

Awuwanainithukik: Living an Authentic Omuškegowuk Cree Way of Life
A Discussion on the Regeneration and Transmission of Nistam Eniniwak Existences

by

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Abstract

This thesis will explore the regeneration and transmission of Indigenous people's knowledge systems and practices in our communities today. The Omushkegowuk Cree teaching of awuwanainithukik (living an authentic Cree way of life by following our ancestors values and beliefs) is used as a foundation for creating pathways of resurgence. A family's journey of reciprocal ceremonial regeneration will be used as a case in point to reveal how Indigenous people can create meaningful and transformational changes within their minds and hearts when they begin to take action according to their ancestral teachings. The challenges Indigenous people encounter on their path of cultural regeneration will be discussed in light of the current religious, economic, political and psychological issues colonialism has inflicted upon our communities. By living according to the teaching of awuwanainithukik Indigenous people can regenerate their authentic ways of being in the world despite of the historical and continuing effects of colonialism.

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Omushkegowuk Cree Words and Concept

<i>Aski</i>	The land
<i>Awuwanainithukik</i>	Living an authentic Cree way of live by our ancestors beliefs and values
<i>Egonegemaga kanaspatiwakik</i>	These are the people I follow
<i>Kakiskinawapamikaat</i>	Mentor; The one who teaches by doing
<i>Kanakituk Ishkotano</i>	Fire Keepers
<i>Kawapachikatek</i>	One can see things
<i>Ketipimatisicik</i>	The living people of the future
<i>Meegwetch</i>	Thank you
<i>Misiweniwakomakanak</i>	All of my relations
<i>Midiwin</i>	Referring to spiritual/medicinal society, a place of healing
<i>Minawachihaiwewin</i>	Healing from anything that is bad, hurtful or harmful
<i>Moochimik</i>	A place of the known or a known place, also translated as the bush
<i>Nichee</i>	Blood relatives
<i>Nichishannanitok</i>	Extended family within the community and natural and spiritual world
<i>Nikiiwan</i>	Home, referring to my home
<i>Nishtumitwewin</i>	First Words

<i>Nisitopamowin</i>	When you understand something, you know it well
<i>Nistam Eniniwak</i>	Original Peoples of Turtle Island
<i>Omushkego</i>	Our language as Omushkegowuk people
<i>Omushkegowuk</i>	People of the swampy land, also known as Swampy Cree people
<i>Tipachimowina</i>	Stories, happenings, history

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This is for all the people, especially the youth, in my community, Constance Lake First Nation.

Dedication

I dedicate this work to my dear grandpa, Bert Moore, whom I miss more than words can express. I hope to carry on your spirit of love, humour and generosity on my life journey.

Chapter One

Nishtumitwewin: First Words

I am the daughter of Jacqueline Moore and Gerald Daigle and the granddaughter of Angela and Bert Moore and Gloria and Armand Daigle. I am from the Swampy Cree land of what is now known as Constance Lake First Nation. These are the people I follow.

From an Omushkegowuk Cree perspective, we would say this thesis is the *tipachimowina*, the story, of the people in my community. This particular narrative, like so many others unfolding on Turtle Island today sheds light on the challenges and struggles, but in the end, the meaningful and transformational changes which take place within people's minds and hearts when they begin to live a life according to the Omushkegowuk Cree teaching of *awuwanainithukik*. This teaching, which has been passed down amongst the Omushkegowuk Cree for as long as our memory extends, can essentially be translated to the importance of living an authentic Cree way of life by acting according to our ancestors' values and beliefs.

The teaching of *awuwanainithuk(ik)* can be understood in two different but complementary ways. The first part of this teaching focuses on the importance of the individual while the other part concentrates on the role of the community. When we say *awuwanainithuk*, we are referring to the individual's personal journey and actions. Today, I understand this to also stand for an individual's awakening from the fear, lies, and psychological trauma embedded within a colonial reality. The core of this teaching, however, speaks more to the individual taking initiative to fulfill their role and responsibilities according to Cree protocols for the balance, harmony and health of the community.

When we speak of awuwanainithukik, we are referring to the role the community assumes in the process of living an authentic Cree way of life. The collective form of this teaching again speaks to our accountability and responsibility to our family and community. Tied to this is the reality that an individual cannot even begin to live as a Nistam Eniniwak, a Cree word for Original peoples, without the support of an interdependent social network both within a given community and across them. We cannot do this on our own. We need those who have come before us to pass on the lineage of teachings our ancestors hold for the people within our community are our link to the past, to who we are and where we are headed. When we come into this life, we are to be nurtured and mentored by these people and when our time comes we are to take on that role for those who follow us.

Though my thesis is grounded in the Omushkegowuk Cree teaching of awuwanainithukik, many other teachings of this nature can be found across our Nations. The essence of these teachings remind us of the vital importance that we start living again according to our ancestral values, beliefs and practices, in exchange for the colonial mentalities which have controlled our people's minds and spirits. Considering this, the main question guiding this research is: How can we begin to live according to our ancestral teachings today in light of the loss of memory of our values and practices which has taken place over multiple generations? In regards to my community in particular, who lost memory of our Cree and Anishinabe spiritual ceremonies, the question becomes further focussed by centering on the aspects of both spiritual ceremonies and the reciprocal relationships which must be re-established between our Nations and communities. Following this, the question becomes framed as follows: How can we

learn to spiritually regenerate our ways of knowing and being in the world from communities that are not our own? Connected to these questions are matters which are unique and pertinent to our particular circumstances in the modern colonial settler-based society we live in today. And so, issues revolving around matters of economics and politics become a concern in addition to the influence religion has had on our people as well as the resultant addictions which have developed in our communities at a rapid pace in the last fifty years or so. These are all matters which must be addressed when regenerating a life which will cultivate the transmission of our Indigenous knowledge and practices.

To explore the journey involved in living according to the teaching of awuwanainithukik and more generally, living a life of cultural regeneration and transmission, I went back home to talk with my family and friends. There is one family in particular, the Sutherlands, who have regenerated ancestral Anishinabe ceremonies within our community in the last fifteen years. After speaking with these people, I began to identify a process that I refer to as reciprocal ceremonial regeneration. I came up with this term to refer to the process by which Indigenous people from one community are mentored by those from another. Oftentimes, this also means people from one Nation end up learning the language, ceremonies and customs of another Nation. After some time, it became apparent to me how the term reciprocal had a much larger meaning as I began to understand the process, the cycle if you will, at work in the regeneration of our ancestral teachings and practices. Reciprocity occurs as the people who were initially mentored are held accountable to their mentors and give back to their mentors' community in some way while also eventually taking on the role of mentors for others in

their respective community or perhaps for those in other communities as well. In this sense, people are giving back to both their mentors and others because they have been gifted with teachings which embody an accompanying responsibility and accountability. From a Nistam Eniniwak perspective, they, like their mentors, take on a role contributing to the balance and wellbeing of the whole or totality of creation within this web of interdependent and reciprocal relationships. In the coming pages, I will speak more to this reciprocal cycle but hopefully it will also come alive to you in the story I tell of this family's journey.

In starting this project, it seemed as though it was important to look further into this specific relationship of reciprocal ceremonial regeneration given how many of our people must reach out to others in neighboring Indigenous communities if they are to regenerate their authentic ways of living. The lack of Knowledge Holders within these communities leaves people in a precarious position despite of their will and commitment to renew their ancestral wisdom and practices. My interactions with many Indigenous people both young and old from such communities, including my own, led me to believe this would be a research project with meaning and purpose.

While sorting through all this, my grandfather, Bert Moore, passed away at the age of eighty-two. I found myself back home exactly one year after I had interviewed people for this project, only this time, my grandpa's loud chuckle and his radiant deep brown eyes were not there waiting for me when I arrived. During the week my family had gathered, we spent most of our days and nights exchanging stories of our dear grandpa. With each memory we shared, I was reminded of the man he was and how he

remained in our hearts and minds. One night, my dad told my sister and I a story he had heard years earlier.

One beautiful day, a local trapper from the neighboring town was on the Kashechewan river.¹ As he was going about his usual routine, he noticed a canoe approaching with a young couple. He quickly recognized Abraham and Maggie Moore. He happily greeted them as he had not seen them for quite some time. To his surprise, Maggie was holding a small infant in her arms. He asked them who this little fellow was. They replied by telling him it was their newborn son Bert and that this was his first time on the river.

This was my grandpa's first journey along the Kash River but it certainly was not his last. Listening to this story, I have visions of my grandfather as a baby and then as a young boy traveling up and down the river with his parents with innocence and eagerness in his eyes, observing the vast Swampy Cree land around him. This image travels through time as this young boy grows into the trapper he became as a young man and eventually the wise and loving grandfather I knew my entire life. Thinking about this life of his makes me realize how connected he was to the river and the surrounding land. Whether he was working to provide for his family or simply taking time to relax, he could always be found in the moochimik, a Cree word that can roughly be translated to the bush but fully translated takes on the meaning of a place of the known or a known place. He lived for that land and spent every moment he could on it whether it was

¹ A river close to Constance Lake. It reaches the remote northern areas of Ontario. In the old days, before the convenient access of air travel, the Kash river was used as a main route linking the far northern communities surrounding James Bay and Hudson Bay to the newly established communities along the TransCanada highway. People from communities such as English River and Fort Albany would travel down this river to places such as Constance Lake and Pagwa to periodically visit family members who had migrated and to stock up on supplies which were becoming scarce in their area.

fishing, trapping or hunting. It was part of who he was, and over time, his spirit became a part of the land.

You see, my grandfather represents all these memories to me. More than that, however, he reminds me of the way things used to be; a different way of knowing and living. Of course, it is a way of knowing the world that is still present and alive today for some of our people yet it is fading for so many others. And so, with my grandfather's passing, I could not help but think I had not only lost a grandparent but I had lost a connection to my Cree ancestors, their sacred knowledge and their ways of seeing and relating to the world around us. I found myself grieving over this because I did not feel as though I was ready for him to leave. I was twenty-five at the time he left us and I had only begun to fully appreciate the Cree man he was in my late teens.

Although my grandpa was forced to abandon his spiritual ways for Anglicism as a young boy (and later on, Catholicism for my grandmother), he continued to live as a Nistam Eniniwak by connecting to the land and speaking his language. Saying he remembered his ancestors' ways would not fully describe who he was. It was more like he embodied their wisdom. It was simply who he was and he knew no other way. He embodied the teaching of awuwanainithukik by the actions and decisions he made every day of his life. In the end, it was up to him how he was going to live his life and relate to people and the natural world regardless of the influences around him. In my eyes, he maintained a spiritual understanding of the land he lived on and his intimate relationship with her and all other living beings.

In the flux of things, my grandfather was able to pass his wisdom down to his children and grandchildren. When I speak about this past, this ancestral wisdom, I feel as

though I am connected to it through my grandfather. Even though there was never a traditional Cree form of mentorship which developed between my grandfather and his children and grandchildren we still learned from him by observing, watching and listening. He was our kakiskinawapamikaat and remains so through memory; the one who teaches by doing. He taught us what he could despite of the external influences of Christianity and residential schooling, Western education and the developing politics of the band council system. He simply wanted us to suffer less than his generation did believing this would be partly achieved through our success in mainstream Canadian society. Learning the Settlers' language and views, he thought, would spare us the heartache and pain he experienced throughout his lifetime. Even though he believed we should learn Cree and be out on the land with him, he also encouraged us to learn English and French and to have ambitious goals in school.

In many ways, I think the men and women within my family learned the same things from my grandfather. Although I cannot speak for everyone, I think we would all agree that my grandfather's character and spirit represented love, kindness, generosity humility and humour to us all. His loud chuckle always got us through hard times as he reminded us we had each other to fall back on. More practically, some of us learned how to hunt, fish, trap and the sacredness and medicinal uses of certain plants. All of us at one time or another was out on the land with him because that's where he could always be found. In the last years of his life, we all learned the importance of our language as my grandpa spoke Cree more and more with every passing day either having forgotten the English he had learned or having chosen to do so willingly.

In other ways, I believe the men and women in the Moore family learned different things from my grandfather. I think the males learned how to be strong Cree men simply from the man my grandfather strived to be over his lifetime. They learned how to respect the land, our Mother Earth, and from that how to respect our women. He would bring his sons and grandsons out on the land to ensure they would know how to be good providers for their families. He did not want them to value their maleness from outside influences but wanted them to feel connected to their Cree manhood and thus secure with it. In turn, I think the women in my family learned what it meant to be respected and loved by a strong and humble Cree man. His daughters and granddaughters grew up knowing they were strong, independent and valuable to the family and the community. He nurtured our strengths, our intelligence and our spirit. And for that, we could never allow ourselves to think we did not deserve anything better from our partners.

When I think of my grandpa today, I still see him traveling along the river in his canoe. I think about how the river is alive with his spirit. It gives me hope knowing there is something powerful out there in the land, something that is going to remember us when we are ready to reconnect with our ancestral wisdom. As for myself, I feel ready now and it is my responsibility to my grandfather, who is a part of the Swampy Cree land I come from, to continue learning our Omushkegowuk Cree teachings, live by them and pass on whatever I can to others. I am accountable to what he taught me while he was here in the land of the living and what he continues to teach me from the spiritual world.

