

wâcîkowiinînhk: Indigenous Identity Resurgence and Land Connectedness

By

Blaire Star Buffalo

BISW, First Nations University of Canada, 2016

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

MASTER OF SOCIAL WORK: INDIGENOUS SPECIALIZATION

In the Department of Social Work

©Blair Star Buffalo, 2024

University of Victoria

All rights reserved. This thesis may not be reproduced in whole or in part, by photocopy or other means, without the permission of the author.

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

## **Supervisory Committee**

Dr. Billie Allan, Supervisor  
School of Social Work

Dr. Jacquie Green, Committee Member  
School of Social Work

## **Abstract**

This thesis aims to shed light and support healing through an Indigenous story-sharing methodology. It is the re-searching of deeper knowledge and history to make known the identity and ancestral teachings specific to Plains Cree worldviews. Each nation has its own unique and distinguished identity; the people of Day Star were once called the Blue Hill people. This name was given to the people by the first signatory Chief and Prophet named Kīsikāwacāhk (Day Star). The knowledge gathered through this study will be used to modify a land-based healing initiative for women, children and families. The scope of the research is to revive kinship practices, cultural continuity, and Indigenous resurgence for myself, community members and future generations. As a member and re-searcher of the nation, I had become interested in knowing our identities and kinship practices by reconnecting to the people and land as an urban member. In this research, I had carried out a story-sharing methodology to do the research by gathering knowledge through my own experiences, interviews and witnessing to be applied in a decolonial approach. Through this research I intended to incorporate nêhiyawewin, ceremony and practices as much as possible while adhering to our traditional protocols.

## List of Figures

Figure 1: Indigenous Research Framework: pakitinikan kâ-ohpikihk.....	23
Figure 2: Day Star traditional lands and territory (wacihk) .....	45
Figure 3: Day Star traditional lands and territory (wacihk) .....	46
Figure 4: Day Star traditional lands and territory (wacihk) .....	47
Figure 5: Jingle Dance Dress, Day Star First Nation. Glenbow Museum .....	48

## Table of Contents

<i>Supervisory Committee</i> .....	<i>ii</i>
<i>Abstract</i> .....	<i>iii</i>
<i>List of Figures</i> .....	<i>iv</i>
<i>Table of Contents</i> .....	<i>v</i>
<i>Nêhiyawewin (Cree language) Glossary Terms</i> .....	<i>vii</i>
<i>Acknowledgements</i> .....	<i>ix</i>
<i>Dedication</i> .....	<i>xi</i>
<i>Chapter 1: Introduction</i> .....	<i>1</i>
1.1 Self-Location & Self in Relation.....	<i>4</i>
<i>Chapter 2: Literature Review</i> .....	<i>6</i>
2.1 Reconnection to the Land .....	<i>8</i>
2.2 Land-based Healing .....	<i>10</i>
2.3 wâhkôhtowin (kinship).....	<i>13</i>
2.4 Stories from the Land .....	<i>15</i>
2.5 Re-generational Healing .....	<i>16</i>
2.6 Nêhiyaw Identity.....	<i>17</i>
2.7 Conclusion.....	<i>18</i>
<i>Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework: pakatinika kê-ohpikihk</i> .....	<i>21</i>
3.1. Methodology: ‘omîsi etôtamiyit’ (this is the way) .....	<i>23</i>
3.2 Gathering the Relatives.....	<i>28</i>
Questions for the participants .....	<i>30</i>
3.3 Rebirth and Renewal.....	<i>32</i>
3.4 Coming Full Circle: Meaning-Making .....	<i>36</i>
<i>Chapter 4: Story-Sharing with wâcikowiyinînâhk</i> .....	<i>39</i>
4.1 Research Circle.....	<i>39</i>
4.2 Kiyohkâtowin - visiting one another.....	<i>40</i>
<i>Freda</i> .....	<i>40</i>
<i>Ray</i> .....	<i>42</i>
<i>Lloyd</i> .....	<i>48</i>
a). Prophecy, Visions and Dreams .....	<i>52</i>
<i>Charlie</i> .....	<i>53</i>
<i>Darren</i> .....	<i>58</i>
<i>Chapter 5: Connection to Land, Identity and Collective Consciousness</i> .....	<i>62</i>
5.1 Transitioning and the Spirit World .....	<i>65</i>
5.2 Being on the Land.....	<i>66</i>

<i>Chapter 6: Implications for Land-Based Healing and Social Work</i> .....	69
6.1 UNDRIP .....	69
6.2. Calls to Action.....	70
6.3 Calls for Justice .....	70
6.4 Treaty and Inherent Rights.....	71
6.5 Implications for Helpers/Social Workers.....	72
<i>Chapter 7: Closing the Circle</i> .....	74
7.1 Land-based Healing as Sovereignty.....	74
7.2 Strengths, Limitations and Challenges.....	75
7.3 Closing in Ceremony: Acknowledging our Ancestors/Creator.....	77
7.4 Conclusion.....	79
<i>References</i> .....	82
<i>Appendix 1: Consent Form</i> .....	87

## **Nêhiyawewin (Cree language) Glossary Terms**

askīy – land

iskwêwak – women

kêhtê-ayak – elders

Kichi-Manito – Great Spirit

kîhkosimowin – fasting

Kîsikāwacāhk – Day Star

kisiskâciwan – swift flowing river

kiskêyihtamowin – knowledge, experience, learning

kinanâskomitin – thank you, I am grateful

kiyâm – let it be

kiyokâtowin – visiting one another

mikâsowin – process of finding ones belonging

miyo-atisōwin – balance

miyo-pimâtisiwin – good life

miyo-wicehtowin - as having or possessing good relations

nanatawihitowin – act of healing

nîkân sihcikewin – protocol

nitānis – my daughter

nêhiyawewin – Cree language

nêhiyâwiwin-itâpisiniwin – Cree worldview; literally, “a Cree viewpoint”.

nimosôm – my grandfather

nipêyakôskân – my family

nôhkom, nôhkomak – my grandmother(s).

nôsisim – my grandchild

ohcinêwin - breaking laws against other than a human being

okāwīmāw – mother

oskâpêwis – elder’s helper or apprentice

ospwâkan – pipe

paskwâwiyiniw – Plains Cree

pāstāhowin – breaking laws against humans

sîpîhkowacîhk - Blue Hill

wâcîkowiyyinînhk – Blue Hill/Mountain People

tâpwêwin – truth

wâhkôhtowin – kinship

wêhko mitowin - feast

wêpinâson – ceremonial cloth used as an offering

wîcîhk - hill

Wîsahkecâhk – a Cree trickster

## Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to give thanks to the Creator for making this thesis a reality, my Helpers and Ancestors who have guided me along the way. As well as the lands, medicines and ceremonies that have been helpers along this grounding and spiritual journey of Indigenous research.

I would like to give thanks to the Chief and Council of Day Star First Nation of Treaty no. 4 territory. Elder George Laliberte and Eileen Cuthand who had lifted their pipes for this work. The Elders, Knowledge Holders (Lloyd, Ray, Freda, Chester, Charlie, Darren) who had agreed to participate in the research, your words and knowledge sharing has truly grounded me personally and professionally. I want to thank Touchwood Post-Secondary program, I am forever grateful for financing me through my education as well as the many successful research grants.

If it weren't for my two beautiful, amazing daughters, Mikaiiah and Adawnis, and our journey together, I would not have the motivation to complete this study. Without them, and our future generations, I would not be carrying out this work. As they have taught me my greatest lessons throughout my life, they are the reason behind everything. Thank you for your understanding and patience, above all, your love at the times I needed it most. They've been my greatest inspiration to keep moving forward.

I want to express my gratitude to my mother Rhonda, who has always been my main source of support in all situations. She is my matriarch and has been my rock of support and strength from the very beginning. In terms of family, love, and support, she embodies all of what this work truly means. I'm forever grateful for the strong women in my life; my late kokum Joan "Second Call of Thunder" who was called home in 2020, while I was working through this study. These strong women have instilled the value of education and prayer in me since I was a young child. I wouldn't be the woman I am today if it weren't for them and witnessing them conquer anything.

Chester Kinequon, my father, who has helped me with this work from the very beginning. For always answering yes to my requests. When I told him I wanted to pursue this endeavour, he gave me advice, helped me all the way through, offering prayers, organizing ceremonies and telling me stories over food or tea at the table. We were able to genuinely mend our connection through this work, and for that I am blessed. You have been an incredible help throughout this journey; you have no idea how much it has helped to heal and rebuild our connection.

Dr. Jacquie Green and Dr. Billie Allan, who serve as my thesis committee member and supervisor. I truly appreciate your belief and support of this work, for the paths you have made and the knowledge medicine you carry. As well as the guidance you have given to your students from your hearts. Dr. Billie Allan, if it hadn't been for your class that lit this fire, I never would have considered thesis work. Continue sowing such seeds in the minds of your students. Thank you for everything you've done, your kind words, your prayers, and the space you shared with me. Dr. Michael Hart, my external reviewer, it was an honour to have you share your expertise and take part of this journey.

I would want to express my gratitude to everyone who helped me during this process, including my family, my brothers and sisters, my ceremonial/prayer family, and everyone else who helped when I most needed the support, and encouragement, you were all there along the way.

I see you and I have so much love for you all.

Kinanâskomitinâwâw

## **Dedication**

**I dedicate this thesis to my kokum Joan Vera Buffalo (Second Call of Thunder). My Ancestors who have led and guided me through this journey and our generations yet to be born.**

## Chapter 1: Introduction

Indigenous peoples have always had our own ways of knowing and being when it comes to (w)holistic and culturally relevant approaches to healing and wellbeing. Indigenous peoples have a relationship and connection to the land, water and cosmos since time immemorial; these relationships were disconnected due to colonization and assimilation policies. On September 15, 1874, Treaty no. 4 was signed with Chief Kīsikāwacāhk (Day Star) amongst 13 other signatory Chiefs in what is now called “Saskatchewan”, which comes from the word “kisiskāciwan” and means “swift-flowing river” (Wolvengray, n.d.). I want to acknowledge that the history of the signing of the treaties is contentious, suggesting that there is both oral and written material of the treaties by non-Indigenous people. It is indicated that there is no proof that all the chiefs were present and had in fact signed the treaties and that some had touched the pen and a clerk had marked an X on their behalf (McLeod, 2007, p. 37). Within the spirit and intent of the treaties, is to live in a nation-to-nation relationship while adhering to our natural laws that have governed our systems from time immemorial. The role of leader Chief Day Star carried during the treaty-making process has been bound by the lifting of the ospwākan (pipe). I would like for this paper to reflect the life he had envisioned for his people and for future generations.

Chief Day Star had referred to his people as the wācīkowiinīnāhk (Blue Hill/Mountain People), named after a hill on the land on the north side of where the current reserve sits (Miller et al., 2019). The story of how Chief Day Star selected the land for his people was through a vision which had come to him while fasting and praying on top of the Blue Hill. According to Miller et al. (2019), Blue Hill was “a place where they spent a lot of their time ‘kīhkosimowin’ (fasting). Chief Day Star would leave the people to go fast there for many days. He would come back and tell the people what the Creator showed him. He talked about education being

important and the one thing that is going to be needed” (p. 49). Through ceremonies, our Ancestors prophesied changes that were going to take place on our lands and what our people would have to adapt to. Throughout those changes, Indian Act policies came into place that impacted lifeways not only for our community, but also oppressed Indigenous peoples across the lands of what is now called Canada. Throughout this research, I want to shed light on ancestral teachings to help others who have been disconnected from their homelands and to help share these teachings, for generations to come. The act of repatriation and the interweaving of education could be a fulfillment of the vision sent directly from the Creator when Chief Day Star fasted and prayed for his people on the traditional lands of sîpîhkowacîhk (Blue Hill).

Due to resurveying of the land, Blue Hill is no longer a part of Day Star First Nation traditional lands and territory. We are Plains Cree people but what makes us distinct from any other Plains Cree is that we are wâcîkowiynînhâhk (Blue Hill/Mountain People). The people of the community have said that the dialect is slightly different from other nêhiyawak as well as a different accent (Dillon Consulting, 2012). My thesis research helps to shine light on this land dispossession and how it has impacted myself and my community. I have discerned that I didn't choose this topic, this topic chose me and led me to the research question: **How does the revitalization of the relationship to the land support Indigenous identity, and resurgence of Plains Cree women, children and families of Day Star First Nation?**

As stated in the Merriam Webster dictionary, revitalization is the action of imbuing something with new life and vitality (n.d.). Resurgence is to rise into life, activity or prominence. Another word for resurgence is rebirth (Merriam-Webster. n.d.) I had formulated this research question, that would best mould the needs of my own identity, my family, community members and future generations. I am hopeful for younger generations to take this

study to learn from, expand on it and perhaps clarify any information that is necessary. The reason I have included only women, children and families in the research question is because of my own self being as a woman, I was not given the rights to speak on behalf of the men and boys. I do want to include that we as Indigenous nations, we must restore the miyo-atisōwin (balance) within our families and communities and with that taken into consideration, throughout the research, the intention is to balance roles of men and women within our systems of governance, communities and nations.

This research aims to contribute towards the creation of an Indigenous land-based healing model rooted in a nêhiyaw worldview to support healing for women, children and families in the Treaty 4 area of Saskatchewan. To bring healing to a nation, we must heal as a community. As Indigenous people, we must reconnect to the relationship we have had with our wâhkôhtowin (kinship), by not turning others away, which in my view, is the foundation of land-based healing. This practice of our natural law of wâhkôhtowin (kinship) is necessary to define then restore resurgence, revitalization and decolonization in our communities. As Simpson (2017) writes, our ways and belief systems were about relationships and being inclusive to everyone. When we talk about being relational and decolonization, we need to include and create space for our 2-Spirit relatives and encourage our people to start having gender inclusive lodges and ceremonies by creating space to rebuild a sovereign nation. To return to the spirit of identity and belonging, we must return to 'relationship to the land' we had/have as Indigenous peoples. This also means returning to the relationships we had with all beings on Mother Earth and to each other. It was colonization that created division and separated us from our true identities as Indigenous peoples. I have relied on the spirit and intent of the research process to lead and guide me throughout this process. I will interweave my own journey in this research through the witnessing of stories with

people from the ask̄y (land) of Day Star First Nation within Treaty 4 territory. The knowledge and research gathered through this research support the revitalization and reconnection to the land; in this Baskin states (2005) “[a]n agenda for Aboriginal research must focus on goals and processes of decolonization and self-determination” (p.174). My goals are that the stories will re-connect to our identities as urban Indigenous peoples to make informed decisions to develop programs that are healing to ourselves, families and community.

### **1.1 Self-Location & Self in Relation**

Sinclair (as cited in Absolon, 2005) states, “the purpose of location in Aboriginal research is to make visible who we are, where we come from, our experiences that have shaped those things and our intentions for the work we plan to do. Hence, “location” in Indigenous research, as in life, is a critical starting point” (p. 106). Social location and self-reflexivity are the beginning points in research, knowing who we are as Indigenous peoples and who we are as helpers. The land and Indigenous peoples have a reciprocal relationship to each other; the land is critical to understanding our identities. This research is a story of Indigenous revitalization, resurgence and cultural continuity; it aims to clear the path for leaders, stakeholders, communities, Indigenous women and families to support reconnection to the land, healing, self-belonging and Indigeneity. It has been my intention and part of my life’s journey to return to my home community to help restore a part of my identity that has been held stagnant. It is my own Spirit and Helpers who have been guiding me through this research.

My own sense of self was challenged throughout this research as I experienced my own vulnerability as an individual and a researcher. I distanced myself from my home community due to the dysfunction and trauma that had taken place in my own life. I have been relocated from my community for the past 21 years. In recent years, I became interested in our ways of knowing

more about what is happening in my community in regard to First Nations data governance for child welfare, health, and wellness. In my spare time, I do enjoy visiting and being on the land. When nôhkum (my grandmother) was alive, I considered her house to be my safe space as it was where I would go when I was fleeing an abusive relationship. Before beginning my research, I didn't know a lot of people who lived in the community anymore and knew that many of the elders were making their journey home to the Spirit World. I didn't know who I was going to connect to and relied on my Helpers, the book *Kīīkōwāhchakōos: Day Star People Speak, Past and Present*, and a few family members who I hoped would believe in the spirit and intent of this research. Although I have been away from our home for such a long time, the desire for 'coming to know' has been with me all this time, and I am committed to returning home to work with my people to re-learn connection to land in an effort to strengthen identity. Even though I've been away, I do have the desire to return home and work for my own people and community one day.

To overcome generational cycles, I have learned that going within ourselves is a way of seeking understanding to who we are and what was generationally passed onto us. Transforming generational cycles is something that requires looking deep within ourselves and healing inner wounds. Learning about my own self and identity through this research has set a solid foundation of awareness and deeper levels of understanding who I am as an individual and from the territory and lands of Blue Hill. It has ultimately led me to evolve into a whole other level of being. As helpers we can only take others as far as our own healing and understanding; with this in mind, I can only take others as deep as my own inner healing work and level of understanding of my own identity. However, I can only act as the messenger and guide to others, in hopes they will grasp it in their own connection and in their own realization of what it means to come full circle.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

Traditionally, Plains Cree peoples moved freely across their expansive territories and followed the buffalo to sustain themselves. When the buffalo were intentionally targeted for eradication (leading to near extinction) as part of colonial tactics, leaders of each nation had to surrender into treaty agreements because many of their people went into starvation including the children and elders. In 1885, the Pass system was introduced to segregate Indigenous peoples on reserves. According to *The Pass System* documentary (Williams, 2015), Indigenous peoples in Treaties no. 4, 6 and 7 needed permission from the Indian Agents to leave their reserves and this Pass system was in place for over 60 years. Many nations were displaced from their traditional lands and territories due to the railroad being built and lands being cut off from original surveys, a form of colonial violence “accomplished through unethical treaty making” (Simpson, 2017, p. 41). Loss of land base has caused grief and loss, dispossession and displacement from traditional lands and territories that will also be examined further as I delve into this research.

