaching and learning of Ktunaxa culture.

Joseph Pugliese (2001) in his article titled "'Fighting with our tongues': The politics of Genre in Aboriginal Oral Histories" describes that the

textual and narratological fabric of the oral histories was fundamentally organized by the structuring role of genre...the concept of genre is useful precisely because it allow for the identification of the particular conventions that operate to organize a text in a specific socio-cultural contest. Genre organizes how something will be said according to a range of codes and conventions. (page number)

By sitting and having dialogue with my Ktunaxa family, I am allowed to observe the "complex interplay of emotions which mark the words, the tonality of voice, the cadence and rhythm of articulation, and the facial gestures of and facial expressions that inscribe any oral performance".

(Pugliese, 2001, 89)

Oral histories are interpretive and constructive in the realm of Aboriginal epistemology, though not an empirical science based upon facts.

Oral history is emerging as a respected field but the history of oral histories is rooted in doubt. In my research project, I chose to hear two life stories of two Ktunaxa women and I also chose to include my story with theirs.

The first principle in *The Sacred Tree* (1984) states "It is....possible to understand something only if we can understand how it is connected to everything else"(ix). Being a participant within the thesis project helped me to understand my own story and how my story fits with theirs. I needed to be able to understand the story of my "my-ness" from the wider perspective of two Ktunaxa women who are family.

The process used did entail qualitative interviewing with lessons being told in a narrative story form. This format was used because it helped focus the research participant and the "interviewing offers researchers access to people's ideas, thoughts, and memories in their own words rather than in the words of the researcher" (Reinharz 1992: 19).

The interviews were open-ended because "open-ended interviewing creates a connection between the researcher and the participants". (Reinharz, 1992). It was important for me to use open-ended questions because I felt it would lead to authentic dialogue that would allow me the privilege to get to know the participants better.

Interview and recruitment process

The research project began as a need to have questions answered about adoption and to help with the reunification process with my Ktunaxa identity. The success of this research project relied heavily upon the recruitment of biological family. The recruitment of biological family immediately created an awareness of how unfair this process could be. I wanted to ensure that I was not abusing my role as the adopted child and the educated adult. I did not want to appear, in any way, to be forcing the research participants into doing this project. I never wanted my family to think they had to do the thesis interview to make up for the decisions made in the past. Most importantly, I did not want the participants to do this project out of guilt.

Because of my educational training, I also knew that asking the participants to be a part of this project could trigger certain feelings, such as: guilt, obligation, fear, perhaps even sadness or anger. I was also aware that I was asking the participants to give up their time and that I was going to be impinging upon their privacy, to a certain degree.

I intended to do this thesis project in a way that was fair and I did not want to use coercion. To alleviate the risks involved, the decision was made to recruit a third party to help with the recruitment process. A third person who was neutral, but known to the researcher and participants, was recruited

to assist me. This person gathered the participants together and explained to them the purpose of the project. He also relayed the message that participation in this research project was fully voluntary. He acknowledged that there might be undue pressure to participate in this research project because we are family. He validated that although family ties exist between us, he hoped that participants would participate in the project because they wanted to, and not because of feelings of familial obligation. I was not present during this meeting, but was available to answer any questions that might arise.

Once the participants agreed to the process, they were presented with a release of information form (attached in Appendix A). I was not the one to present them with this consent form. It seemed best to do it this way, as a means of reducing the possibility of any coercion.

After the consent forms were signed, I made a point to contact the participants to thank them for agreeing to participate in this project and to explain what the process of interviewing would look like.

Agnes, Gina and Leona

The recruitment of the research participants was done to fulfill the need to hear the stories of women within one particular family. I have read much literature and I had never read any articles that touched on

intergenerational stories. Tackling intergenerational storytelling within one family would be a challenge, but it seemed worthwhile and real.

I have been taught that a good teacher never asks their student to do what they would not do themselves. Thus, if I was to ask my family to be a participant in this project, it seemed only fair to make myself a participant as well. Asking myself the interview questions was humorous. I was the interviewer as well as the interviewee. Thank goodness this was done in private because no onlookers watched this process. I would ask myself the question in one chair and would physically switch chairs to answer the question. It meant moving back and forth between two chairs, but this process seemed to allow me move between questioning and answering in an authentic way. When I completed my self-interview, I transcribed my story and analyzed the transcripts along with those of Gina and Agnes's interviews.

The data included in this thesis was gathered through two face-to-face interviews and one self-interview.

The three participants in this project are all Ktunaxa citizens and are all connected to myself. Gina is my biological mother. She became pregnant by Don McCoy, who is also a Ktunaxa citizen. Agnes McCoy is Don's first cousin and in the Ktunaxa way, first cousins are like brothers and sisters. Because Agnes and Don were raised as brother and sister, Agnes is

considered my auntie and is a grannie to my children. Being a grannie to my children is also another Ktunaxa way of family.

Using only the women within one particular family was done on purpose, to celebrate the power of womanhood. I have been taught about women being powerful, the givers of life and the ones who have been denigrated by patriarchy. Interviewing and hearing the stories of women in my family, was an opportunity to observe the strengths in my family lineage.

We continue to be Ktunaxa. This includes myself and my daughter Rachel. Gina and Agnes have survived the residential school period and have entered the new age of technology. Gina and Agnes both have a connection to the traditional land and community. This connection is recognized in how they both currently choose to live within the traditional territory and participate in community to varying degrees. It is because of the lived experience of these women and the journey they have each been through, that I see them as having wisdom to give and lessons to teach. It is the wisdom and strength transformed into lessons that I want to pass along to Rachel.

Gina, Agnes and I have had lives filled with hardship. Taking these hardships and turning them into lessons shows how experiences can be re-linguaged and re-visioned. This transformation can be used to teach the next generation that we can grow, heal, and learn to love as Aboriginal women.

Interview process

The interview process took between 3 to 7 hours. The interview process took place in each of the participants' homes, as a means of making them comfortable. The start of the interview process involved explaining what the interview would look like. I clarified that during our interviews, I would tape-record our conversations. I assured them that the taped conversations would be confidential. I told them I would not share the tape-recording with anyone else. I informed them that I would not put their names on the tape, but that I would be using a coding system to identify the tape-conversations. I told them that I would be transcribing the tapes into written data myself. After I transcribed the written data, I would then fact-find with the participants. I explained how fact-finding is sitting down with them, showing them the transcripts, and clarifying what I heard on the tape to be true. At this point in time, I told them that if there was any information they wished deleted within the written document they could point it out and I would not use it in any manner. I also assured them that once the thesis project was complete, I would give it to them to read first. If they had any feedback and wanted any changes to be made, I would honor these changes prior to submitting my first draft to my thesis committee members. The process of explaining these ethical standards was lengthy because a lot of my explanations involved having to explain the academic system of graduate

school, including the fact that my thesis would be read by my thesis committee and eventually be placed within the University of Victoria Library as a public document.

To ensure that the research participants felt safe, I also developed three options for what to do with the taped interviews, after they had been transcribed. My ideas were as follows:

- Dispose of tape-recorded interview in your presence.
- Give tape-recorded interview to you, and you can decide what to do with it.
- Keep the tape-recorded interview in my possession as a family keepsake.

Upon completion of the interview, all the participants felt comfortable with me keeping the tapes as my own keepsakes.

As a final step in creating an environment that was friendly and non-coercive, I made it clear that they did have the full right and responsibility to terminate or withdraw from the project at any time.

Interview questions

The beginning of the research project came from the intrinsic need to know where I came from. I was seeking help from the women in my family for this process. To identify where I came from seemed to be an effective first step in becoming comfortable in my own skin. For me, being comfortable in

my own skin meant that I would be a more effective mother to my children.

As a catalyst for the process, I formulated five questions to be answered by the research participants. The five questions were:

- 1) Preliminary warm up questions such as: place of birth, early childhood memories and significant memories or people;
- 2) How did you come to know and respect your Ktunaxa-ness and brown skin?
- 3) What are some of the significant lessons you learned from significant adults in your life?
- 4) What are some of the hardest hardships experienced in life and how have you come through? What strengths developed?
- 5) Tell me a story of what your ideal life story would have looked like in a perfect world?

The questions were designed to be open-ended giving the participant the freedom to talk with minimal interruptions by me.

Data Analysis

As stated earlier, our taped conversations were transcribed into written text, called data. The data was analyzed and developed into an oral narrative story of the participants' lives. This proved to be the most difficult part of the thesis project. The original transcripts were 40 to 50 pages in length and included many side stories (sub-genres). For the purposes of the thesis project, I needed to reduce the length of the stories while keeping them intact. I finally came to the place of developing the narrative stories of the

women involved into a succinct biography/auto-biography, each with their own story written as its own short chapter within the thesis project. I also chose to use direct quotes from the women's stories within the analysis of recognizable themes. Using the interview questions to help in the arranging of the narrative stories helped with the arrangement of the writing.

Validity

The validity of the project was ensured by having the audiotapes transcribed verbatim, summarized into a story and then reviewed again by myself. The participants also reviewed these summaries to ensure accuracy and to ensure that the meaning they tried to relate to me came through in the written text in a fair and justified manner.

In the identification of themes and analysis of the data, I used direct quotes from the participants. I also thought that by using direct quotes, I would also reduce, to a certain degree, my bias as a researcher, daughter and niece.

The validation of oral history comes from an intrinsic belief in respect. The respect comes from a sense of listening and validation and the attempt to understand.

Another way I tried to keep the oral history of these women accurate, was by relaying their story in a chronological fashion. I attempted to do this

as much as possible, but found this to be a difficult task. My upbringing and my schooling have always emphasized the importance of chronological logic and order. So in doing this project, I automatically assumed chronological order would be the best way to transcribe the participant stories. I automatically assumed that chronological order was important for accuracy. In doing this research project, I have learned that linear, chronological order does not validate or invalidate an Indigenous style of research. Chronological order is just another way to tell a story, and it is not necessarily the best way. The best way to tell a story is to tell it in a way the audience will understand it and relate to it.

In my journey of doing this thesis project, I have learned that spirit and interconnectedness to the spirit world comes with no clock, watch or time. In the realm of the spirit world there is no past, present or future. In the realm of the spirit world, existence just is. Keeping this in mind transcribing the stories in what the participant's thought was the most important order, could have been an option. If participants were spirit-led this approach could have worked.

Defining if the participants were spirit-led leads us into another realm, where validation and authenticity of work is questionable. Who defines who is spirit-led? My automatic thought process led me to believe that chronological order made the most sense and would be the easiest approach

for this project. The colonization process has instilled in me automatic ways of looking at defining the world, that only become apparent when challenged.

In the end, this thesis project is my story. Being the author of this story, I have taken the liberty to organize it as I see fit. It is only right that I seize this self-empowering moment.

Credibility, trustworthiness & being authentic

Using pre-designed questions allowed for a certain degree of objectivity between the participants, the topic and me. Developing pre-designed questions also gave me the illusion that I was in control of the situation, that I was in a place of self-imposed power. I thought that using academic questioning would be an intellectual strength and it would separate me from emotion. I developed the questions thinking they were safe, non-intrusive and informative. The questions were safe in that the participants could determine how much information they wanted to disclose.

Upon first glance at my research proposal and the intentions of my project, it could easily be said that my being so connected to the research participants and the research topic invalidates my work, thanks to a high degree of subjectivity. By using my unique approach to researching this thesis project, I propose that I am contributing to the newly forming academic

discourse of Indigenous Knowledge. Dei, et al (2000) state that Indigenous knowledge:

...is not intended to create a false dichotomy of 'conventional/colonial/external' knowledge as bad, and 'indigenous/marginalized/non-Western' knowledge as good. Our objective is to rupture the present relationship between 'valid' knowledge and 'not valid' knowledge and to introduce 'indigenous knowledges' as legitimate ways of knowing that are both dynamic and continuous. In doing so we interrogate aspects of Western science that have had destructive effects on indigenous communities. We are careful not to treat indigenous knowledges as static, or to romanticize the past of indigenous peoples. We are aware of how complex indigenous knowledge forms are, and we are proposing a multiplicity of centres through shifts in knowledge production. (p. 4-5)

To include the researcher and the validation of oral narrative stories is an Indigenous way of practice. In writing her book titled "A Recognition of Being" Kim Anderson interviewed 40 Native women. In re-telling the stories of the forty women and in telling her own story Anderson (2000) states:

I hope this section demonstrates how my interests, biases, abilities and perspectives play into how I assembled the stories of the interview participants to create *A Recognition of Being*. Finally, I would like to preface the personal by saying that it is a difficult task to make one's personal journey public, and I appreciate the courage of all of the interview participants for their sharing. Like the women I interviewed, I offer a small piece of my story in the spirit of Aboriginal teaching and sharing practices. (p. 22)

Smith (1999) adds that:

[Decolonization] does not mean and has not meant a total rejection of all theory or research or Western knowledge. Rather, it is about centering our concerns and world views and then coming to know and

understand theory and research from our own perspectives and for our own purposes. (p. 39)

The research and contributions made by this thesis project are themselves an attempt to bridge the contemporary aspects of academe with the decolonization process of what is valid or invalid. This research project is committed to identifying the Aboriginal60's scoops and the impacts on women's relationships from Gina, Agnes and my own perspectives.