In many ways, this thesis became about what I have learned from my grandfather, after his passing into the spiritual world. I've opened this dialogue with my grandfather's story because it brings up a lot of questions I wanted to bring to the forefront. While his

life story makes me think of the strength he represented, it also makes me reflect on the challenges our people face in creating meaningful transformations in our minds and hearts. His story, like all others, is not perfect but this is exactly why I have and continue to learn from it. While I cannot dwell on the fact I did not grow up always valuing what my grandfather represented and that the older generation in my family did not always take on the mentoring roles our people practiced in pre-colonial times, I *can*, however, draw upon what I've learned along the way, continue along this journey and ensure my children and grandchildren are rooted in their Cree perspectives from birth. In my eyes, my grandfather did what he could do based on specific circumstances during his lifetime. He and many others have paved the way for my generation to create meaningful and transformational changes for those who follow us. In light of what he did for me and many others, I feel as though I now have the responsibility to carry on his knowledge and spirit.

In the coming pages, I want to focus on the challenges of living according to the Omushkegowuk Cree teaching of awuwanainithukik and thus the regeneration and transmission of our Indigenous knowledge systems and practices. I will do this by sharing the Sutherland family's story of reciprocal ceremonial regeneration and by also drawing upon my own experiences with my family and community. Central questions which will be addressed are: How can we realistically and creatively work towards regenerating our ancestral wisdom and practices today? What are the challenges we will confront in such a process of cultural regeneration in regards to the historical and increasing influence of Western economic, political, religious and social factors within our communities? What are the processes and relationships by which we will create

lasting transformational changes within people in our communities? How do the pre-colonial processes of knowledge transmission become crucial in maintaining our ways of knowing and living in today's society? How can those living outside our reservation communities work towards regenerating and transmitting our ancestral knowledge and practices?

While my work centers on ceremonial regeneration, I could easily be talking about language, land-based practices or any other ancestral practice which make our communities unique. My work, however, is grounded in my community's story and I have come to realize to what extent the memory of our ancestral Cree and Anishinabe ceremonies have been lost. For this reason, I want to share the Sutherland family's story of reciprocal ceremonial regeneration to illustrate the larger process of living according to the teaching of awuwanainithukik and thus the regeneration of our ancestral ways of living. At the end of the day, my community's story and that of my grandfather's are the ones I know, the ones that are closest to my heart. My grandfather's presence in my life has guided me along this path where these are the questions I believe I must bring to light for the future of my family and community.

Literature Review

In preparing for this project, I was not successful in locating literature on the Omushkegowuk Cree teaching of awuwanainithukik. The essence of awuwanainithukik, which articulates the importance of living according to our ancestors' values and beliefs, more generally, involves the regeneration and transmission of our Indigenous ways of thinking and living. Though I located a limited number of sources on the transmission of Cree culture, including our language and land-based practices, I have also included a

more general body of literature on the regeneration of ancestral Indigenous knowledge systems and practices. An analysis of these combined sources will provide an understanding for the inspiration of this project as well as the need for a discussion on the transmission of Indigenous knowledge systems grounded within an O mushkegowuk Cree worldview. Throughout this examination, I will attempt to create a connection between the teaching of awuwanainithukik and the current body of literature on the regeneration and transmission of Indigenous culture.

The inspiration for this project is first and foremost grounded in my experiences within my community. My experiences within academia, however, have also contributed to my understanding that a discussion on awuwanainithukik and the implicated regeneration and transmission of our Indigenous knowledge systems and practices is relevant and meaningful for our communities today. In particular, the work of Taiaiake Alfred, a Kanien'kehaka scholar, has influenced my thoughts and comprehension of this research project. In *Wasase: Indigenous Pathways of Action and Freedom*, Alfred sets the tone for his discussion by sharing the meaning of the ancestral Rotinoshonni war ritual, the Thunder Dance, which is expressed as Wasase:

The new warrior's path, the spirit of Wasase, this Onkwehonwe attitude, this courageous way of being in the world-all come together to form a new politics in which many identities and strategies for making change are fused together in a movement to challenge white society's control over Onkwehonwe and our lands.²

² Alfred, Taiaiake. 2005. *Wasase: Indigenous Pathways of Action and Freedom*. Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press, pg. 19.

With these opening words, Alfred ensures the reader knows he is framing his arguments within a Rotinoshonni understanding of the world and thus the responsibilities and roles that have been historically passed down for his people.

Throughout his discussion, Alfred applies his ancestral teachings, including that of Wasase, while also incorporating the views of people from other Indigenous Nations, to provide a foundation from which we can begin to confront the history of devastation colonialism has plagued upon our communities. Laying groundwork for a spiritual revolution, Alfred discusses issues related to language loss and economic difficulties but insists that the main problem within our communities today is founded within the spiritual defeatism of our people.³ Based on the teaching of Wasase, a way of life which enables the mental awakening, emotional fortitude and strengthening of our people as well as the rediscovery of meaning of our ways of living and understanding the world becomes central in confronting this spiritual defeatism.⁴ From Alfred's work, one is led to believe that by re-rooting ourselves within our ancestral knowledge systems and practices, we will strengthen our minds and hearts while learning the ways by which we can begin to live again as Nistam Eniniwak despite of the generations of colonial impact. Alfred argues that the pathways of healing and re-rooting our people within their ancestral traditions are through strong and supportive familial networks, traditional teachings and culture and by way of mentoring relationships.⁵

³ Op. cit., Alfred, (2005), pg. 144.

⁴ Op. cit., Alfred, (2005), pg. 87.

⁵ Op. cit., Alfred, (2005), pg. 175.

From Alfred's work, I have come to realize how the healing and resurgence of our peoples can only be attained through the reconnection, regeneration and transmission of our Indigenous knowledge systems and ways of living. From Alfred's example, I understand how a discussion of such a process or more accurately, a way of life, must be framed within the words and teachings of our ancestors. And so, as Alfred refers to Wasase from his own people's teachings, I have come to understand how my work must be grounded within the Omushkegowuk Cree teaching of awuwanainithukik. I simply wish to take Alfred's work in the direction of looking at communities, such as my own, who have lost memory of their ancestral ways of thinking and living. My research attempts to look at what people in these situations can do in order to embark on this path of cultural regeneration of awuwanainithukik. Alfred's words on the meaning of familial and mentoring relationships become a vital focal point when discussing the realities within these communities.

Many other Indigenous scholars have followed in Alfred's footsteps by recognizing the spiritual defeatism of our people from colonial influence and thus have grounded their work within their ancestral teachings and knowledge systems. A more recent example of this is the work of Nishnaabekwe scholar and researcher Leanne Simpson. In *Lighting the Eighth Fire: The Liberation, Resurgence, and Protection of Indigenous Nations*, Simpson brings together Indigenous writers from various backgrounds to discuss the resurgence of our ancestral ways of being. Throughout this compilation of writings, the authors ground their work and underlying understandings and arguments within the knowledge and traditions of their people. In introducing this compilation of essays Alfred eloquently says:

The strength of these essays is that, facing this situation, they do not surrender to despair and advocate collaboration with colonialism or stroke mindless rage. They have stronger vision of liberation. They are guided by ancient teachings—they are patient and wise and they recognize the futility of “revolution” and turn inward to focus on the resurgence of an authentic Indigenous existence and the recapturing of physical, political, and psychic spaces of freedom for our people. In this, they are a powerful truth that our people need to hear.⁶

Simpson, ultimately sets the tone for this collective work by providing an introduction grounded in the Nishnaabeg prophecy involving the teaching of the Oshkimaadiziig, a new people:

It is the Oshkimaadiziig whose responsibilities involve reviving our language, philosophies, political and economic traditions, our ways of knowing, and our culture. The foremost responsibility of the “new people” is to pick up those things previous generations have left behind by nurturing relationships with Elders that have not “fallen asleep”. Oshkimaadiziig are responsible for decolonizing, for rebuilding our nation, and for forging new relationships with other nations by returning to original Nishnaabeg visions of peace and justice. According to the prophecy, the work of the Oshkimaadiziig determines the outcome of the Eighth Fire, an eternal fire to be lit by all humans. It is an everlasting fire of peace, but its existence depends upon our actions and our choices today.⁷

Simpson goes on to say how this prophecy represents both hope for her and a “crucial mandate for action”.⁸

Simpson’s own essay within this compilation is entitled *Our Elder Brothers: The Lifeblood of Resurgence*. Within this essay, Simpson extends her understanding of the

⁶ Alfred, Taiaiake. 2008. “Opening Words”: Pp.9-11 in *Lighting the Eighth Fire: The Liberation, Resurgence, and Protection of Indigenous Nations*, edited by Leanne Simpson. Winnipeg, MB: Arbeiter Ring Publishing, pg. 11.

⁷ Simpson, Leanne. 2008. “Oshkimassdiziig, the New People”: Pp.13-21 in *Lighting the Eighth Fire: The Liberation, Resurgence, and Protection of Indigenous Nations*, edited by Leanne Simpson. Winnipeg, MB: Arbeiter Ring Publishing, pg. 14.

⁸ Ibid.

responsibilities and roles of the Oshkimaadiziig. Throughout, Simpson focuses on the vital importance of the regeneration and transmission of our Indigenous knowledge systems in our communities today. Based on her teachings and understanding of this knowledge transmission, the process becomes the most important element in creating resurgence amongst our people:

I believe one of our most critical and immediate tasks in building an Indigenous resurgence is ensuring that the knowledge of our ancestors is taught to coming generations. But, according to our intellectual traditions, how we do this is as important or perhaps more important than the product of our efforts. Nishnaabeg Knowledge Keepers believe that the processes we use for transferring that knowledge will either positively or negatively influence the outcome. So, the first thing we must recover is our own Indigenous ways of knowing, our own Indigenous ways of protecting, sharing, and transmitting knowledge, our own Indigenous intellectual traditions. And we must begin to practise and to live those traditions on our own terms.⁹

The nurturing and honouring of our familial and communal relationships are central to these processes of knowledge transmission.¹⁰

Essentially, Simpson goes on to offer a four-part strategy for the resurgence of our Indigenous ways of living which includes confronting what she calls our “funding mentality”, addressing the linguistic genocide within our communities, envisioning resurgence within our own teachings and traditions and renewing our pre-colonial treaty relations in between Nations and communities.¹¹ Simpson summarizes the importance of this strategy in the following passage:

⁹ Simpson, Leanne. 2008. “Our Elder Brothers: The Lifeblood of Resurgences”: Pp. 73-87 in *Lighting the Eighth Fire: The Liberation, Resurgence, and Protection of Indigenous Nations*, edited by Leanne Simpson. Winnipeg, MB: Arbeiter Ring Publishing, pg. 74.

¹⁰ Op. cit., Simpson, (2008), pg. 75.

¹¹ Op. cit., Simpson, (2008), pg. 76.

The best way (perhaps the only way, according to some Knowledge Holders) to preserve Indigenous Knowledge systems is to live Indigenous Knowledge systems by creating a generation fully connected to the land, our languages, and our Knowledge Holders and trained in the artistry of the oral/aural tradition. Over the past fifteen years of working with communities and Knowledge Holders, I have found that the way to accomplish this is to simply provide the space and time for youth to connect with the Elders or the Knowledge Keepers of their community. We do not need loads of cash to develop fancy curricula and learning programs; we need to provide opportunity and support, and then get out of the way.¹²

Again, like Alfred's work, Simpson's writing has influenced how my work has been framed and how I have come to understand the meaning of awuwanainithukik in creating resurgence for our people. The focus Simpson places on process becomes a focal point in my work. By sharing the story of the Sutherland family, the process by which we can begin to live again according to our ancestors' teachings, despite the current challenges we face in light of generations of colonialism, becomes the forefront of this narrative. Furthermore, the Sutherlands' story exposes the reality of Simpson's four-part strategy as issues surrounding the "funding mentality" and renewing pre-colonial treaties become important elements to this tale of reciprocal ceremonial regeneration. The particular difference in my work stems from the fact that I focus on the distinct reality of communities having lost memory of their ancestral traditions, in this case, our Cree and Anishinabe spiritual ceremonies. The underlying reason for this focus ultimately stems from my own experiences growing up in Omushkegowuk Cree territory in addition to the experiences and conversations I have had with Indigenous peoples from my generation from all parts of Turtle Island. Though I fully support Simpson's stance on creating space for the younger generation to connect with and learn from Knowledge Holders

¹² Op. cit., Simpson, (2008), pg. 82.

within our communities, I believe there is a need to have an extensive discussion on how this is possible within communities who are losing Knowledge Holders every day while still others have already lost them to either old age or to the colonial mentality.