Disconnection from our traditional lands and territories meant disconnection of language, culture, family and community: as the Aboriginal Healing Foundation (2005) stated; “in the context of residential schooling, ‘killing the Indian’ meant dis-connecting children physically, emotionally, mentally and spiritually from their language, culture and their communities and also, but most painfully, from their own sense of identity as being Indian”. According to Statistics Canada (2019), Indigenous people have three times higher rates of suicide, mental health and addictions than non-Indigenous peoples. Patterson and Moriarity (2021) state that “this rate can be linked to the effects of intergenerational trauma caused by residential schools, oppression of Indigenous peoples within Canadian institutions, the effects of colonization and on-going violence against Indigenous peoples” (para. 7). I am interested in how we heal

ourselves, our identities and our kinship by reconnecting to the land. As such, I chose to gather and examine literature related to land-based healing using the search parameters described below.

I chose to examine literature related to land-based healing in a 10-year period from 2012 – 2021 including reconnection to land and identity, kinship, cultural continuity and healing. The reason for this specific period of time is because I want to know what is currently being addressed in regard to land-based healing for Indigenous peoples. I was interested in what healing is available for women and children, where are the healing places located and how these places of healing are being financially sustained. My search started through various online databases including University of Victoria Library, University of Saskatchewan Indigenous Studies Portal, University of Toronto, Google Scholar and on Google search. Some of the key terms when searching out my proposed research topic on Google Scholar and Google Search were; ‘land-based healing’, ‘Indigenous identity’, ‘land resurgence’, ‘Indigenous land displacement and dispossession’. The literature I gathered from University of Victoria library search portal using the key words ‘Indigenous’ and in interconnectedness of ‘land-based resurgence’, ‘language’ and ‘spirituality’. In the University of Saskatchewan Indigenous Search Portal (iPortal) I used key words ‘Indigenous’, ‘healing, and ‘land-based healing’. In addition, two books I used throughout the research that were critical to my learning, titled *Posâkanacîwiyiniwak: nitaskînân: The Touchwood Hills People, Our Land* (Miller et al., 2019) and *Kîsîkôwâhchakôos: Day Star People Speak, Past and Present* (Dillon Consulting, 2012).

The literature I had chosen only includes Indigenous scholars and worldviews across Canada and United States; specifically for my re-search, Indigenous scholarship is relevant to knowledge of the relationship to the land, land-based healing, self-identity, belonging, kinship,

reclamation and revitalization of Indigenous knowledges. There has been a substantial increase of Indigenous scholars that are bringing forth land teachings, histories and ceremonies through literature to inform nations, communities and organizations in addressing policy and practices. It was crucial for me to concentrate on Indigenous scholarship in order to have an understanding of the research that has been done and the current state of Indigenous knowledge and land-based healing. I wanted to highlight the expertise and significant work that has been done in other Indigenous communities with recognition of the sacred knowledge and key topics that can only be held adequately by Indigenous peoples. I chose to highlight the work unfolding in Indigenous communities over the last ten years and identified the following six key themes that emerged through my review of the literature on the topic of land-based healing: 1) reconnection to land; 2) land-based healing; 3) revitalization of wâhkôhtowin (kinship); 4) stories from the land; 5) re-generational healing; and 6) nêhiyaw identity. I explore each of these themes in the sections to follow.

## **2.1 Reconnection to the Land**

On the topic of reconnecting to land and identity, studies have shown that there has been some success in the healing of self-identity by returning to ways of land through land-based life skills, ceremonies and ancestral knowledge. I found three extensive studies of land-based healing initiatives in the United States and Northern Canada. Johnson Jennings et al. (2020) conducted a study called ‘Returning to our Roots’ addressing land-based healing in the United Houma Nation. The study was done as a pilot project aimed to support health promotion and wellbeing of Houma women in Louisiana and the findings assert “that land can serve as a feasible therapeutic site for healing through reconnecting Houma tribal citizens to both ancestral knowledges, stories of resilience, as well as viewing self as part of a larger collective” (p. 1). In

the context of the Cherokee Nation “Educate to perpetuate: Land-based Pedagogies and Community Resurgence” study utilized a qualitative methodology, participatory action research (PAR) and an insurgent research approach with the youth of the Cherokee nation in the United States. Describing the research, Corntassel and Hardbarger (2019) identify important implications that relate to community health and wellbeing. For example, community resurgence from an Indigenous youth lens is at the forefront of the study and the research itself focused on Indigenous notions of sustainability for future generations. Youth participants shared their perspectives in this study through storytelling, photovoice and sharing circles. In my analysis, both studies illustrate that there are three key themes that emerged from the data: responsibility to honour the ancestors through cultural continuance, family relationships and communal values, and relationship to the land and water (Corntassel & Hardbarger, 2019, pp. 98-99; Johnson Jennings et al., 2020).

In “The Land is a Healer”, Redvers (2020) examines land-based healing aimed at supporting mental health and wellness promotion from perspectives of Indigenous practitioners in northern Canada (including Northwest Territories, Yukon, and Nunavut). Like Corntassel and Hardbarger (2019), the Redvers study was based in a storytelling methodology, thus creating a voice for Indigenous youth throughout the research. The objectives of land-based healing were focused on mental health and wellness promotion. According to Redvers (2020), evaluations in their study demonstrated that land-based programs increase resilience and wellness in youth by improving self-esteem, interpersonal relationships and cultural pride. Redvers (2020) suggests that the nuances of reclaiming and putting forth land-based practices for youth promoted well-being and healing for many Indigenous identities, all of which encourages (w)holistic and culturally relevant approaches. Accordingly, she notes that “all practitioners indicated that a

‘land-based program’ ultimately promotes healing and wellness regardless of its disciplinary origins” (p. 95). All studies related to the wellbeing of women and youth of different tribe affiliations in United States and Northern Canada and their collective findings suggest that further research is needed to determine if long term transformations exist particularly for the women and youth. It would also be beneficial to know within current research if findings will be integrated into land-based healing programs, healing centres or systems of governance in support of revitalizing the relationship to the land to support Indigenous identity resurgence of Indigenous women and families across Turtle Island.

## **2.2 Land-based Healing**

Indigenous peoples are exerting our inherent right to bring back ways of healing of our nations through ‘reconnection to the land’. There are many land-based healing camps and programs being put forward across Turtle Island for youth and adults. Furthermore, every healing camp or program is unique as they all follow their own traditional ways of knowing, being and doing. Hansen (2012 as cited in Milligan, 2019) wrote the definition of land-based healing as cited in the report on “Indigenous Land-Based Healing in Canada”:

A health or healing program or service that takes place in a non-urban, rural or remote location on a land base that has been intentionally spiritually cultivated to ensure the land is honoured and respected. The land is understood to be an active host and partner to the people engaged in the healing process. The cultivation of a land base under the stewardship of First Nation people is usually done through the development of an intimate spirit-based relationship through ceremony, offerings, expression of gratitude and requests for permission from the land to enter and use it for healing purposes (p. 8).

The definition above does set the tone of what land-based healing is, I believe that land-based healing must be done in a secluded area, or as we say ‘out in the bush’, where we do many of our ceremonies. Many of our ceremonies take place in remote and clean areas, where there is not much access from the general population. For urban people, many do not have access to attending ceremony or being on the land. As Indigenous people, it is from our bloodline that we have a connection to the land, and this becomes activated when we are immersed in the land. The land is a living spirit and being, it knows who we are, it knows our intent. And when we make our offerings to it, it connects us to the spiritual world, it works on our behalf.

In a scoping review of Indigenous land-based healing programs, Milligan (2016) identified 11 programs across Canada, including several locations of Nunavut, two in Quebec, Newfoundland, and Labrador, and one of each in the Yukon and British Columbia (p. 11). However, from these programs, there is very limited amount of land-based healing programs across Canada, with no data of long-term results. Many treatment centres do not offer the support or after-care for youth, individuals and families who return to the cities once they complete treatment. Some are placed back into the same environment they came from and therefore are at risk of relapse. It is important to know that there is a high demand for healing programs that are specific to the needs of the diverse Indigenous nations across Canada. A large number of Indigenous families are desiring for cultural and holistic approaches to healing that are not continuously provided by westernized methods.

According to the article titled “Land based healing offers treatment program for youth rooted in Indigenous culture” by Patterson and Moriarity (2021), the program they offer is a place where Indigenous youth start a healing journey by reconnecting to and renewing their relationship with the land. The program is the only land-based healing treatment in northern

Quebec and the only bilingual youth treatment centre in the province; the youth who attend the program are battling addiction and mental health challenges. Indigenous healing camps are increasingly in demand in Indigenous communities as there are not enough treatment centres for those impacted by the generational effects of trauma, mental health and addictions. According to the authors, there is an extensive waitlist for youth to begin treatment because of demand. There is a high need for land-based healing resources for Indigenous communities in all areas and for all ages. Patterson and Moriarity (2021) state that, “[l]and-based healing programs and practices are increasingly becoming safe spaces for Indigenous youth and other community members” (para. 12).

A recent CBC News article described a 30-day Indigenous Treatment Program for mothers on the Poundmaker First Nation (Brace, 2021). This article was a significant finding as there are very few published studies or evaluations of land-based healing camps for women specifically in Saskatchewan in the past 10 years. The camp was intended for mothers struggling with substance use who are working towards reuniting with their children due to child welfare involvement. The camp was supported by the Ahtahkakoop Child and Family Services in Saskatchewan and, according to the article, seven mothers completed the thirty-day camp. During the camp, the women were given their traditional names in ceremony and were taught traditional teachings such as medicine picking, beading, ribbon skirt making and traditional parenting (Brace, 2021). Although this article is significant, there is no sufficient qualitative or quantitative data included in the article, and no voices of the women who attended the treatment program. However, the article does mention that there have been some success stories that had evolved from the camp (Brace, 2021). Similar findings in the articles by Johnson-Jennings et al. (2021) suggest that from an Indigenous lens, the introduction to land-based practices may encourage healthy and

positive behavioural changes by reconnecting to the way our ancestors who once lived and practiced ceremony, however more research is needed to determine if these behavioural changes are sustained in the long-term. While further studies are needed on the effectiveness of the camp, there is a strong emphasize that more research is needed for land-based healing specific for women and families in Saskatchewan that will enhance and inform this re-search I am embarking on. These articles indicate that sustainable funding for land-based healing initiatives and related research and evaluation is required to assist in validating the long-term effectiveness of the healing demonstrated through land-based efforts to date.

In the article “Land Based Healing: I do not own the land, the land owns me”, the late Cree author Harold Johnson-pan (2021) spoke about “Camp Hope”, located on the Montreal Lake Cree Nation in Saskatchewan. According to Johnson-pan (2021), the success rate of land-based healing at Camp Hope is 70 percent whereas, western world therapies for substance use disorders typically have success rates around 2 to 5 percent and Alcoholics Anonymous and twelve-step faith-based therapies have success rates closer to 8 percent (p. 1). Unfortunately, the article does not indicate where this research data had come from or offer further details about the description of the camp and how it is operated. Despite these limitations, this article provided important information. For example, the article describes when clients reconnect to the land, they find out who they are, where they belong and their birthright to the land. Participants are taken back to the land to learn how to reconnect and work through their trauma. Johnson-pan (2021) stated that “when people know who they are and where they belong, their essence increases. Land-based healing is a resurrection. It brings our people back to life by reconnecting them to the life force of the planet” (p. 1).

### **2.3 wâhkôhtowin (kinship)**

Indigenous people know that we are all interconnected when we speak about identity; interconnectedness generally means we are speaking about relationships with the land and with everything around us. Everything is believed to have a spirit, therefore, when we speak about the reconnection to land, we must include the importance of relationships to all living things. Our beliefs were embedded into relational ties we had with one another as we faced challenges together as a community and decisions were based on what was best for the community, our children and future generations. Connection of our kinship systems and relationships were severed due to residential schools. Clark et al. (2021), guide us through their creative practice which involves connecting to community and landscape, and uncovering mikâsowin and wâhkôhtowin: belonging and kinship (p. 2). Cardinal and Hildebrand (2000, as cited in Clark et al., 2021) describe “mikâsowin as a process of finding ones belonging” (p.1), while Clark et al. (2021) note that Elders describe mikâsowin as “locating oneself within the circle” (Clark et al., 2021, p.2). The re-generation of relationship and kinship lies within the relationships to further understand our identities with all of creation.

Simpson (2017) states “healing and regeneration of relationships involves ceremony and truth; these are all aspects given by the Creator” (p. 92). In line with Simpson’s work, I believe that research about identity and land connectedness cannot be done without the spirit being involved throughout the process. Indigenous research is ceremony, especially when it is about land and identity. This has been shown to me over and over again while in this research process. It is the Creator, Ancestors and the spirit of the land and all its beings that need to be requested for this guidance. Corntassel and Hardbarger (2019) write that the act of ceremony is ultimately tied to the physical landscape in a multitude of ways, while Clark et al. (2021) state that the land acts as a facilitator of the healing process and the regeneration of wâhkôhtowin. In Clark et al.

(2021), Moe Clark shares her process of how she explores Indigenous identity by re-establishing her relationship to the land, kinship, and those we share Mother Earth with through creative practices as part of her path to healing and wellbeing. Each of the authors document their approach to connection to Indigenous self-identity, self-growth and self-healing through ancestral knowledge and practices that are based within land-based approaches to healing. More studies related to familial ties are necessary in the current literature presented, as this research is intended for generational healing of kinship ties that were broken due to assimilation policies.

The important tasks of my study are to revitalize the connection to land, ceremony and kinship that was embedded into our systems and our ways of being as Indigenous peoples. As Indigenous peoples, it is our responsibility to take ownership of our inherent rights, self-determination and sovereignty. In the research to follow, I plan to take this ownership of our healing by sharing stories, reclaiming our identities, belief systems and practices through an Indigenous epistemology and story-sharing methodology. Neal McCleod (2017) states “Cree narrative emerges from the worldview and spirituality of the Cree people and is grounded in the names of both ancestors and places. It is through our connections to storytellers and k̄h̄t̄-ayak (elders) that we can access this ancient collective memory. Cree narrative memory is ongoing, and is sustained through relationships, respect and responsibility” (McLeod, p. 18, 2017).

## **2.4 Stories from the Land**

In Simpson’s (2017) *As we have always done*, she states the land was an integral part of our being and identity. Simpson (2017) articulates that she didn’t seek out catastrophe or crisis-based stories to learn how to rebuild, but instead sought out creative energies, continual processes that bring forth more life and more creation and more thinking. Simpson (2017) states, “these are the systems we need to recreate” (p. 24). As a researcher seeking out stories that have

deeper knowledge and require deeper understanding, Simpson's states that Indigenous people who have identified storying as imperative work, we will continue to seek stories of deeper knowledge, meaning and understanding of what our true identities, beliefs and lifeways are.

Jobin (as cited in Kermoal and Altamirano-Jiménez, 2016) shares that although her grandmother was forcefully assimilated through the residential school system, she understood the need to protect and reclaim the knowledge that she had held onto by her ancestors. By doing so, "her knowledge was passed down and weaved into five generations of women in her family, this in itself was 'an act of resistance to assimilation, one that insists on the importance of collective narrative memory'" (p. 52). Both Jobin and Simpson argue that despite the assimilation done to our families, communities, and nations; it is the teachings through stories that are going to intertwine the legacy of the ancestors with ourselves, our children and our babies yet to be born. Despite what was done towards Indigenous peoples, the sharing of stories is the way to emerge Indigenous knowledge to revitalize our relationships with each other. As an Indigenous researcher, I will act as the knowledge gatherer to share with my kin to assist them in their own journeys of land connectedness, belonging and regeneration of kinship ties.

## **2.5 Re-generational Healing**

In "Land as a pedagogy", Simpson (2017) states that, "my uncle as well as knowledge keeper invested more time in my spiritual, emotional, and intellectual education than anyone else in my life. Yet the land knowledge is completely unrecognized, unsupported, and disregarded by academic institutions" (p. 167). Re-generational healing is understanding that land-based healing knowledge is yet to be understood and accepted as a way of healing for Indigenous people. Moreover, it is necessary to learn and understand so that programs and communities can attain sustainable funding from the Canadian government. Sustainable funding for healing initiatives

has been an ongoing debate with government officials as they continuously deny funding for women and children that require fundamental resources.

The impact of intergenerational trauma continues to emerge in society which causes further overrepresentation within systems such as child welfare and is also evident in the epidemic of Missing and Murdered Indigenous women, girls, 2 Spirit, boys and men, and high incarceration rates, violence, suicide and addictions. However, many Indigenous peoples are clearing pathways for others to create more land-based healing camps specific to the needs of their communities. Re-generational healing reflects forward thinking through the reclamation of traditional teachings so that families can heal and find a higher state in consciousness of self-identity; reclaiming identity is in itself a demonstration of the most foundational act in resistance. A vision of healing and self-identity is what has been placed on my heart and spirit to pursue for our communities and nations.