The era is ending wherein Aboriginal ways of knowing are looked upon as being primitive and "lesser than". Smith (1999) further states:

One of the supposed characteristics of primitive peoples was that we could not use our minds or intellects. We could not invent things, we could not create institutions or history, we could not imagine, we could not produce anything of value, we did not know how to use land and other resources from the natural world, we did not practice the 'arts' of civilization. By lacking such virtues we disqualified ourselves, not just from civilization but from humanity itself. In other words we were not 'fully human'; some of us were not even considered partially human. (p. 25)

The stories of the women involved within this thesis project add to knowledge of what it is like to be an Indigenous/Aboriginal person. The stories add to the humanness of being Indigenous and a land-based cultural group.

Who is it that validates who is Indigenous? Who is it that claims to have the power and knowledge to make such a claim? Is it the researcher who stands on the sidelines and makes assumptions? In true Indigenous style it is

not our way to impose truths. Indigenous truth appears to reiterate that the development of assumptions and truths needs to come from us. Maori scholar Smith (1999) eloquently states:

The development of theories by Indigenous scholars which attempt to explain our existence in contemporary society (as opposed to the 'traditional' society constructed under modernism) has only just begun. Not all these theories claim to be derived from some 'pure' sense of what it means to be indigenous, nor do they claim to be theories which have been developed in a vacuum separated from any association with civil and human rights movements, other nationalist struggles or other theoretical approaches. What is claimed, however, is that new ways of theorizing by indigenous scholars are grounded in a real sense of, and sensitivity towards, what it means to be an indigenous person. (p. 38)

My goal for this project was to relay the stories of three Ktunaxa women in a way that expressed honesty, feelings and stories. The three Ktunaxa women involved with this project have family lines that go back generations. They are the Indigenous peoples of the territory. They have told their stories and now their stories are inked to paper. "Giving 'voice' in print culture is one way Native writers empower themselves and claim themselves as agents of their own cultural traditions" (Emberley, 1993, 73). This thesis project has made the three Indigenous women cultural change agents. The validation of their stories adds to the continuum of Indigenous scholarship and knowledge.

Ethical considerations

I approached this research topic with the intent of doing no harm, but I also knew that the topic at hand would bring up many emotions for all involved. To help me wade through these ethical issues, I completed my Human Research Ethics Committee application at the University of Victoria. In doing the data collection I knew that I was dealing with the ethical issue of being the researcher as well as the adoptee.

When I began my interview process, I made sure the participants signed a consent form. I made it as clear as possible why this project was being completed, who the audience was, what the intent behind the project was and what would become of the project once it was completed.

Talking about the choices leading up to adoption, with the one who made the decision, brings up feelings of loss, grief and possible guilt for all participants. In doing the project, it became apparent that other previously unimaginable emotions were evoked, such as bewilderment, philosophical essentialism and moral/ethical debates about rape. Prior to the start of the project, it became important to ensure a cultural means of healing be available to all the participants. A man in the community, who is sometimes considered a medicine man, was approached. All the research participants knew the medicine man. After conversation with this man he made access to

his sweatlodge easily and readily available to all the participants. He also made himself available to 'run' the sweatlodge ceremony.

Using the Sweatlodge ceremony to assist the three women as a group did not happen. Prior to the start of this thesis project, Gina and Agnes attended this particular Sweatlodge regularly. When I returned to the community, I also started to go to this Sweatlodge. Once I began going to this Sweatlodge, Gina quit going to the Sweatlodge. Even to this day, Gina does not attend the ceremony with this group. It appears that having access to the Sweatlodge may have impacted this thesis project in a significant, measurable way. This is difficult to measure, because speaking about the Sweatlodge in a critical, analytical way is not allowed.

Constraints

Diagrams and charts were used within one interview. One research participant felt that it would help in the interview to use a family chart and autobiographical chart that she developed while in counseling. I was not provided with the chart upon my departure from the interview. I would have liked the chart for my own personal growth and healing as it clearly laid out who the people in my family are. But using the chart as an attachment for this thesis project would not have been appropriate. The transcribing of the interview and the analysis of the data was sometimes confusing because the interviewee often used terms like 'if you look here' and then pointed to the

chart with her finger. Since I had no chart to consult when transcribing the tapes, I was left confused a few times.

The silences on the tapes were often penetrating to the heart. Interviewees would sometimes go quiet and unspoken words were sometimes acknowledged as quiet nuances of 'I know'. In the transcribing of the tapes, there did not seem an accurate or right way to transcribe this transaction.

Researcher as participant

The process of using myself as a participant was a dichotomy that caused me to stretch between the depths of emotional pain to new heights of liberation. Lee Maracle (1996) of the Sto:lo Nation writes:

Liberation is not simple. Re-feminizing our original being is not a matter of gaining equality with Native men, sharing the work of providing for family, obtaining decent jobs and education, moving out into the world and struggling to make the law work fairly for us. First, we must understand the conditions under which we currently live. It is difficult to critically examine our current condition while the power to alter or maintain it rests with those outside ourselves. (p. xi)

In doing this thesis project, I learned first-hand what Maracle meant by liberation. I learned what it means to be a woman, what it means to be an Aboriginal woman.

In doing this project, I had the opportunity to find out a part of my story which, in itself, is privilege. I had many of my questions answered and I was able to learn about who my family is and where I came from.

In being the researcher and participant I found everything to be a process. Haig Brown (1995) thinks "people doing research engage in a process called gaining access. For me, it conjures up a vision of breaking down a gate or arriving with a search warrant. I prefer to think of the start of research as the beginning of a relationship" (33). I was attached to the data on a personal level. When the participants talked of the deaths of loved ones it meant they were talking about my relations too. I found myself in a realm where the boundary between empathy and sympathy sometimes intertwined so tightly, that it was difficult to distinguish between the two. As a research social worker, I was empathetic with the stories and could imagine the pain the participants went through. I was also sympathetic because I could feel their pain on a heartfelt level. Indigenous scholar Smith (1999) writes "I think that indigenous research is not quite as simple as it looks, nor quite as complex as it feels! If I have one consistent message for the students I teach and the researchers I train it is that indigenous research is a humble and humbling activity" (5). I was humbled in doing this thesis project. The secrets that my soul harbors in doing this project cannot be eloquently

expressed in words. I have learned about a discourse of tears that is unfathomable by most.

This was not my experience. I found it difficult at times to listen without interruption. In dialogue, there is usually reciprocal communication where one talks, the other listens, provides feedback and tells something to add to it. We often compare stories, telling each other eloquently of our own experience. No one listened to me except my pen and paper. In doing this research project, I never had the opportunity to tell Gina and Agnes my story. I heard their story, but they have never heard mine. I am left thinking there was no reciprocity in this relationship and I often think that without reciprocity there is no relationship. It could be argued that there was a relationship it was just not the kind of relationship that I wanted. I assert that this research project did not create a reciprocal relationship based on sharing, intimacy or friendship.

Because of the whirlwind of emotions felt doing this thesis project, self-care became a way of preserving myself. The model of self-care incorporated into my Medicine Wheel included on-going counseling, hedonistic time off to literally do nothing, creating boundaries that began with "if I don't do this..... will the world end?", learning humility and acknowledging that the world can go on if I don't go to this meeting or make this phone call, committing to my sobriety, practicing traditions, reading

books that write about the essence of spiritual growth, committing to healthy relationships based on love and not expectations and most importantly being honest with myself. Someone told me long ago that my thesis is a birdhouse, not a mansion, and that it would be best if I did not make it my life. Because of these words, I gave myself license to put my thesis away for lengths of time in order to get my life and emotions in order. When I began graduate school, I was in my first year of being sober. I am now approaching my eighth year of sobriety. I am encouraged by Ivy Chaske's (Dakota) words:

How you live your life is a ceremony. I have met many people who do not have the language, don't know any ceremonies, don't know anything about who they are as an Indian person, but they are the most traditional people I know. They are loyal, they are honest, they have integrity, they are caring, they know how to be respectful, they are all those things that made our people who they are. [Ivy Chaske (Dakota) cited in Anderson 2000, 27]

The words in this quote reflect who I am, how I took care of myself in doing this thesis project and how I comforted myself when I thought *how can I keep doing this work as an Indigenous scholar who grew up off-reserve?*

I often wonder if, given the opportunity to do things again, I would do this same thesis project topic, or would I do pursue a more quantitative project? Would I choose a qualitative study that was not attached to myself? I often have this internal dialogue that never comes to a real concrete conclusion, but when at I look at the process involved, I cannot help but

recognize I am still doing this original thesis project. No one has forced me to do this. No one has forced pen to paper. I worked hard to get where I am, so that I could meet me. So perhaps, yes, I would still probably go forward with my original project.

Relationships in research

The relationship that existed within the parameters of this research project was one of pure academics. As mentioned, there was no sense of reciprocity within the verbal exchanges. I asked the questions and I got the answers, but the other participants have never heard my story. They will read about me when reading the written drafts of this thesis, but reading about me differs greatly from hearing my story. Through this thesis process, they have learned that I am a student pursuing a Masters degree but, beyond this, they have never heard what it is I have learned by growing up out there, in mainstream society.

I began this thesis project with the hope of building relationships with the women in my family. I have become a friend to Agnes. My mother and I do not relate to each other as friend, family or foe. She and I exist as blood-bound strangers who cross paths every once in awhile.

The thesis project was not the catalyst in the developing friendship between Agnes and I. The catalyst to this relationship was rooted in us being work colleagues and Sweatlodge participants. I bonded with her because she

cared about me and she would call me out of the blue just to ask 'how are you doing?' She bonded with me because I am her niece through her cousin Don and because I am good company. In some ways, the thesis project, between Agnes and I, became a part of a process. A process that will allow me to be academically successful at a goal, which Agnes feels, she never had the opportunity to try out for.

Strengths and weaknesses of the methodology

I do not know if Agnes and Gina are finished telling their story. I know that we are never really finished telling our story, but that someday we become more than our stories. I have found that our stories eventually become a portal to who we are. They create our reality. I think by focusing on the oral histories methodology, I opened the door to validating Agnes and Gina's story. I let them know that their stories are worthy of being told, put into print and being made in written history. The white man has put much power into written word, that we three Aboriginal women, originally from the 'rez', have lifted ourselves to their level, and we are still three Aboriginal women originally from the 'rez'. Kim Anderson is a Cree/Metis woman and academic and she writes "[my] journey as a Native person, my recognition as explored in this book, is one way of telling the assimilation-makers that it didn't work. We may be struggling, but we are still here." (Anderson 2000:

31). But doing this work and re-telling the stories has been political in nature, and has made ceremonial history.

Overview of argument, observations and personal experience

When I look at my thesis journal, the first entry in it is dated June 8, 1998. It is now September 2005. Seven years have passed since I first began this project. My intent was to begin this oral history research project and finish it in a year. I wanted my thesis done, so I could receive my Master's of Social Work degree and carry on with my life, and feel proud of my accomplishment. On the first day of graduate school, I had an instructor who told the class that only 8% of us would complete our degree. I scoffed at her under my breath, turning to my friend to make a sarcastic quip. Little did I know, I was about to embark on a journey that could have made me fail graduate school and keep me from being part of the eight.

I had always intended the thesis project to be a healing process for myself and I always intended my work to help bridge the disconnection between my heart, thought and recklessness. I have always known that a part of me suffered from dissociation and I wanted my thesis to be a catalyst to help me. My original thesis project title was "Grannies, Aunties, Mothers and Daughters: A Story of Truth and Healing." A year and a half into doing my project I changed the title to "Grannies, Aunties, Mothers and Daughters:

All the Skeletons are Out, A Story of Truth and Healing." My title changed because of the data collection process. The data revealed to me taught me that I was a product of rape, stemming from a violent episode one hot summer night in 1966. The skeletons were out of the closet and no undergraduate or graduate school educational experience prepared me for this news.