By way of Alfred and Simpson's works, I believe there is a need for a research project on the regeneration and transmission of Indigenous knowledge systems and practices based in Omushkegowuk Cree teachings and communal experiences. In terms of research done within Omushkegowuk Cree territory, our worldviews have often been excluded from the understanding of cultural regeneration. In *Transmission of Indigenous Knowledge and Bush Skills Among the Western James Bay Cree Women of Subarctic Canada*, co-authors Kayo Ohmagari and Fikret Berkes examine the loss of transmission of Indigenous knowledge and bush skills amongst Swampy Cree women in what is now known as Moose Factory and Peawanuck Ontario, Canada.¹³ Ohmagari and Berkes frame their study by observing ninety-three items they believe to be associated with bush skills.¹⁴ The successful transmission of such skills is determined by an individual's level of mastery.¹⁵

Throughout, Ohmagari and Berkes provide compelling arguments behind the loss of transmission of Cree knowledge and bush skills as they refer to the historical and continuing influence of the Western economy, education system and Christianity.¹⁶ Moreover, the authors make valid points in reasoning why many Cree women are reluctant to approach Knowledge Holders as they become older and more interested in

¹³ Ohmagari, Kayo and Fikret Berkes. 1997. "Transmission of Indigenous Knowledge and Bush Skills Among the Western James Bay Cree Women of Subarctic Canada" Pp.197-222 in *Human Ecology*, 25(2), pg.197.

¹⁴ Op. cit., Ohmagari, Kayo and Fikret Berkes, pg.197.

¹⁵ Op. cit., Ohmagari, Kayo and Fikret Berkes, pg.199.

¹⁶ Op. cit., Ohmagari, Kayo and Fikret Berkes, pg.207.

their ancestral wisdom and practices. Their thoughts on people being embarrassed and disconnected from the older generation are well taken.¹⁷ Ohmagari and Berkes main shortcoming stems from the fact they are approaching Swampy Cree communities and knowledge systems from an outsiders' perspective and not one that is grounded within an Omushkegowuk Cree understanding of the sacredness and purpose of transmitting our ancestral knowledge. This is made apparent on several occasions throughout the thesis as they refer to the level of mastery of skills rather than the continual learning and understanding of one's role and responsibilities within the community as well as the authors' exclusion of the community's location-base knowledge of land and animals and spiritual belief systems in the ninety-three items list and the constant orientation towards economic self-sufficiency and livelihood.¹⁸

The authors close the paper with the following concerns:

Thus, an issue of central importance for the Omushkego Cree is whether reduced transmission of bush knowledge and skills among the women is becoming a liability for livelihood security for the society as a whole.¹⁹

Though Ohmagari and Berkes make a reasonable point by arguing that subsistence is not simply a way of obtaining food but a way of life, there is a clear misunderstanding on the holistic nature of an Omushkegowuk Cree way of life and the sacredness and purpose of our knowledge system. This is made particularly clear as their final recommendations involve the integration of Cree women in the contemporary economy by way of income security programs and educational training courses²⁰ rather than discussing the need of

¹⁷ Op. cit., Ohmagari, Kayo and Fikret Berkes, pg.215, 216.

¹⁸ Op. cit., Ohmagari, Kayo and Fikret Berkes, pg.199, 203, 208.

¹⁹ Op. cit., Ohmagari, Kayo and Fikret Berkes, pg.218.

²⁰ Op. cit., Ohmagari, Kayo and Fikret Berkes, pg.219.

and thus how we can begin to regenerate Cree ways of knowing and living despite of the continuing influence of colonial forces. Hence, there is a need for work in Omushkegowuk Cree communities based within our own ways of knowing and understanding the world which incorporates our roles and responsibilities within our relational network with people and the natural and spiritual world.

In *Kihkipiw: A Cree Way*, Cree scholar Patricia Joan Steinhauer-Hill grounds her work in the teachings and language of her people, the Plains Cree from Saddle Lake First Nation, in attempting to answer the following central question: What do Cree First Nation community members perceive a traditional Cree way of being to be?²¹ In discussing this question, Steinhauer-Hill is particularly interested in the components of this Cree way as well as how it has evolved and adapted over time.²² In pursuing these questions, Patricia's work becomes one that is founded in a more philosophical standpoint than one that is practical. While her work ultimately becomes one that is founded on the meaning of language and relational accountability in Cree culture, the incorporation of real-lived experiences within our communities is left out to a great extent. While she makes numerous references to her own experiences within her community, there is an absence of a discussion on how this Cree way of life has been lost within many of our people's memory and thus how we can realistically begin to regenerate and transmit our Cree ways of knowing and living in contemporary capitalistic colonial society.

²¹ Steinhauer-Hill, Patricia Joan. 2008. *Kihkipiw: A Cree Way*. Edmonton, Alberta: University of Alberta, pg. 25.

²² Ibid.

The key elements to build upon in Patricia's work lie within her understanding of a Cree way of being which she defines as a process of self-discovery in that it involves inductive collective learning.²³ Perhaps what is more important about Patricia's work is her incorporation of the Cree language in understanding our strengths and roles as Cree people. As I have already mentioned, in the Omushkego Cree language, Nistam Eniniwak refers to the Original Peoples of this land. From Patricia's teachings in the Plains Cree territory, Iyiniwak, which is very similar to Eniniwak, refers to all Cree people. This word stems from the Cree word Iyinihakisiw which can be roughly translated to the people who heal themselves.²⁴ Recalling her auntie's words and that of a fellow Cree scholar, Patricia says the following:

As a Cree instructor, she (her auntie) said the derivative of that word is from the meaning that Cree people are self healers. They have the knowledge of herbs, botany and ecological consciousness.[...] Makokis adds: "Iyiniwak means healing people and is the term Cree First Nations people use to refer to themselves to distinguish themselves from others (all life forms) to convey a sense of identity and purpose".²⁵

From this insightful passage, it becomes quite apparent that from a Cree perspective, we hold the wisdom and ways of healing for our people. In our current situation, after generations of colonial impact, the regeneration of our ancestral forms of knowing and living become imperative for the survival and resurgence of our Cree existence. My work will build upon Patricia's more philosophical-based work by applying this Cree way of being in discussing how we can confront the challenges our communities face today in terms of the loss of memory of our ancestral ways of living, in this particular

²³ Op. cit., Steinhauer-Hill, Pp. 82-83, 97, 137.

²⁴ Op. cit., Steinhauer-Hill, Pp. 82-83, 97, 137.

²⁵ Op. cit., Steinhauer-Hill, pg. 139.

instance, our spiritual ceremonies, by connecting with people from other communities so that we can begin to live again as Nistam Eniniwak.

In *Nehiyaw iskwew kiskinowatasinahikewina-paminisowin namoya*

tipeyimisowin: Learning Self Determination Through the Sacred, Janice Makokis

provides perhaps the most relatable literature to this thesis. Makokis discusses Cree women's understanding of iyiniw pahminsowin (self-determination- or more accurately how Cree people regulate and organize themselves) through spiritual ceremonies.²⁶

Throughout the thesis, Makokis insists on the need of experiential knowledge, in this case through ceremony, for Cree women to reach an understanding of their roles and responsibilities:

One can read all the books she wants about “what an Indigenous philosophy is” but only when one truly immerses and embraces his/herself within Indigenous ceremony do they find the true meaning of an Indigenous way of thinking and experiencing the world through a true anti-colonial framework. It is through the experiential knowledge acquired by participating in various ceremonies that you appreciate the importance of a philosophy based on ceremonial teachings found in the spiritual realm of an Indigenous existence.²⁷

As Makokis says, ceremony is “a repository of our knowledge systems” and a way to spiritually connect to our ancestors and their teachings and ways of life.²⁸

Makokis' work becomes particularly relevant as she acknowledges how some communities may have lost memory of their spiritual ceremonies by way of colonial impact by briefly sharing the story of her community and her family's journey of reviving their Cree ceremonies in the 1970s through the support and mentorship of Ojibewe Elders

²⁶ Makokis, Janice. 2008. “Nehiyaw iskwew kiskinowatasinahikewina-paminisowin namoya tipeyimisowin: Learning Self Determination Through the Sacred” Pp.39-50 in *Canadian Woman Studies*, 26(3/4), pg.39.

²⁷ Op. cit., Makokis, pg.41.

²⁸ Op. cit., Makokis, pg.43.

in a community south of the border.²⁹ It is on this aspect of Makokis' thesis that I wish to expand on here. Through Makokis' work, one senses a feeling of hope and empowerment as she shares the story of her own personal journey in reconnecting with her Cree spiritual ceremonies to better understand her role and responsibilities within her community. The fact remains, however, that many people within our communities are not able to reconnect with their ancestral ways of life, in this case, ceremony, within their communities. They must, as Makokis' family did in the 1970s, connect with people from neighboring communities who will lead them on a path where they will revive their own ancestral ways. In this thesis, I wish to further explore this process of reciprocal ceremonial regeneration based on an interdependent kinship network by sharing the Sutherland family's story.

Makokis' work brings up another relevant component. Because her thesis focuses on women's relationships to ceremony to understand the meaning of iyiniw pahminsowin, the issue of gendered ways of relating to spirituality comes to the reader's attention. This begins with addressing how Indigenous males and females have sometimes been psychologically affected in different ways from colonial impact.³⁰ Following this, the ways our spiritual ceremonies have helped heal from colonial effects may sometimes differ for men and women based on how their minds and hearts have been shaped by colonialism. The different ways Indigenous men and women have internalized the effects of colonialism has been discussed in recent years by many Indigenous scholars such as Ty Tengan and Tricia McGuire Adams. In *Native Men*

²⁹ Op. cit., Makokis, pg.41.

³⁰ Taiaiake Alfred talks about this gendered difference in *Colonialism and State Dependency*. Prepared for the National Aboriginal Health Organization Project Communities in Crisis.

Remade: Gender and Nation in Contemporary Hawai'i, Tengan discusses how Indigenous men from Hawai'i have lost a sense of purpose and pride in their ancestral roles within their communities from the legacies of colonialism.³¹ By incorporating personal narratives, Tengan proceeds to look at how Indigenous men's reconnection to ancestral practices and ceremonies has helped them reach an understanding of their community's history and culture and thus their roles and responsibilities within this kinship network.

In *Ogichitaakwe Regeneration*, McGuire Adams provides a discussion centered on the regeneration of Indigenous women's empowerment by incorporating the Anishinaabekwe teaching of ogichitaakwe (an Anishinaabekwe who is committed to helping the Anishinaabe people) to challenge the effects of colonialism.³² Like Tengan, Tricia bases her thesis on the voices and experiences of Anishinaabe women's journeys of decolonization and cultural regeneration. By doing so, she reveals how the strength of our ancestral teachings heals our women from colonial impact by showing them the way to live once again as Anishinaabe women. These gendered perspectives on cultural regeneration and spirituality become relevant to this thesis as they help us comprehend how colonial impact has sometimes affected our people in different manners depending on our genders. While the reconnection to our teachings and practices remains a common theme regardless of person's gender, works such as Tengan's and McGuire Adams' show how the way men and women relate to these teachings and practices and what they learn in terms of their roles and responsibilities within the community may

³¹ Tengan, Ty. 2008. *Native Men Remade: Gender and Nation in Contemporary Hawai'i*. US: Duke University Press.

³² McGuire Adam, Tricia. 2009. *Ogichitaakwe Regeneration*. Victoria, BC: University of Victoria.

differ in some ways according to their gender. For example, the way men learn to respect the land, our Mother Earth, and how this informs their relationship with women within their families and communities. This speaks to the continued relevancy and urgency for the regeneration of our ancestral practices and ways of knowing in creating resurgence within our communities today.

After reviewing the literature on resurgence and cultural regeneration within Indigenous communities, three things became apparent. Firstly, there is a need for people across all Nations to heal themselves, their families and their communities according to our own ways of knowing. As an Omushkegowuk Cree woman and scholar, I have come to understand how the work I do here must be grounded within the teachings of my ancestors. I have also learned, however, from the teachings of people from differing Nations, and for this reason, I have included the work of various Indigenous academics and community workers throughout this thesis as well as the Sutherland family's story even though they are from the Anishinabe Nation. As Simpson argues, we must re-establish the pre-colonial treaties which made our nations strong. The collaboration of our work, stories and teachings contribute to our understanding of what our responsibilities are and where we are headed in the future. So, even though I feel most connected to my family and community's Omushkegowuk Cree teachings and language, I also honour and am thankful for stories and teachings of other Nations.

Secondly, there is a void in the literature on work that is done by Omushkegowuk Cree scholars. While I found a number of sources from Cree academics from the Plains area in addition to the area now known as Manitoba, the representation of work by Cree people from the James Bay area and northern Ontario was sparse. Naturally, I felt it was

important to create a thesis on Indigenous resurgence and cultural regeneration that would be based in the Omushkego language, our history and our stories. As I have mentioned, however, I could not do this exclusively with the stories of Omushkegowuk Cree people since we share a history, land and a similar language with our Anishinaabe brothers and sisters.