## **2.6 Nêhiyaw Identity**

*Kīsīkōwāhchakōos: Day Star People Speak, Past and Present* is about a research project carried out with the people of Day Star First Nation in 2012 (Dillon Consulting, 2012). The book reflects stories from different focus groups which consisted of elders and community members and covered traditional stories and traditional ways of life for the community of Day Star First Nation and, has acted as a guide during my own research. The people and stories in the book gave me direction on where to begin, people to contact and places I needed to visit.

*Posâkanacîweyiniwak: nitaskînân: The Touchwood Hills people: Our land* was another research project done in 2018 with the 4 communities of Day Star, Kawacatoose, George Gordon and Muskowekwan which are all surrounded by the Touchwood Hills area of Saskatchewan (Miller et al., 2019). The book shares stories about the history of Day Star, the land and its people. These

books were both done as research projects in partnerships with Dillon Consulting, Saskatchewan Indigenous Cultural Centre and First Nations University of Canada. Unfortunately, the books do not go into further detail of what I wanted to know about the traditional lands of Blue Hill in regard to the relationship it has with the people of the community. I wanted to know more from Knowledge Holders on what their perspectives are on the research questions I had proposed in regards to healing through land identity for families, women and children.

## **2.7 Conclusion**

The findings of the literature review affirm that the need for and importance of land-based healing is substantial when it comes to the many different nations across Turtle Island. As Simpson (2017) articulates, the spirit and intent of land resurgence in Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg worldviews, I would like to bring forward the spirit and intent of a nêhiyâwiwin-itâpisiniwin (Cree worldview) from a perspective of the Blue Hill People. Clark et al. (2021) spoke about the emergence of pathways to a greater consciousness through the awakening of culture and healing, while Jobin (as cited in Kermoal & Altamirano-Jiménez, 2016) stated that the passing down of Indigenous women's knowledge through stories is an act of resistance. Consequently, it is my desire to utilize my proposed research in support of kinship ties and land resurgence in the nêhiyaw worldview in the territories of Saskatchewan through ceremony and story-sharing.

My research focuses on paskwâwiyiniw (Plains Cree) laws and worldviews, which is what makes this research significant. This research is a reclamation of a shared history and a centring of what is needed for the women and families in the area. The current research literature is mainly focused on youth and adults, and I would like to envision more familial involvement throughout the process through the community and nation. Based on my review of the literature, I would recommend more studies to promote family-orientated programs in land-based healing.

Here in Saskatchewan, there is a need for sustainable land-based healing programs that will address the root causes of addictions, mental health, and intergenerational trauma specifically for families. There is currently no data available on land-based healing initiatives for families on Treaty 4 land. This thesis research is intended to contribute towards the rematriation and recreation of traditional land-based healing systems through ceremony that will benefit generations to come. Our children and young people need to understand the teachings of the land so that it can be passed onto future generations. This multi-generational work, along with ceremonial work and spiritedness, is the essence of Indigenous research that I have carried with me throughout the process, and I recognize this is as what makes Indigenous research unique and significant.

As Indigenous peoples, we must learn to reconnect to the land through ancestral knowledge, traditional kinship practices and ceremonial ways of life. Indigenous peoples always had a close relationship with the land, water and believed everything is interconnected. Being interconnected, the stories can be used and adapted into our own programs, systems and governance. Traditionally, our customs and laws have governed our nations such as having our own societies, these traditional systems can be incorporated into our own governing bodies to reclaim sovereignty and revitalization of traditional governance systems such as incorporating matriarchal tribunals, Indigenous birth and death doulas, rites of passage ceremonies that aim towards restoring our traditional roles. This research aimed to connect to others through *nêhiyaw* worldviews and *wâhkôhtowin* (kinship) practices, such as *kiyokâtowin* (visiting one another), sharing food and tea, sitting in ceremony, gift giving, being on the land as well as various other practices that has been done throughout the process. The research has led both myself as the researcher and participants involved to regenerate relationships through knowledge and truth; as

Simpson (2017) states, this is done through ceremony, and therefore is an embodiment of collective resurgence.

### **Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework: pakatinika kâ-ohpikihk**

I chose to delve deeper into the concept of pakatinika kâ-ohpikihk (a seed growing) as my theoretical framework. Pakatinika kâ-ohpikihk takes place when there is a seed such as a thought, idea, or a word that is implanted and given a life form. Once it is planted, nourished and cared for it will be given life and grow or evolve into a tree, plant, flower or even a human being. It is also how I would like to honour the life stages of the past, present and future. Kovach (2021) states that Indigenous research frameworks require a purpose statement about one's own self-location and worldview, and that this meant honouring the kôkoms and mosôms by remembering them. Furthermore, Kovach also states that "knowing why we are carrying out research – our motive – has the potential to take us to places that involve both the head and heart" (p. 150). I will begin by sharing a story of how this framework has been developed and how it had manifested into my own process of this research.

In August 2022, I attended a Traditional Health Gathering on Treaty 4 Territory; it was happening at Fort Qu'Appelle Saskatchewan at the same location where the treaties were signed in 1874. There were many different sessions, I attended the traditional midwifery session, where we sat in a tipi with other women, mothers and grandmothers. I sat and listened to everyone and chatted with the other women when the session was over. An older kokum had approached me and said to come to her tipi, that she would teach me all of this and how to take care of these little ones as she pointed to one of the baby's being carried by his mother. I remember what she had shared during the circle which resonated with me, she said when you are in the room while a baby is being born, it is just you, the mother and Creator. Ultimately, this told me that this is the most sacred work to be done on Earth. She said that the babies remember her as they get older, that they will smile at her. I did not attend the session afterwards. I knew that I would need to

come to her with an offering in Creator's divine timing. I left there feeling as if this is what my spirit needed.

I began to think that this kôkum who I just met was wanting to openly share this knowledge with me at the same time while I was struggling with my thesis and getting my research off the ground. I started to feel a disconnect when I thought about my research and how I should have chosen traditional midwifery as a topic because it is very close to my heart. It was difficult to accept this struggle, and I couldn't help but feel a deep sense of regret, it was at that moment I started to feel these intense emotions. As I was driving home, I started to receive messages in my Spirit telling me that I am closer to this topic than I thought. It started telling me that this research is like the process of giving birth. It's comparable to feeling the emotions of concern, worry, anxiousness and curiosity. When researching, you will need to ask yourself how are you going to take care of it (the research)? Are you going take care of it as we have done traditionally? In terms of how do you want to nourish it as it goes through the growth process? It is to think positive thoughts as you would for an unborn child being carried in a womb. Or are you going to take care of it in a westernized sense? In a western system there are all types of methods and procedures that are not going to fit well when it is delivered into this world. By taking care of it traditionally, you will need to put down tobacco, make offerings, take it to ceremony and sacrifice. Ask the Ancestors and Creator what it needs to be nourished with for it to grow. Once the research has been birthed it will be given the most beautiful life that you have ever imagined. After this moment, I had felt better about what I was doing. It's been years since I experienced an epiphany like this. I also thought it happened because I was back on my own homeland and territory. I wanted to be home.

---

## *Pakitinikan kâ-ohpikihk 'a seed growing'*

---

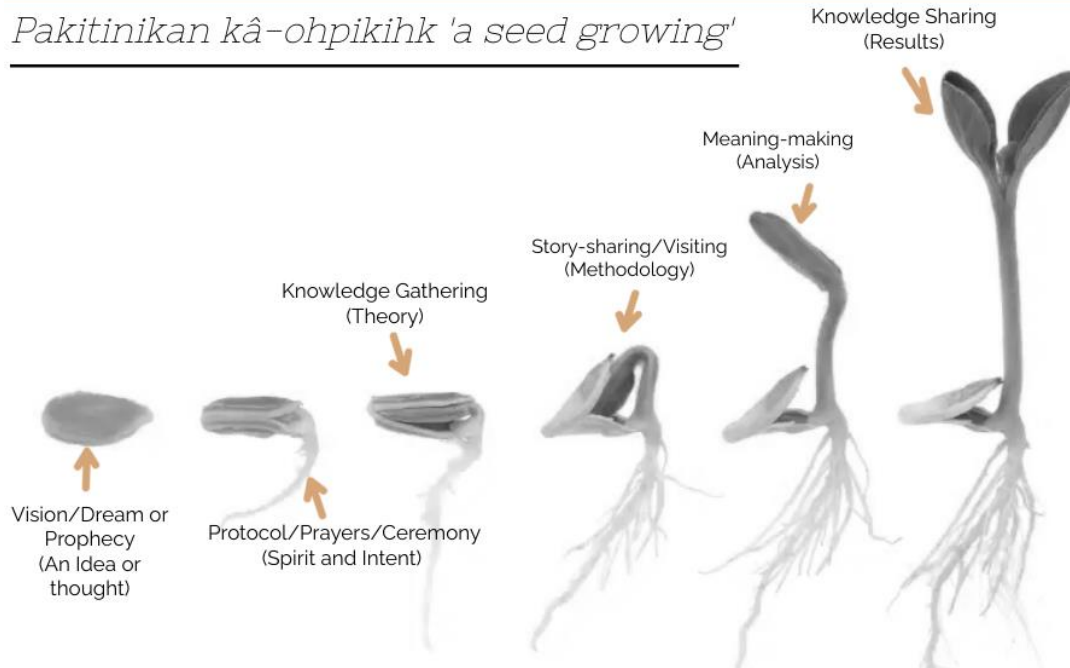


Figure 1: Indigenous Research Framework: *pakitinikan kâ-ohpikihk*

Ermine (2016) states that “[t]he muntou (mystery) or mamatowisowin (life force), the Old Ones focused on this area for guidance and as the foundation of All Aboriginal epistemology” (p. 104). Our people once followed cycles of the universe, such as stars, seasons and elements of askīy (earth). The nêhiyaw word means is the nêwo, meaning the number four. Four is a symbolic and significant number in Cree worldview. The four represents the four aspects of our selves which are the mental, emotional, physical and spiritual of our being. McLeod (2013) states that “in order to understand Cree narrative memory, one must understand Cree philosophy and perspectives, nêhiyawî-itâpisiniwin (Cree worldview)” (p.32). By understanding ourselves and who we are we can discern our own truth. No one else can tell us who we are because that foundation has already been set for us.

### **3.1. Methodology: ‘omîsi etôtamiyit’ (this is the way)**

Through this research I aimed to incorporate nêhiyaw language, ceremony and practices as much as possible while adhering to nêhiyaw protocols. I planned to dig deeper into my own

identity and begin to better understand how identity can develop my skills and practice as an Indigenous helper. I am writing this thesis based on a fire that burns within me in having this knowledge become known for myself and for future generations. Kovach (2009) states that “a nêhiyaw epistemology is about giving back to community, and as researchers we can do this by sharing our work so that it can assist others” (p. 11).

Incorporating a nêhiyaw (Cree) epistemology means respecting the laws and protocols of my bloodlines of the paskwâwiyiniw (Plains Cree) nation. It is proper nîkân sihcikewin (protocol) that I begin this research by integrating my own belief system and Indigenous worldviews I was born into. As a nêhiyaw iskwêw (Cree woman), I am aware that I must uphold the responsibility to myself, community, and nation as well as to my Ancestors. In my role as a mother, which I hold in high regard with its own sacredness, I must be responsible for myself, nipêyakôskân (my family) and Homefire<sup>1</sup>. With this role, I must continue to maintain a healthy lifestyle and pursue my own healing work for myself, my family and therefore the communities and people I work for. I recognize that this research has transformed these roles as I dig deeper into the understanding of cultural knowledge and stories of the Blue Hill people and its lands.

My approach to this research is based in ceremony by giving acknowledgement of the spirit and intent of the research and ensuring that everything will be done in a good way with appropriate protocols in place. I wanted to give spirit to this research and knowledge because, as Indigenous people, we believed that everything is animate, everything has a spirit and is relational. It was important to have both a women’s and men’s pipe lifted during the ceremonies to represent the balance that is necessary within our Indigenous communities. This has helped me to be ethically driven and responsible to everyone involved in this research. Through this

---

<sup>1</sup> In nêhiyaw traditional knowledge, the home or homefire belonged to the women to nurture and care for. There are deeper knowledges of the tipi (home) and how it is interconnected to the fire and women’s teachings.

ceremony, I offered acknowledgement to those who have suffered from colonial policies from the Canadian government and send prayers for those who continue to be oppressed by the current governmental systems.

Castellano (as cited in Kovach et al., 2013) offers a useful conceptual framework for understanding three different knowledge systems: traditional, empirical, and revealed knowledge (p. 490). In alignment with these three knowledge systems, I have been keeping a journal with me while on this research journey as I have already witnessed empirical knowledge being revealed to me before the process started. I had feelings of anxiousness from doing this research because of what it involved. I avoided the topic and ultimately it felt like this topic was following me. The topic came to me in my dreams and had also arisen sporadically in conversations. It was further confirmed to me by hearing others bringing up the topic to me when I have not shared my thoughts on it with anyone. I feel I was chosen by my Ancestors to do this work and I know they have stood with me as I carried it out. I knew I needed to follow my intuition and trust that this was going to lead me to where I needed to be.

In this research I chose to use story-sharing as an Indigenous research methodology. The nêhiyawak (Cree people) have used this method to pass on oral teachings from time immemorial. Story-sharing was to be done in the winter season as this is proper protocol with the nêhiyawak. It was how the Cree people got through and survived the cold and rigid winter months. There were times during the process when the research had to break or pause to ensure we were following protocols. Other times, when we had scheduled interviews there would be snowstorms that would happen the day before. These occurrences like that, would confirm to me that I was on the right track. This method of research is an act of resistance and a personal journey of self-reflexivity. As a child, I have witnessed my family practice 'wâhkôhtowin' by visiting amongst

each other and with other families on the reserve. They would sit with one another to have tea and share food. With this same method this research could have potentially taken me to other territories, communities, and nations of the Treaty 4 in Saskatchewan. I felt that I was to remain within the territory of Blue Hill. During this research, I had come to the realization that as individuals we must heal ourselves, our families, communities and then extend to other nations. I felt in my spirit and intuition that this was the area I had to remain in for my own healing of self-identity and self-location.

The themes of self-identity, connectedness to land and healing identity in women have been interwoven and interconnected throughout the research. Therefore, I wanted to pursue research as if I were going to visit my own relatives from my homeland. According to Wildcat (2018):

In the Cree language this means ‘miyo-wicehtowin’ as having or possessing good relations. It asks, directs, admonishes, or requires Cree peoples as individuals and as a nation to conduct themselves in a manner such that they create positive or good relations in all relationships (p. 14).

Through this research, I intended to create genuine and lasting relationships that tends to the relational accountability of integrity, respect and reciprocity.

I carried out the research through my own experience, interviews, witnessing and story-sharing methods. Hunt (2018) states that in the witnessing of stories, it is my obligation that the participants’ stories are not denied, ignored, or silenced. I wanted to connect with participants by actively listening to their stories that they were willing to share with me. I want to make it known to them that their stories have meaning, and their voices will be heard through generations. Cornthassel (as cited in Pedri-Spade, 2016) notes that our stories contribute to our

Indigenous survivance and perseverance. Story-sharing has been a way to connect to others with our own Indigenous resistance and resiliency in one another's shared stories of survivance. It's powerful to share our true identities with one another as it is more than the core of ourselves, it is the root of everything in how we connect to the spiritual aspects of our being. I wanted the research process to be enriched with calmness, care and gentleness. Archibald and Parent (2019) write about approaching wholism in story work with a heart-centred approach that will be in alignment with your body, mind, and spirit. First and foremost, I went to lay down tobacco, berries and water at the burial ground of the signatory Chief Day Star. I requested guidance through this process and to lead me in a good way. When we lay and offer tobacco, this signifies a sacred covenant between the individual and spiritual beings.

I began this research by writing a letter to elected Chief and Council to request approval to do this research with community members. Following this, I also attained a certificate of ethics approval from the UVic Human Research Ethics Board. I produced the letter and the intent of my research to the Day Star Chief, Council, its members and participants who I met with through visits, interviews and witnessing. Once my research was approved by Chief and Council, I prepared for each participant interview to be 2 hours in length and aimed to engage participants from three different groups: 1) 1 female knowledge holder and/or an Elder aged 65 years or older; 2) 1 male knowledge holder and/or an Elder aged 65 or older; and 3) 1 male, female adult aged 30-65 years old. I decided to have it this way specifically to restore the balance of the masculine and feminine energies as well as the difference in the age groups – as there may be adults who have a lot of knowledge and wisdom to share surrounding the topic of research. Throughout the research I talked about options of verbal and written consent and each participant was given an option to sign a consent form or a give a verbal consent.

I also asked participants if I could record the session with an audio voice recorder and this request was added to the consent form. Some participants were not comfortable being recorded and all agreed collectively that they would not be audio recorded. I respected their decision and requested to write field notes. The Elders were agreeable to me taking notes while we were in the research circle and interviews. The participants were given the opportunity to review the written piece of their shared stories to make any further edits prior to finalizing stories (data). I requested to write field notes or to document/reflect what I have witnessed in the best possible way the participant feels most comfortable with. I informed the participant that everything shared would be confidential, however as a helper it is my duty to report any abuse or harm of children or to themselves. I informed them that any information that they did not want shared with the community would be kept off record, as this research may be used to inform land-based healing initiatives. All notes were kept confidential and safe guarded in an encrypted file with a password only known by myself. I locked my computer and field notes in a box with a key only accessible to myself. To be relationally responsible to the communities I do research with, I kept my contact information accessible and available to the Chief, Council and participants. As discussed with the Elders, the finished thesis will be mailed or emailed to each participant in addition to a copy being made accessible at the band office.