The news of my conception was intensified because in the spring of 1998, the first year of graduate school, I sat by my biological father's bedside and I sat with him for seven days while he went through the process of going to the other side. I could not believe that the man who I watched die, and the man who lay in the hospital bed totally helpless, had been so violent. To come to terms with the impacts of the rape and the death took two years of my life.

Learning of my fathers' violence was only the beginning of my introduction to the violence that continues to exist in my Aboriginal community. To help aid in the process of writing my thesis and to help get me back on track with writing my thesis, I thought reconnecting with my community of origin would help. In January 2000, I began a social work job with my people, in my home community. Because of my education and experience, I was able to work my way up the hierarchical and bureaucratic ladder to be promoted to Executive Director. The world I was trained in has a process in place that protects workers from injustice. I soon learned that the

'rez world' does not have this process of fairness. Policy manuals do exist on-reserve, but the politics of band and tribal councils can be manipulated to the extent that the dust-covered policy manuals are over-ridden with ease.

In October 2000, I was fired from my position as executive director for insubordination. I was told I came back to the community as a non-Ktunaxa and that my education did not do justice, because I treated my people poorly. My firing was unjust and resulted in a two-and-a-half year BC Human Rights case. The Daniels vs. Ktunaxa/Kinbasket Child and Family Services case was settled out of court through mediation, two and a half years after the case began. Because of my firing, I was forced out of my home community and took jobs in Calgary, AB. To this day, my biological mother, who lives in the community, has never contacted me to see if I am okay or to comfort me for being fired by our extended family. I was ostracized from my community and had minimal support from my family of origin.

I wandered through life for two-and-a-half years, trying to make sense of the oppression I felt from my own people which I now know to be lateral violence. Because I spent so much time trying to make sense of my experience, I gave no time to my thesis. My thesis project was lost in the abyss of my pain and confusion.

As fate would have it, I had the opportunity to go back in my traditional territory working at the local community college as the Aboriginal

Education Coordinator. My people knew I was back and those who wanted to know me knew where to find me. The ones who fired me looked at me in disbelief. They stared or sometimes glared, but they never expressed anything in words. Occasionally they would mumble, or was it grumble, a hello. My job protected me from being fired without due process. Although I worked at the college for eighteen months, my biological mother and I had no contact and my family of origin was not a part of my daily life. My life seemed to be very isolating.

I could only handle this isolation for so long. I felt I was not being nurtured or challenged in a spiritual, physical, intellectual or emotional way. I would look around my community and witness hypocrisy. I chose to leave my community once again. Presently I am living in Algonquin territory in northern Quebec. I am many miles away from home, but have come to realize that home is where I make it. I may not always think this way, but for the time being this thought-process works for me.

I write all this because my life experiences over the last six years impact my thesis analysis. However, I still stand strong behind my argument and I still say vehemently, that knowing the stories of the women in family has helped my healing process. Yes 'all the skeletons are out' but I still assert that 'the more I know, the more I trust and the less I fear.'

CHAPTER 4

ORAL HISTORY STORIES: GINA, AGNES AND LEONA

The following pages will provide the reader with an introduction to the stories of the women involved in the thesis process. Highlights of their stories will be shared. These are small sketches of their lives and more of their words and experiences will be shared in later chapters.

The Story of Gina, the Mother of Leona & Friend to Agnes

The first interviewee is commonly known as Gina, which is short for Georgina. She was born July 02, 1947 at the old hospital in Invermere, BC. Gina is motivated to deal with her inner child and past problems.

Gina states "I have done a life line." Gina states "The first positive event I guess was my birth, July '47". Gina says that she was read the *last rites* at the age of 6 weeks. Gina contemplates out loud: "Was I an early birth or a premature child or what?" The questions are still lingering, so Gina is looking for people who remember her birth so she can ask them for answers.

When Gina was five her mom died. Gina doesn't remember too much of her. Soon after the event of her mother's death Gina went to residential school. Gina says she lost her will to show joy at age seven or eight. Gina shared that she was sexually abused at the age of 11 or 12. At this time, she stopped trusting her relatives. Gina's dad remarried when Gina was 12 or 13.

Her new stepmother's name was Idora. Gina calls her *mother* and keeps the name *mom* for her biological mom.

Gina's dad died in 1965. He crashed his vehicle off a cliff into a river. When Gina's dad died, he took Idora and all of Gina's step-siblings. Gina acknowledges how she felt pain the other day when she heard about a crash and people drowning. Gina was in hospital when her dad and family died. Gina struggled. Gina quit school with the plan to find out what was wrong with her. Gina does not recall why she was in the hospital when her dad died.

After the death of her immediate family and upon release from hospital, Gina went back to residential school. But soon after, she quit residential school and her grandfather came to pick her up at the school. Gina lived in Cranbrook for the months of November and December 1965. Gina then decided that she wanted to go back to school and that she didn't want to go to school around Cranbrook. The Indian Agent sent Gina to school in Kelowna, British Columbia.

When Gina was home for her two-week break during the summer of 1966, she was raped. When Gina returned to work she definitely knew something was wrong because she quit menstruating. Gina was scared and thought she couldn't talk to anybody.

Gina finally talked to the doctor. The doctor told her how babies are conceived and Gina realized how she got pregnant. At last Gina realized "Okay, I have a child growing inside me, now what?" Gina panicked and came back to Cranbrook.

When Gina came back to Cranbrook, in the fall of 1966, she saw that nothing had changed. Gina's grandmother was still alive and Gina was determined she was not going to hurt her grandmother and grandfather in any way. She vowed that she was going to be "good little girl in their lives and do nothing wrong." Gina ran away.

While in Kelowna Gina met a girl whose name she can't remember. This girl had informed Gina of her plans to move to Nelson to attend school. Gina ran over to Nelson to talk to her. This friend invited Gina to stay until she decided what she was going to do. In April 1967, Gina gave birth to her daughter, Leona.

After the birth Gina and Leona went to Vernon. Gina began work at the local rest home. Gina buried herself in work. Gina took no responsibility for Leona's care because the old people in the home looked after her. Gina would look after Leona in the nighttime.

Gina reported that she had nothing to offer Leona and that Leona needed something solid. Gina isolated herself from family and friends as she didn't really trust anybody. Gina took Leona to Social Services in Cranbrook,

BC. Gina states and clarifies 'No, not taken, I brought Leona over to Social Services'.

After Leona's departure, Gina felt loss. In May/June 1968, Gina started drinking heavily. She began drinking so heavily that she received a drunk and disorderly charge in 1968. Gina thinks of her jail experience as a life-long lesson learned through shaming. Gina drank heavily between 1970 and 1978, but never had a run-in with the law ever again. In 1969 and 1975, Gina had two more children whom she did not give up for adoption.

In 1978, Gina attended a self-recovery workshop. When Gina left this workshop she wondered to herself 'where are these people at home?' She meant 'role-models'. Gina remembers there were only three people in the community who were sober in 1978. Gina met Agnes in 1978 and both began their own journeys of self-discovery.

Gina tried to make changes and the changes were hard. Gina started to attend counseling services. In 1985, Gina began her journey on the road of spirituality and cultural identity. She also went to back to school for her Grade 12 education.

In 1976, Gina fell down a flight of stairs and hit her head severely, so when Gina returned to school, she struggled to learn how to read and do math all over again.

As Gina started to read better, she began to read self-help and spirituality books. Gina found fault in everybody. Gina attended a workshop on ancestors. Gina was impressed by how ancestors survived, and did things so well. At this point, Gina decided who her role models would be. Her role models would be the ones who have gone on to the spirit-world.

Growing up, Gina was ashamed of herself and who she was. The nuns at the Residential school did not help Gina's self-assurance grow. Gina admits how she robbed the two children she raised of the life experience of living on the reserve. But Gina does like how the children did go to the reserve to visit. Although Gina did keep involved with the reserve life, she admits shame was still embedded inside her.

Gina's journey has meant that she has had to look at why she has been ashamed of being Indian and why she was ashamed of her color. Her journey has meant she has had to deal with internalized shame. Gina is glad she never moved out of the community, because it meant she had to deal with her issue.

Gina's journey has meant she has had to deal with internalized shame. Gina feels sad because her two children are following her pattern. She states that the selfish intention within them is anger. Gina recognizes this because of her own anger. Gina tries to turn her anger into sympathy.

Gina is eloquent about how she is angry that her daughter Leona has returned. She says:

I'm angry! I know I shouldn't be. I should have prepared myself as time went by. I should have asked myself, what are you going to do when your daughter looks for you and how are you going to feel? Talk to people who have been through that experience so you'll be prepared. You'll know what feelings are going to be coming. All these questions I'm angry because I was found and I'm not ready. I don't know when I'm going to be ready but I've got to start dealing with it. I got found. I knew I was angry so I had to deal with that anger. How did I want it to be? How do other people go through it?

All the people that I know who have given their children up for adoption- are afraid. They come to me about it. They say, when my child comes looking for me. What should I do, they ask? I'd say, I'll tell you what I went through. These things may come to you or may not. It depends on you 'cause we deal with things differently. I was angry and I didn't want to be found 'til I had everything pretty well okay in my head. I was intruded. I didn't want to be pushed. I didn't like being found.

Gina believes that when life is awkward, it is best to change it and that's how life is. When you make the change, it's awkward and it'll hurt until the hurt goes away, and then it's okay.

Gina's new goal is to become a healer. Gina did not want to answer the final question "Tell me a story of what your ideal life story would have looked like in a perfect world?" When I asked this question Gina said she did not want to answer this question and asked that the interview end. Gina gave no reason as to why she did not want to answer this question.

The Story of Agnes, the Aunt to Leona & Friend to Gina

Agnes McCoy was born at the old Cranbrook, BC, hospital on November 18, 1953. She is the youngest child of four brothers. Agnes fondly remembers how, as a child, the grandmothers and grandfathers raised her. She says that "You were always surrounded by family and you were never alone. It felt like you always had a place to belong". Agnes remembers how the grandmothers and grandfathers talked to them as children. She was never told "No, you can't do that" or "No, you can't do this" Agnes says her lessons revolved around doing and learning. When she did something that hurt herself her grandparents were quick to ask, "Did you learn from it?" "What did you learn?" and if Agnes made the same mistake again the grandparents would ask "So what did you learn this time?" Agnes says, "Way back we were one happy family, but things changed with the residential school and alcohol use".

In late-January 1958, Agnes and another little boy were taken to the train station. They were told they were going to the big hospital. Agnes had a touch of T.B. Agnes remembers that, as she was getting on the train, a lady was getting off the train. The lady stopped, held Agnes and spoke to her. She said "Be a good little girl and listen to what the nurses tell you and you won't get into trouble." It turned out that this woman was Agnes's mother. Agnes doesn't remember a whole lot about her mother. Agnes got on the train and

was gone for more than a year. On her arrival back at Cranbrook, Agnes entered the St. Eugene Residential School and was told her mother had died on February 1, 1959, of tuberculosis.

Agnes admits it took a long time for her to deal with the loss of her mother. Agnes spent a lot of time looking for her mother, but admits she did not know what she looked like, and besides, she had already passed on.

Agnes entered residential school in September 1959. She did not know what was happening, or where she was going. In June, she was told she was going to go live with a woman named Rose Michel up the valley in Windemere. On the last day of school, Agnes was standing talking to the other kids. An old woman showed up at the school and she did not speak English, but she made it known that Agnes was to go with her. Agnes just knew she was to go with the woman, so she grabbed her bag and went with the old woman. Agnes thought the woman was Rose Michel, but it turned out that this old woman was her dad's aunt, or Agnes's granny in the Ktunaxa way. The old granny had no tolerance for English and that she only spoke Ktunaxa. Later in life, Agnes learned that the reason why the granny picked up Agnes at the school was because she was family and in their way of thinking, "Nobody raises my family."

Agnes remembers her time with her granny candidly. Agnes never had store-bought dolls, but her granny made her dolls out of old socks. The

left socks were girls and the right socks were boys. Agnes says that as a child, her dolls only spoke Ktunaxa, they never spoke English.

One day her granny was standing behind Agnes and combing her hair. Her granny told Agnes the story of her life. She told Agnes,

Later on when you grow up you will have a hard life. You will be wandering for awhile and you will go away. You will not be happy and you will come home when you are ready. You will work with your people and you will try and have kids, but you won't go through with it. And when you work with your people it will be hard and it will not be easy.

Agnes never realized what she told her and why she was being told. All the predictions were true. Agnes left home for 20 years and lived a hard life filled with alcohol. Agnes sobered up when she came home in 1983.