The third point flows from the second in that the loss of ceremonies across Omushkegowuk Cree communities in northern Ontario naturally led for the need to include how we can begin to regenerate our spiritual ways despite of generations of colonialism and the loss of memory of our ancestral teachings and practices. The literature in the field of Indigenous resurgence and cultural regeneration is rich in terms of providing a rationality of why this is important for the future of our people and land, is increasingly based in Indigenous scholars' native languages and teachings and often discusses the central function of our relationships as a pathway towards resurgence. There is a lack of work, however, on how we can begin to create change, resurgence and cultural regeneration within communities who have already lost the Keepers of some of their sacred traditions. This thesis wishes to fill this void by sharing the story of a family that was from such a community but who became committed to regenerating their Anishinabe existence despite of the challenges of colonial historical trauma. From an Omushkegowuk Cree perspective, it is a story of awuwanainithukik, as they made the conscious decision, effort and action to regenerate their authentic ways of knowing and being in the world. I have come to believe how the incorporation of such a story, grounded within an Omushkegowuk worldview, will contribute to the existing literature

by many other Indigenous scholars who have grounded their work in their ancestors' words, teachings and stories.

Research Method and Methodology

Awuwanainithukik and the implied meaning of regenerating and transmitting our ancestral knowledge and practices played a fundamental role in guiding the development of my methodological rationale. As a Cree woman, it was important for me to create a research project which would both uphold and honour the stories and experiences of my contributors. By developing a research project that was based on the teaching of awuwanainithukik I ensured I would be directed by a methodology of Cree ways of knowing. By not upholding this teaching, I would be completely devaluing the purpose of my work. As Steinhauer-Hill says, "An Indigenous research methodology involves a paradigm grounded in Indigenous intelligence".³³ Furthermore, I would not be living up to the teaching of kakiskinawapamikaat; the one who teaches by doing. I want to set an example for those in my community who are hoping to, one day, obtain a post-secondary education. I want them to know that it is an empowering experience to use our Nistam Eniniwak worldviews in our work.

In thinking about how I could better explain my methodological rationale I was brought back to the teachings of the medicine wheel through Shawn Wilson's book *Research is Ceremony*. The teachings behind the medicine wheel, including community, ceremony, family and language, tie into those of awuwanainithukik. Other elements such as land are tied into these main teachings. All parts of the medicine wheel are created

³³Op. cit., Steinhauer-Hill, pg.39.

equally, related to one another and are in constant motion. It follows that through a cyclical process a change in one element will create change in all others. As Wilson says, the process of these interconnected relationships creates a mutual reality and constant reinforcement in the flux of creation.³⁴

Although the teachings of the medicine wheel are intricate in themselves, I will briefly explain how I understand these to be guiding principles for my own research project. I begin with community for it was imperative for me to go back to my roots in order to explore the meaning of awuwanainithukik and the implicated regeneration and transmission of our Indigenous knowledge. In Omushkego Cree, we say nisitopamowin to refer to when someone has an understanding of something. When we say nisitopamowin it is implied that we have had some sort of experience to have reached this understanding. The experiences I have had within my community led me along a path where I understand it is crucial for our people to restore our time-honoured knowledge systems and ways of living, in this specific instance, our Cree and Anishinabe ceremonies. The processes and relationships by which we do this are the life behind regenerating these ways of thinking and being in our communities today. And so, it follows that I could not even begin to explore the meaning of these processes and relationships before going back to the place which led me to be passionate about this in the first place.

This flows into the teaching of family. Family can be expressed in a number of ways including nichee which can be roughly translated to “my blood friend” and nichishannanitok which refers to the extended family within the community. From the

³⁴ Wilson, Shawn. 2008. *Research is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods*. Black Point, NS: Ferwood Publishing, pg. 70-71.

outset of this journey I knew I needed to include the stories of those within my community. I interviewed founding members of the community, including my grandparents, to learn more about the history of Constance Lake. In order to establish the political, economic and socio-cultural factors which led to the current state of my community, it became quite apparent that it was necessary to include the voices of those who lived through it.

Throughout my time at home, my extended family became progressively more important to my project. Not only did they shape how I came to view the importance of awuwanainithukik but I began to see myself more and more as a vessel for their stories to be heard. Moreover, the quality of my work would have suffered had my grandmother not been there to help me along the way. There were many instances when I did not understand my grandfather or Edgar Sutherland (another contributor to this thesis I will introduce later on) fore they often communicated in Cree. Likewise, my mother who is a professor and has experience working with Indigenous communities, including our own, was my guide along the way. She made sure I followed the appropriate protocols within our community.

This brings me to the teaching of language. This project could not have been properly formulated without the guiding wisdom of my ancestors' words. My grandmother, who is a fluent speaker of the Omushkego language and who has dedicated her life to teach those within our community, has been my mentor in this area. She has helped me understand the Cree meaning of main concepts I wanted to bring forth within this thesis such as family and living an authentic Indigenous life. The entire idea of this

thesis first began with awuwanainithukik because in our way this does not simply represent a word or even an idea. It is action, spirit and a way of living.

The last teaching is ceremony. In the pages to come, I will focus a great deal on the Sutherland family's story of reciprocal ceremonial regeneration. In terms of methodology, however, I have reflected on how this would guide my research. By way of being invited to a ceremony an individual becomes committed to great responsibility. The knowledge one is gifted throughout this process is sacred and is to be upheld with the highest honour and respect. To this end, I think of the stories and knowledge which were shared with me in the same way. It is sacred and ceremonial in nature. Ceremony, like the stories which were shared with me, brings someone to a raised state of consciousness.³⁵ With this heightened consciousness comes the responsibility of sharing this knowledge with others in a respectful and accountable manner.

Ultimately, the interdependent relationships the medicine wheel represents guided my intentions and motives for this project as well as my interactions with contributors. Just as each element in the medicine wheel is accountable to the other, I am accountable to every aspect of this project. I am accountable to all my relations including the people within my community and the land we draw strength from. The knowledge which has been shared with me is part of these relations. It comes from the people in my life who have nurtured my growth as a Cree woman, from the language they speak, the songs they sing and the land I come from. I am accountable to all of this in what I am doing here and in everything I will do in the future to fulfill my role within our community. This all becomes a part of my understanding of relational accountability.

³⁵ Ibid, pg. 69.

By following the teachings of awuwanainithukik and the medicine wheel, I naturally developed an Indigenous research method. In sum, this can be explained as research that is carried out with a sense of responsibility and relational accountability an Indigenous researcher and community worker has to their family and community which ,in turn, leads to work which is grounded within an Indigenous philosophical framework, our language and our ways of relating to one another. As Cora Weber-Pillax says, it requires a level of integrity that is founded in our roles within the community at large and our relationships with all other living beings.³⁶ The process of carrying out an Indigenous research method is just as important, if not more important, than the end goal of the research itself which is to create change and resurgence within our communities.³⁷

Ultimately, an Indigenous research methodology allowed me to develop this thesis' main themes from the voices and the stories of those in my family and community. Once I listened to their stories, I reflected on them in relation to my own life experiences. Because of the place I am on my journey as a Cree woman, Indigenous scholar and community worker, I believe that this thesis was strengthened from this personal reflection as it shaped my understanding of lessons to be learned from people's stories in addition to realizing the need for this thesis in the realm of academic and community-based work aimed at creating resurgence amongst Indigenous people today. According to an Indigenous research paradigm, it then became my responsibility to my family and community to share this story in a respectful and understanding way so that

³⁶ Weber-Pillwax, Cora. 2001. "Coming to an Understanding: A Panel Presentation: What is Indigenous Research?" Pp.166-174 in *Canadian Journal of Native Education* 25(2), pg.168.

³⁷ Op. cit., Weber-Pillwax, pg.169.

we could all learn a little more about ourselves as Nistam Eniniwak, where we have been and where we should be headed into the future.

Conducting the Interviews

The interviews took place in February of 2007 in Constance Lake First Nation. The research was somewhat divided into two sections. Firstly, I inquired into the history of the community. For this section I interviewed Bert and Angela Moore and Edgar Sutherland all of whom are Omushkegowuk Cree. I chose these individuals because they are founding members of our young community, have knowledge of the Omushkego language and history of our people from what is now known as the Hudson Bay and James Bay area. They know all too well the beginning days of Constance Lake and thus recounted them vividly.

Secondly, I inquired into the process of ceremonial regeneration within the community. To accomplish this I interviewed John Sutherland and his niece April³⁸ who are from the Anishinabe Nation. John is in his early fifties while April is in her early twenties. John and his family moved to Constance Lake in 1975 from a neighbouring Anishinabe community Hornepayne, Ontario. For the purpose of knowing more about the Sutherland family, I knew it was crucial to have a multi-generational perspective on how ceremonial regeneration has affected their lives. At this point it is crucial to highlight the fact that Edgar Sutherland's family is separate from John Sutherland's family despite of their identical names. In asking my family about ceremonial regeneration within our community, my aunt spoke about John's family. She put me in

³⁸ Fictional name. This participant wished to remain anonymous because her grandmother did so while being a participant for Michelle Frost's M.A. dissertation "The Lived Experience of a Traditional Ojibway Elder, 2001, thus following her mentor's example.

touch with John because he is known in the community for holding ceremonies and having been mentored by his mother Taryn³⁹ who has since passed on into the spiritual world.

Finally, I interviewed Hannah Meyers who was born in a neighbouring rural community but has made Constance Lake her home since the age of fifteen. Hannah, who is also Anishinabe, was also referred to me by my aunt. The purpose of interviewing Hannah was to obtain a more inclusive examination of ceremonial regeneration within the community. Although the Sutherland family initially regenerated ceremony for their family they have mentored others, including Hannah, within the community.

I interviewed all of the participants in person at their desired location. For some, it was their homes, while for others it was at my grandparents' house or their workplace. As part of Cree protocols, I offered each participant tobacco and a small gift. This was to show my appreciation and respect for the knowledge they were sharing with me in addition to ensuring I would be accountable to this shared knowledge. At the approval of the participants, my mother and grandmother sat in for a couple of the interviews as translators as some of the participants do not speak fluent English.

Although I had an array of themes in mind, I did not let this shape the direction of my research. Rather, I ensured I initiated the discussions with open-ended questions. In terms of inquiring into the history of the community, I asked questions such as: Can you tell me how you came to live in Constance Lake? Did you grow up with Cree or Anishinabe spiritual ceremonies? Ultimately, I wanted to create the space for people to explore their own thoughts and allow the stories to develop in their own way,

³⁹ Fictional name. This participant asked to remain anonymous in Michelle Frost's M.A. dissertation "The Lived Experience of a Traditional Ojibway Elder" because of her teachings on humility. She passed away before the beginning of this thesis project.

uninterrupted. By doing this, I believe that my work became more about the people, history and knowledge in my community than my own set agenda. The stories I was told made me think more about the teaching of awuwanainithukik and what we could learn from this in moving forward along a path of cultural regeneration.

I am forever thankful for the contribution each participant presented to this thesis. Without them I would not have been able to develop a dissertation that would have value and purpose for our community and hopefully for others as well. Many of them continued to inform my thoughts once the interviews were complete as I reflected on the meaning of the stories being shared as they became alive. Each contributor verified the interview transcriptions once they were done in order to ensure accuracy and validity. Once the hard copy is produced I will present each participant as well as other community members with one.

Structure and Content

In closing these first words, I would like to provide a brief outline of what will unfold in the coming pages. In Chapter Two, *Tipachimowina: Our Community's Story*, I provide a genealogy of Constance Lake First Nation. Though the economic, political and socio-cultural factors leading to the current reality within our communities are well known, I believe there is a need to begin this discussion with some sort of contextual information in order to better inform the reader. In many ways, this history allows us to acquire a deeper understanding of the challenges we encounter in regenerating our ancestral knowledge systems and practices in our communities today. More important than this, however, is the fact that I have the people, especially the youth, within my community in mind as I write this thesis. While some know the story of our community there are many

others who do not. Personally, I know I learned a lot about the early days of our community through the stories people shared with me.

In Chapter Three, *Tipachimowina: The Sutherland Family's Story of Reciprocal Ceremonial Regeneration*, I will share the Sutherland family's story of ceremonial regeneration. As the story unfolds, I will focus on the interdependent mentoring relationships which enabled the family to regain memory of their ceremonies. This story is told here to provide insight and hope for communities who may have lost memory of their ancestors' knowledge systems. The Sutherlands' story teaches us that we can restore this wisdom if we are committed to the process of cultural regeneration which includes respecting and honouring the relationships connecting us to this knowledge. Subsequently, I will explore how members of the Sutherland family have become mentors themselves for people within the community. A focus on the process of spiritual healing and understanding of one's role and responsibilities within the community will be provided. Additionally, I will discuss how this ceremonial regeneration has affected people in the family differently depending on their age.

In Chapter Four, *Kanakituk Ishkotano: The Fire Keepers*, I will focus on the challenges the Sutherland family continues to face in regenerating their ancestral ways of living. This discussion will focus on issues related to the effects of the band council system and government funding, religious influences, substance abuse, and familial networks. While this chapter begins with a critical tone, it ends with one that is hopeful and which places trust in the teaching of awuwanainithukik. I complete this discussion centering on the importance of our ancestral forms and understandings of our extended familial networks, expressed in our Omushkego language as nichishannanitok. I will

focus on how the ancestral roles and responsibilities within our nichishannanitok are the pathway towards living again according to the teaching of awuwanainithukik.