### **3.2 Gathering the Relatives**

The recruitment occurred through the band councillor, who connected me to four elders from the community. There were two female and two males; I also had assistance from my dad who had one male and one female come to visit him to discuss the research. My dad also shared a lot with me; he had nimosôm (my grandfather's) photos and old documents which he gave me to hold onto. There has been a total of eight or more participants who have contributed in some

way to this research. There were two research circles held on two different occasions. There was four days held for individual/one-on-one visiting, where we scheduled a 1-to-2-hour window for each Elder to come in to meet with me at the Elders' Lodge at the band office. Before each interview and circle, I had smudged the room with sweetgrass spray. I smudged myself and the materials we used such as my notebooks, pens and tobacco pouch. After our initial research circle, one of the Elders had said I need to start off in prayer when doing this type of work. I began looking into Cree prayers that I could say before we begin every research session and continue to learn and practice to pray in nêhiyawewin (Cree language).

Most of our meetings took place at the Elders Lodge at the band office with those in attendance. Other times it would just be around the kitchen table with my dad, where I was connected to Elders just by being present when I am visiting with my dad or when I had set up interviews at his place. Aside from that, I had met one participant when we found ourselves at the same table at an urban member's event. I have never seen or met this person before. We were discussing who we were and he told me he was adopted out at a young age. I spoke with him about my research I was doing on land and identity and that it would be interesting to have an interview with him if he wanted, in relation to his perspectives on dislocation and his challenges of land connectedness to share with others. I left him my contact information and was contacted a few weeks later. What was helpful was just being open, being trusting to the process and trusting that my spirit helpers were guiding me on the right path. Everything that transpired during this process happened not as planned or it happened when I least expected it. Some of the participants shared less on what they wanted and that was okay. As we sat together, we had discussions about what was essential to share. I had a strong belief that what was supposed to be

written would be here because of the ceremonies and prayers we did before starting this research journey.

### **Questions for the participants**

Elders and Knowledge Holders were engaged to address these specific questions. Each participant was given a copy of the questions.

- 1.) Could you share what land-based healing looks like for women and families?
- 2.) What are the teachings that belong to the women and children? (e.g., ceremonies of life-givers, birthing)?
- 3.) What are the practices and associated forms of knowing of the land of the Plains Cree people for future generations?
- 4.) How do community members reconnect to urban relatives disconnected from the community and help them to find a place here? (Kovach et al., 2013).
- 5.) How does loss of traditional lands (displacement) affect Indigenous people and communities? Prompt: In relation to identity loss and sense of belonging?
- 6.) How does dispossession and/or displacement impact health?
- 7.) How do we reconnect individuals to the land in a safe and positive way when they have experienced trauma on their homelands?
- 8.) Is there anything I haven't asked about that you would like to share with me in regards to land-based healing?

While witnessing the different perspectives of participants, I wanted to create an ethical space and environment which means that I wanted to conduct interviews in a comfortable space, a place that has been cleared of any negative energy and wanted to do this by smudging. In addition, I wanted to provide a safe, comfortable room for interviews held inside during the

winter. We sat in the Elders lodge in the band office to conduct the research circle and one on one interviews. I had cleansed the area with Mother Earth smudge spray before we started. Considering that I had my doubts about using smudge in that area and that I had been absent from the community for a number of years, I wasn't sure if smudging is (was) done on a daily basis at the band office, but at the time I thought using smudge spray was the safest option. I personally believe and acknowledge that smudge spray is similar to burning medicines. I had brought food or medicine tea such as mint tea and water as this practice was done during visiting time when I was younger and some still do this today. As Indigenous people we shared everything we had, even if that meant that we were going to go without. Once agreed, and receiving consent of the research, I gifted participants with natural tobacco, a braid of sweetgrass, a blanket and cloth. I also bought small gifts such as beaded lanyards. This was in line with other Indigenous researchers, such as Hanson (2018) who had offered Elders cloth, tobacco, and sweetgrass to demonstrate respect and acknowledge the Elders' contributions to the study.

Interviews were no longer to be held using Zoom as I knew they would not be comfortable in doing this approach, instead I completed COVID-19 rapid testing before conducting the research circle or interviews. I had hand sanitizer and disinfectant wipes to ensure anything passed such as tobacco and gifts would be sanitized. With the ever-changing COVID-19 restrictions, as the researcher and interviewer, I needed to adapt and keep myself updated on public health changes both within my nation and in the province of Saskatchewan, which was challenging as the Saskatchewan Health Authority did not record the number of cases in community. The research began in the winter of 2022 and by then COVID-19 restrictions had been lifted.

### 3.3 Rebirth and Renewal

From an Indigenous approach, research begins with our own story, our own vulnerability. In the words of Cherokee author Thomas King (2003), “You can’t understand the world without telling a story” (p. 32). Therefore, we share our perspectives of our diverse identity positionings within Indigenous research through story. Both my parents are survivors of the Gordon’s Indian Residential School, my dad was also a part of the 60’s Scoop. They had split up when I was 3 years old. When I reflect on my younger years in life as a drug and alcohol addicted adolescent and young adult, I see a lost and hurt young girl who endured a broken childhood due to trauma and intergenerational trauma. I didn’t grow up having any traditional teachings or language taught to me and my siblings. As a young adult, I had no sense of belonging and no sense of self-worth. My healing began by seeking out my identity and culture; this has given me a sense of belonging that my inner most being had always longed for. To this day, I have grieved and continue to pray for my brothers and sisters who continue to be caught in broken cycles of intergenerational trauma. It is now my responsibility to be a role model and teach my children the culture and knowledge so that they know their identity as young *nêhiyaw iskwêwak* (Cree women).

During the summer, my family planned to go pick medicines in Hudson Bay, Saskatchewan. It was myself, mother, sister, my niece and two daughters. While we were there together, we learned how to ethically source the medicines. Our daughters who are our next generation will carry this teaching as it is now a part of their spirit. As we all have been in different stages in our healing, I thought this is how we as Indigenous people have always connected to each other. That mother bear and her cub came through that day, that to me was confirmation that this is what revitalization of *wâhkôhtowin* (kinship) and healing is about. This

was a teaching for me in what it means to come full circle within our traditional family systems and lifeways of Indigenous families.

This thesis journey brought me to learning the importance of grieving and forgiving myself and others. Prior to carrying out the groundwork of my research, I was brought to that courageous but beautiful position of vulnerability; an essential position individuals must come face-to-face with as we evolve. It is very difficult, however, without *tâpwêwin* (truth); we must acknowledge those darkest parts of ourselves or we cannot move forward into our own healing. Right before my research began, one of our Elders who had tried to keep our culture and history had passed away. As a community we were devastated by this loss. It was a huge loss on our community and our way of life. I just hope that he left what was needed to carry on the work he had worked hard at doing. As part of my research journey, I also learned that my late *kôkums* were death doulas in our communities, although they would not say that this is what they were in this terminology. When someone had been called home from the Creator, the community would request my *kôkums* to take care of preparing food, sewing armbands for pallbearers to prepare the physical body. They had their own ways of doing things and they had to be done a specific way. Everyone had come together for the family and when something was needed such as a starblanket, moccasins and medicines to carry them throughout to the next journey to the Spirit World, the community came together to gather these items and set a fire for 4 days so that their loved ones would have what they needed for their next journey. My mother had experienced a near death experience and also has knowledge as to what is on the other side. Some are chosen for these roles, if it is meant for you, it will be given to you. McLeod (2007) states that “[t]hrough stories we find our place in the world” (p. 69). I can resonate with this as I sat and listened to the Elders speak about their own understandings, knowledges and views on life. I

found myself feeling that vulnerability every time I sat with the Elders, however I felt safe with my vulnerability with them. That is the energy we must have with all of our relatives.

Wilson (2008) stated that ‘Research is Ceremony’, which I wholeheartedly agree, although I would like to add that Indigenous research is ceremony. Once that tobacco is offered, it is a sacred covenant that only you, Spirit, Ancestors or our Helpers know. If they know you are ready and sense your intent, your helpers will show up on your path. Epiphanies will strike you at the most unexpected times, they stand with you, they will affirm to you that you are on the right path. The path cannot be rushed and no short cuts can be taken; it is exactly as it is in how we do ceremony. Otherwise, you are not going to get the same result or outcome. In Research is Ceremony, Cree Elder Jerry Saddleback (as cited in Wilson, 2008) explains that:

According to tradition, there are three styles of storytelling (I think that “story” is not a good word for it, as it carries an English language connotation of being make believe. But that is the word he used in trying to translate what he was saying into English). At a higher level are sacred stories, which are specific in form, content and structure. These stories themselves must be told at different levels according to the initiation level of the listener. Only those trained, tested and given permission to do so are allowed to tell these stories, which must never vary in how they are told. They are sacred and contain the history of our people. I maybe shouldn’t even talk about them here. The second level stories are like the Indigenous legends that you may have heard or read in books. There are certain morals, lessons or events that take place, but different storytellers shape them according to their own experience and that of the listener. The intent or underlying message of these stories remain the same. The third style of story is relating to personal experience or the experiences of other people (pp. 97-98).

Wilson (2008) also states that “Elders often use experiences from their own or others’ lives to help counsel or teach” (p. 98). My aunty said that when her uncle had told her stories, there was never an ending to the story, she would walk away with no answers. The answers come or they are to find the answers within the story (personal communication, K. Bird., March 22, 2022). Through this research I have witnessed each style of story-sharing that brought up many emotions for me. When we talk about the next generations, my eyes welled up because we had talked about that unconditional love we have for our children. Not only for us but for generations to come, this love is a reminder that we must continue when we wake up every day to do this work and to live a miyo-pimâtisiwin (good life).

At one time this paper was just a thought until I started discerning the signs of what my thesis topic was to be. I would meditate, pray and ask questions in ceremony and was told that I already knew. I was taken aback and given a lesson by this because Spirit knows when you are trying to find the easy way. When we are called to spend time with ourselves and go within, it is during this time that we need to go spend time in nature, meditation or go to ceremony and pray. It is our own responsibility to go within. This can be when we feel we are being called by Creator to do so. According to Kovach (2009), “Ancient Knowledge is still alive in Cree communities. The most sacred comes through dreams, fasts, sweats, vision quests and during sacred ceremonies” (p. 66). This research journey is a spiritual rebirth of this knowledge to manifest into physical form of a life being that it will have and carry its own spirit.

When I visited with some of the Elders and Knowledge Holders, they had mentioned that I needed to get my spirit name. Therefore, my goal for that summer was to acquire one and I knew once I had that, it would shift a paradigm. Through Elders telling me to attain my Spirit name, I knew Spirit was leading me and I knew that once I hit a writing block it was a reminder that I

needed to go to ceremony or go make offerings. My uncle Lloyd said something to me, that stays with me to this day: “time doesn’t wait for no one”; this was true when it comes to this research and our ceremonies. It was part of this journey to acquire a spirit name. Freda had also shared that, “if you say you are going to do something, then you must do it”.

The naming ceremony happened unexpectedly for me. I was attending the ceremony for the naming of nôsisim (my grandchild). She is my niece’s daughter. However, through our Indigenous relationship concepts she would be recognized as my granddaughter as well. While at the ceremony, I was called to go in with my tobacco. A young man left and when he returned, he handed me a blue wêpinâson (cloth). I believe it was fate that brought everything together the way it did that day. It was the colour of the cloth that came in for me and the Knowledge Holder with the gift to give names shared with me about what he envisioned my name to be. It was a Woman Standing at a Mountain. I told him about my traditional lands and territory of Blue Hill and traditionally it is called a mountain. He said that I am to go there with blue cloth and hang it there. The muntou, the mystery that is mentioned is what had transpired during this research process. I don’t believe in coincidences, everything aligned for this to happen as it did. It does not need to make sense for others, that name is between you and Creator.

### **3.4 Coming Full Circle: Meaning-Making**

I had to unpack my own grief during this process, I learned that I had a delayed grief response to everyone I lost. At the time of their loss, I had packed it down so deeply to the point that I was numb to feeling any emotion of their deaths. As I reflected on how they had left us, it was sudden and due to unnatural causes. I did not begin to deal with it until these last couple years, as I started to unpack this grief, I came to terms that it was the unexpressed love I had for them. I had a sense of poignancy of holding back the love I had for them when they were here in

the physical realm. Grief is its own expression of emotion, and people cope with it in ways that is most accessible for them. For me that was through years of drug and alcohol addiction. Our own people are living out that unprocessed grief and its surfacing in all forms of pain upon each other. My prayers go to my brothers and sisters who are trapped in an extremely sad and heartbreaking circumstance. This grief process serves a purpose. I have gained empathy, love, and compassion both for myself and for others from my experience of loss.

I had been reflecting about the extent of love we have for our children. My children continue to make me remember them as babies. The future we hope for them to have. We offer prayers for them each and every day. The prayers that were lifted and still carry us through by our grandmothers, grandfathers and Ancestors. This was an act of the Indigenous love we once had and shared with one another. In addition, this is something that our children teach us, my children have taught me this in their own unique ways and have been my life's most valuable teachers. The residential school system stole these teachings from us for generations. As Indigenous peoples we are relearning and reclaiming our purpose, truths and identities. The fact that we are reconnecting to our genuine selves and filling the emptiness we once had is the most significant aspect of it all, it is necessary to share and teach this message to our loved ones, families and communities. The seeds are to be implanted within our own children, families, communities and nations. The teachings and knowledge I have gained from this work is something that I will remember for the rest of my life. This work needs to be shared with others.

As the research went further in depth, the questions shifted towards land, identity, to loss and grief. The research was leaning towards the dispossession of our sacred land and traditional territory. I had to analyze where the research was leading me and how this impacted individuals, families and communities. Ultimately, the dispossession and loss of Blue Hill had emerged

which had played a key role in our grief of the people and community. It had brought me to the analysis that when we are doing Indigenous research that we cannot come forward with our own agenda, our own questions as to where we want our research to be. Ultimately, we are to have faith in our Creator, our Ancestors, Grandmothers and Grandfathers that they will direct or set us on a straight path. It was the muntou (mystery) that has carried me through this ceremony, it was the supernatural that we have to discern and trust while in this experience.

In the chapter to follow, the Elders, Knowledge Holders and participants have shared their stories drawing on the interview questions shared earlier only as a guide. Proper nîkân sihcikewin (protocol) was used throughout the research to signify our relationships to one another and the spiritual aspects of the research. The initial research began with a research circle to discuss my proposed research question, topic and intent with the Elders/Knowledge Holders. I wanted to bring forth the research in the concept of kiyohkâtowin (visiting one another), which is later explained in more detail. I share photos that were taken and found from the research in Figures 2 through 4. In the final two sections of the next chapter, I wanted to offer space to the sacredness of stories shared as well as the project with the drone photos that was drawn out from the discussions with the Elders.

## **Chapter 4: Story-Sharing with wâcîkowiinînhk**

### **4.1 Research Circle**

On March 28, 2023, I travelled to my home community; this was where we held our initial meeting with the elders who were potentially going to be involved in the research if they consented. I brought water, mint tea and snacks and my offerings such as gifts, tobacco, sweetgrass, cloth and a blanket for each elder. I went through the consent form and described the research with each participant who attended the research circle. I answered the elders' questions to the best of my knowledge. After we went through the consent form each participant were given the option to sign or verbally agree. I gave the offering of tobacco as I didn't want anyone to agree to the research and be bound by the tobacco, as to this is a sacred covenant to Indigenous ways of life. Indigenous custom requires that tobacco be offered before a request is made; if tobacco is accepted, both parties are obligated to uphold that commitment. Before granting my request, as an Indigenous researcher seeking information, I wanted to make sure the participants and elders understood what was involved. The research circle involved their time and they knew it could last up to two hours. We agreed to meet every so often when our schedules allowed, as they are all very busy and have responsibilities of their own. At our initial meeting we had a look at the set of questions that would be used as a guide to our circle. Our first discussion raised the current issues that Indigenous families and caregivers are faced with in the communities.

The research interviews were scheduled April 21 from 10 am to 3 pm. I scheduled one on one interviews to take place in the Elders lodge at the band office. I had to rephrase the questions I had prepared and had just used them as a guide during our first circle meeting. In our individual interviews, I had let the Elders and participants to lead in the sharing of their stories. I reflected

on the importance of this work, because much of our elders have passed on lately and how soon this work needed to be done. At that time, we had had a recent snowstorm in the previous couple of days. I was thankful for the snow, I felt like my Ancestors were making things possible for me to do this work. According to Cree tradition, it was bad luck for storytelling to occur when there was no snow on the ground. I had to ensure that I was following proper protocols as I was going through this research. When there was a death in the community, I had given time and space to be respectful to the families and community.

#### **4.2 Kiyohkâtowin - visiting one another**

In the following section, I briefly introduce each of the participants and present some of the stories they generously shared as part of this research.

##### ***Freda***

Freda is 71 years old. She can speak Cree and Saulteaux. She is a mother, grandmother and great-grandmother. She had raised her 2 grandsons from small children until they graduated. She has 7 great-grandchildren. Freda lived on Day Star for most of her life. She had volunteered and sat on the board for WISH safe shelter, attended classes and different courses and provided workshops and presentations to the schools in the surrounding area. Freda attended school in Wynyard, SK. She had worked in early childhood education, 10 years at the plant in Wynyard and 7 years in Muskowekwan Residential School until it closed.