Agnes says her people are not happy yet because there are too many drugs and too much alcohol. The alcohol and drugs break us up. The deaths, the car wrecks, the abuse: all get covered up and not dealt with.

In being sober, Agnes has learned to apologize to her dad for being so ashamed of him. Agnes only met her dad at the age of 13. She says "He would come to her granny's house and bring meat and money". She adds, "But he was poor and a drunk". Agnes only knew this man as the man who brought deer meat and other stuff. She did not know why he did this and she thought of him as a "good Joe." One day in her early teens one of the other children who also lived at granny's place meanly asked Agnes "You know

that drunken man that comes along here? The one they call Alowisis? Well that's your dad!" The other three children joined in taunting her. Agnes says this is the day she learned how to fight. Agnes states "I learned to fight with words". Agnes speaks of how all four of the children she lived with at grannies are all passed on now and how they all died of alcohol-related causes.

The hardest thing in Agnes' life, was the loss of her mother. Her mother died when Agnes was five years old. Agnes says the second hardest thing she has done, is come back home and work with her people. She states that her people are not happy yet, but that she understands them and their treatment of others. Agnes states "To this day I am still trying to fit into the community". In her interview, Agnes describes how her people have forgotten to pray. She states "And they don't pray anymore and they don't talk about love or how to love anymore".

Agnes says she learned about her brown skin in residential school, because the nuns would tell them to scrub good and get that brown off. It took a long time to reclaim her brown skin and identity. Her pride came back when she started to speak the language again and when she learned about spirituality. Agnes says "We can't just learn about the land and people, we need to learn about what is inside of us, that is Ktunaxa-ness, it is culture and

it is heritage. Today I am proud of who I am, of my brown skin. I am Indian and I am proud".

Agnes also states:

We lost the ability to pick up a child and see the ability of a child. Back then our people could hold us. Today we can't even do that. The medicine people once helped us with this and now that has all been lost. My grandmother knew how to do this. I would like to see our people strong enough to see our spirituality, this has been my most important lesson in life". Agnes's second biggest lesson in life has been "to groom your young. Groom your young so they can do the fights for you and so you can rest with freedom.

Agnes also says:

When I lost my mother I lost the relationship and that the relationship was gone forever. No matter how many women came into my life such as my grandmother, it was just not the same. When I was raped at the residential school I needed a mother to talk to me. I have lived with it and it was hard because I felt shame and guilt. I thought her death was my fault". . . . It has been hard and sad, but I have learned how to forgive, forget and let go.

Agnes goes on to say:

I really wanted to be a strong traditional person. Role models back then were the nuns. I wanted to be nun so bad, but when I got raped I was told I could not be a nun because my virginity was gone. Next I wanted to be a nurse, and then I wanted to be teacher, and then I thought I could be a guidance counselor and then I wanted to be a school principal. Eventually I went to be on Band Council. I wanted to be a good councilor, but I soon learned I would not make everyone happy. I wanted to be good grandmother and a good role model and teach the language.

Agnes says, "a role model is someone who can handle their mistakes.

We all make mistakes, but it is how we handle it that matters".

Agnes' ideal life story:

In a perfect world I would have a mother and father who didn't drink. They kept their family together and they didn't get sick and they didn't drink. They would have kept the whole family together and they would have kept the farm running like it should. And we would have had happy children and that's what it would have been like. But then I wake up.

Agnes closes with

I realize now it is all up to me. To live a good life. That is why I am going to retire. I do got everything, I got my home, my belongings and my health. What more do I really need? It is all this other stuff, like materialistic stuff, that I would think would complete me. But it is not. I got my life and it is how I live it that will create it. Your belongings are what you can pack up and leave with, it is all in spirituality.

The Story of Leona, the Daughter of Gina & Niece to Agnes

I, Leona j Daniels, am two-spirited, a partner, a mother, a daughter, an auntie, a niece, a granddaughter, a product of the Canadian child welfare system, a graduate student and a college teacher. I play various roles and have come to admire myself for getting to the place I am presently at.

My life began April 24, 1967 at 4:29 a.m. to a woman named Gina Stanley, nee Clarricoates. I was born in Nelson, British Columbia which is approximately 200 km from Columbia Lake Reserve. Gina was 19 years old, a St. Eugene's Residential School survivor and an orphan. Gina was not married to Leona's father when she was pregnant with me. I have since learned I am a product of rape.

My biological father is Donald McCoy, he is also a Ktunaxa citizen and a former student of the St. Eugene's Residential School. Don's life journey

was filled with pain and violence. My father resided on East Hastings Street in Vancouver, BC, living off the avails of his free spirit and charismatic nature. Don died on the streets of East Hasting in Vancouver, BC and his body now rests on the St. Mary's reserve, in Cranbrook, BC.

After my birth, my mom and I moved to Westbank, British Columbia. In Westbank, my mother worked at a home looking after the old people. While my mom worked, the old people looked after me. At the age of nine months, I was put in the care of the Ministry of Social Services. I became a ward of the court and was eventually put up for adoption. I was taken into two foster homes and eventually adopted into a non-Aboriginal home at the age of 19 months.

I came to know my natural mother eleven years ago, and even though I have known of her, I am not comfortable calling her mom or going to her home for coffee. My journey of meeting my mother has led me back to my Ktunaxa community and to meeting my Auntie Agnes.

Agnes McCoy is the first cousin of Donald, my natural father, and in Ktunaxa lineage, this makes her my auntie and the granny to my own children Rachel, David and Trevor. Agnes has been gracious in her acceptance of my children, my partner and myself. I have come to know Agnes as a mother figure and I honor and respect her for who she is and the role she plays in my life.

My own children were born in 1986, 1988 and 1989. The father to my children is a white man. He is of German/Polish ancestry. We were married in 1985, when I was 17 years old. Our marriage broke down in 1992. We have joint custody of the children, but he has day-to-day custody of them. They are being raised in Manitoba, Canada. I am close to my children and have regular contact and visits with them. My children know they are loved and I know they love me. This was a hard lesson to learn, but once I accepted their love I was able to love them back reciprocally. On that day, my life changed.

The breakdown of my marriage tore the heart out of my adoptive parents, Bernard and Monica. Bernie and Monica Daniels belong to the Christian sect called the "the Brethren." They are strict believers in the Bible and bringing shame to the family is taboo. My siblings Carmen, Barry and Ian were also disheartened by my choice. Even to this day, two of my adoptive siblings have no contact with me because of the shame I bring to their family name. To this day, the relationship is fragile with my adoptive parents and maintained through occasional phone calls.

When I was removed from my Native community, all sense of identity was also removed, even to the point that Bernie and Monica did not tell me I was Native until early 1986. I was 18. When I was a child I did not know I was brown. In some ways I knew I was brown, but my denial system was so embedded, I did not see brown. My self-esteem was so low, I felt I was nothing. I was a damn good lying nothing. I experienced racism and my

experiences taught me toughness. My reputation of toughness was demonstrated to the world by my attitude. I did not acknowledge the color of my skin until 1996.

In 1996, I went to the University of Victoria. I met my first Native friends. It was by watching my Native friends that I learned I was brown. I had this one friend who was brown and she was going for tanning sessions because she wanted to be browner. I looked at myself and thought she is the color of me. Hey I'm brown; hey I like my color. It was at this time in my life that I recognized that embedded in me is the essence of truth that I am *Indian*. Even though I was removed from my community the *Indian-ness* of my identity is still flowing within my blood, crying within spirit and originating within body. The color of my skin proudly reflects the color of my people - red which, upon visual inspection, looks brown.

My children know they are of mixed ancestry and know that their lives are complex, in varying degrees. They understand the history to a certain degree and they seem to witness how knowing our history helps heal. They know that the mom I was 15 years ago is not the mom I am now. I often tell them they want to know Leona as she is now and not how she used to be. Knowing the truth about their mom helps to take the blame from hating me for leaving them at such young ages.

I grew up a very angry, displaced and misunderstood child and as a result I grew into adulthood expressing my feelings through anger, violence and alcoholism. By the time I was twenty-two years old, I was married, miserable, suicidal, a child abuser and a closet drinker. At the age of twenty-two, I started to search my soul, wondering who my mother was, where was mother now, and why would she give her little girl away? To add to my feelings of pain and confusion, in my early adulthood I found out that I was also a Status Indian. It is no wonder my marriage broke down: my life was pretty screwed up.

In February 1993, I attended a workshop where the speaker spoke of spirituality and how spirituality and religion differ. He was proud to be Native. He spoke of how tears are our way of praying. I thought this was cool, because I had given up on praying, but I knew I had a lot of tears. I began my soul searching at this time.

The conference I went to was part of my Diploma of Social Work practicum at Mount Royal College in Calgary. After I left my marriage, I began college.

My true search for spirituality and myself did not truly begin until I got clean and sober, in 1997. I looked for role models, but could find none. All the role models I sought out eventually were knocked off their pedestals once I witnessed their human-ness. My standards were high. At that point, a

friend told me to look for the wisdom of my grandmothers. My friend told me: Your grandmother existed so you could come to existence. They walked this earth and they went through similar experiences as you. They survived and they learned lessons and those lessons are only a prayer and dream away from you. On the day I was told this story, I began to pray to my ancestors for help and guidance and made them my role models.

I have found that most adults in my life teach me how not to be. I think my life story has created a cynic, but my cynic does not rule my life. My cynic is my advisor and keeps me aware so I don't get hurt by those whose intentions are not pure.

One of the most difficult hardships I live with, is the fact Gina told me that I am a product of rape. This was a shock and still, to this day, brings bafflement to my mind and soul. I often want to ask "And you are telling me this, why?" What has gotten me through is my spirituality and knowing that spirit views life differently than a human being views life. People sometimes think this does not make sense and it's like I am making up my own language. My response is: I am, and that is what gets me through. When it comes to accepting my conception, I don't need to interpret it so it can make sense for others.

When I imagine my ideal life, I would have been a Native child growing up with my biological kin.

The Hallmark Version:

In this version, my dad is a healer within the helping profession. He is vibrant and is honest in his communication. He is kind and gentle with a mild mannered demeanor. He is witty. One of those individuals who is quite silent most of the time, but once in a while cracks a joke that shakes the room up into a state of belly-aching laughter. My dad's parents are very traditional and hold the Ktunaxa culture in a place of great esteem and sacredness. They live close by to Don and my father visits them daily ensuring that their needs are met. Because my Granny and Grampa are aging it is more difficult for them to get around. My Granny is one of the community's judges. She is consulted very often. The younger community members can be found talking with her asking her for guidance on which way to govern our Ktunaxa Nation. My grampa is "jack of all trades". His forte is to go around the community ensuring that everyone's roof on their house has no holes and that everyone has meat to eat. In general, he is a maintenance helper. Many a day my grampa would take the young ones out and show them how to pick soap berries, peel bark off trees and how to track a deer. Everyone in the community knew my granny and grampa and it was a good feeling to come from their blood.

My mom is an activist. She has wisdom, mixed with a loud vibrating voice. My mom takes no guff and when she sees injustice, she names it for what it is. My mom is known for calling a spade a spade. She may sound like she is stern and cold when in fact she isn't, actually she is one of the kindest souls around. She just

expects responsibility, accountability, honesty and integrity. My mom has mastered the ability to be tough but sensitive, gentle but firm, strict but fair.

My parents send me to College. So I can learn the white man's ways. I am ready for college because I am comfortable in my skin because of all the love I received as a child. In college, I meet a man called Bryan and we have three children together. Even though Bryan and I share children together, we amicably decide our marriage is not meant to be. Because I am going to go to graduate school he agrees to keep the children until I am done and when I am done he will return to the children to my care so he can pursue his dreams. My hallmark story continues on from where I am in my life now.

My goal now is to finish graduate school, wait for my grandchildren and to love my partner and children so much they will die knowing love. The end.

CHAPTER 5

THE LESSONS ARE IN THE DATA

Introduction

This chapter presents lessons heard within the stories and is dedicated to my daughter Rachel and to others who are also mixed-ancestry second generation adoption scoop ceremonies. I have been taught that each and every one of us is ceremony and that life in itself is ceremony. The individuals to whom this thesis is dedicated will also be identified as ceremony.

The struggle I had in writing this chapter stemmed from the information that is contained in the data. In my first attempts at writing this chapter, I tried to make the impolite polite. I have learned though, that sometimes it is nearly impossible to gloss over the impolite while keeping a sense of integrity intact. The two cannot be congruent and at some point, the truth overrides superficial niceties. I attempted to write this thesis so that my daughter would not feel pain and trauma. But I have succumbed to the idea that what my daughter will do with this information is not known. I now hope that the information contained within the following pages will help to form some type of self-knowledge in her life.