Chapter 2

Tipachimowina: Our Community's Story

"We Came Here To Cut Wood"

The Swampy Cree land my family calls home is now known as Constance Lake First Nation. It is situated minutes off the TransCanada highway in northern Ontario. In 1905, the land encompassing Constance Lake became part of Treaty 9. The Chiefs of surrounding communities formed Matawa First Nations Management Inc. which is a non-profit regional Chief's Council, which in turn, is a member of Nishnawbe Aski Nation Tribal Political Organization (NAN). NAN represents Northern and Northwestern Ontario First Nations. Constance Lake is described today as an Oji-Cree community and is the successor to the English River Band though it has also absorbed many people from the Albany and Moose Factory (Attawapiskat) Bands.

Tucked away in northern Ontario, Constance Lake is fairly isolated. It is miles away from the blooming urban centers found in southern Ontario. In fact, a five hour drive either east or west will bring you to what we used to call the big cities; Thunder Bay to the west and North Bay to the east, each with a population of approximately one hundred thousand. The isolation of our community was something which once drove me mad as a young child. The glamorous city lifestyles depicted on television often led me to foolishly daydream about the day I could leave home and live like the characters on 90201. Now that I'm older and living in a city far from home, my heart misses the land I once played on as a child. I miss the full breath of all seasons the land embodies on the Swampy Cree land and the smell of fire burning from my grandparents' basement stove combined with the aroma of rabbit and dumplings cooking in the kitchen.

Constance Lake is a relatively young community. Many of the founding members are still alive today though some have passed on in recent years. As I mentioned earlier, two of these founding members are my grandparents, Bert and Angela Moore. My grandfather moved to Constance Lake in the early 1940s as a young adolescent. He arrived from English River with his family in search of employment. He recalls the community merely being a street of ten houses upon his arrival.

My grandmother arrived a few years later in 1949. Following the passing of her father, she left Fort Albany to visit her uncle in Constance Lake. Her short-term trip turned into a lifelong stay. When I asked my grandma why she had decided to stay in the first place, a huge smile suddenly appeared on her face and in a somewhat sheepishly way she replied that she had met my grandfather and the rest, as they say, is history. The two built their lives in Constance Lake. Today, my grandmother remains in the quaint house I visited most weekends throughout my childhood while my grandfather now watches over her from the spiritual world.

Edgar Sutherland, who is also a founding member of the community, moved to Constance Lake in the early forties from Pagwa, a neighbouring reservation forty miles West of Constance Lake. He too moved for the employment opportunities which were available on and near the reserve. Edgar's father was originally from the James Bay area close to English River and Fort Albany.

While John and Hannah are a generation younger than Bert, Angela and Edgar, they too recall a history of migrations within their family histories. When I spoke with John, he told me that his father's family was originally from the Fort Albany area while his mother's family was from the White River area. In turn, Hannah's family roots can

be traced back to the Fort Albany and Moose Factory area. Again, both John and Hannah's families relocated in search of financial security.

The stories Bert and Edgar shared with me are those which are all too familiar for us in Indian country, especially for that particular generation. They are stories of struggle for economic survival and the subsequent migrations which often resulted from these life circumstances. My grandfather's story is particularly interesting as he recalled multiple migrations within his family lineage. Bert was born in English River, a community in the far northern peak of Ontario. English River was established as a serving community for the Hudson's Bay Trading Company. Family residents of English River were originally from Albany and Kashachewan but migrated for the employment opportunities Hudson's Bay offered at the time. As time passed however, the fur trade lost its competitiveness in the global market to other sectors of the economy. As Bert grew older, the construction and natural resource extraction industries rapidly gained importance in the Canadian economy. The lumber industry, in particular, was booming in the area where Constance Lake was established. As expected, Bert's family, as all other families in English River, was compelled to move once again to keep up with the growing Settler economy. Most families moved south to either Pagwa or Constance Lake.

Edgar also remembers a similar pattern of migrations within his family history so that his father could secure employment to provide for his family. While Edgar's father was originally from the James Bay area, Edgar was born in Pagwa. As Edgar, my grandmother and I were sipping tea one afternoon, he told me about the numerous community meetings held in Pagwa during the early forties, at the time of the Second World War. As he told me more about them, he recalled the pressure the government

placed on families from both Pagwa and Constance Lake in determining a location for the establishment of one reservation. Of course, families from both locations had become comfortable in their present residence and thus neither group wanted to move. This went on for quite some time until, one day, the Department of Indian Affairs and the pulp wood company in Constance Lake at the time, Arrow Timber, became partners with the goal of relocating the families from Pagwa to Constance Lake. As Edgar says “They made a good story”.⁴⁰

The inner workings of this operation were founded on the fact that Arrow Timber needed cheap labour in Constance Lake to keep up with the growing demand for pulp wood while DIA was eager to create one community out of Pagwa and Constance Lake. The two parties worked together to persuade families from Pagwa to relocate to Constance Lake by guaranteeing them with the provision of building materials for houses. As Edgar recalls, however, this promise was not kept once the families found themselves in Constance Lake. While remembering this time in his life, Edgar laughed saying “When my dad he wouldn’t care about that. He said, my family, I have to help my family and help myself. I cut the trees”.⁴¹ And that’s how Edgar’s first home in Constance Lake was built.

In providing a background on Constance Lake, I believe it is necessary to share and understand these family histories of migration. These narratives become crucial in comprehending how our people were firstly, disconnected from their ancestral lands and thus the specific places which were at the root of our ceremonies and language. Secondly, and might I add significantly related to the first point, these stories teach us

⁴⁰ Edgar Sutherland. *Personal Interview*. February 2007. Constance Lake, ON.

⁴¹ Ibid.

how and why our people became increasingly controlled and preoccupied by the growing Settler economy. Together, these two factors help us understand how our people became disconnected from their Nistam Eniniwak identities. Furthermore, we gain insight into the history of events which have led up to the current psychological and spiritual defeat amongst our people today and thus the challenges we must consider when we talk about working towards a resurgence in Indian country.

Aski: The Land

Constance Lake and the communities which most families migrated from such as English River, Fort Albany, James Bay and Moose Factory are all located in the heart of the northern boreal forest. This forest being composed of wetlands and muskeg is filled with black and white spruce, pine, cedar, poplar, birch and aspen. And so, it's not as though the people migrating from the far north down to Constance Lake were met with a completely different landscape and ecosystem. On the contrary, people were still able to maintain their yearly goose harvests, beaver trapping, deer and moose hunting, and fishing of pike and pickerel in addition to making teas and medicines from the trees of the boreal forest. Essentially, people remained within the same ecosystem that their ancestors had built their ceremonies, language and ceremonies from. Yet, the distance from Constance Lake and these northern communities is a few hundred miles which is a considerable move. Considering all of this, I have often wondered how this migration or, multiple migrations in some cases, have affected our lifestyles. In particular, I have thought about the sacred sites in the area my ancestors come from near James Bay and Hudson's Bay. Where did my ancestors carry out their ceremonies? Which places were

vital to our language? Did the Bays themselves have an important role within our traditions? We were now so far from these places, I had not even *been* to these places, yet I find myself often wondering how they formed who we are as Omushkegowuk Cree people.

Despite of these migrations, many people kept speaking their language and maintained a connection to the land through our customary land-based practices of hunting and trapping. The land, in essence, is very similar. Our Cree and Anishinabe spiritual ceremonies, however, were lost somewhere along the way. While there is a story of a shaking tent ceremony taking place somewhere in the deep woods within our community in the 1970s, which both John and Hannah recounted in their interviews⁴², the people I have interviewed as well as my family and friends seem to agree that the effects of religious missionaries essentially divulged our connection to our spiritual ceremonies by the time my mother's generation was growing up in the 1960s and 1970s. They became a part of our unconscious being, perhaps because we became disconnected from the particular places which were central to our ceremonies. Certainly, religious missionaries and residential schools played a principal role in this forgotten knowledge, which I will turn to next. First however, I want to explore this idea of land a little more.

In *Native Science*, Gregory Cajete discusses the history of differing physical and psychological characteristics amongst mountain people, desert people and plains people based on how they built relationships with the ecologies of their regions.⁴³ While I agree with Cajete on this point, in that people from the muskeg land of northern Ontario

⁴² John Sutherland. *Personal Interview*. February 2007. Constance Lake, ON.

Hannah Meyers. *Personal Interview*. February 2007. Constance Lake, ON.

⁴³ Cajete, Gregory. 2000. *Native Science: Natural Laws of Interdependence*. Santa Fe NM: Clear Light Publishers, pg. 187.

developed distinctly linguistically, ceremonially and socially from other Nations say from the area we now know as Arizona and New Mexico, I would add that there are specific places within each particular region that are important for each community. While Cree and Anishinabe Nations in northern Ontario are very similar in terms of their language, ceremonies and cultural practices, each community will be attached to certain places, land, rivers, lakes from which their customs are grounded in. While the families in Constance Lake were able to maintain a large portion of their Cree and Anishinabe culture despite of their numerous moves within northern Ontario, others were eventually forgotten or are in the process of being forgotten. For the people in Constance Lake, our traditional Cree and Anishinabe ceremonies were the first aspect of our culture our ancestors ceased to remember. Today, however, you can see the memory of the language and other cultural practices beginning to fade.

This is the point where our identities began to suffer and continue to do so. As many wise people in Indian country have said before, the land is our identity.⁴⁴ This idea of our identities being connected to a specific area has been described as mindspace by Anne Waters in *Ontology of Identity and Interstitial Being* “[...] Indigenous cultures nurture individual identity formation within a communal interdependence and sustainability in a specific geographic location”.⁴⁵ The forced relocation from these specific locations has been discussed by many as our people suffering from some kind of

⁴⁴ Water, Anne. 2004. “Ontology of Identity and Interstitial Being” Pp. 153-170 in *American Indian Thought*, edited by Anne Waters. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, pg. 154.

Deloria, Vine Jr. 1973. *God is Red: A Native View of Religion*. Golden, CO: Fulcrum Publishing, pg. 143.

⁴⁵ Op. cit., Water, pg. 154.

psychological dissonance.⁴⁶ In *Out of Chaos*, the late Standing Rock Sioux writer, Vine Deloria Jr. describes this alienation as an Indian being in exile:

If we understand ceremony and ritual, performed as a condition of living in certain places, as the critical element which distinguishes each Indian group, then the cultural life of the people, its continuance or destruction, is the important fact in considering whether an exile has occurred. So while the Sioux, Apache, Blackfeet, and Crow, for example, all live within their original lands, persistent efforts to change their culture and exclusion from sacred places has produced a profound sense of exile.

Deloria goes on to say:

Removing an Indian tribe from its aboriginal territory, therefore, results in the destruction of ceremonial life and much of the cultural structure which has made ceremony and ritual significant.⁴⁷

I find these particular quotes by Deloria to be exceptionally suitable for our discussion here since he reflects on the relationship between the forced relocation of our people from our original sacred places to the reduced role, and often non-existence, of ceremonies within our communities.

Of course, there are instances where people were able to maintain and preserve their ceremonial life despite of forced relocation. Still, there is an undeniable history of many others losing memory of their ceremonies once they relocated to a different area. For this reason, I believe it is necessary to discuss this history since it is a factor we must consider today when we talk about regenerating our ancestral ways. In this particular

⁴⁶ Ibid.

McLeod, Neil. 1998. "Coming Home Through Stories" Pp. 437-454 in *The Canadian Journal of Native Studies*, XX 2(2000), pg.439.

⁴⁷ Deloria, Vine Jr. 1992. "Out of Chaos" Pp. 259-269 in *I Become Part of It: Sacred Dimension in Native American Life*, edited by D.M. Dooling and Paul Jordan-Smith. New York, NY: Harper San Francisco, pg. 262.

case, I have chosen to focus on ceremonies but this also applies to language and cultural practices such as trapping, hunting and so on. In terms of ceremony, we must ask ourselves how the history of forced relocation contributes to our people's disconnection from the land and ceremonial life and thus from our Nistam Eniniwak identities. The renewal of our Nistam Eniniwak spirits was essentially lost when our ceremonies began to fade.

The rising role of the Settler's economy played a pivotal role in affecting our relocation from sacred places both in the sense that many of our ancestors' felt compelled to move in order to survive and also in the sense that our involvement in such an economy took our time away from the land and our roles and responsibilities to our communities. This has only gotten worse over the years and for this reason I will now briefly discuss the effects of the Settler's economy as it became obvious to me through my interviews how it has played a primary role in disrupting the transmission of our Cree and Anishinabe knowledge and continues to be a challenge when we speak about regenerating processes of knowledge transmission today.