Freda agreed with the other elders who had expressed and encourage their grandchildren to leave the reserve. She said there is no education on reserve. Freda had previously held the position of band councillor for six years. It was known by the elders that she would become a leader. Serving and becoming a band councillor, was what they were referring to. She says:

*we tell our grandchildren to leave the reserve but when they leave, everything is accessible to them. But when they stay here, they are not doing anything. Since the pandemic, things got worse with drugs and the young ones dying in our communities.*

*When we talk about teachings we start off in a good way with a prayer and smudge. We are to respect the old people and the way they are. We were taught not to answer elders back. Not to be negative or say bad things to the children. Children are lent to us from Creator, don't hurt them in any way. Creator will know that and can lose them, through death, he can take them back. Don't take pictures of ceremonies. It could set us up for bad things 'ohcinêwin' (breaking laws against something). **Kīyam, let it be.***

Freda expressed that she had regret of not sitting and listening to the old people when she was younger.

*When the young girls were on their moon-time they were kept in a room for 4 days, away from everyone. They had to learn how to sew, iron, clean. The young women couldn't pick berries, touch or cook for a feast when she was on her moon-time. She would kill the bush if she touched them. After four days she can go pick berries. The new young woman was not to be around boys or men, or step on or over their hats that they placed on their head. She was not to attend ceremonies. She had to drink and eat from separate cups and utensils. Depends on what kind of feast, they could sit on the outside. Not to go to raindances, the Elders would know and they would be told not to come around.*

*My mom was a midwife too (Mary Rose or Rose). After a birth there was a feast and naming ceremony for the baby. An elder, would pray and get a name for that child. Indian names are how Creator would know us by. They told me to take my baby to the lodge at early in the morning to get his Spirit name (Indian name). When you say you are*

*going to do something, you have to follow through with what you say. For example, if you say you are going to do something like get your children's Indian names, you need to do it. If that child cries and cries. That could be the reason. It is best to get their names when they're babies, they get strength from that name. All my grandkids have their names.*

*We were living on-reserves because they took our land, we had land towards Wynyard and Wishart. Mr. Goodfellow was the Indian Agent, he used to be the farm instructor, welfare. Teachers would go back and forth. They took control, our old people got sick. I remember how we lived in my family, we used to get rations, salt, pork, flour. Tom, (Ray's dad) and my brothers would help deliver them in a wagon. Our grandmothers hunted, fished and picked medicines, we fished at Long Lake. It is hard what our people went through in residential schools, all the abuse, but we have to move forward we can't keep holding onto the past.*

*The culture camps gave us a sense of connection, reconnection. We have not lost all of it but we can reconnect what we can. Culture camps, language and Cree classes is where we can all get together. Meeting regularly, making crafts, instead of gossiping about each other. We had lots of fun, getting our kids into that. Hand games, pow-wow singing, come to the culture camps, we have pipe ceremonies. Come to the culture camp, come to that. Day Star people were called wac̄iyiniwak (mountain people). We've had someone to come do a blanket presentation.*

Day Star revitalized its first traditional pow-wow in the summer of 2023.

### **Ray**

Ray is 64 years old; he resides on Day Star and works for the community. Ray had a significant role as the Traditional Knowledge Community Coordinator of the research project

titled 'Kīsīkōwâhchakôos: Day Star People Speak' that was done on Day Star First Nation in 2012. Like Freda, Ray's sharing also included birth and midwifery as he recalled his own birth:

*My mom couldn't make it to the hospital, we had to deliver our own babies. All parents were our midwives, they helped each other give birth. I was born at home. We never had access to vehicles or hospitals. My mom was a midwife, we used to be the doctors.*

As we went through the consent form Ray mentioned an Indian Bible with the Lord's prayer written on birch bark in Cree syllabics, it had been passed down one generation to the other. Ray shared that this Indian Bible is in the book Kīsīkōwâhchakôos: Day Star's People Speak: Past and Present and is a part of Day Star's history. He said that there are sacred songs and ceremony to be done when it is brought out. My dad had also mentioned this book to me.

Ray went on to say that Blue Hill is a very sacred place for us, when one is to become an Elder or knowledge keeper, they are to go sit on that hill for four days to fast and pray. It was then they were gifted their rights to be elders, to give Indian names and practice medicine. He said:

*We never gave that up that is Day Star land. Name of "going up" (in Cree). He had also told the same story about how Chief Day Star had a vision to take that land for his people. The population was 23 families from the time of treaty signing in 1874.*

*Relationships are important, for everyone to know their relations. He said that he is my relation through my dad. Knowing who your relations are, how we relate to one another is vitally important. We need to take time to learn and listen to each other. We need to take time to listen to our parents, grandparents on how we are related. There were also fishing stations in Quill Lake that belonged to Day Star, we don't know what is being*

*done with it currently. Blue Hill was a very spiritual place to us, it is now surrounded by farmland. There are lakes back there that have been given Indian names.*

He requested that photos be taken to identify them. We discussed how we could use technology to take photos of the lakes via drones.

When I visited with Ray and my dad to discuss the naming of the aerial photos, he said he could not make out the photos to name them. However, he had given me permission to use the photos in this thesis as a visual. He said it was important to be used for others to gain knowledge and understanding of our territory and for sites to be identified. He said he always wanted to do that and that there are traditional Cree names of the islands and lakes in the area. He told me that we will go there next summer to take the photos again and he will show me where they are and what the names are. Although, we did not get to label them specifically, the name of the area is called wicihk, which is what everyone has called it. I had included the photos of the area below in Figures 2 to 4.



*Figure 2: Day Star traditional lands and territory (wacihk). Photo by Jeromy Desjarlais*



*Figure 3: Day Star traditional lands and territory (wacihk). Photo by Jeromy Desjarlais*



Figure 4: Day Star traditional lands and territory (wacihk). Photo by Jeromy Desjarlais

During the research circle, Ray shared:

*We got medicines from the ground, our medicines such as the sweetgrass is a form of healing and cleansing our bodies. Our cultural practices such as round dances, were healing. Culture camps and pow-wows are healing but have become commercialized and had become about money.*

Ray also explained that there are “*Indigenous artifacts that are in museums that belong to Day Star. There are more items that belong here, things that should not have been sold*”. For example, there is a red jingle dress displayed in the Glenbow Calgary Museum that is from Day Star; this can be found online and is pictured below in Figure 5.



Figure 5: Jingle Dance Dress, Day Star First Nation. Glenbow Museum Retrieved from: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Jingle\\_Dance\\_Dress,\\_Day\\_Star\\_First\\_Nation,\\_mid\\_1900s,\\_view\\_1,\\_cloth,\\_metal\\_-\\_Glenbow\\_Museum\\_-\\_DSC00864.JPG](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Jingle_Dance_Dress,_Day_Star_First_Nation,_mid_1900s,_view_1,_cloth,_metal_-_Glenbow_Museum_-_DSC00864.JPG)

### ***Lloyd***

Lloyd is 74 years old and works 12-hour days farming. He had served as Chief of Day Star First Nation for 6 years. While Lloyd served as Chief, he had brought changes to the reserve that are still in effect to this day. He shared: *“We had made the motion, there are only two of us alive today. The rest are gone, they have passed away”*. Lloyd and his wife are caregivers to their 4 grandchildren. Lloyd was raised by both his grandparents. Lloyd shared about how his grandchildren were placed in his care and shared about the current gaps his family had faced with the systems of today.

*The current programs don't offer supports or communicate with them about the children even though they were placed in their care. When people are asking or requesting help, it is not there. They are not being listened to, that is what is needed for our people.*

He explained that is why we have two ears to listen and one mouth to talk. He added:

*This younger generation has lost total identity of themselves. The vulnerable population of the community such as the children and those needing help suffer the most. The children have become traumatized through sexual, mental, emotional, and physical abuse. It comes with the drugs and alcohol; we cannot control it. It finds us, our children and community. Even if we try to keep it out or ban it from the communities, it still finds its way in.*

Lloyd always tells his grandchildren to leave the reserve to go find work as the reserve will always be here, where it is. He tells them to go out and see the world and not to become dependent on hand-outs.

*People don't have a place to go home to, or a house to go to, it's not their choice that they have no place to go. These are our own people that are homeless, some die from drug overdoses. When we lose one or two people, that is a lot because we are a small community. Relatives that die from addictions or no housing. It happens in all communities; they die from addictions. We can't go to funerals without someone doing or bringing in drugs or alcohol.*

*There is lack of communication to urban people, it's known. This speaks volumes. It is getting better. Don't like the drugs, alcohol and suicide. Our young people are dying, how do we get them to stop, they administer it to themselves. Bring in something they know. Bring awareness to the people. Anything is accessible in the cities. The reserve will always be here. We reconnect by having open communication, people or communities can be stubborn. They will give up or quit. We have learned that at home. We need to know both sides, have balance, and spend more time understanding one another. As well*

*as at the band level. It has to be their decision to want to come home. They need to communicate, ask questions, and ask who they are related to. Some people can't connect because of the way they think, need to change the way they think. My daughter makes connections between INAC (Indigenous Service Canada) and the communities. Take the time. We need somebody like that in the community who can make those connections for us. Communication is very important when it comes to reconnecting.*

He told me a story about a family who have lived off-reserve. There is a family who lived in Winnipeg, she has kids. She wanted to come but could not travel due to health problems. I asked that because of the dislocation if health problem have contributed to our health. He nodded.

The forms of knowing we discussed included how important it is to know your traditional lands and boundaries. More specifically, Lloyd stated that *“By learning and knowing where your family lived. As people of this land, we need to respect where lands were developed and by whom. Land was passed down generationally. The foundations will still be there”*.

Lloyd also spoke about the bear, elk, moose, cougar and how they were always here, but that for some reason, they had vanished for a few years:

*They are all coming back now. The rabbits were the best kind of meat to eat. As kids my mother would send us early to go hunt ducks. The dogs were trained specifically to hunt ducks, to go get them out of the water. There is a certain way to pluck them, so that the skin did not tear. We had to pluck them outside away from the house. I bet you didn't know that.*

I didn't know. As children we were not brought up in that time to hunt, fish, trap, etc.; those ways of living had already declined while I was growing up. There have been bears spotted near my mother's house, which is something that was never seen or heard of growing up.

Lloyd also shared that: *“When a man and woman make a vow in front of all the people, a preacher and Creator, "one might stray away from that”*. His late dad taught him that there needs to be balance like when you have two horses on a wagon, they need to have balance, not one in front of the other, side by side.

*When we go through things, one has to be stable minded for the other. I tell my children when they have a problem, to put everything on the table and talk about it. Take the time to talk about things, communication is very important. Everyone has to make it work between both parties. We can be civil. Everybody is different. You can't keep children from their parents. When it comes to the children, we can't break that bond between brothers and sisters, they must stay together.*

*Singing and drumming done with the children. Kawacatoose have come to assist and played hand games. Uncle Irvin, wanted to do the cultural camps, 4 directions. When we lost Uncle Irvin, we lost a huge part of knowledge from our community. He said the younger ones need to visit our old ones more, they appreciate when we go visit them, they get lonely. The young people don't take the time to go visit, I don't know why. You are the first one that had asked me to do this. Time doesn't wait for nobody.*

He told me about a time when he used to go visit the old people:

*I went to see my late uncle Charlie Bigknife and his family, we went there at 10 in the morning. They were just waking up, he started the fire on their old wood stove, they made tea and breakfast. He was happy when we went to see him. It makes the elders happy when we take the time to go visit them. It is important to connect to each other, as we once did.*

I said that I learned so much when I went to his funeral and about the community. I shared that I remember hearing that there was a river that went through Day Star. “Yes,” he said “*that was before my time.*” Mosôm Irvin was raised by his grandparents. He had passed on in 2020; right before I had planned this re-search it was part of my plan to visit him. He knew a lot about our history. It is crucial to visit with our Elders because they are rejoining the Spirit World.

**a). Prophecy, Visions and Dreams**

My uncle Lloyd shared that the “old ones”, were powerful, the people who knew what they were talking about:

*The real traditional people. They knew how to heal people. As a young man they showed me how to be an oskâpêwis (ceremonial helper), being an oskâpêwis is a sacred thing. They told me to sit down and gave me the pipe. I took my hat off and sat beside those old men to learn. It comes with great responsibility. Your dad will tell you. Does he share this with you?*

Yes, I said, he shares what he can. Lloyd shared a story with me about his experiences he had with visions and dreams: *his experiences with dreams or visions throughout his life. He would dream of situations happening back home even when he was working miles away.*

*We have not talked about visions and dreams yet. They have power, they can let you know when someone does something or is going to do something bad to you.*

We were talking about our children which caused me to become emotional. My eyes welled up during this conversation, he had noticed this. He told me: “*Don't be afraid to show emotion and shed your tears. That is what makes us human. Some people can understand or feel when you are doing things in a genuine manner. People will know where your heart is at*”. I told him, me, doing this work, I feel that I didn't choose it. It chose me. “*That is good,*” he said. I

believe for me it was that time I felt safe to be vulnerable. Not just with the Elders, but in life in general.

*“You already know the answers you just need to put it on paper, you have my blessing”.*

His words here reminded me of the time I sat in ceremony. Before I started this thesis journey, I was confused about what my research topic should be about and I meditated on the question as I prepared to go into ceremony. The words that came to me, were “*you already know*”. When my uncle said that to me it was like he was speaking those same words that were said to me through Spirit months before I began this study. There is no deception, lying, only truth that comes forward from our Helpers and Spirit Guides. The answers we are seeking are already within us. There are no short cuts when doing ceremony and that is also how it is when doing Indigenous research. Our spiritual learning journey is done in a way that is gentle, kind and forgiving.

### ***Charlie***

Charlie resides on Day Star, he is an oskâpêwis (ceremonial helper). He said many of our people on and off reserve have diabetes, cancer, pneumonia, arthritis and asthma.

*The young people are dying from drug overdoses, alcohol, suicides. Sickesses that we have are cancer and diabetes. The alcohol is getting worse out there. If you come here (Day Star), you don't have to worry about your kids. The city is not good for us. Our people are killing each other for nothing. How can we stop that? There probably is a way but I don't know. I try to tell my kids to be kind, be nice, be helpful to people. If they need or ask for money, give it to them even if it's your last dollar. We weren't greedy, we were satisfied with what we had. If we go back to how we lived off the land and picking medicines, we would be a healthy nation again. We need to go back to our medicines, that is the best thing that Creator gave us. Wake up early and pray for our young people.*

The animals act as messengers to us, he explained that when he got up early one morning, he had heard a baby crying. He went outside and there was an eagle sitting on the tree that sounded like a baby crying. The next day, he got a call from his daughter who had a new baby. He said that there are also badgers on the reserve, which is another animal that was never seen or spotted on the reserve. Charlie shared another story:

*Chief Day Star along with others have fasted on Blue Hill for many days. Through our oral history they have passed on have told stories about his visions, that Chief Day Star was to stand up and share what he seen. He seen vision of white and orange lights which were the farms on the land.*

My dad confirmed that nimosôm (my grandfather) Leslie told the same story. Charlie described more of his work as an oskâpêwis:

*All the things that I do here for the people is when we have funerals, I'm the one they come to, to help out the family with their loved one that has gone to the Spirit World.*

*And that was given to me by my great uncle Harold. And things like that, they have to be given to you. And when we have feasts too, when somebody's having a sweat, I go help there as well. When I do those things, it makes me feel really good. Because I'm not only working for myself. I'm working for everybody. I know when I do things like that, it also makes the people feel good because when I look at them after I'm done with all the smiling faces that I see, and that's another thing that makes me feel good is when I see somebody smile after I do something. Sometimes when I do funerals, it gets very hard on me because sometimes I have to do my own family. That's the hardest ones to do is with my own family, but I don't have a choice. And when the sweats start slowing down here, once in a while I will go to Kawacatoose and go help there. Wherever I can.*

*A lot of things growing up as a child. When you start getting older, you start slowing down. You are going to have to pick somebody to train in that way. A lot of these things that I had misunderstood, but now I have a clear conclusion on all of them. And you know, the only thing that each and every one of us can do here in this earth is our best. We can't promise anybody anything because the promise is just like a lie. If they promise somebody something, if they do it. You thank them. I always do everything from my heart because when people always tell you things your mind will confuse you. And that's true. This is why people have to take their time when they talk. A lot of times I hear people talk, talk, talk. But when you talk, you speak from your heart. So that they have that understanding, so that they have that knowledge and they know what to think. Medicines, all kinds of medicines here. You know, I've been looking for chaga in the last little while there. Now is the time to pick it and I still haven't found none. But I'm going to go back up north and look. Since I can get up there with a vehicle, I'm going to get up there, you know, before I can't get up there.*

*I know a lot, but I still don't know everything. There's a lot of things. It is sometimes hard questions to answer. But I will always say which direction of where to go, because if I don't tell you then how you will know which way to go. I like what I do. And it's quiet. The things I do for my people. I always stayed to myself. I would stay home all the time. I wouldn't be alone. It's great to be home. It's not just the drugs and alcohol. But it's these other things we have to stop. Like what? A lot of people asked me, we all have to get along like they want us to. We all have to. It makes me think on how could we make this place better? How can we better Day Star? I said many things, many things that I see, in the 27 years I've been home, I said I haven't seen a lot of people like me and a lot*

*of things that I seen that I didn't like. Why, I don't like it is because it also affects me as well as everybody else here. Not just them, it affects the whole community. This is why the Old People tell us don't say nothing about anything. Don't say nothing bad. If you're going talk about somebody, say something good about them. Don't say nothing bad about them because that can turn around and bite you right back. It won't happen right away, but eventually it will.*

*The things that I want to do to pick medicines or go pick whatever, even just to cut down a tree, even if it's just a dead tree to cut down. Even when that tree is dead, I still pray to the Creator and I also pray to that tree spirit to thank them for letting me use them for their wood is going to keep warm no matter what. Anything I do like that before anything even happens. I will always put tobacco down. I always pray for that, for the Creator, for the spirit, or whatever it is. When everybody asks me, why do you do that? I say, that's to give thanks to the Creator, for myself. I know a lot of times I say, you know, a lot of people forget they don't. They don't think of themselves. They think of everybody else, but they don't think of themselves.*

*That's something that we all have to learn. It's another one of those things. In times of the years, I do it to you as well. One of the things that we used to do this time of the year is to tell Wīśahkīcāhk stories because winter is the time of the year you have to tell them.*

### ***Chester***

My dad was very instrumental in my research, as he would assist me when it came time to visit with the elders, set up the ceremonies and share nimosôm's photos and old documents with me over tea or food. He would put the tea on or prepare something to eat when he knew I was coming over. He had quit his job and moved back to the reserve so he could take care of a family

member. My dad has truly shown me the epitome of what kiyohkâtowin (visiting one another) and wâhkôhtowin really is. He had also shown me what it means to take care of our own. My dad told me the teaching and his dad shared with him about pâstâhowin. It is one of Creator's or Natural Laws of Mother Earth. Creator and Natural laws are above everything. I share this teaching with others because it has brought me more justice than the colonial system ever will. We don't know why things happen to us or our loved ones. However, Creator sees everything and we must put our faith into this teaching. What you put out ultimately comes back to us whether if it is positive or negative.