I hope that this chapter will help ensure a future for my daughter that will deconstruct any negative ideas she may have about the Aboriginal side

of her family and her thoughts of being mixed ancestry and having Aboriginal identity.

Nothing annoys me more than when a person who has identified as western-European embarks on a conversation with me that begins with "I have just found out that my great-great-great grandmother on my father's side is Aboriginal and I am just trying to figure out what that means." A part of me thinks "Wow, this is quite fascinating." and another side of me says "Yeah, whatever. What racism have you experienced? Look what your privilege has gotten you and three generations in your family." Thus, this thesis is written so the children in my family will know they are of Aboriginal ancestry and the process of the 1960 adoption scoop regime will not prevail. This thesis project is my attempt to not have my great-great-great grandchildren say "I just found out my family was Ktunaxa. ."

I am writing this chapter as an adoption scoop ceremony and I am taking the data and facts I have learned from the stories of the women in my family and am writing them as my teachings and lessons to be passed onto the generations to come.

I am passing on these oral history stories and writing these lessons to give my daughter a sense of where she has come from and to expose her to a reality of her life that has not been fully nurtured.

My daughter is the first-born daughter of a German/Polish man and she is the daughter of a Ktunaxa woman. I write this thesis with the acknowledgement that this is her reality and what she chooses to do with this amalgamation of cultures and identities is her own.

I also write this chapter with the hope that the lessons and wisdom learned from the stories will help Rachel's maturing process and that she will learn from our mistakes. I also hope she will learn wisdom on how to "re-create the wheel" of identity formation and that her own experience is not filled with pain and trauma sometimes associated with being Indian in the 21st century.

The past

The first lesson develops from the introduction of each woman. In 1943, Agnes McCoy was born in what we know to be as Cranbrook, BC. In 1947, Gina Clarricoates was born in the old Invermere hospital. And in 1967, Leona Daniels was born in Nelson, British Columbia. Gina is Leona's mom and Agnes is Leona's paternal aunt. Gina and Agnes are best friends, but they did not become best friends until the 1980's. Gina, Agnes and Leona are family and they share blood/cellular knowledge.

Holmes, an Indigenous scholar, (2000) describes the importance of blood and the connection of family, or genealogy, as connecting Hawaiians to one another:

It doesn't matter where Hawaiians live. They can live all over the world... when you say that you are Hawaiian, we never say... 'how much Hawaiian do you have?' Which is a total ... alien concept, but the fact that you are Hawaiian and you are 'ohana {a food made from taro} bowl ... And that we come from the same roots. And that's the connectedness that ... brings all Hawaiians together, no matter how much Hawaiian they have by blood quantum. Wherever they live, if you are Hawaiian, you are Hawaiian. You are accepted into the 'ohana {family}. Unconditionally. There are no restrictions, no limitations, no obstacles, no barriers. And that is very important. That's why our genealogy is so important and that genealogy connection ... to our ali'i. And then of course because {of } the ali'i {our connection} to the gods themselves ... and again, back to the land, so ... it's a circle, it's a circle of love. For Kalo the circular connection between the people, the ali'i, the gods, and the land is forged not by information but by blood and 'roots'. (p. 43)

Holmes eloquently describes how we are connected through blood, genealogy, spirituality, and love.

When reading this one may think, what does being Hawaiian have to do with being Ktunaxa? The correlation between the two is that both groups are Indigenous. Indigenous in that they have a connection to the land they live on and have both experienced and are still experiencing, first-hand, the colonization process. Each group also has pre-colonial ties to the land and territory.

Holmes discusses the innate connection between blood relations. But Holmes fails to discuss what to do when the blood relations are not able or wanting to acknowledge this connection.

The lesson to pass on

Rachel is the grand-daughter of an Indian grandmother and Indian grandfather. Rachel has Indian blood running through her veins. The connection to a North American Indigenous group exists. There is no denying that our Aboriginal ancestry exists and, with this truth, there is now no going back.

My question to Rachel is, what will you do with this responsibility? What will you do with this ancestry and history that is part of you and the country we live in?

Avoid alcohol for well-being not for fear

The second lesson comes from the story of each women's drinking stories. Agnes, Gina and Leona were all drunks at one time in their lives.

Gina states:

Then May/June started drinking pretty heavy there. And, I was kicked out for d/d in June...so then I went to jail for d/d and that's drunk and disorderly so I guess that is how it is, my anger.

Leona states:

I began drinking when I was 13. From the very first time I drank I drunk to get drunk. Whenever I drank I was on a mission to get drunk. I never drank socially. I use to think why bother? If you're gonna drink you might as well get drunk.

Agnes states:

She told me I would have a hard life and that I would drink. She was right.

In their stories Gina, Agnes and Leona speak of how the casting aside of alcohol was a recovery process.

Gina states:

In 1978 when Agnes came back she was another one that was sober. We stuck together and I think it was the idea that we're trying to stay sober and helping each other that helped us through the struggles of the urge to pick the bottle up. From then we learned a lot of things, why we drank. What happens, all the attitudes we picked up when we were kids and carried on. I see that it was being passed onto the kids....and oh shit I've got to change my ways if I'm effecting them like that they'll be doing that to their kids.

She adds:

I tried to make changes. Changes were hard. I was so accustomed to the old ways. I was going to counseling to and the counselor would help me get things out.

Leona states:

I didn't want to quit drinking. I resisted it at first. But I was handed so many responsibilities and it was the students who looked at me to be an example. I couldn't be an example if I was gonna be seen in the community a drunk though. So I had to quit drinking. I never went to AA. I did go see a counselor though. She helped me a lot. She listened and taught me my stories were true and that I was not a liar.

One of the most written about topics within Native literature is the effects of the residential school. Many writers will eloquently describe how

the effects of residential schools is intergenerational. Elizabeth Furniss (1994)

states:

Being aware of the problem and where it originates from is the first step to recovery. We have been forced to deal with the residential school issues and we now know that all the suicides, the alcoholism, the very low self-esteem of our people, the sexual abuse, the loss of our language and culture, the family breakdown, the dependency on others, the loss of pride, the loss of parental skills, and all the other social problems that have plagued our people can be traced directly to the (residential) schools.

There are many things that have been looked at, and we have to find ways for reversing the damage that has been done. We have to reprogram our people into believing in themselves again. We have to find ways of strengthening the family bonds and reviving the traditional values of culture. We have to find ways of mending the spirits that were broken. (p. 126)

Both Agnes and Gina went to St. Eugene's Residential School which is located just outside Cranbrook, BC.

Gina says:

I went to residential school. I was about six years old. And, I don't remember the first days there. I've had to forgive a lot of things that happened there.

Agnes describes her relationship with the residential school as this:

I couldn't go back in that school for many years. And then I got a job that made me go back into that school. I had to clear out file boxes after file boxes that were stored in the basement. I made your mom help me. And then I had to take other people through the school. Give them tours. Even today many people still don't go into the school. It scares them. But by going back into that school I had to start looking at the many things that were inside of me. If it hadn't been for that job I don't know if I would have started.

Leona adds:

I never went to residential school but I know my mom and dad both went to St. Eugene's. I know I am a product of residential schools though and that even my own children are affected. If my children weren't affected I would still be with them 24 days hours a day and 7 days a week. By knowing about the residential schools help take the blame away from my mother and the decisions she has made. It gives understanding for why she and our community is the way it is.

All three women appear to have begun their story of recovery from the abuse and misuse of alcohol. Additionally within each woman, the journey of self recovery began when they each became aware of how the residential school impacted their own lives.

Self-recovery and reclaiming of our self is a form of identity formation.

Absolon and Tabobondung (1999) state:

Reclaiming is the process of doing something twice and in this case taking back ownership and control of your SELF....The journey of rediscovery involves a multitude of knowledges and wisdoms. First and foremost is the wisdom we have of our self. This is the beginning place - self knowledge and it is this self-knowledge that guides the journey of rediscovery. (p. 2)

The lesson to pass on

Rachel, be aware that alcoholism runs in the family. The best way to avoid alcoholism is to not drink. The residential schools seemed to give our people an excuse to drink. I encourage you to look at the effects left by the

residential schools because this knowledge gives meaning to the "why's" and "how's" our family is the way it is.

It sometimes also helps to not make drinking a moral and conscience based issue. Don't make not drinking a rule for yourself because it is what the Bible says. Try to make not drinking a soul well-being issue. Try to make non-drinking a soul-development issue and have your decision not to drink alcohol a means of becoming a more powerful, self-controlled, healing woman.

The rape

In 1996 Leona answered the phone and on the other end, a man said "Leona, this is your dad, Don. You had a brother, who you never met, die today. His name was Jerome." This phone call was the catalyst for Leona meeting Donald, her father. A few days after the phone call, Leona picked up Donald, on the corner of Main and Hastings which is in the heart of the East End of Vancouver, BC. Leona took Donald for dinner. Leona felt comfortable asking Donald the questions she never felt comfortable asking Gina. Over dinner she asked him. "So did you love her? Or was I product of a one night stand?" Donald looked at Leona, in the eyes, and said "Let's just say it was a hot summer night." Leona said "Oh." Leona's feminist lens was shut off that night in February 1996, because she didn't get it.

Back in 1992, Gina, a Ktunaxa woman, told Agnes, another Ktunaxa woman about Leona, another Ktunaxa woman. Leona is Gina's oldest daughter. Gina only told the story of Leona to Agnes because Leona had come home after being given up for adoption in 1968. Agnes then told Donald about Leona. Agnes and Donald are brother and sister in the Ktunaxa way. When Agnes told Donald about Leona she learned that he was a rapist and that Leona was conceived by rape. No one told Leona until the Fall of 1998.

So in late-October 1998, Agnes told Leona about the rape. Agnes says that Gina asked that Leona be told. After being told by Agnes, Leona called Gina for confirmation. Leona asked Gina "Is it true?" Gina said "Yes". Leona asked "What happened?" Gina told her. Gina asked "Are you mad?" Leona said "No". Leona lied because she was in so much shock, she did not know if she was mad, sad or glad. Funny thing is, Leona knew this story even before Agnes and Gina told it. Call it intuition. One thing for sure though is that Leona did not blame Leona for the rape and neither did she blame Gina for the rape.

Leona states:

I still don't know why they thought I needed to know about the rape. They just figured I needed to know just in case someone else told me and I found out in another way. No matter what though to find out I was conceived through rape turned my world upside down. I was a wreck. I checked out of the world for two weeks. I was able to take

time off work and my friends covered for me on a few things. In these two weeks I went to intensive counselling, acupuncture sessions, body-energy work sessions and I just cried. Some people couldn't figure out what the big deal was and that I should just be happy that I am alive. But to be given such news is just blow to how the world is seen. It is almost unfathomable to take in. So by the end of the two weeks I came to the conclusion my soul needed a body and because my soul needed a body at that time and at that moment my soul chose rape as the vehicle to get here. Childish in thought. Maybe, but you try and make peace of such violence resulting in your life. So I figure my soul had a purpose and needed to be alive. My life is therefore ceremony. And ceremony is sacred. And sacredness has purpose. So then I have purpose. I am not the rape I am just the result of the rape. I think I know my purpose although my purpose changes each day. I do believe though that children born out of rape have a purpose that goes beyond a regular conception. It may not be more important but it exists.

Eber Hampton (1988) recognizes spirituality as the respect for the spiritual relationship that exists between all things. It is also believed that the core level of this respect comes from within and when this self-respect exists the equilibrium of dysfunction is altered. To have a self-respect that demonstrates having a respect for all things results in a sense of spirituality that transcends life's hardships.

This type of spirituality rises above hardships. The spirituality that Ross (1992) describes is similar to the sense of spirituality that Leona describes in her story. To be able to respect that which is incomprehensible is a form of faith that supersedes dysfunction and man-made idioms. Non-Aboriginal writer Rupert Ross articulates it eloquently:

We must be careful when we consider the role of the spiritual plane. We are not dealing with some quaint custom, nor are we dealing with religion as many of us define that term in our post-industrial, western world. To many Native people, the spiritual plane is not simply a sphere of activity or belief which is separable from the pragmatics of everyday life; instead it seems to be a context from within which most aspects of life are seen, defined and given significance. (p. 54-55)

The lesson to pass on

Rachel, I believe the rape occurred as a means to get my soul here into the physical realm of the world. My soul needed a physical body: it chose the rape as a means to get me here. My soul has a purpose to fulfill and this is the body it chose. Perhaps my purpose was to give birth to you. I also know that, like myself, you also have purpose for being here and that it is your job to figure out what that purpose is. In an oxymoronic unfolding of events it seems to me that the purpose of the rape is generational and it is spiritual.