The Settler's Economy

In discussing the disconnection from the land and ceremonies amongst Indigenous people, it becomes necessary to examine the history of the growing influence of the Settler's economy in our lives. As I said, migration narratives within our communities are telling of this process and draw attention to the fact that forced relocation can also be understood as people migrating for the sole purpose of providing the basic necessities for a family's survival. In the case of Constance Lake, our ancestors originating in the James Bay and Hudson Day area were vastly and quickly affected by the Hudson's Bay Trading

Company which was established in 1670.⁴⁸ As illustrated by my grandfather's family history, once the demand for fur diminished in the global economy, people were forced to relocate south for opportunities in the natural resource and construction industries which were booming at the time. In the last decade, as the lumber industry has become less competitive and profitable to the Canadian economy, people within my community have sought to enter the tourism industry which brings up a whole new set of issues for our land. The point here is we have become so entrenched and dependent on the Settler's capitalistic economy that we have been preoccupied with thinking about what the next means of economic stability will be for our community while our ceremonies, language and cultural practices become fading memories for our people.

In a modern capitalistic commodity-based economy, our accountability to our historical roles and responsibilities within our communities has shifted. We have now become accountable to various Aboriginal political organizations and economic industries such as NAN and the lumber industry rather than being responsible to our ancestors, elders, the land and the coming generations. Our commitment to this system over the last few generations has resulted in many of our people investing their hopes in the creation of wealth and economic security to 'cure' a reality with deeper historical, psychological and spiritual origins which the Settler's economy helped create in the first place. These methods of co-optation which include the generation of dependency are explained in detail by Alfred in *Peace, Power, Righteousness: An Indigenous Manifesto*.

⁴⁸ Francis, Douglas, R. and Howard Palmer. 1992. *The Prairie West: Historical Readings*: Edmonton, AB: Pica Pica Press, pg.43.

⁴⁹ I will explore later with the case of my community, how these methods of co-optation become key challenges we must confront if we are to uphold the process of regenerating and transmitting Indigenous knowledge today.

In the end, the idea of forced relocation by governmental bodies and economic industries has created generations of Indigenous peoples who are alienated from their land and thus their ancestral knowledge systems. We often hear in our communities how we simply do not have the time to learn our language, go on annual hunting trips and gather for cyclical ceremonies. We are all often too busy working long hours, writing funding grants to various Aboriginal political organizations and so on that the practices and values which make us who we are have become secondary in our personal, familial and communal lives. We must ask ourselves what is truly important to us as Nistam Eniniwak. What, in the long run, will ensure we make meaningful and transformational changes within our lives and begin to live again as Nistam Eniniwak?

“We Were Born that Way. We Were Born with Religion.”

When people moved to Constance Lake in the 1940s, they brought their customs and ways of life with them. This lifestyle included both Anglican and Catholic religions. As my grandmother says “We were born that way”.⁵⁰ Because most of the founding families of Constance Lake came from the Fort Albany and James Bay area, most had been affected by religious missionaries at a very early stage during colonization. My grandmother recalls her parents telling her about Cree ceremonies such as the shaking tent. She herself, however, never encountered such ceremonies while she was growing

⁴⁹ Alfred, Taiaiake. 1999. *Peace, Power, Righteousness: An Indigenous Manifesto*. Don Mills, ON: Oxford University Press: pg. 75.

⁵⁰ Angela Moore. *Personal Interview*. February 2007. Constance Lake, ON.

up in Fort Albany nor did she hear about them going on. This is not to say ceremonies were completely disseminated in Fort Albany while my grandmother was a child. Rather, her deep commitment to the Catholic religion would likely not have put her in contact with people who practiced their Nistam Eniniwak ceremonies. Moreover, her youth coincides with a time in Canada where Indigenous peoples' traditional ceremonies were outlawed and so, ceremonial people were forced to hide.⁵¹ These two factors combined make me very reluctant to state there were no ceremonies in Fort Albany while my grandmother was growing up. What is certain, however, is that traditional Cree ceremonies had become very scarce and somewhat of a taboo even as my grandmother was a child.

While growing up in English River, my grandfather recalls taking part in shaking tent ceremonies as a very young boy. Cree ceremonies never became a part of his life, however, as his Anglican auntie assumed responsibility of him at the age of about five when his father passed away. He went on, as most other people in this region, to attend residential school and was immersed in the Anglican religion. He converted later on to the Catholic religion for my grandmother.

Edgar had many stories to tell about our Nistam Eniniwak ceremonies. Edgar, who is Anglican, vividly remembers ceremonies taking place in Pagwa while he was growing up. As Edgar explains, he saw people going into wigwams to kawapachikatek, a Cree word which is roughly translated to "one can see things". Beyond this, Edgar's father, who was an Anglican Minister, told him countless stories of midiwin as a child.

⁵¹ Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. 1996. Volume 1, Part 2. *Looking Forward, Looking Back: False Assumptions and a Failed Relationship*: Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. Ottawa: Minister of Supply and Services Canada.

A generation later, while John was growing up in the neighbouring community of Hornepayne, ceremonies remained in the stories of the past. Like Edgar, John grew up not having experienced ceremonies but heard of them from his grandmother. Hannah was perhaps the most sheltered individual out of all the people I spoke with in that she never knew of traditional ceremonies while she was growing up. In fact, she was astonished to find out, as she says, how so many Indians existed when she moved to Constance Lake!

Growing up, it was always particularly strange to me how my family was so involved in the local Catholic Church. My grandmother was in charge of the music for Sunday mass and she often asked her grandchildren to participate as altar girls and boys, to sing a song or to recite a passage from the Bible. Even though I never particularly wanted to do these things I felt good for having made my grandmother happy and proud. When I began to learn more about the history of residential schools I remember thinking how odd it was for me to be a part of a family who was so dedicated to the Church despite of them denying our people from their families, communities, language and spiritualities.

The discussion of ceremonies amongst people in Constance Lake is often communicated with the use of language such as black magic or witchcraft. This way of thinking is most prominent amongst the older generation. For example, Edgar describes his father's stories of *midwin* as instances of black magic.⁵² On a few occasions during my interviews, I was told there was a shaking tent ceremony held in the community in

⁵² Op. cit., Edgar Sutherland.

approximately 1977.⁵³ Again, many people in the community referred to this incident as black magic.

In *God is Red: A Native View of Religion*, Vine Deloria Jr. discusses the influence of residential schools on our traditional ceremonial life hence our views of it:

A substantial portion of every tribe remains solidly within the Christian tradition by having attended mission schools. They grew up in a period of time when any mention of tribal religious beliefs are superstitions and pagan beliefs that must be surrendered before they can be truly civilized. They stand, therefore, in much the same relationship to the tribal religion as educated, liberals now stand to the Christian and Jewish religions. Both groups have lost faith in the mysterious, the transcendent, the communal nature of religious experience. They depend on a learned set of ethical principles to maintain some semblance of order on their lives.⁵⁴

As I spoke with my grandparents and Edgar it became quite apparent they were rooted and dedicated to Christianity. My grandparents both attended residential school and later on sent their children there as well. While my grandfather barely remembers his time there, my grandmother has always spoken of her eight years in residential school as a treasured time in her life. She loved her time there so much so that she willingly spent summers there some years “I used to attach to them. I used to go wash dishes in the summer, when I was twelve, thirteen years old”.⁵⁵ Edgar, on the other hand, never attended residential school yet his father was a Minister thus Anglicism was always an influential factor in his life.⁵⁶

From the perspective of these founding members, then, it becomes no surprise how there does not seem to be an apparent history of ceremonies being practiced in

⁵³ Op. cit., John Sutherland.

⁵⁴ Op. cit., Deloria, (1973), pg. 247.

⁵⁵ Op. cit., Angela Moore.

⁵⁶ Op. cit., Edgar Sutherland.

Constance Lake until recently. I once discussed this phenomenon with a mentor of mine. I was pondering over the meaning of the eldest generation in my community being so embedded in Christianity yet they were still deeply connected to who they were as Nistam Eniniwak. For example, my grandmother is an avid defender of the Omushkego language. She spent her life teaching it to others in the community and she remains one of the few who still speaks the Omushkego language while many others have adopted Oji-Cree. Her profound knowledge of the Cree language has in many ways shaped the person she is, how she views the world and the role she assumes in our community. In turn, my grandfather was deeply connected to the land by living out traditional Cree practices on a day to day basis such as trapping, hunting, gathering traditional medicines and so on. He was a hunter and provider in the traditional sense of speaking. He too held a deep knowledge of the world from a Cree perspective and assumed a role within the community based on his understanding of this.

When I spoke with my mentor about this he offered what I thought to be a very insightful explanation. Although my grandparents and many others within this generation were affected by religious influences, mainly through residential school, many of them managed to maintain a connection to their Indigenous knowledge systems through speaking their language and connecting to the land. And so, while many of them adopted Christian spiritual practices in favour of their own ancestral ones they remained connected to their own cultures and identities through other pathways. Today, however, this is becoming increasingly rare. When we speak of the influence of Christianity we must also acknowledge how there is an increasing rate of language loss and disconnection from the land occurring simultaneously. These factors combined, with a

priority being placed on Christianity, contribute to what Alfred has identified as spiritual defeatism.⁵⁷

Given how Christianity has pervaded our communities it is a reality we must bring to the table when we talk about ceremonial regeneration. In particular, we need to address how the fear ingrained in our spiritual defeatism creates challenges in regenerating our ancestral ceremonial life. As Alfred argues:

The Christian Bible has brought fear into the hearts of our people. This is our main weakness. I say it is fear because the combination of an authoritarian reading of the Bible, the lack of experience with contention, and the threat of retribution and violence are terrifying. This fear has paralyzed our communities, preventing any form of effective resistance to the colonial church-state agenda.⁵⁸

As Deloria says in *Red Earth, White Lies*, religion becomes an inherited way of looking at the world.⁵⁹ Instilled in this inherited view is the fear of living a life which refutes Christian doctrine. Just as many of us have become invested and controlled by the Settler's economy, so too we have become controlled by Christianity as well. In the case of religion, many of our people have developed a psychological dependency on the Church and its' doctrine judging other forms of spirituality for the fear it has instilled in them.

I remember reading a chapter in a compilation of works entitled *Phenomenology of Mugwump Type of Life in an Autobiographical Snippet* by an Anishinabe man, Leslie Nawagesic. His story struck me in a special way because, as he was talking about his upbringing, he mentioned places in northern Ontario which were familiar to me. He

⁵⁷ Op. cit., Alfred, (2005), pg. 144.

⁵⁸ Op. cit., Alfred, (2005), pg. 145.

⁵⁹ Deloria, Vine Jr. 1997. *Red Earth, White Lies: Native Americans and the Myth of Scientific Fact*. Golden, CO: Fulcrum Publishing, pg. 3.

spoke about his time at St. Joseph's residential school, the same school my grandfather attended, and how that affected him as he developed into an adult. As I read Leslie's story I could not help but think of my grandfather and how he had been affected by his time at St. Joseph's. The following passage particularly resonated with me:

By the time I was introduced to the regimen of residential school living I had all but fully integrated to life on the reserve as an "Indian". Gone was the spontaneous, full-of-emotional-energy kid spawned in a clinical setting oblivious to color and class lines. Instead, I became less spontaneous and a bit more cautious of people, in particular white people and very especially, those in authority. In one sense this passive orientation was to provide me with a strategy for avoiding confrontation with authority. On the other hand this passiveness in its most nefarious form would have a long-term negative effect and would completely pervade my behavior through life. I don't doubt this process afflicted many more people than just myself.⁶⁰

When Leslie talks about losing his spontaneity in favour of passivity it makes me think about how so many of our people are not really living. They do not know who they are, where they come from and thus have no direction, desire and passion in their lives. Instead, they are controlled by a fear that originated in residential schooling with the abuse of our children and the denial of our culture. This fear becomes so important to the story I will tell in the coming pages as it sheds light on how it becomes difficult for us to accept and *want* to regenerate our Indigenous ways of being, including our ceremonies. There is a fear in Indian country tied to our people's experiences in residential schools and thus of confronting the resulting psychological and spiritual trauma that was incurred and passed down to younger generations. You see, at the root of it, fear is our inability to create meaningful relationships with ourselves, our extended family and the natural and

⁶⁰ Nawagesic, Leslie. 2004. "Phenomenology of Mugwump Type of Life in an Autobiographical Snippet" Pp. 140-152 in *American Indian Thought*, edited by Anne Waters. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, pg. 148.

spiritual world. In the pages to come, I wish to discuss these issues further and offer some insight into how we can work to overcome these challenges with the help of our families, communities and neighbouring nations.

“They All Remember that When They Came Because People Were Very Territorial Around Here.”

Starting in the 1960s and onwards, the composition of the Constance Lake community members began to diversify. Being Cree, Edgar, Angela and Bert clearly remember the arrival of Anishinabe people within their community. These people had come from neighbouring communities such as Hornepayne and Ogoki. They too came with their customs such as language and their adopted Settler religion. Those coming from Ogoki were Catholic while the people from Hornepayne were Anglican. Some had moved to Constance Lake for employment while others married community members.

At the time, the founding community members in Constance Lake were quite territorial. The rising rate of intermarriages amongst Anishinabe and Cree people was a leading contributing factor to such feelings. More specifically, the Oji-Cree dialect which resulted from the growing number of intermarriages within communities in the north, including ours, posed a threat to the maintenance of an authentic form of the Omushkego language. As my grandmother remembers, many of the Anishinabe people who moved onto the reserve at the time already spoke this Oji-Cree dialect. Likewise, Edgar spoke to me about this dialect existing in Pagwa before moving to Constance Lake himself.