My dad shared a story of when his dad was young. His dad remembers the older people chasing out the young children so they could talk.

*The old people sat in a tipi, an old kokum was talking about the treaties. When nimosôm Leslie, was a young boy and he peaked under the tipi to listen to what they were talking about. They were talking about the treaties.*

*From the oral history, the story of Blue Hill and why it is no longer a part of Day Star is because Chief Day Star had wanted a wooded area for wood and hunting. He also wanted land for his people to farm. They had re-surveyed the land from the north end and added land to the south end of the reserve so that his people can farm in that area. We used to own Blue Hill, ceremonies were done there. There were raindances that happened there when ceremonies were outlawed by the government. The people would go have them there in secret. The band had done a history project and hired ground penetrating radar to search for the traditional burial sites of Chief Day Star and others. There were things found at the site, these items must remain at this sacred site.*

*The Elders and knowledge Holders have said they want a sweat lodge built for the community they have all agreed that by not having sweats we are losing out.*

*In those days, they didn't have an income, and getting that Seneca root was income for them. So, other than the sacredness of the Seneca root, they use it as a means to pay their bills and to acquire food, supplies and stuff like that. That's why they did that. What they did was they dried that medicine, well it was already dried, but they would make into powder and they would use it for headaches, like aspirin. And it was a mind-altering, mind-healing medicine like aspirin. That's what it was used for by the pharmaceutical companies. And yeah, that's what they did with that. Sometimes they didn't dry the Seneca root, they just shipped it, they just took it to the pharmaceutical companies, just raw, the way it was freshly picked. But they didn't get as much money for it. That's what Ray told me in the stories. Yeah, they made a lot off the backs of our people. But anyway, I thought that was really important. So, I took that to the group and I took pictures of that, of what I learned. I told them about it. Because that's something, you know, that we First Nation people provided to the white people, this medicine. And it wasn't ever to get rich quickly, it was for survival, I guess.*

### **Darren**

Darren and I had met at a Christmas urban dinner for Day Star members. We were sitting at the same table and we had started sharing about who we are. He had stated that he was adopted out of the community. Darren is in his 50s and has one grandchild on the way. He is an artist and has done sculptures around the city of Saskatoon. I wasn't aware of nor had ever met anyone who had been adopted out of the community. Day Star is a very small community, where everyone knows everyone and I was very interested in hearing from him; therefore, I shared my

research with him. Darren was receptive in sharing his perspective on trying to reclaim his identity back into the community. Like many other Indigenous children who had been adopted out he had shared his experience in how it has been difficult.

*I think we are trying to figure that out, that's why we are here, right? I want to understand. I don't know. I'm pretty sure one of my grandfathers was a chief of the band. I would really like to find out. That's the thing about being adopted you don't hear the stories from your grandma when you are a kid.*

Darren shared: “*I think we are horse people*”. He said he would like to see a horse land-based camp and ride to the sacred places. **A long time ago, the people of Day Stay used to go to these places and do ceremony every spring.** Darren added: “*There is Manitou Lake and a big stone there. Well, that's what I had read in that book on the area*”. He was referring to the book *posâkanacîweyiniwak: nitaskînân The Touchwood Hills People: Our Land* that is mentioned here in Chapter 2. Land-based healing to Darren was taking two weeks or a summer to ride and camp in tipis.

*Applying for grants for children who have been adopted or in the child welfare system to take them on this land-based education camp to learn about their people, culture and history. They will get that connection back and they don't want to leave. The camp could have support people that can ride along in a van with a trailer. Imagine a lot of people on the street, given that opportunity, would choose to occupy the land. Oh, yeah. They go rough it in the bush for a few days, for a week or 10 days or whatever. Yeah, and it humbles us, you know?*

He said it would be something he could take his daughter and his grandchild to.

*My memories get kind of old. I said, Kôkum, do you have any pictures of my câpân (great-grandmother)? And she opened this book and she pointed at this photo and it was this real wicked deadly looking old time Indian and he's holding two wing fans in front of him like this. And he had this really cool, you know how they had like those shirts that had like two bands? I looked at that thing and I stared at it and it's like burned into my mind, right? Like that design on his clothes? Because I went and carved it into a carving after that. And then, yeah, I think that's one way to, you know how people say like reading and writing is like you develop a memory of that, whatever you read. Well, carving stone is like about a million times more. I think, yeah, I don't think that that's been explored, right? Like that idea, but I bet you that it's true. Because it takes way longer to carve something in stone than it does to write something down on a piece of paper, right? And like now that you're talking about it, lots of like ancient, yeah, like ancient stuff like that in stone.*

“*What about singing and drumming? That's important*”. I mentioned to Darren that they had recently started a youth and men's drum group on-reserve called Blue Mountain. That is something they haven't had in years that they have brought back.

*Every territory had a lead singer. So that singer would know all the songs. That's what a real singer is. Right? Well, they have songs. Oh, he's such a great singer. Like, okay, he's got a pretty voice. Now, does he have a song? Does he have a pipe song? Does he have a rock song? Does he have, and then I don't mean a rock song. I mean a song for like actual stones. Because there's a song for everything. And those old-timer singers, they would know those songs.*

*I think we have to go radical. We've done it, you know, we've done it a lot of ways, right? But, like, we've never gone radically Indigenous. I don't mean, like, grabbing guns and going and messing around or anything like that. But I mean, like, radically Indian and occupy the land. Did you read Art Manuel's books? But it's like, Russell Diabo and him were bros back in the day. Anyways, he's got some books. But I guess I'm telling you to read them. Did you read, Thomas King? I know Winona LaDuke. That's, like, one of my heroes. They're bringing back rice harvesting. Eating their traditional foods. And they are, like, growing hemp. We need to go back to that.*

*I was oskâpêwis for 2 elders and we travelled all over to different ceremonies. They were poor, they didn't care about money. He had taken care of the Big Lodge for 24 years before he passed on. We drove from Toronto to Regina, and he would sing songs the entire way. I would load his pipe for him and everything. I was learning. He gave me my name. I can't forget what the old timers have said in those lodges, that has been my guiding compass.*

Darren and I had a conversation about our ceremonies and our purpose on earth as human beings. “*We are exceptionally pitiful*”, he said. This reflects the sense that we are always learning, growing and developing. It is our ways of being and doing that offers us the guiding principles to go through life.

## **Chapter 5: Connection to Land, Identity and Collective Consciousness**

Dreams and visions are capable of materializing into something physical. Because of this, our prayers and ceremonies are essential. Similar to what my uncle Lloyd told me in that "our dreams and visions have power", my theoretical framework explains how an implanted seed develops into something tangible. As spiritual beings, we are able to alter or pray against anything that might try to cause harm to ourselves, other people, or circumstances. It's critical to communicate love and kindness to one another as well as to ourselves since what we say and release has an energy that naturally returns to us. We need to heal ourselves in order to prevent passing it on to our children and the next generation. Through the reviving of the relationship to the land our natural laws such as the kinship we historically had with one another.

Indigenous people have the land embedded in our DNA; or as Indigenous people have called it, we have blood memory; therefore, when we are connecting to the land it is a reawakening to those cells that were once stagnant. It awakens a part of our being that was once sleeping. As is the language, they say that our Indigenous languages have a spirit and spirits don't die they either transform into stagnation when they are no longer being used. As is the land, the land remembers us, it is us that don't remember the land. Indigenous people have been assimilated into wider society, through forced assimilation. Therefore, the land is waiting for us to come home as we had once taken care of the land. It welcomes us.

The relearning of our Indigenous identity plays a key role in prevention, healing, self-determination, sovereignty and Indigenous collective consciousness. Being connected to one's Indigenous identity means knowing who we are as spiritual beings rather than surviving or existing. Living with our trauma experiences takes away from our ability to see past our challenges or leads us to see our challenges as who we are rather than believing we can rise

above trauma. It is an awakening of the spirit. Moving beyond grief has played a vital and substantial role in what it means to heal and grieve not only from loved ones and our past but from the disconnection to the land. Grief of a lost one takes time and healing; healing from loss of land links to how our land was everything to us, its sacredness flows from its life-giving abilities, for both losses, we need to re-hear old stories, and be able to re-tell these stories for healing of self and land identity. I realized the significance in this when thinking back and engaging in Indigenous re-search. The spiritual aspect of it was something that could only be felt and experienced within one's own self and through having one's own relationship with the Creator.

Witnessing practices and teachings resurfacing within our own family systems has been healing, in this, we will witness changes in the dynamic to reflect on teachings. The importance of sending off our relatives in a good way and with sacred gifts being passed down generationally is what we need to re-learn and teach to young ones. Bringing back our sacred objects mean that these teachings don't die, they are asleep. These objects have a spirit and the connection to objects still lives. We don't ask for them. If you are ready, it will be gifted to you. When the 'old ones' or our old Chiefs wouldn't know what to do, they would go fast and pray for the answers. They would sacrifice themselves for their people so they could lead them in a good way. Many of their prayers and sacrifices had carried our people through hardships.

Our grounded-ness lays in our sense of identity. It is liberating to know that our Ancestors and those who have gone before us are still taking care of us from the other side. They set out a path for us when it is truly what we've been called to do. Based upon what has been shared with me in the research circle and in the individual interviews, culture, language and land-based resurgence would be beneficial in communities if there were more accessibility to both urban and

on-reserve peoples. In *Treaties to Contemporary Times*, McLeod (2007), writes “coming home through stories involves the attempt to recover collective narrative memory and to reconnect to the territory of our ancestors” (p. 71). He further notes that “[i]n addition to being an intergenerational process, Cree collective memory is anchored in places and landscape. The various places-names within Cree narrative form the basis for a shorthand encoding of experience, of various relationships, and the articulation of core Cree values and worldviews” (McLeod, 2007, p. 23).

Traditionally Indigenous peoples had our lives prearranged according to our own laws, ceremonies and rites of passage. Our rites of passage, ceremonies and laws were done in the spirit and intent of our livelihood and how we were to conduct ourselves throughout our life. I want to share a story about how my oldest daughter who had done the Berry Fast when she had first started her moon-time. She had fasted from berries throughout that entire year. Four years had passed since she had taken on this ceremony, and she has grown into the most disciplined, patient and responsible youth I have witnessed. I couldn't be more proud of her for taking on this teaching even though it was not familiar to us. As time moved forward, I have noticed how much of the teachings remain with them. My children continue to be my most valued teachers.

The participants of my study discussed what our purpose is here on earth which can mean many things, as our journey through life is to have a human experience and feel emotions that comes with being human. The Elders and knowledge holders who participated have shared their life experiences to pass on their teachings that they have learned. They taught not to be afraid to be vulnerable, to be good to one another, to live in balance and harmony with all things we are connected and tied to, and to lead and teach our children a good path and life. We have held onto our resilience and it is also embedded within our traditional systems and lifeways.

## 5.1 Transitioning and the Spirit World

Grief and loss continuously impact Indigenous peoples and communities and has been a common theme during the course of this study. When it comes to land and dislocation, the grief that follows the losses, further affects us and can have prolonged stages of grief from the loss and displacement in a community, group or people. I know this as I feel this grief within my own being when it comes to the loss of Blue Hill. McLeod (2007) states that:

Indigenous people remain attached to an area of land over an extended period of time. This connection is manifested through such things as the knowledge of plants, sacred sites, and songs. Indigenous people remain attached to specific pieces of land shown through songs, ceremonies and language (p. 23).

Today, our younger generation are dying at higher rates in urban areas and on-reserves. We don't need the statistics to show this, it is very visible. Parents and grandparents are burying their children; this was not common back in the day. It is not supposed to be this way. When we don't heal what has been built up inside us, it will resurface in us externally. No matter how much we try suppressing the emotion, it can make us sick. I had many losses throughout the duration of this thesis. I had to learn how to grieve and that, when it comes to losses I've had in life, my grief process was hindered due to the response to trauma I had learned. This is not to place blame on to anyone but to bring awareness to how we have not learned to regulate our emotions and to allow ourselves to grieve. We don't know how much time we have left to spend with our Elders or with any of our loved ones, so it is good to go visit with them at any opportunity. Our people had this understanding; there are specific protocols, ceremonies to be carried out in our stages through life.

With my daughter's permission she allowed me to share this story. When nitānis (my daughter) paternal grandfather had passed, she felt compelled to cut her hair. This was not something that was practiced in my family, so it came as a surprise to me when she had expressed that she wanted to take this on. The cutting of hair when someone passes is an old traditional teaching. We mourn and grieve through the cutting of our hair. She had grieved through this process as her hair was offered to the fire at one of the lodges we attend. This is one of the practices that is not always done by our people anymore. I believe that after the ceremony and releasing of the offering of her hair to the sacred fire, cloth and tobacco, a part of grief was lifted. We still have to honour our loved ones with offering of food and prayers, we do this through ceremonies, such as annual feasts and round dances.

My mother had a near death experience in the winter of 2021, and had encounters with the other side while she was in a state of a coma. With her permission, she had allowed me to share these parts of her story. My mother shared with me that she was taken away by the Star People, who our people have told stories about. Our spirits are transformed and carried away by the Star People to the Spirit world. While she was in the coma, our family had gone to the sweat lodge to make offerings of cloth, food, tobacco and gifts. She said she had seen us there and could smell the medicines burning. After experiencing and witnessing this and almost losing my mother to COVID, I know that her stories and experience reflect and embody the power that our ceremonies, medicines, and prayers have.

## **5.2 Being on the Land**

I have maintained ceremonial practice throughout the research by having a beginning, middle and a concluding ceremony to close things up. I have also followed my intuition as well as the requests and guidance of the Elders. Given that this research is directed by ceremony. In

this same spirit, I followed the direction of the Elders. For example, during the research circle, one of the Elders had requested drone photos. I planned and initiated this excursion to be on the land and to take photos of these traditional sacred sites. Another time during the process I was told I needed to go to ceremony for a Spirit name. During the naming ceremony I was told I needed to go hang cloth at our ceremonial grounds; these were all occurrences where I was led to go. On May 20, 2023, I hired a local company 'No Budget Films' to take aerial photos from a drone of the areas of Day Star that were given traditional Cree names. This was requested from the elders and Knowledge Holder Ray, during our research circle. It was something that had not been done before. This was done in a respectful and honourable manner as we started off with prayers and smudge led by my dad. He had ensured that we left everything the way we found it, as in not leaving trash on the ground. We had offered tobacco to the areas we were taking photos of. The photos will be printed and presented to the community. This was also done in good way, as we exchanged tobacco and money for gas with the photographer.

My mother, father, sister, cousin, and niece were all present and there to witness the photos being taken that day. My niece who was there was expecting a baby soon, by her being there, I perceived this as this knowledge being carried through to our next generation. It really set the tone and showed me the meaning of this work in the revitalization of our wâhkôhtowin (kinship). While we were out on the land, we had come across medicines such as muskeg (Labrador leaves), berry bushes and markers on the trees where there were cut offs. These were to inform or make known where the reserve starts and ends. My younger cousin also talked about how he enjoyed this time on the land, as he learned about the land from my dad while we were out there. This expression showed me the ripple effect this work had on others. Additionally, when we looked at pictures and saw the area from a bird's eye view it was a whole other perspective that

we had never seen before. It was beautiful to see how vast the lakes were. I received comments from others saying they thought it was a different place. It really gave me sense of pride of my community, which I will carry for the rest of my life. Being on the land promotes healing, relieves stress and provides solace. The teachings we experience on the land will always remain and help carry us through the challenges in life.