Another word of advice is that once a purpose in life is figured out, it will help you become more fulfilled and content with your own life.

The argument

It is interesting to note that when looking for spirituality Gina did not incorporate the use of Elders. Verna Kirkness (1998) states:

Elders possess the wisdom and knowledge that must be the focus of all our learning. It is through them that we can understand our unique relationship to the Creator, our connection with Nature, the order of things and the values that enhance the identity of our people. (p.13)

Gina vehemently states:

Then I went looking for role-models, elders. I found faults in everybody. I'd think they do this and they do that, they're not fully developed mentally and emotionally...so I started using my ancestors of the past as my role models. I could picture them making things they had like making arrow heads, go hunting to get their food and the berries, hide they worked at it with out complaining. They did all that. I always use my ancestors as my role-models. When I feel sorry for myself I can feel my grandmothers giving me a kick and saying "quit feeling sorry for yourself.

For Gina the incorporation of elders to assist in her spiritual development was not done. Her spiritual development occurred in the developing a relationship, a dialogue, with the ancestors of the past. The dialogue between Gina and her ancestors is just like the dialogue two live human beings would have. She spoke with them as though they were in the present and not in the spiritual realm.

Furthermore, healing and spirituality appear to go hand in hand. Spirituality includes the common belief that healing is an individual process. In the book, *The Sacred Tree*, Bopp, et. al (2002) state:

Healing means having a clear mind, having a spiritual way of thinking, believing in the Creator, in yourself and other people and freedom from rage, anger and hurt. As people are healing, they become more and more functional. Anger, fear and despair gradually leave them and are replaced with feelings of hope, caring for others, compassion, and love. As the grip of negative feelings loosens, people feel less and less paralyzed, and more able to think clearly, to see themselves as effective agents of change in their own lives and more able to take responsibility for their own choices. (p. 47)

Agnes states within her story:

I do my spirituality for me. Some people say don't do this or don't do that. Or I am doing it wrong. Or don't go there. Or come over here. It does not matter what other people say. Because when I practice my spirituality and my culture it is between me and Napika. Not Joe, Napika and me.

Agnes acknowledges that spirituality is an individual process that is not conditional on another person's progress, demands or success. Spirituality is an individual relationship between oneself and a higher power of some form. Lastly, spirituality contributes to healing. Healing contributes to identity formation.

The lesson to pass on

Rachel, the one thing we have not talked about in a long, long time is the religion vs. spirituality argument. One thing I have learned, is that spirituality and religion differ. I also know that you and I have learned what it means to respect each other's point of view and that within our family, love has surpassed many differences. The one lesson I would like to pass onto you is that it is okay to explore the religion vs. spirituality dialogue within the internal parts of your mind and heart.

Let it be known that, at the end of the day, the choice will be yours as to what it is you want to believe. All I ask is that if you choose to do these internal dialogues, please don't let fear drive your decisions.

The enmeshment

Gina speaks to Leona. Gina states to Leona in the interview tape:

What do you want from me? If you are looking for something...pause.... if I can't give it to my regular kids I can't give it to you.

A grown child returned to her mother many years later. The child, as well as the mother, are metaphorically raised from the dead. Recognized in Gina's words is the thought she does not consider her daughter a regular child. Even to this day Gina is unable to give anything to Leona. I cannot help but wonder if she thinks her grand-daughter is non-regular also.

The lesson to pass on

Rachel, I know you have experienced the cold shoulder of Gina, because I was there to witness it. We have talked about it briefly. The lesson in this portion of the chapter is that we are each on our own journey. Sometimes, our individual journeys become joined and sometimes they don't. Sometimes, we want our journey to join with another person's journey, but for some unseen reason the other person is not wanting it or is not ready for it. This is how it is with Gina. My mother and your grandmother is not wanting to connect our journeys together. Why this is, I do not know. What I do know, is that the one journey that we need to be most concerned with, is our own. And as sad as it is that we may never join journeys with Gina, at the end of the day, this is just the way it is.

There is no use trying to force a relationship because this will just cause resentment. It is best we each just carry with our own journey to the best of our ability.

The mothering

In 1943, Agnes McCoy was born in what we know to be as Cranbrook, BC. In 1947, Gina Clarricoates was born in the old Invermere hospital. And in 1967, Leona Daniels was born in Nelson, British Columbia. Cranbrook, Invermere and Nelson are all a part of the Ktunaxa traditional territory, which is commonly known as the Kootenays. Gina is Leona's mom and Gina kept this a secret from Agnes until 1992. Once Leona's paternal aunt, Agnes, learned about Leona, her niece, she told Leona's father Donald. Gina and Donald had not seen each other since July, 1966. When Leona met these women, Agnes and Gina were best friends. Recovery for Leona, Gina and Agnes was only the beginning of their healing journey. Each woman engaged in active healing techniques to help them on their healing journeys. The healing techniques used by Gina, Agnes and Leona are a combination of tradition, Ktunaxa culture, Canadian culture and contemporary therapeutic techniques.

Gina laughingly speaks:

My children were basically raised by Oprah. Watching Oprah Winfrey provided me with a glimpse of right and wrong, sane and insane, productive and unproductive.

Gina adds:

I abused the kids. Physically I slapped them, hit them, throw things at them, scream at them and everything. I was abandoned, neglect and poverty and loss of financial security. That what I went through in my life. I felt I was emotionally abused. I felt I was abandoned when I was abused. The adults were there but weren't there for support. They'd tell me to shut up, don't say nothing - whatever. So I had to deal with the garbage there and the men in my life. So I have dealt with a lot of issues.

Agnes adds:

The need for me to start healing came from me being pushed by a hurting child. When I was chief of St. Mary's Band a child in the community approached me and starting to tell me of their sexual abuse. I was horrified. I froze. I could not comfort this child because she triggered me so much. The day after hearing her story I planned to go treatment. I was sober at this time but a treatment program was the only safe place where I felt comfortable processing my hurt.

Leona states:

For myself, my healing has been a process that has involved at least 11 years of counselling. If I was to tag a dollar figure to the cost of counselling fees it surpasses \$20 000. To be able to access such a large sum of money is in itself privilege. A privilege that was accessible to me because of my life experience of being urban, employed, assimilated and educated. I sometimes think my dad has been the catalyst in all my counselling. When he died I went to many sessions and when I found out he raped my mom I had to go to even more sessions. If he wasn't dead I'd send him the bill. Not that he had the money to pay it anyhow. But then again if you get right down to it I think it's the governments job to pay the bill in the first place. Fact is counselling has helped me get to where I am at now.

Healing for all three women is a process. Each woman expresses a commitment to be better tomorrow than they are in the present day. Each woman also acknowledges that her healing process is a lifelong process.

Healing is an individual process. Wastasecoot quotes Clarkson et al. (1992) in defining healing as:

Their minds must be healed from the ravages of centuries of oppression. Their bodies must be reclaimed from alcohol and abuse, both sexual and physical. Their spirits must be reclaimed, the spirit of their ancestors not the spirit of Christianity or any other doctrine." Adding to that, an alter Native to the present Western mental health services. "We have found where psychoanalysis, conventional therapy, and other means of dealing with peoples' problems, have failed, there is one way that has consistently given results and that has changed peoples' lives profoundly, giving them renewed sense of self, stronger foundation to face the world and a vision for the future. This way entails the reclamation of their understanding of themselves as Indigenous people and their role on their planet. (p. 133)

These words eloquently describe how healing involves hope for oneself and for the future. Additionally, she is clear in articulating that healing does not solely depend on modern therapeutic techniques. Most importantly, healing requires that Indigenous people create an understanding of themselves and the role they play on their planet..

Lastly, the healing that is described by each person is reliant on their own opinion. Gina, Agnes and Leona define their own healing and their own journey and how they are doing. Each woman appears to have their own knowledge about their own journey. Castellano (2000) states "Aboriginal

knowledge is rooted in personal experience and lays no claim to universality.

The degree to which you can trust what is being said is tied up with the integrity and perceptiveness of the speaker" (26). Each woman, within her story, does not claim to be the knowledge holder, but each seems to be content with the fact that others will see them as having knowledge, or not.

For example, Gina states:

All the people that I know that have given their children up for adoption - they're afraid. They come to me about it. They say, when my child comes looking for me what should I do, they ask. I'd say, I'll tell you what I went through. These may come to you or may not. It depends on you. Cause we deal with things differently. I said I'll tell you just from my experience, but with yours it will be different. I don't know but if you need help I'll be there to help you but I'll bring you as far as I've gone and maybe we can go further but maybe I can't help you too much because there's something blocking.

Further words that support Castellano's words can be seen in Leona's story.

She states:

I don't claim to be an expert because I am sober and educated. I do believe I have some interesting things to say and if people choose to hear what I have learned it is up to them. People can take or leave what I have to say but if they take the time to look at my life I must be doing something right so therefore must know a few things.

The lesson to pass on

Rachel, the best way to be a mother is to look after your own healing first. Once you have embarked on this self-healing, look to what I have done

to you. Take what has worked and do it again. For the parts where I did not do you justice, create new strategies.

I am sorry that this is not the best answer to help with parenting woes, but I do know that Aboriginal universal parenting techniques do not exist.

Gina, Agnes and myself have all re-created the wheel in making ourselves parents and I think it is best that you do this too. The best way to describe what I mean, is through a story.

Many years ago my friend was going through great struggles with her teenage children. They were running away, drinking, being defiant and just being nasty on so many levels. My friend would call me and ask me for advice. When she would ask me for advice I would always think silently to myself "Why are you asking me this? I've never had teenage children." So my friend and I would toss ideas back and forth. Each time we had this conversation, we found we would always go back to the same question. We would ask each other "What would our parents have done? We would then share that with each other. If our parent's tactics worked, we would create a plan around this positive aspect. But if our parent's tactics resulted in poor outcomes, we would then giggle and say "okay, let's try the opposite." We always tended to do the opposite to what our parents had done, especially if we thought what are parents had done was a poor job. This absurd practice of parenting was created out of our own realization that we lacked positive

Aboriginal role-models of parenting and we both knew we had enough sense to critically analyze the situation and create good parenting skills within our families. So, my daughter, I just want to say it is okay and welcomed that you create your own path to parenting skills.

The 'pick-me-up' strength

Gina, Agnes and Leona have all been through hardships in their life which include death, loss and mistrust.

Agnes lost her mother to tuberculosis when she was five years old.

Agnes remembers:

The last time I saw my mom was at a train station. I didn't even know she was my mom until later. I just thought she was a woman being nice to me.

She adds:

Losing my mom has been my worst pain.

Gina states:

The next event was at five. That's when my mom died. I don't remember too much of her. The only thing I remember I remember of her is that I was trying to crawl in the coffin with her and somebody was pulling me away.

Leona did not lose contact with her biological mother at the age of five.

For Leona she lost contact with her biological mother at the age of nine months. Leona was told about her adoption at the age of five though. Leona says:

I remember I was in my room looking at a book. It was my bedtime and I was getting ready for bed. I remember my sheets were pink with lots of flowers on them. Anyway, my mom walked in my room and proceeded to tell me what adoption is and then she told me I was adopted. I was 5. I was shocked. After this we never talked about it again until I was a teenager. And when I was a teenager it wasn't a talk. I just remember yelling if my real mom was here she'd understand. Little did I know she wouldn't understand even when I was 28.

The three women grew up with a sense of mother-loss since the age of five. Leona only learned about this odd coincidence in doing her thesis research.

To add to this coincidence of the significance of the age of five, is the fact that Rachel also lost her mother as her full-time caregiver at the age of five. When Rachel was five she too was sat down on the edge of her bed and told how much she was loved and that I would never go away for good. I never told Rachel I was leaving that hot summer night in June, but when she awoke, I was gone and a new chapter in her life was etched on her heart.

Gina and Agnes lost their mother at the age of five. Leona was told of her adoption at the age of five and presently has two mothers: one biological and the other adoptive. Rachel lost her mother as a full time caregiver at the age of five and presently has a biological mother who lives three provinces away and a step-mother who has helped raise her in the last five years.

Severed roots can be recognized in all four of these stories. These severed roots can sometimes create stories of what if, why me and poor me. It is these unanswered questions that can create many tears and can make the dark nights seem even darker and lonelier.