In addition to intermarriages, my grandparents spoke about the role the residential schools may have had in creating and perpetuating this Oji-Cree dialect. Remembering

his days at St. Joseph, my grandfather addressed the fact that the nuns and priests would only speak to him in the Anishinabe language that is of course when they weren't speaking to him in English. Failing to recognize the diversity and distinctive traits of Nations surrounding the James Bay and Hudson Bay area, nuns and priests within residential schools routinely addressed their students in Anishinabe regardless if they were Cree or Anishinabe. While both languages are very much similar to one another, they are nonetheless different Nations and thus are distinct according to their native languages and dialects. My grandfather, like so many others, however, was able to somewhat understand the Anishinabe language.

The animosity which developed between Cree and Anishinabe people was intensified with governmental influence. As my grandmother recalls, the Department of Indian Affairs played a significant role in adding fuel to the fire by pressuring Constance Lake community members to define the official tribal affiliation of their reservation. Both Cree and Anishinabe people were adamant about their own case knowing the Nation which would prevail would have an upper hand in maintaining their language within the community through social institutions such as education. While community meetings and discussions were being held throughout the years to make such a decision, three different Chiefs in those days, including Edgar, made the determination to preserve the Cree language by declaring it the official language of Constance Lake.

The animosity between Cree and Anishinabe people on the reserve today is not particularly apparent, especially because it has since been determined that the community is Oji-Cree. Rather, it is a sentiment remembered by the eldest generation which sometimes resurfaces when people begin to discuss the issue of language revitalization

within our school. Still, this time in Constance Lake remains vivid in the older generation's memories and remains significant to the process of transmitting Indigenous knowledge through reciprocal ceremonial regeneration. As I will discuss in subsequent pages, knowing this history between the two founding Nations of Constance Lake, I have often wondered whether this would affect Cree people's willingness to learn Anishinabe ceremonies rather than Cree ones.

As Leanne Simpson says in *Elder Brothers: The Lifeblood of Resurgence*, in creating a resurgence in Indian country, it becomes crucial for us to re-establish solidarity across our Nations by honouring historical treaties which our ancestors worked hard to create and maintain.⁶¹

[...] It also provides us with an ancient, decolonized model for relating to other nations, even settler nations with whom we share parts of our territory. It preserves our own visions of sovereignty, self-determination, nationhood, and freedom, while showing us how to relate to other nations in a just and responsible manner.⁶²

Many of us have suffered in some way or another from colonization. In Constance Lake, the reality is, in terms of language, both Cree and Anishinabe people can learn their respective dialects. In terms of ceremonies, however, the only ones which are currently taking place are those held by Anishinabe Ceremonial Holders. Following this, we must resolve what has occurred in the past due to governmental pressure and persuasion and begin to honour once again the pre-colonial treaties we had with differing Nations, especially in communities composed of more than one Nation. Because the Omushkegowuk Cree and Anishinabe people share a history of common land, language

⁶¹ Op. cit., Simpson, Leanne (2008), pg. 83.

⁶² Op. cit., Simpson, (2008), pg. 84.

and cultural practices⁶³, the need of renewing pre-colonial treaties between these two Nations becomes particularly vital for the regeneration and transmission of these two related knowledge systems.

Where We Are Headed

In the last pages, my main intention was to create an understanding of the history of Constance Lake and thus people's current social and cultural realities. This story is well known by many of us in Indian country by now as it has been told by the last few generations. While the places may change and the invading religious groups and economic industries may vary, the story in essence, remains quite familiar wherever one might be on Turtle Island. Still, I believe it was necessary to incorporate this history here for two reasons. First and foremost, as I write these words I always have the needs and well-being of my community in mind. For this reason, I wanted to include a brief history of our community for those who are not familiar with it. I hope that by sharing the stories of the eldest generation in our community the generations to follow will begin to learn a little more about where they come from and develop a curiosity and desire to learn more. Secondly, the issues touched upon in the preceding pages such as the relocation and thus disconnection from sacred places and land, the effect of the Setter's economy and religion and the history of disputes occurring amongst our Nations due to governmental coercion, allow us to better understand the challenges which stand before us as we work towards creating a resurgence amongst our communities today. It is the comprehension of this history together with the learning and transmission of our

⁶³ Johnston, Basil. 1976. *Ojibway Heritage*. Toronto, ON: McClelland and Stewart, pg. 138.

Magocsi, Paul Robert. 1999. *Encyclopedia of Canada's Peoples*. Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, pg. 44.

Indigenous knowledge that will allow us to reach a clear vision of how we can renew and maintain our Indigenous ways of living for the coming generations.

Now that I have set the scene to our story, I will begin the Sutherland family's story of reciprocal ceremonial regeneration. Until this point, I have spoken about the process of transmitting Indigenous forms of knowledge in a more general form by referring to examples of language and traditional practices such as hunting and trapping throughout. While I have already stated that my intention was to focus on reciprocal ceremonial regeneration as a case in point of this process of knowledge transmission I have yet to truly center-in on this aspect. As I proceed, I will focus on this particular story of reciprocal ceremonial regeneration within my community in order to explore and discuss the larger issues involved in creating pathways to transmit our Indigenous knowledge systems today.

Chapter Three

Tipachimowina: The Sutherland Family's Story of Reciprocal Ceremonial Regeneration

I will tell you something about stories,
 [he said]
 They aren't just entertainment.
 Don't be fooled.
 They are all we have, you see,
 all we have to fight off
 illness and death.

You don't have anything
 if you don't have the stories.

Their evil is mighty
 but it can't stand up to our stories.
 So they try to destroy the stories
 let the stories be confused or forgotten.
 They would like that
 They would be happy
 Because we would be defenseless then.

He rubbed his belly
 I keep them here
 [he said]
 Here, put your hand on it
 See, it is moving.
 There is life here
 for the people.

And in the belly of this story
 the rituals and the ceremony
 are still growing

What She Said

*The only cure
 I know
 is a good ceremony,
 that's what she said.*

Leslie Marmon Silko⁶⁴

⁶⁴ Silko, Leslie Marmon. 1977. *Ceremony*. New York, NY: Arcade Publishing, pg. 2.

A couple of years ago, I became quite preoccupied with the fact my community had lost memory of our Cree and Anishinabe ceremonies. One night, I met my friend Summer⁶⁵ at our local coffee shop. Preoccupied with this, she noticed something was on my mind. As I unloaded my worries and frustrations on her she proceeded to tell me about a story of ceremonial regeneration which began in the 1960s within her community. I was somewhat shocked by this revelation since I had always thought of her as a Cree woman who was deeply immersed in her people's spiritual ways and teachings. She had become someone I often turned to for support and guidance. Because of her deep connection with ceremony I had automatically assumed it had always been a part of her family and community's life. Her story made me realize this was not the case. They too had gone through a time when there was a loss of memory of their Cree ceremonies.

Summer connected me to her auntie whom I spoke with a few weeks later over the phone about the story of reciprocal ceremonial regeneration within their community. Afterwards, as I reflected on the story, I could not help but think it had merely taken place forty years earlier. To my amazement, Summer was simply one generation away from those within her community who took it upon themselves to revive their ancestral ceremonies by traveling to another Native community every summer for several years. Now here she stood in front of me, a person I had come to respect because of her knowledge of Cree ceremonies and teachings.

⁶⁵ Fictional name. I have chosen to keep this person's name anonymous and the details of the story limited because of the protocols involved in this person's community.

Since then, I have carried this story with me. While I cannot delve into the details of the story due to protocols within this community, I can say the message goes as follows: When people are committed, courageous and determined to regenerate their ancestral wisdom and ways of living through concrete actions, they are able to create meaningful and lasting changes within themselves and the community at large. This story gave me hope as it made me re-evaluate my own community's reality. I suddenly felt as though there was a way for us to recover our ceremonies even though I was not aware of anyone in the community being committed to this process. As I spoke with my family more about this I soon realized there were indeed people within our community who had been renewing Anishinabe ceremonies since the 1990s. This is where our story begins.

The story I am about to tell you here was gifted to me by the Sutherland family. With this gift, comes the responsibility to share it in a respectful and honourable way. I am forever grateful to the Sutherlands for welcoming me into their home with open arms and allowing me to share their story here with you.

Nikiivan: Going back to My Home

Once Summer told me the story of her community regenerating their traditional ceremonies, I began to seriously reflect on the teachings that arose from this tale of reciprocal ceremonial regeneration. I began to reflect on the transmission of our Indigenous knowledge today and how this could be done in a realistic, meaningful and lasting manner. More specifically, I pondered over how the process of reciprocal ceremonial regeneration was connected to the Omushkegowuk Cree teaching of awuwanainithukik. How did this story illustrate the meaning of living according to our

Cree values and beliefs in order to fulfill our roles and responsibilities within our communities?

In planning my trip home, my auntie made sure I would meet with John Sutherland since he played a significant role in regenerating traditional ceremonies within his family and our community. John and I began correspondence through e-mail before I traveled home. At the time, I was quite uninterested in e-mail correspondence yet I found myself increasingly enjoying our dialogue. I surprised myself as I began to eagerly check my e-mail a couple of times a day to see what John's response would be to my latest message. Though I had never known John on a personal level while living at home, we immediately built a connection on-line by discussing issues within our community we shared a concern for.

Like many other people in the community, John was feeling under the weather when I arrived in Constance Lake. It was the beginning of February, the dead of winter back home, and the flu was lurking around the community. Living on the west coast for a few years, I had quickly grown accustomed to the mild winters and foolishly forgot how brutal the northern temperature and winds can be in our neck end of the woods. My grandparents definitely had a good laugh at the coat I brought with me for the minus forty degree Celsius weather. I stood still like a child in my grandparents' kitchen as my grandmother bundled me up in her parkas, scarves and whatever she could find to keep me warm for my walk to the community's school which I could see from their living room window.

Within days, I adapted to the cold winters I was so used to growing up. By that time, John called me to let me know he was feeling better. That afternoon, I hopped into

my grandpa's old Ford pickup truck and drove over to his house. As I walked into his home I immediately smelt the sage he had been burning minutes before. The smell was familiar as was John though I had never met him before that day. I felt safe and at home.

As I walked into John's house, I was somewhat astonished of the man who stood before me. In corresponding with him over e-mail I had created an image of an old man. John, however, is a young man who appears to be in his early forties but is actually fifty years old. He welcomed me into his living room. Once I offered him tobacco, we began our conversation.⁶⁶ As he introduced himself, he told me he is Anishinabe and from the deer clan. The deer meat I had brought with me as a gift suddenly seems wholly appropriate.

He lives in a small modest home in the community, just two doors down from his brother's house, with his wife and eight year old daughter. The afternoon I first met John, his wife was at work while his daughter was at school. The house was still, tranquil and at peace, just like John. Behind his house rests a sweat lodge where he holds ceremonies for his family, community members and, as John says, basically anyone who approaches him and is committed to this process regardless of their culture, gender or race.⁶⁷

John's calm and relaxed disposition reminds me of his niece, April, whom I met the day prior. At the time, she was twenty-two years old and had two young boys. I had already heard many wonderful things about April before our meeting. As soon as April walked into my grandparents' house, I felt what I now think of as the Sutherland family's calming and welcoming presence. She is unusually mature for her age. She is a beautiful

⁶⁶ The offering of tobacco is a Cree protocol that is carried out when someone shares sacred knowledge.

⁶⁷ Op. cit., John Sutherland.

young woman both internally and externally. She does not seem to be preoccupied with the superficial distractions many girls her age are concerned with. She does not fuss over the way she looks; her beauty is natural and effortless. Soon after we begin our conversation I realize her true beauty emanates from within. Now that I know her better, the words understanding, respectful, wise and humble come to mind when I think of her.

Before meeting John and April, I read an M.A. thesis by Michelle Frost which is based on Taryn, John's mother and April's grandmother.⁶⁸ The thesis specifically focuses on how Anishinabe ceremonies have shaped Taryn's views of the world. Because I read this thesis before meeting John and April, it was somewhat strange yet very powerful to meet them both. It was almost as though Michelle's written words on Taryn came to life in John and April. Within minutes, it became quite apparent to me how Taryn's energy was being carried on in her son and granddaughter after her passing into the spiritual world.

A Collective Awakening

This story begins with the birth of Taryn. Unfortunately, I never had the honour to meet Taryn when she was alive. As I mentioned, in 2001, Michelle Frost wrote about Taryn's life as an Anishinabe woman for her M.A. thesis. Frost's main research objective was to explore the following: "What is the lived experience of a traditional female Ojibway Elder?"⁶⁹ Her guiding questions throughout her work focused on Taryn's experiences within the community including her perceived role within it, her personal life history and

⁶⁸ Frost, Michelle. 2001. *The Lived Experience of a Traditional Female Ojibway Elder*. Thunder Bay, ON: Lakehead University.