Our teachings are what helps us grieve our loved ones when they have passed on. When we send our loved ones onto their next journey to other side, it is not only for them but also for the ones left behind. Bringing in new life as we once did is equally and vitally important for us as well. As I had mentioned before in Chapter 3, bringing in new life was the most sacred work on this earth. However, from what I learned and witnessed from this process is that both practices are equally and vitally important to our way of being and doing. Healing and bringing forth our own truth and sense of identity. In terms of energy, there is no death of the spirit.

## **Chapter 6: Implications for Land-Based Healing and Social Work**

This research is meant to pave the way for sustainable funding and to support the recognition of land-based approaches in the healing of Indigenous peoples. I believe that this research can help further develop helping practices to be adapted into our own self-governing policies as sovereign nations. A strategic plan and structure can also support these beliefs, practices and values to be integrated into responses to Bill-C 92 for prevention, family healing and restoration of traditional practices. I believe this research will act as a guide in how we are to walk in both worlds as Indigenous people and in a contemporary society. According to Mi'kmaq Elder Dr. Albert Marshall of Eskasoni First Nation referred to this as “two-eyed seeing”:

Two-Eyed Seeing refers to the mindful effort of learning to see from our one eye with the strengths of the Indigenous knowledges and ways of knowing while also learning to see from our other eye with the strengths of the Western (or mainstream, or Eurocentric, or conventional) scientific knowledges and ways of knowing and, furthermore, to mindful efforts towards using them together in our contemporary academic programs and community endeavours (Bartlett et al., 2012, p. 70).

### **6.1 UNDRIP**

This research is the implementation of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) (United Nations, 2007), specifically, the rights stated in Article 22 and 23 which involves the wellbeing of Indigenous women, youth, children and elders.

According to UNDRIP (2007), Article 22:

1. Particular attention shall be paid to the rights and special needs of indigenous elders, women, youth, children and persons with dis-abilities in the implementation of this Declaration.

2. 2. States, shall take measures, in conjunction with Indigenous peoples, to ensure that indigenous women and children enjoy the full protection and guarantees against all forms of violence and discrimination (p. 17).

As Indigenous Peoples of this land our nations must assert our rights to health and wellbeing in all levels of programs and governance in which our people are being provided service for.

UNDRIP Article 24.2 states that:

1. Indigenous individuals have an equal right to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standards of physical and mental health. States shall take the necessary steps with a view to achieving progressively the full realization of this right (United Nations, 2007, p. 18).

Indigenous peoples' right to self-determination involves exerting Indigenous ways of knowing and being that also involves the inherent rights to this land.

## **6.2. Calls to Action**

This research is also in response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's (2015) Calls to Action, specifically call 21 states:

We call upon the federal government to provide sustainable funding for existing and new Aboriginal healing centres to address the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual harms caused by residential school, and to ensure that the funding of healing centres in Nunavut and the Northwest Territories is a priority. (p. 21)

## **6.3 Calls for Justice**

The 231 Calls for Justice and the Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (NIMMIWG, 2019) is aimed towards ending genocide, tackling root causes of violence, and improving the quality of life of Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQQIA peoples. The Calls for Justice were released in 2019 with only two calls that

have been carried out by the federal government of Canada. The implementation of land-based healing could promote prevention of further harm and violence to (MMIWG2SLGBYQQIA+) peoples through culture and healing in Indigenous communities. Call for Justice 2.5 states:

We call upon all governments, in partnership with Indigenous Peoples, to create a permanent empowerment fund devoted to supporting Indigenous-led initiatives for Indigenous individuals, families and communities to access cultural knowledge, as an important and strength-based way to support cultural rights and to uphold self-determined services. This empowerment fund should include the support of land-based educational programs that can assist in the foundational cultural learning and awareness. This empowerment fund will also assist in the revitalization of distinct cultural practices as expressed by Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people, with eligibility criteria and decision making directly in their hands (NIMMIWG, 2019)

Being that current systems continue to fail Indigenous peoples, the government of Canada needs to recognize and implement sustainable funding for healing centres which includes land-based healing initiatives in the same way they do for westernized treatment centres. There is “a general failure among Canadian health and social services systems to recognize Indigenous knowledges, ways of knowing and cultures contributes to health policies and services that are culturally unsafe and do little to address Indigenous peoples’ wholistic health needs” (Milligan, 2019, p.3). Gaps in current health systems, judicial systems, child welfare and services have shown that there is a need for sustainable funding for accessible and inclusive ceremonies, healing lodges and culturally sensitive spaces for Indigenous peoples across Canada.

#### **6.4 Treaty and Inherent Rights**

Our inherent right as Indigenous people in Canada coincide with the concept of land-based healing for families in Treaty 4 Territory. According to the Centre for First Nations Governance (2024):

Our people have an inherent right to govern ourselves and decision-making authority over our title lands. We are free to create our own form of governance to preserve our culture, foster healthy families, build vibrant communities, develop our economies and restore our nations (para 5).

By going back to the land to gain knowledge through the sharing of stories and history is collective healing and is empowering for our Indigenous youth and children. Using the knowledge, stories and ways of being can be strategically adapted into our systems of governance and programs for Indigenous families. This research is a step towards dismantling the colonial ways of governing our own people with our own ways of healing and sustaining ourselves.

Indigenous peoples all come from diverse backgrounds with our own identities. There has been loss of identity which further reveals an identity crisis of Indigenous people due to colonization and genocidal policies. The knowledge gathered through this research can be applied to assist the development of family land-based healing programs, services and social work practices to support Indigenous people, families and children. By doing so, we will be implementing our Inherent Rights to self-government, rights to land, right to practice our own culture and customs. This includes Indigenous family-focused programming that relates to land-based learning, traditional life skills, roles, food systems, parenting as well as the learning of ceremonies and cultural-based activities.

## **6.5 Implications for Helpers/Social Workers**

With the knowledge and teachings shared from the stories of participants, they could be implemented as guiding principles for helpers and for those coming into their roles as helpers for Indigenous children, families and communities. As Darren mentioned, he had remembered the words of the Elders in the lodge that have been there as a guiding compass. In relation of our natural laws, as told by Chester and Freda, pâstâhowin and ohcinêwin are the teachings that have given me hope in the work I do with families. As frontline workers in communities it is important to promote our culture as a way of healing. By remembering where we come from and the teachings that we have implanted within us to be relational and reciprocal in others in terms of wâhkôhtowin (kinship) become enlivened. These teachings support us to live in balance and harmony by communicating with each other; they also remind us not to be afraid to be vulnerable and show our emotions as human beings as was expressed by my uncle Lloyd. Our way of helping each other in time of need, even in times when it gets too hard on us, is deeply appreciated by others and comes back to us in unexpected ways.

## **Chapter 7: Closing the Circle**

To close the circle, it is important to acknowledge the interconnectedness of our own stories, cycles and belief systems. My research question states: How does the revitalization of the relationship to the land support Indigenous identity, and resurgence of Plains Cree women, children and families of Day Star First Nation? Every person has their own unique journey, plan and purpose that is set out for them and it is for each individual to connect to themselves in ways that honour themselves and their journey. Our communities and families carry their own stories that are pathways towards our identities. Whatever Creator sets on our hearts is our calling and is our purpose. It does not always have to involve the land we are from, as many Indigenous people don't know where they are from. Part of this study carried on the research that has already been in the community for the people of Blue Hill people, lifting up reminders of the knowledge held within the lands we come from. The main themes that were uncovered were the importance of reviving our kinship and restoring our relationship to the land; these themes reflect the responsibilities we have to continue to ground ourselves within our natural laws and remind us that we are all to remain interconnected. These teachings are vitally important in supporting the reconnection to our identities as Indigenous people.

### **7.1 Land-based Healing as Sovereignty**

My hope and intention for this research is that it reaches others in the way it has done for me. I had never fathomed what I was getting into when I started this re-search journey of self-identity. It was something that I was called to do. I like to think that this work is a part of Chief Day Star's prayers and prophecies that education was going to be the answer and our responsibility to weave it together with our belief systems to take us where we need to be. To me, this work – identity and land-based healing work – reflects a preventative stance against

what the colonizer has used and oppressed us with; however, it is also just the beginning. As Indigenous people of the land, it is our own responsibility to go within and for some, that means rebuilding that relationship to the land. A treaty elder said “the land is who we are”. Our connection to the land was how Indigenous were made to be sovereign – and that is how we are to return to that connection. I have included words in Cree as part of the thesis as I want to include the vital importance of learning our languages. Our language has deeper meanings and connects us to our people, our land, our belief systems and worldviews.

## **7.2 Strengths, Limitations and Challenges**

A strength of this research is practicing my own self-determination being that this research story is a part of my own healing and self-identity as a nêhiyaw iskwēw and all the roles that entails including my roles as a daughter, mother, aunty, nôhkum and helper. In “Reclaiming Native Womanhood”, Anderson (as cited in Campbell, 2016) states that there are stages in the acts of self-identity: resist, reclaim, construct and act and she also notes that, “[t]he return of home or community is one of the final stages of healing and the final act of resistance to the colonization of Native Women’s identities” (p. 2). This method of research is an act of resistance, and it is also a personal journey of self-reflexivity. The self-reflexivity component is a crucial standpoint for helpers when it comes to reconnection, resurgence and healing through land connectedness and Indigenous self-identity.

To make meaning of the research, Wilson (2008) states that part of your journey as a researcher is finding your own voice. Once the story is told, the story becomes a part of you. He also states that if research doesn’t change you as a person, then you are not doing it right. Research is a ceremony and I fully agree with this statement, in this, research ceremony starts from the conception of this research journey. Indigenous research is a ceremony, I can attest

there were many synchronicities that occurred as I embarked on this journey that confirmed for me that I was on the right path. During the time spent doing research, it was best to respond to the needs of the people of the community first. During this time, I had to give proper space and time when there was a loss or tragedy in the community; I also had to attend carefully to understanding of the participants needs and responsibilities of their own time as well. I carried many roles and responsibilities in my own life; therefore, I could not prioritize the research as much as I would have liked. I worked in a full-time job that was caring for others in their most vulnerable states. Being that I am a survivor, I had to overcome much of my own healing and do my own shadow work. Again, I relied heavily on prayer and ceremony during those times.

Most of Canada's First Nations people are under the political system of the Indian Act policy since 1876 (Indian Act, 2020). With this current system in place, it is a challenge as women try to bring forward much needed changes, since some of challenges are patriarchy and the way it is embedded in colonial systems. These systems have perpetuated misogynistic behaviour in institutions and governmental systems on our own lands and territories. As Indigenous people, we have witnessed over the years the discrimination enacted by the Indian Act policy to disenfranchise Indigenous women if they married non-Indigenous. The continued genocide of women when it comes to caring for our own children through forced or coerced sterilization and newborn apprehensions. St. Denis (2007) explains:

Historically, the Indian Act discriminated against Indian women who married exogenously because they and their children lost the right to Indian status and the right to live on the reserve. Although Indian women and their children lost Indian status and Indian rights upon marriage to a non-status person, Indian men who married non-status persons, including white women, could, through the Indian Act, bestow Indian status

upon these non-status women. Subsequently, although Indian women and Indian men could both have children of similar mixed cultural and racial heritage, the children of the Indian women were not recognized as status Indians because of the Indian Act membership laws, but the children of Indian men were. There have since been revisions to the Indian Act regarding membership; however, Aboriginal people continue to live with the legacy of this injustice (p. 1073).

The next step into my healing journey is to address the calling to go back to my homelands to seek out the history, stories and teachings from the Plains Cree people of the Blue Hills. The axiology of this research has been grounded in ceremony from the beginning phase to coming full circle. Similar to Thomas (2005), my “understanding of cultural protocols [was used] to guide and direct my understanding of the teachings the storytellers shared. As time went on, I also relied on Prayer” (p.19). The research was spiritually led and driven; however, community involvement was fundamentally key in the research process. I believed that through this research I would learn and know more for myself, my family and community, and that it would also be a way of giving thanks to the Ancestors for making those prayers for their descendants and it would also honour the grandmothers and grandfathers. We need to know our own research story to be accountable to self and community. The knowledge that has been shared withing this study is a mere fraction in regards to our stories, teachings, songs and ceremonies.

### **7.3 Closing in Ceremony: Acknowledging our Ancestors/Creator**

It was only appropriate to do a closing ceremony with a feast. When we have a feast, we invite our ancestors to come sit with us to pray and offer food. It was my intention to make offerings to give thanks to our Ancestors, Grandfathers, Grandmothers, Elders and Knowledge Keepers of the community. As part of my reciprocal responsibility, I will be creating a poster and

will be setting up a community gathering via social media and word of mouth. An invitation will be sent to the Chief and Council by calling the band office. I want to share the information openly with everyone involved as well as with the band members to retain the reciprocal relationship with the community. I will be doing a presentation on the research findings and concluding with a community feast. With the knowledge gathered the OCAP (ownership, control, access and possession) principles will be explained at the presentation. As part of my presentation, I will also share with community members how I addressed the OCAP (ownership, control, access and possession) principles in the research. I plan to present the research to the Tribal Councils in Treaty 4 to propose a land-based healing camp or programs to be implemented on Touchwood Hills area. I would like to give the first option to my community of Day Star First Nation. I will also present the research with organizations and communities I have established working relationships with.

The community meeting will begin by giving a brief introduction of myself, discussing the research, the reasoning behind my topic selection, the findings, the drone images, and how I found myself in the community. The results will be presented in a PowerPoint that I had developed. At the conclusion of the presentation, I will ensure to provide time for questions and comments. I will inform the people in attendance that, in my role as an Indigenous researcher, it was my duty to return the information, and that it is up to them to determine how to utilize it. I will further explain how I feel that this information would be useful and how it may serve as a foundation for community research initiatives. I had framed the drone photos and will gift them to the Chief and Council. A copy of the gathered knowledge will be bonded and sent to each Elder, Knowledge Holder who had participated in the research. A copy will also be given to the Chief and Council to be kept at the band office for community members to access.

## 7.4 Conclusion

Throughout my childhood, we were brought up with religious beliefs. My family attended church, gospel tent meetings and Sunday school. For many years when I start learning my culture and going to ceremony, I felt like I was doing something wrong because of religious concepts that were ingrained into me. I asked about it in ceremony and it was said that the same spirit that comes into this ceremony, is the same spirit that lives within us and all around us. It doesn't matter where we go, whether it's to church or to be in ceremony. It's all the same spirit that we pray to, Kichi-Manito. 'Great Spirit', Creator or God. It is all the same spirit.

While in the midst of doing this research, it was difficult for me to express what was embedded into me as an individual. I had come to believe that I had set a solid foundation for who I am as nêhiyaw person. Indigenous values and ethics are rooted in the teachings of ceremonies and ancestral knowledge. Baskin (2005) states that "Indigenous ethics are rooted in the context of oral history and storytelling" (p. 105). The values are also taught within Indigenous languages. The stories shared by the participants brought medicine to my Spirit.

The language itself has much to offer, when it comes to Indigenous worldviews. Many fluent Cree speakers will say that the language or a story has a different meaning when it is told in Cree. As an Indigenous helper, it had brought me to the understanding that learning the values and ethics are embedded into the teachings that I had unconsciously learned as I was growing up. The learning of stories, teachings and ancestral wisdom involves working collectively for the betterment of future generations. As Indigenous people we need to carry this knowledge forward to bring back those teachings we once shared to be resilient. There is much empowerment in knowing our identity and therefore having a healthy sense of well-being and healing for ourselves. We have to unlearn what we have been programmed by colonization to be who we

were truly meant to be. We were once spiritual beings on this physical realm and have come to this earth to have a physical experience. There is no such thing as death, as it is known; we simply transition back to the spirit world. I believe that once Indigenous people know our ancestral knowledge and develop a relationship with the land and Creator, we can bring much healing to our nations. It is a step forward in Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing.

Visions and prophecies were something that our people were attuned to and there are stories of Chief Day Star having many visions and prophecies about what was to come and happen. It is through our Ancestors in which we could all access if we believe and spiritually practice it. Our people would fast, pray and meditate when they had come across something that needed answers to whether it was a sickness, a community problem or issue. Our people were very close to Creator, they knew and practiced the mysteries of universe.

The stories of what has been shared is only a small fraction of what really lies beneath the surface of our identity, knowledge, and land. Indigenous knowledge, natural and universal law is something that we cannot finish learning, as we discussed there is the ‘muntou’ mystery of this universe and place we call Mother Earth. It goes beyond that, our ceremonies and the supernatural healing that takes place there. There is a time and season for everything in our own life journey, when our people had set out to do something, it was intentional. This is and always has been how Creator and the Spirit moved within our ways.

Indigenous knowledge research is something that cannot be finished learning, our systems go beyond the westernized approach of thinking. Ancestral knowledge and wisdom are held within our spiritual ceremonies and practices. Some of that ancient knowledge is only shared with those that have been trusted and gifted with that knowledge; it takes someone with

discipline and of lifelong practice. Everything comes at a specific time and place in our lives, sometimes all we can do is surrender to the process.

I would like to honour and give the upmost gratitude to our people of the land who have shared their knowledge and have brought this vision to life. I genuinely feel privileged to sit with each and every one of the participants who wanted to share their stories with me. It has established a foundation for Indigenous re-search here on our lands, especially for our next generation who would like to continue this journey. In addition, I would like to honour the land, our grandmothers, grandfathers and our Ancestors before us who have laid down tobacco and uplifted their prayers for the next generations. I am appreciative of everything that has been offered here during this journey. Kinanāskomitin.