Agnes tells it eloquently:

I felt pain when I lost my mother I lost the relationship and that the relationship was gone forever. No matter how many women came into my life such as my grandmother, it was just not the same. When I was raped at the Residential School I needed a mother to talk to me. I have lived with it and it was hard because I felt shame and guilt. I thought her death was my fault. It has been hard and sad but I have learned how to forgive, forget and let go.

Leona adds:

The adoption hurt, the living with an abusive family hurt, the divorce hurt, leaving my children with their father to be raised by him hurt, having sexual abuse flashbacks hurt, learning that my dad is a rapist hurt but I think the worst hurt has been since going home and hearing my natural mother say, after not seeing me for so many years say, What are you doing here? I remember when I left my husband too. She was in Calgary for some reason. I found her at my sister Tania's house. So I went to tell her how I had left my husband and instead of getting a shoulder to cry on I got a 'how could you be so stupid'. My mother can't say anything beyond 'oh', 'I know', or anything beyond 'who, how, when, where or why'. I even took my kids to meet her once and she just stared at them and said. 'oh'. My daughter still remembers this. I sometimes think my life is a hardship. And when I am angry I cannot help but think that meeting Gina has not helped heal the hardships in a lot of ways.

Although the three women were impacted by such horrific and sad events each of the women, at one time or another in their lives, started a story of recovery.

As mentioned in a previous lesson, it is seen how clearly identifying the results of the residential school can lead to healing. Healing can often be recognized in balancing the aspects of one's life. Agnes states it explicitly when she shares the following:

And I often keep my Medicine Wheel in check too and if my wheel is not balanced my wheel will not turn properly and if my wheel does not turn properly I am no good for myself or anyone else. And if I live in only section of the medicine wheel my wheel will not turn at all.

Gina, Agnes and Leona all speak of how they each began their healing journey by bringing balance to their own lives. And after they each became comfortable with balance within their own lives they taught it to their own families and community and a desire to further teach it to their communities.

Supernault (1995) describes the maintaining of balance in body, mind, heart and spirit. She describes this by separating the individual, the family, the community and the nation into separate aspects and how each intersects with the other and vice versa.

Gina supports Supernault's words in her description.

I have done a lifeline a number of years ago for a class to help people working on themselves. I made my lifeline in a medicine wheel this

includes the emotional, spiritual, mental and physical. All specific events that come up have a space on this life line. I hope that someday I can use this to help people.

To further support Supernault's word Agnes states:

I had to learn to pray and in my prayers I learned to always say thank you for my health, my home and my belongings. I say thank you for the two legged, the four legged, the ones who fly and the ones who swim. I pray for my family and friends and I also pray for my enemies too because they have something to teach me too.

Leona adds:

It's not like I wanted to go home and save my people. I did want to go home and share what I had been through with the hope that someone might gain from it. Because I think I have been through a lot and have lived to tell a successful tale. The one thing I know for sure though is that I had to get better because if I didn't get better I would surely die.

And to this day all three women live their lives sober and drug free.

The lesson to pass on

Rachel, always pick yourself up and brush yourself off after making a mistake. And after you have done this and are functioning okay again, learn to laugh at that mistake and yourself. In picking yourself up, look to create balance in your life. In your week, you have been given one hundred and sixty eight hours. Try to take these hours and divide them up into nurturing yourself physically, emotionally, intellectually and spiritually. The more balanced you are the easier it will be to pick yourself up too.

Lastly, one way to pick your self up is through writing. I have often used poetry as a release. One poem I wrote, during this thesis process, which really helped me on my going onward process is titled "Twenty-three chromosomes from Martha." Martha is your great grandmother, my grandmother and the mother to Donald who is your grandfather. The poem goes like this:

Twenty-three chromosomes from Martha

by Leona Daniels 1999

Dinner's being made
 Twenty-three chromosomes are the common ingredients
 Twenty-three chromosomes passed down from Martha

What will you do with those genes sir?
 How will you make them up?

My father answers:
 Well you know I think I shall take my twenty-three 'somes
 And be mean
 I shall bring grief and pain to all I meet
 I shall be a master in betraying peoples trust

But I shall once in awhile be real nice
 People will remember this nice façade
 They will remember my humor
 And it will not be until my death
 That someone will expose how I am a wolf in sheep's clothing

I will choose to hit and be hit
 I will choose to fight
 I will choose to through women down stairs
 I will choose to smash beer bottles in women's faces
 I will choose to feed my dog beer
 My friends will laugh at how funny it is that I have drunk dog

I will choose to shoot heroin up my arm

I will choose to rape a woman
 And I will father a child within a woman through this act of violence
 And I will choose to praise this woman this act of violence
 And I will choose to walk away from her too
 I will choose to praise this woman for being a good woman
 Because she is good in that she kept my secret
 And still let me portray to the public that I was a nice guy

I shall father seven children
 And I will choose to have no responsibility in fathering any of them
 I will know my Native language
 And I will die taking my Native tongue to my grave
 I will choose to not bother teaching our Native language to my children
 Or my grandchildren as a matter of fact
 I will choose to live as a victim
 I will choose to die in my anger
 That is what I shall do with my twenty-three chromosomes
 And finally I will choose to live my life aiding the Canadian government
 I will help them in getting rid of the Indian Problem from the inside

Yup, that is what I shall do with the twenty-three chromosomes passed down
 passed down from Martha?

I reply:

Well, I think I shall take the twenty-three chromosomes
 And I shall have them combined with some spices
 The spices called transcendancy, resilience, and nice-ness
 And I shall choose to combine my 'somes with hope, forgiveness and love
 I want my 'somes to be moistened with tears once and awhile too
 As to not dry out the soul

I shall, like my father, like to laugh
 I shall be gregarious, friendly and outgoing
 But I will choose not to hurt though
 I will choose to hit people for a short time but eventually I will stop
 And I will choose to turn my hands into healing hands
 Instead of using them as hurting hands

I will, like my father, be a wanderer
 I will follow the wanderlust of my soul
 Travel to new houses, cities and towns

Meeting new souls and sharing stories

I will voice my stories of truth
Stories that are honest
Stories that don't build me into something I am not

I shall choose to learn about my Indianness
And I shall be thorn in the side of the Canadian government
And I shall take pride in being a part of the Indian problem
I will choose to live my life and not play a victim

I will use my voice loud
I will know what it is to cry
And I will balance my tears with laughter
I will work through my anger
And by working through my anger I will learn to grieve
I will grieve my losses of not knowing my father
and I will grieve the realization that my father did not know himself

I will choose to be a change maker
Striving to change the injustices of the world one step at a time
I will choose to seek truth
No matter how the truth may hurt
I choose to live my life in a way that will make life easier for the generations
behind me
I will choose to know integrity
I will expose how my dad misused his twenty-three chromosomes
I will not expose his misdeeds to make myself feel better though
I will choose to expose his misdeeds as a tool for challenging
Challenging ourselves, our communities and our Nations

I will choose to tell those who come into my life
Enough is enough
No longer will we keep the secrets of violence shelved on a pedestal of silence
No longer will we tolerate the bad behaviors of others
I will give the message loud and clear
To not tolerate the misbehaviors of others is not punishment
To not tolerate the misbehaviors of others is a form of survival
A form of survival for the generations to come

And most importantly
Although, my father and I share similar ingredients

Known as chromosomes and genes
 I will until the day I die
 Loudly exclaim
 I am not my father

Yup, that is what I shall do with my twenty-three chromosomes
 And yes, I will have that to stay

The teacher

Who creates enlightenment? Came (1995) writes:

Knowledge of the physical world, which forms an essential part of the praxis of inner and outer learning, does not flow exclusively or primarily through the intellect, as Mathew Coon-Come, a Cree leader from Northern Quebec, learned. After spending years in residential school and university, Matthew asked his father to teach him about the lands of the ancestors. He arrived in the bush with a topographical map of the territory they were about to explore. The first thing my Dad did was to tear that map into tiny little pieces. He said I was committing to the white man's mistake, making plans for the land without ever setting foot on it, without ever getting feel for it'. (p. 29)

In this story, Matthew Coon-Come describes how enlightenment requires that we get a feel for "what is" prior to filling our head with foreign knowledge from the outside of us. Does this process support the thought that enlightenment come from feelings rather than from thoughts? Constenello (2000) goes onto describe the art form of feeling and how words cannot adequately describe feeling and knowing. Constenello quotes from the 1996 Royal Commission on Aboriginal peoples:

The need to walk on the land in order to know it is a different approach to knowledge than the one-dimensional, literate approach of knowing. Persons schooled in a literate culture are accustomed to having all the context they need to understand a communication embedded in the text before them...Persons taught to use all their senses - to absorb every clue to interpreting a complex, dynamic reality - may well smile at the illusion that words alone, stripped of complementary sound and color and texture, can convey meaning adequately.(p. 29)

For the women in this story, the need to be enlightened beyond their life circumstances came from the calling to be a teacher.

In Gina's story she was called to grandmother and she needed to pass on good teachings to her grandchildren. She mentioned:

What happens all the attitudes we picked up when we were kids and carried it on. I see that it was being passed onto the kids when they were two-three years old. They're the ones that threw it in my face as I watched them play. I watched them play and say gee, that looks familiar. Who does that look like and it was me. It was a little me they'd play with their dolls, an oh shit I've got to change my ways. I felt awful. I realized if I'm affecting them like they'll be doing that to their kids.

Agnes was called to be a teacher when she was to help the young sexual abuse victim within her community. She verbalized:

When I was chief of St. Mary's Band a child in the community approached me and starting to tell me of their sexual abuse. I was horrified. I froze. I could not comfort this child because she triggered me so much. The day after hearing her story I planned to go treatment. I was sober at this time but a treatment program was the only safe place where I felt comfortable processing my hurt.

I was called to be a teacher when I was given a faculty position at Camosun College in Victoria, BC. I also touched on this experience earlier. I stated:

I didn't want to quit drinking. I resisted it at first. But I was handed so many responsibilities and it was the students who looked at me to be an example. I couldn't be an example if I was gonna be seen in the community a drunk though. So I had to quit drinking.

The lesson to pass on

Rachel, you are the teacher to me as to the realities of what it was like to grow up being a child of divorce. You are the teacher of what it is like to grow up and be a person of mixed ancestry. You are the teacher of what it is like to be the offspring of an adoption scoop person.

Rachel, I do not know your reality and this is okay. My loving daughter, you are my teacher.

So Rachel, please seize the moments to teach me what it is like to be you and to live through your experiences. I am here to listen, to hear your story and to celebrate your uniqueness of an unfathomable journey of the mind, body and heart.

Conclusion

This chapter articulates the lessons created from the data. The lessons are written to teach my daughter insights about life. The lessons can be applied to the person searching for a sense of who they are. These lessons are simple, yet unspoken in casual conversation.

This chapter takes life's experiences and makes them into lessons. To live a life unexplored, is to forget to see the lessons in everyday experiences. This chapter shows how life's experiences, either good or bad, have a lesson included within them. If Rachel has no use for these lessons which I have interpreted from the data, that is okay. It is mostly hoped that this thesis has shown Rachel that each and every life experience provides us with a lesson. It is my hope that Rachel will make the realization that nothing lived and experienced is in vain, that sense can be made in everything we go through, and that listening to other people's stories can help make sense of our own.

CHAPTER 6

TAXAS

Taxas, in my Ktunaxa language, means done, finished. I am done talking, so now you can talk if you need to. It doesn't mean that you have to respond to what I have said it just means I am done. I am now stating taxas. I am finished writing on the topic of adoption. The topic of adoption has been exhausted for me. My thesis writing journey has taken me through a portal of passage.

I have been invited through a portal of passage

The portal is what provides the framework

The framework is what makes me up

It is what makes me, me

The framework is my history

The framework is my story

The framework is not secrets

Secrets laced with shame

The passage is the process

I must remember not to get stuck in the portal

I must remember to keep traveling down the passage

Moving through the passage

The passage is my healing journey

My healing journey that runs like a river

A river made of my tears

What you are reading is draft eight of this thesis topic. Each of the drafts had its own process and organization. The thesis you are reading now is not the thesis that was started seven years ago. As I passed through the events of the death of my father, finding out about the rape and being fired

from my First Nation community my thesis underwent a complete change resulting in a new draft. As I wrote each draft I expressed many feelings of anger, loss, grief, disillusionment and pain. This final thesis version has so many stories and experiences woven through its paragraphs. And within each draft as I explored each emerging feeling I was able to articulate my thesis topic in a more succinct way. As you read this thesis you are welcomed and encouraged to use these words as your own portal to your own emerging feelings that may arise and have a say to your own healing.

The history of how I have gotten to where I am at in life has been explored. I have explored the lives of Ktunaxa women who have been affected by adoption. I have made sense of the life experiences and have transformed them into life lessons for my daughter, and now I am done. It is time for me to lay to rest the topic of adoption and identity and perhaps seek out other topics to explore.

This thesis has shown that the healing can occur and that healing is continuous.

There are many lines to read between, in this thesis. It is hoped that this thesis will be a trailblazer to inspire other Aboriginal adoptees to expose new realities which I don't know about.

In my life's journey, I have been known as an activist, a daughter, a mother, a partner, and an adoptee. There was a time when people would say

"Oh, there's Leona, she was adopted out and that's all she talks about." I have now exhausted my need to tell the world about my adoption experience. I know I will grieve this role I used to wear so loudly, but I am excited to see what my next role will be. But for now, I say: Texas.

EPILOGUE

WHAT SENSE I MAKE FROM THE INTERVIEWS

On the completion of the interviews with my biological mother and auntie and the identifying of themes I am able to recognize a continuum of thoughts and feelings that exist within me. I need a voice. It is also believed that the sharing of my voice will contribute to the collective consciousness of those of us who are adopted and who live with it each day.

Awed by the resiliency

I find great solace in receiving new knowledge of where I came from. I was inspired in knowing that the spirit of transcendence that has gotten me to where I am in life exists within Agnes and Gina also. The women in my family have been through addictions, abuse, family violence, internalized racism and loss. Gina and Agnes experienced lots of loss, losses that were alcohol-related in one way or another. Although tragedy and grief seem paramount in the lives of the women, each woman still finds the strength to wake up each new day.

Comforted, but irritated

To hear the stories, the oral history was especially important because it provided me with the underlying reasons for decisions made.

I am comforted in knowing that their life situation did not enable Gina and Agnes to be my mother and auntie.

In the realm of positive and new age thinking, the cliché goes “Don’t take things personally.” This idiom is easier said than done when it comes to adoption. Upon completion of the thesis project, I can clearly state that I did not cause the schism to occur between my mother and I. I do not to take the adoption personally and can clearly recognize how the social structures embedded within policy and procedures contributed to the fact I be given/taken away. I recognize how discrimination and prejudice towards Aboriginal people contributed to my adoption within my family and by the social workers involved.

I am irritated though, because I see my biological mother still not wanting a relationship with me, her daughter. My biological mother still does not want to step up to the plate in being a mother or a grandmother to my children and me. She declines the invitations to interact with us. She turns down invitations to birthday teas and family suppers and never invites us to be included in her family events. It is irritating to acknowledge that my mom and I are divided into a ‘them and us’ faction. I am frustrated in knowing that my mother acknowledges the legal papers she signed 38 years ago more than she acknowledges the blood connection we have between us.

Did what I knew how

In my life, the only commitment I could keep, at one time, was to my post-secondary schooling. In my life, I have never been an athlete and growing up in an abusive home also instilled in me that my physical strength was lacking. I learned at a young age that if I needed to protect myself it was best I become a master of intellect and words. Thus, working towards a Master of Social Work seemed natural to me.

But I am left to wonder, whom did I write this thesis for? I am left asking myself, did I write this thesis and complete my Master of Social Work course requirements as an excuse to sit with my mother and ask her the questions I needed to know? Did I try to bond with my mother under the guise of academe? Academic and intellectual stimulation is safe for me. Academics have been a way of me to express thoughts as feelings and have made me feel worthwhile. Approaching such the subject of adoption reunification with my own family allowed me to reach out to family in a safe way. Academia is all I knew and know in some ways. Leona has trouble walking up to people saying, "Hey, I like you, let's get to know each other" but it is easy to say, "Hey, I am doing a research project, would you like to participate?"

At the end of the day, I have come to realize that moving towards my biological mother through academic means has not gotten me to a place of

knowing what it is to have a biological mother and biological siblings. The academic process has given me the privilege of being educated and employed, but has not given me a mother who says "I love you" or a sibling who can say: "Come for coffee."

Hurt, but tired

My hurt emotions see my mother as the enemy and when I see her I still cringe in fear. I sometimes ask myself in quiet dialogue "What do I want from my biological mother?" I sometimes think I just want a mom to hold and love me but, in the split second I think this thought, I tell myself I don't want anything from her. I wonder would a relationship with her add to my life circumstances or would the chaos of Aboriginal realities pull me down?

At this time I wake each day and spend my energy loving my partner and my children and accepting me and my gifts. I have expended seven years of energy to complete this thesis project so I find great joy in knowing that it is now time to start living my life as a partner and mother and allow for relationships to develop as they may.

Sensitive, but toughened or is it Caring, but indifferent

My social work training and life experiences have taught me about empathy. I am able to put my self in someone's shoes quite effectively. I can sometimes move to a place where I cry tears with people and can feel their pain to a degree. I can now even cry tears of joy when I see someone's spirit

being touched. At the same time, I can share and relate to feelings but I am able to cut off my feelings in an instant. I am also able to cut off these feelings in a justified way, supporting myself with academic prowess, if needs be. This sometimes scares me and it is with great self-talk that I remain in moments of vulnerability and empathy.

Alone, but filled

I am able to validate how the oral history research process helps reclaim lost stories for both the narrator and the participant

Healing comes through unlocking the stories, and letting them be told in their entirety-rewriting the true history. Healing is a holistic approach beyond generations involving the individual, the family and the community and the nation. Trainee for the B.C. Native Family Violence program (Nadeau, 1990-: Lesson 5, Page 6 as stated by Supernault)

The oral history report also helped with validation of how memories define individuals as well as how memories define experiences and define the roles within the community. Jamie Sams (1998) writes:

We experience trauma and pain in our own unique ways. Some people heal their wounds as they occur and move on, while others carry the pain with them for years. When we heal the imbalances created from our past wounds and embrace life from our present viewpoint, we see our experiences from a new perspective. Eventually, if we can let go of the past, we are able to be authentically grateful for our wounds, our harrowing experiences, and the brutality that we may have endured. Through healing those wounds, we become *healed healers* who have embraced our own suffering and the transformed our lives. (p. 92)

I am able to recognize how hearing stories helps but, as mentioned, I am alone without a biological mother to call 'mom'. But I am filled in knowing that I can go forward creating new relationships that are healing, reciprocal, fun and balanced.

Wounded, but healing

My life shows that an adoptee can move forward in life. I didn't expect the thesis process to hurt so much, but I am okay and am comforted that I do have daughter and that the relationship I have with her is strong. And even though Gina and I do not have a strong mother and daughter relationship, that is okay because my loss of Gina has encouraged me to be the best mom I can be for my daughter, Rachel.

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APPENDIX

Dear _____,

Now that Leona j Daniels has completed her course work she is now completing the thesis portion of her Master of Social Work Graduate studies degree.

For her thesis project Leona intends to interview three Ktunaxa women of whom she has come to know as family. Leona has chosen you to be a participant within this project because of your status as her auntie Agnes McCoy, through her dad Donald McCoy.

The purpose of Leona's project is threefold. First the project will allow Leona the opportunity to get to you in a deeper way. Second, the project will provide you the opportunity to express your Ktunaxa pride, teachings and learning. Third, you will be able to share your life with Leona and in turn you will be helping Leona in her own Ktunaxa identity formation.

The research objectives of Leona's project are:

- To tape record the oral histories/life stories of you
- Allow participants to share their life story
- Contribute to the healing of women and our Ktunaxa people on a whole

I need to clarify that the participation within this research project is fully voluntary. I acknowledge that there may be undue pressure to partake in this research project because you and Leona are family members. Although family ties exist between you and Leona I invite you to participate in this research project because you want to and not because of internal feelings of obligation.

The research project will look like this. Leona intends to return to the St. Mary's Reserve for the summer of 1999. During her stay it is her intent to sit down with you and listen to what it is you want to say in regards to your life story and lived experience. Your conversations will begin with some formal interview questions with the hope dialogue will develop.

Each conversation will be approximately two hours in length. Leona would like to get together with you at least four times throughout the summer. In total the amount of time needed to participate in this project will be about eight (8) to ten hours. Leona hopes the interviews will happen at the Ktunaxa/Kinbasket Child and Family Services Office, your home or Chris Luke's home. As the time approaches the best and most convenient location will be determined.

I recognize the thesis topic Leona has chosen is very touchy and emotional. And intermingled within the project issues surrounding Leona's adoption may arise creating feelings of grief, loss and wonderment. To help alleviate any feelings of turmoil within the interview and relationship building process I want to inform you that the Sweatlodge is available to support you in your own spiritual and healing and cleansing process. As you know the Sweatlodge has been open to you in the past and it will remain available as Leona endeavors forward with her project.

There is a major issue that may come up during Leona's research project. Leona is writing this project from a personal standpoint. She will be using the pronoun "I" often. If people know who Leona is they may easily recognize who you are in relation to her life. Leona states that if you or any of the protection of all participants. In regards to third party identities such as other family members Leona has stated that all third party characters, events, details and

settings will be replaced with fictional nuances. Data cannot be masked in a way that assures confidentiality and thus may be detrimental to the third parties character will not be included within the thesis project. To ensure that the inadvertent defamation of character identities does not happen Leona is required to submit her final thesis project to the University of Victoria's Associate Vice President of Legal Affairs. The purpose of this process is to help protect the welfare of Leona, you and other potentially identifiable individuals.

Within the interview sessions Leona will tape-record the conversations. The taped-conversations between you and her will be confidential. Leona states she will not share the tape-recording with anyone else and that she will not put your name on the tape because she will use a coding system to identify the tape-conversations. Leona states she will transcribe the tape conversations into written data herself. After showing you the transcripts, and clarifying what she heard on the tape to be true. At this point in time if there is any information you wish not to be used within the written document you can point out and she assures she will not use it in any manner.

Leona states that once the thesis project is complete she will give it to you to read first. She will ask you for feedback and make any requested changes before she submits the final draft to her thesis committee members and the University of Victoria's Associate Vice President of Legal Affairs.

At any time you may request any data be deleted from the transcripts. Leona will take the taped conversations write an oral narrative story of you life. After completing the narrative story portion of the thesis she will go back to the data, analyzing and reflecting on it and identifying how your story interacts with the formation of Ktunaxa identity.

The final project writing will be written in a letter format to Leona's own Rachel Bach. The National IndianBrotherhood states "unless a child learns about the forces which shape him, the history of his people, their values and customs, their language, he will never know himself or his potential as a human being" (1972). It is with these words, Leona is encouraged to facilitate the process of giving her own daughter the opportunity to grow up having a clearer sense of who she is as a Ktunaxa woman. As Rachel grows into her young adulthood Leona intends to hive her this written thesis project as gift.

As stated earlier that tape recordings and data information will be for Leona's purposes only. NO ONE else will have access to the information. After Leona has completed transcribing the tape recordings into written data there is a decision you will need to make. As a researcher Leona needs to ensure that the tape-recorded interviews are not abused or misused. Thus, she has developed four options of what to do with the taped interviews, after they have been transcribed. Her ideas are as follows.

- Donate tape-recorded interview to the Ktunaxa/Kinbasket Archives
- Dispose of tape-recorded interview within your presence
- Keep tape-recorded interview herself, and you can decide what to do with it
- Give the tape-recorded interview to Leona as a family keepsake

Leona plans to discuss these options with you to determine which one you are most comfortable with after the transcribing is complete.

You must also be informed the final Thesis document will eventually be placed within the University of Victoria's Library as a public document and Leona hopes that her writing may

eventually be published as a book. Leona thinks there is a lack of writing that focuses on the adoption scoops and the interpersonal aspects of women's relationships and healing. Her vision is far off though and she is will discuss this with you in more detail when this dream becomes a reality.

As Leona closes this letter she needs to make it clear that you have the full rights and responsibility to terminate or withdraw from this project at any time. You have the right to clarify questions, share your thoughts and ask for information at any time. You have the right to clarify questions, share your thoughts and ask for information at any time throughout the research project. And that if you have any concerns regarding Leona's research, practice or capabilities as a student you may talk with her thesis committee members.

It has been stated that "Indians do not like to sign papers" and rightfully so due to our history in regards to broken treaties. I am requesting your signature though as to keep in the guidelines of the University of Victoria research policies. Your signature below signifies that you have read and understood this letter. At the same time you are making it known that you have understand your participation in this project and that you are able to withdraw at any time.