## References

- Aboriginal Healing Foundation. (2005). *A Healing Journey: Final report summary points*.  
Aboriginal Healing Foundation.
- Absolon, K. & Willett, C. (2005). Putting ourselves forward: Location in Aboriginal research. In S. Strega, & L. Brown (Eds.), *Research as resistance: Critical, Indigenous and anti-oppressive approaches to research* (pp. 97-126). Canadian Scholars Press.
- Bartlett, C., Marshall, M., & Marshall, A. (2012). Two-eyed seeing and other lessons learned within a co-learning journey of bringing together Indigenous and mainstream knowledges and ways of knowing. *Journal of Environmental Studies and Sciences*, 2(4), 331–340.
- Baskin, C. (2005). Storytelling Circles: reflections of Aboriginal protocols in research. *Canadian Social Work Review*. 22(2), 171-187.
- Brace, S. (2021, September 18). Finding their inner light: Mothers recover from addiction with support of Indigenous healing camp. *CBC News*.  
<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/saskatchewan/healing-on-the-land-camp-1.6166373>
- Campbell, M. (2016). *Acts of Resistance: Reclaiming Native womanhood in Canadian Aboriginal theatre*. [Doctoral Dissertation, University of Toronto].  
[https://tspace.library.utoronto.ca/bitstream/1807/72938/1/Campbell\\_Melissa\\_C\\_201606\\_PhD\\_thesis.pdf](https://tspace.library.utoronto.ca/bitstream/1807/72938/1/Campbell_Melissa_C_201606_PhD_thesis.pdf)
- Centre for First Nations Governance. (2024). *Our Inherent Rights: our inherent right to self government*. <https://fngovernance.org/our-inherent-rights/#>
- Clark, M., Aviles-Betel, K., Richardson, C., Allouche, Z. (2021). Mikâsowin-Returning to the body, remembering what keeps us alive. *Genealogy*, 5(34), 1-10.

<http://doi.org/10.3390/genealogy/5020034>

- Corntassel, J., Hardbarger, T. (2019). Educate to perpetuate: Land-based pedagogies and community resurgence. *International Review of Education*, 65, 87-116.
- Dillon Consulting. (2012). *Kīsīkōwāhchakōos: Daystar's People Speak: Past and Present*. Dillon Consulting.
- Ermine, W. (2016). Aboriginal Epistemology. In H. Macfarlane & G.A. Ruffo (Eds). *Introductions to Indigenous Literary Criticisms in Canada*. (pp. 101-112). Broadview Press.
- Hansen, J. (2018). Cree Elders' Perspectives on Land-Based Education: A case study. University of Saskatchewan. *Brock Education Journal*, 28(1), 74-91.
- Hunt, S. (2018). Researching within relations of violence: Witnessing as a methodology. In D. McGregor, J-P. Restoule & R. Johnston (Eds.). *Indigenous research: Theories, practices, and relationships* (pp. 282-295). Canadian Scholars Press.
- Indian Act. (2020). In *The Canadian Encyclopedia*. Retrieved from <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/indian-act>
- Jobin, S. (2016). Double Consciousness and Nehiyawak (Cree) Perspectives: Reclaiming Indigenous Women's knowledge. In N. Kermoal & I. Altamirano-Jiménez (Eds.). *Living on the land: Indigenous women's understanding of place*. (pp. 39-58). Athabasca University Press.
- Johnson, H. (2021). Land-Based Healing: I do not own this land; this land owns me. In *Roads, The Canadian Journal of Opinion*. Issue 48. <https://inroadsjournal.ca/author/harold-johnson/>
- Johnson-Jennings, M., Billiot, S., Walters, K. (2020). Returning to our Roots: Tribal Health and

- Wellness through Land-Based Healing. *Genealogy*, 4(3), 91, 1-21.
- Kermoal, N. & Altamirano-Jimenez, I. (Eds.). (2016). *Living on the land: Indigenous women's understanding of place*. Athabasca University Press.
- King, T. (2003). *The truth about stories. A Native narrative*. House of Anansi Press.
- Kovach, M., Carriere, J., Barrett, M, J., Montgomery, H., and Gillies, C. (2013). Stories of Diverse Identity Locations in Indigenous Research. *International Review of Qualitative Research*. 6(4), 487-509.
- Kovach, M. (2009). *Indigenous methodologies: Characteristics, conversations and contexts*. University of Toronto Press.
- Kovach, M. (2021). *Indigenous methodologies: Characteristics, conversations and contexts*. (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). University of Toronto Press.
- McLeod, N. (2007). *Cree Narrative Memory: From Treaties to Contemporary Times*. Purich Publishing Limited.
- Merriam-Webster. (n.d.). Resurgence. In *Merriam-Webster.com dictionary*. Retrieved December 6, 2023, from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/resurgence>
- Merriam-Webster. (n.d.). Revitalize. In *Merriam-Webster.com dictionary*. Retrieved December 6, 2023, from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/revitalize>
- Miller, A., Strongarm, B. & McNab, M. (2019). *Posâkanacîwiyiniwak: nitaskînân: The touchwood hills people: our land*. Touchwood Agency Tribal Council & Saskatchewan Indigenous Cultural Centre.
- Milligan, C. (2019). *Indigenous Land-Based Healing Programs in Canada. A Scoping Review*. *Hotîi ts'eeda Northwest Territories Sport Support Unit*. NWT Recreation & Parks Association & Hotîi ts'eeda Northwest Territories SPOR Support Unit.

[https://nwtspor.ca/sites/default/files/2019-11-06\\_ht\\_lit\\_review\\_indigenous\\_land-based\\_healing\\_final.pdf](https://nwtspor.ca/sites/default/files/2019-11-06_ht_lit_review_indigenous_land-based_healing_final.pdf)

National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. (2019). *Reclaiming Power and Place: The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls*. <http://www.mmiwg-ffda.ca/publications/>

Patterson, C. & Moriarity, K. (2021). Land based healing offers treatment program for youth rooted in Indigenous culture. *Capital Current*. <https://capitalcurrent.ca/land-based-healing-offers-treatment-program-for-youth-rooted-in-indigenous-culture/> Pedri-Spade, C. (2016). The Drum is your Document. Decolonizing Research Through Anishnabe Song and Story. *International Review of Qualitative Research*, 9(4), 385-406.

Q'um Q'um Siem (Archibald, J) & Nox Ayawailt (Parent, A.). (2019). Hands back hands forward for Indigenous storywork as methodology. In S. Windchief & T. San Pedro (Eds.) *Applying Indigenous research methods: Storying with peoples and communities* (pp. 3-20). Routledge.

Redvers, J. (2020). The land is a healer: Perspectives on land-based healing from Indigenous practitioners in northern Canada. *International Journal of Indigenous Health*, 15(1), 90–107.

Simpson, L., B. (2017). *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom through Radical Resistance*. University of Minnesota Press.

Statistics Canada. (2019). *Suicide among First Nations people, Métis and Inuit (2011-2016)*. (Catalogue number: 99-011-X2019001). Retrieved from: <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/99-011-x/99-011-x2019001-eng.htm>

St. Denis, V. (2007). Uniting Aboriginal Education with Anti Racist Education. *Canadian*

*Journal of Education* 30(4), 1068-1092.

Thomas, A, R. (2005). *Honouring the Oral Traditions of the Ta't Mustimuxw (ancestors) through Storytelling*. In L. Brown & S. Strega (Eds) *Research as Resistance: Critical, Indigenous and Anti-Oppressive Approaches* (pp. 177-198). Canadian Scholars Press.

Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. (2015). *Truth and Reconciliation*

*Commission of Canada: Calls to Action*. Retrieved from:

[https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/british-columbians-our-governments/indigenous-people/aboriginal-peoples-documents/calls\\_to\\_action\\_english2.pdf](https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/british-columbians-our-governments/indigenous-people/aboriginal-peoples-documents/calls_to_action_english2.pdf)

United Nations. (2007). *United Nations of Declarations of Rights of Indigenous People*.

Chicago. Retrieved from: [https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/wp-content/uploads/sites/19/2018/11/UNDRIP\\_E\\_web.pdf](https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/wp-content/uploads/sites/19/2018/11/UNDRIP_E_web.pdf)

Wildcat, M. (2018). Wākōhtowin in Action. *Constitutional Form constitutionnel*, 27(1), 13-24.

<https://www.ualberta.ca/wahkohtowin/media-library/data-lists-pdfs/wahkotowin-in-action.pdf>

Williams, A. (Director). (2015). *The Pass System* [film]. Tamarack Productions.

<http://thepasssystem.ca>

Wilson, S. (2008). *Research is Ceremony: Indigenous research methods*.

Fernwood Publishing.

Wolvengray, A. (n.d.). *Indigenous Languages*. Indigenous Saskatchewan Encyclopedia.

[https://teaching.usask.ca/indigenoussk/import/indigenous\\_languages.php](https://teaching.usask.ca/indigenoussk/import/indigenous_languages.php).

## Appendix 1: Consent Form



**University  
of Victoria**

---

### Wâcîkowiynînhk: Indigenous Identity Resurgence and Land Connectedness

Researcher: Blaire Buffalo, Master of Social Work – Indigenous Specialization, University of Victoria

Phone: (639) 916-1061

Email: [bbuffalo22@gmail.com](mailto:bbuffalo22@gmail.com)

This consent form provides general information about the research project and what would be involved with your participation. Please read through carefully and do not hesitate to ask any questions regarding the research and consent form. You are welcome to contact the researcher directly if you have any questions or require further information.

This research project is being conducted to fulfill the thesis requirements of the Master of Social Work – Indigenous Specialization program. It is being supervised by Dr. Billie Allan at the University who may be contacted at [allanb@uvic.ca](mailto:allanb@uvic.ca) or 250-472-4632. This research has also been approved by the Human Research Ethics Board at the University of Victoria.

#### **Researcher Information**

My name is Blaire Buffalo, I am an urban member from Day Star First Nation of nêhiyaw descent. My parents are Rhonda Bird (Buffalo) and Chester Kinequon. I am a mother of 2 daughters. I started the Master of Social Work student (MSWI) in 2020 at the University of Victoria. It is my desire to learn the knowledge from my land and people for my children and generations to come as well as to adapt this knowledge to develop land-based healing initiatives for women, children and families.

#### **Purpose and Objectives**

This study aims to gather knowledge of nêhiyaw identity, through story sharing, kinship and ceremony of the people of Day Stay First Nation of Treaty 4 territory. The study will examine the question: How does the revitalization of the relationship to the land support Indigenous identity resurgence of Plains Cree women and families in Treaty 4 territory?

This research also aims to:

1. Develop a nêhiyaw land-based healing program or initiative.
2. Create a deeper sense of identity for myself, family and community.

#### **COVID-19 Protocol**

All participants will be taken through the COVID-19 safety protocol. If the researcher or participant is feeling unwell, the interview will be rescheduled. The researcher and participants

will be taking all safety precautions to reduce the spread of COVID-19 such as wearing masks (disposable masks will be provided), sanitizing surfaces and shared items, hand washing, physical distancing, use of rapid testing prior to interview as well as following public health directives. Data collection will take place in person if public health measures allow or by telephone. If participants choose to be social distanced the researcher could arrange it.

### **Importance of this Research**

This research is based on the resurgence of nêhiyaw identity through the reconnection of relationships and land connectedness. Indigenous ways of knowing and being from a nêhiyaw perspective specifically for the Plains Cree peoples of Treaty 4. I wish to acknowledge gathered to support nêhiyaw families through the development of land-based healing program or initiative.

### **Participants**

You are being asked to participate in this research because you fit the specified age criteria needed for the study (aged 65 years or older or adult aged 35 – 64 years of age), are of nêhiyaw descent or you are known or identified as an Elder or Knowledge Holder for the community.

### **What is Involved**

I will be asking participants to share their knowledge on traditional knowledge. If you consent to participate in the study, I would ask to visit you for an interview which may take up to 2 hours of your time. If you agree, I would like to audio record our conversation; however, if you do not wish to be recorded. I will ask if I could take field notes during the interview instead. The interview will be held at a place that is best suited to your needs such as your own place of residence, band office or community centre.

I will also be concluding the research with a traditional feast. I will be doing ceremonies such as a pipe ceremony and sweat lodges to pray and request guidance for this research. You will be invited and are more than welcome to attend any of the ceremonies during the process of this research.

### **Inconvenience**

Participation in this study may cause some inconveniences to you, including the time it takes to share stories through interview that may take up to 2 hours, as well as reviewing and revising your transcript or interview notes for desired outcomes.

### **Risks**

Although the risks are very minimal, you may become emotional in sharing your stories or experiences of culture and identity. To alleviate any risks, you are encouraged to share only as much as you feel comfortable with. I will also have smudge or medicines available for you to take home and you will also be invited to participate in any of the ceremonies being held for this research.

### **Benefits**

Some of the potential benefits for participating in this study is to share your knowledge and experience and have your stories documented for younger or future generations. As Indigenous people it is our responsibility to assert and uphold our inherent right as Indigenous peoples to our own identity and belonging to the land. By participating in the study, your stories will contribute towards the resurgence of bringing healing through identity and connectedness to the land and having your knowledge documented to be shared with women, children and families.

### **Compensation**

Being that this is Indigenous research, with an Indigenous approach to research, I will give an offering of tobacco, and a gift of a blanket, tea and medicines such as sage or sweetgrass. The gifts of the blanket, tobacco and medicines signify the accountability to my relationship to the participants. If you decide to withdraw from the research at any point, you can keep everything that was initially gifted to you.

### **Voluntary Participation**

Your participation in the research is completely voluntary. You are welcome to withdraw at any point in time during the research process without any consequences and you do not have to provide any reason for your withdrawal. If you choose to withdraw, any data collected during your participation will be destroyed. If you do decide to participate in this research, you will be asked to sign or verbally agree to this consent form.

### **Anonymity**

You will have the option to choose whether your name will be published in this research or if your identity will remain anonymous. If you choose to remain anonymous, all identifying information will be removed or a pseudonym will be used. You will also be given a chance to review your contributions before the research is finalized. During this process you can edit or delete any information you feel that may identify you or which you do not want to be published in the finished work.

### **Confidentiality**

All information shared will be held strictly confidential. All data will be password protected and locked in a storage box with a key that will only be accessed by the researcher. Electronic files, audio and paper materials will be destroyed. All materials and content will be kept for up to 2 years.

As a registered social worker under the Association of Social Workers of Saskatchewan it is also my duty to report any abuse or harm to any children or if anyone expressing intention to harm themselves or someone else.

As part of the permission of the Chief and Council of Day Star First Nation to carry out the research, I have the assistance of one of the council members in connecting with potential participants. The council member will also be bound to confidentiality during this research.

**Dissemination of Results**

The results of the research will be documented in my Master of Social Work thesis, shared during an oral examination and published through the online data base at the University of Victoria where it will become available for members of the public to access. If you wish, I will send you a copy of the final written thesis either by mail or regular mail depending on which option works best for you. There will also be an electronic and written copy accessible by band members.



Interview

Please indicate your consent to participate in the study by signing below. If you prefer to indicate your consent verbally to me instead, I will document that your verbal consent by signing as a witness below.

As the participant in this study, you can choose either a verbal or written consent. Please initial one or verbally indicate one of the following:

Verbal \_\_\_\_\_

Written \_\_\_\_\_

**Signed:**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher signature if witnessing verbal consent: \_\_\_\_\_

**Confidentiality Preference:**

Please initial one or you can verbally choose one of the following:

\_\_\_\_\_ I consent to be identified by name/credited in the results of the study.

\_\_\_\_\_ I do NOT consent to identified by name and wish to remain anonymous.

\_\_\_\_\_ I would prefer to be known as \_\_\_\_\_ within the research study.

**Consent to audio recording and/or field note:** \_\_\_\_\_

Please initial or verbally select one of the following options.

\_\_\_\_\_ I consent the audio recording of my interview.

\_\_\_\_\_ I consent to the researcher taking notes during my interview.

\_\_\_\_\_ I do NOT consent to any kind of recording – audio or notetaking – of my interview.

**Use of Photographs and other materials:**

Please initial or you can verbally choose one of the following:

\_\_\_\_\_ I consent to the inclusion of any writings, documents, photos and/or artifacts I choose to include as part of story sharing and used within the research study. I understand that I can change my mind about the inclusion of any of these items before the researcher’s thesis is finalized.

\_\_\_\_\_ I do NOT consent to have any of my writings, documents, photos and/or artifacts as part of story sharing being used withing the research study.

**Research Results:**

Please initial or you can verbally choose one of the following:

\_\_\_\_\_ I do not wish to receive a copy of the research results.

\_\_\_\_\_ I wish to have an electronic copy of the research results emailed to me at

\_\_\_\_\_.

\_\_\_\_\_ I wish to have a paper copy of the research results mailed to me.

Mailing address: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ I have read the research information and have had all my questions answered to my satisfaction.

\_\_\_\_\_ I am aware of the aims of the research project and the nature and extent of my involvement of the study.

\_\_\_\_\_ I am aware that I can contact the researcher, Blaire Buffalo, by telephone at 1 (639) 916-1061 or email [bbuffalo22@gmail.com](mailto:bbuffalo22@gmail.com) regarding any questions or concerns with respect to the research.

\_\_\_\_\_ I am aware that my participation is completely voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from the research at any point in time without consequence and that any gifts I have received for my participation will remain mine regardless of whether I choose to continue my participation or not.

\_\_\_\_\_ I am assured that the researcher will safeguard the knowledge shared by keeping my responses and ensuring all identifying information is removed from any data associated with me if I choose to remain anonymous.

***A copy of this consent will be left with you, and a copy will be taken by the researcher.***