⁶⁹ Op. cit., Frost, pg.44.

her spirituality.⁷⁰ While I learned a great deal about Taryn from the conversations I had with John and April, Michelle's paper also informed me on her character and worldviews. Frost goes to ceremony with the Sutherlands and did so when Taryn was still alive. My mother introduced me to Frost when I went home and through this familial connection, I have taken Frost's words on Taryn to be trustworthy and reliable. For this reason, I wish to begin this story with some of Frost's words on Taryn:

The participant in this study is an Ojibway woman who is also a traditional Elder in her community. She is considered a traditional Elder due to her life's grounding in the Ojibway spiritual belief system, which focuses on the Creator and the respective spiritual laws derived from that belief system. She is a pipe and water boy drum carrier and participates in sacred ceremonies⁷¹. [...] Taryn is a very humble, respectful and happy woman. She is seventy-two years old and she has lived in "the bush" her entire life. She has a strong spirit and a sharp mind. She is a very wise woman, who uses storytelling as a means of teaching⁷² [...] Taryn has five children, three boys and two girls. All of her children follow traditional ways. She lives with her youngest son, a very traditional man, who spends a good deal of time praying to the Creator⁷³ [...] Belief in the Creator was a fundamental component of Taryn's life. She derived meaning of life, in how the Creator prescribed that we live it [...] As an Elder, not only did her beliefs affect her life, but those around her as well. Her deep resolve to impart her beliefs and teachings was directed to her own children and grandchildren. She believed that the traditional teachings were being revived. On imparting teachings to her family, Taryn said: "Everything you see I keep for now. I keep it for my grandchildren. I didn't tell my dad about the dreams, my mom told me not to tell him. She kept her bundle bag (traditional teachings) with her always, it was in her heart. She kept it, now I know why, for her children, grandchildren. It's coming back now, slowly it's coming back"⁷⁴ [...] In her role as an Elder, Taryn believed that the traditional way taught you how to live a good life. This was

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Op. cit., Frost, pg.60.

⁷³ Op. cit., Frost, pg.61.

⁷⁴ Op. cit., Frost, pg.63.

expressed in the conversations. Taryn's concern was that in today's society not enough focus is placed on tradition or the way things used to be done. She said, "It is different days now. There's too much. Too much White people things. It's gonna get hard time to get it back." She finds that amidst Aboriginal people's focus and participation in mainstream society, traditional ways are being lost and that men and women, boys and girls are forgetting how to live off of the land the way they used to⁷⁵ [...] Taryn believes that traditional ways of life and their teachings are being lost because they are not being taught to the next generation. When she was young, she said that her mother was an important teacher in teaching the girls how to perform certain tasks⁷⁶ [...] Her concern was that no one is teaching children these tasks anymore and because of that lack of teaching, it will be hard to continue with a traditional way of life⁷⁷ [...] Taryn's spiritual belief system requires individuals to perform specific tasks. Each task complements that of another's and no one person's task is more revered than another's. Together these tasks create life's meaning while maintaining equality among its members at the same time.⁷⁸

Taryn's son John, whom Frost mentions in the previous quotation, was born in 1956 in Hornepayne Ontario, which is approximately forty kilometres south-west of Constance Lake. As I mentioned earlier, traditional Anishinabe ceremonies were not a part of John's life while he was growing up. When he was a child and young adult, ceremonial life was something which people still remembered yet chose to leave in the past. While Taryn was told stories of ceremonies such as the shaking tent by her mother and grandmother it never became a part of her life as a child and young adult:

By the way, I'm good way, now today. I know now, Indian used the good way.' It would seem that Taryn became confident about and proud of her cultural beliefs as she got older. She was not

⁷⁵ Op. cit., Frost, pg.69.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Op. cit., Frost, pg.101.

encouraged as a child to believe in or practice her traditional spiritual beliefs.⁷⁹

Taryn, John and the rest of his siblings moved to Constance Lake in 1975, after the death of their father. John was about eighteen at the time. As John grew into a young adult he remained in the area going in and out of school while working at Lecours, the local lumber mill, and trapping. Throughout these years, John was constantly searching for something more in his life. As John recalls, almost twenty years passed by before Taryn began to speak to her children about Anishinabe ceremonies:

I remember, maybe around the 90s, that's when my mom started talking about spiritual ceremonies. She got it from her great grandmother, who used to tell her about ceremonies near White River.⁸⁰

Taryn's growing concern for the revival of Anishinabe practices including ceremony came at a time when she was living the latter part of her life as she was in her sixties. Taryn's concern was supported by a group of approximately ten people in Hornepayne who were collectively working towards reviving ceremonial life within their community. Taryn, along with her family, joined these individuals on their path of resurgence.

A man in Hornepayne, by the name of Miles⁸¹, took on a leading role in reviving Anishinabe ceremonies in the community and surrounding area. In many ways, he assumed the role of a connector bringing people together from many different communities who all had the same determination and commitment to revive their ceremonies. Miles met what John calls "spiritual people"⁸² on his travels to Sagi, Manitoba. As Miles built a trusting relationship with the people from Sagi, he introduced

⁷⁹ Op. cit., Frost, pg.63.

⁸⁰ Op. cit., John Sutherland.

⁸¹ Fictional Name.

⁸² Op. cit., John Sutherland.

some of his close friends, including the Sutherland family, to his newfound mentors. Together, they began to hold ceremonies on a regular basis. Over the years, Miles and the Sutherland family dedicated much of their time traveling to their mentors' community in addition to arranging for their mentors' to travel to Hornepayne. Visits would occur regularly three times a year to follow the change in seasons and the renewal ceremonies which take place at these times.

Over time, Taryn and John began connecting with other families who they met in Sagi and began traveling to their communities in Western Canada and southern Ontario as well. While many ceremonies were held by Anishinabe ceremonial holders, others were held by people from other Nations. When I asked John about this, he is unsure and somewhat indifferent, displaying his belief in the healing and renewal that is a part of all of our ceremonies, regardless of where we come from.⁸³ Through their travels, the Sutherlands built an interdependent network of relationships with other communities. They supported one another and continue to do so.

As the seasons changed and the years passed by, the Sutherlands continued to travel to different communities, including Sagi, while also inviting people to their community from time to time. John had many stories to share with me about their travels and experiences over the years. As I listened to him speak about this transformative time in his life it touched me that all along he had been following his mother's example. Because Taryn had been so committed to regenerating Anishinabe ceremonies for her family and community, John had developed this commitment as well. Whether it was because he felt some sort of loyalty towards his mother or because he began to feel more

⁸³ Op. cit., John Sutherland.

grounded in who he is as an Anishinabe man, his role and responsibility in this entire process was and continues to be reinforced by the relational accountability he has with his mother, even after her passing.

As John shared with me, the commitment Miles and Taryn displayed throughout the years eventually led to the responsibility and honour to carry out ceremonies within their communities. This role and responsibility of a ceremonial holder and mentor was passed on with the gifting of a pipe. By 1996, Taryn was holding ceremonies in Duck Bay, which is part of the Sutherland family's traditional land.⁸⁴ A protest from religious people in Hornepayne, however, led Taryn to carry out ceremonies in her own backyard for the last five years of her life.

It's difficult to describe what this commitment actually means in detail because it essentially encompasses an entire way of living based on Indigenous knowledge and teachings. From my conversations with John and April, I took away that this commitment meant Taryn believed her life purpose was to learn Anishinabe teachings and knowledge so that she could pass it on to her children and grandchildren so they, in turn, could become teachers themselves for their children and thus continue this cycle of knowledge transmission. As Frost says in her paper:

Taryn understood that teachings and learning traditional ways have been in jeopardy. Her life's meaning was derived from her beliefs to others by teaching traditional ways to her children, grandchildren and others who came to her to learn."⁸⁵

⁸⁴ Op. cit., John Sutherland.

⁸⁵ Alfred, Taiaiake and Jeff Corntassel. 2005. *Being Indigenous: Resurgences Against Contemporary Colonialism*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, pg. 609.

Ultimately, her commitment to transmit Anishinabe knowledge for coming generations was expressed in her relationships with the people in Sagi and others she had met there, her family, her community and the natural and spiritual world. To Taryn, the balance of all these relationships was of the utmost importance to her for she believed they were the pathway towards regenerating our ancestral knowledge systems. For this reason, she lived her life in a way which was centered on the maintenance of these relationships through actions based on respect, commitment, honour and love. To Alfred and Corntassel, this is all a part of “being Indigenous” and passing on our knowledge and hence identities to younger generations:

Building on this notion of a dynamic and interconnected concept of Indigenous identity constituted in history, ceremony, language, and land, we consider relationships (or kinship networks) to be at the core of an authentic Indigenous identity.⁸⁶

Alfred and Corntassel proceed to explain how the maintenance of respectful relationships within our communities guides our interactions with clans, families, individuals, homelands, plants and animals.⁸⁷ From this perspective, when we begin to lose one of the ways our identity is passed down through generations, such as in this case ceremony, we must “[...] restore that part of the community by utilizing relationships, which are the spiritual and cultural foundations of Indigenous peoples.”⁸⁸ This is precisely what Taryn, John and Miles did by traveling to Sagi throughout the years and then passing on the knowledge to those within their families and communities.

In the early days of this story, April was simply ten years old. Despite of her young age, she embarked on her family’s journey of ceremonial renewal. As we spoke,

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid, pg. 610.

she remembered her first ceremony at her grandmother's house with the men and women from Sagi. It is quite amazing to listen to her as she remembers this time in her life. In doing this, she's drawn back to her grandmother's teachings which she learned, as she says, by watching and listening. April's character and actions, however, are far more expressive of her grandmother's teachings than the words she articulates to me. As I listened to her speak I thought of how her grandmother has had a profound influence on the woman she has become today. As she speaks about her roles and responsibilities, she conveys her understanding that it is a life-long process and commitment:

They say too, you know the oldest man who, a seventy year old man, who's been following the traditional way his whole life, he won't know everything. There's so much one could never know everything. It just keeps on going on and on.⁸⁹

April continues on to say that she will carry on her grandmother's spirit by learning from other mentors and by, one day, taking on the role of a teacher and mentor for other young people within the community.

This role of being a teacher and mentor with the responsibility of transmitting Anishinabe knowledge to other people in the community, especially the young ones, is something which came up quite a bit as I spoke with John and April. As I read Frost's dissertation, it became quite apparent how this belief emanated from their mother and grandmother, Taryn. In speaking with Frost, Taryn shared how she believed her role as a mentor originated with her birth:

Her birth outdoors was a means to cement her relationship with nature and pay respect to the Creator. This was a powerful message, as it gives credence to her life and offers insight to those who wish to understand her life's meaning and the role she chose to live. [...] Once Taryn understood the teaching on her birth, she

⁸⁹ April Sutherland. *Personal Interview*. February, 2007. Constance Lake, ON.

realized that her role was to be an elder in her community and guide its members in such a way that traditional ways of life would be understood and maintained.⁹⁰

Taryn knew however that such a role was not something one could take or be given but that she had to display commitment and respect through her actions and the way she lived. Once she was gifted this responsibility, she saw herself as a vessel whereby individuals would embark on her canoe and travel down a path of teachings she was once taught by her mentors.⁹¹

Throughout this process of learning and teaching, John assisted his mother in any way he could. In talking about this journey, he described himself as living out the role of skabish:

I used to help out with ceremonies they always would call me Skabish. That means ceremony helper or fire keeper. That's people who help out in ceremonies and in sweatlodge, teaching lodges, watching over the fire and cutting wood, stuff like that, to keep the ceremonies going.⁹²

John also contributed by strategically utilizing his position as cultural coordinator at the community's health clinic. As cultural coordinator, John had access to funding for what the clinic and funding political bodies defined as cultural activities. With the assistance of this funding, John coordinated traditional workshops where mentors would teach Constance Lake community members about their history and customs. John made the most of funding by paying for his mentors' travel expenses so that they could hold ceremonies in Constance Lake and Hornepayne.

⁹⁰ Op. cit., Frost, pg.68.

⁹¹ Op. cit., Frost, pg.78.

⁹² Op. cit., John Sutherland.

Since the Sutherlands have embarked on this path of living a life that is connected to their Anishinabe teachings and values, they have welcomed many people to the ceremonies they or their mentors have held. As they told their story the reciprocity in the process of reciprocal ceremonial regeneration took on a life of its own. Through the mentorship of others, the Sutherland family has, over time, been able to take on a mentoring role for others within our community. In many ways, it has become a cyclical process by which people are constantly learning and being mentored in order to teach and mentor others in the future and so on. It is through these relationships of reciprocity that the Sutherland family and many others who are connected to them are able to live according to their ancestral teachings and subsequently pass them on to others. While this has occurred within my community with the Sutherlands mentoring people such as Hannah Meyers and Michelle Frost, they have also invited people from other communities into their ceremonies as well as non-Indigenous people.

While many people who have sought the Sutherlands' mentorship and support have come and gone after attending a couple of ceremonies, others have been more committed. Hannah is one such person who has remained connected to the family. Hannah, who is Anishinabe, moved to Constance Lake at the age of fifteen. Hannah's relationship with the Sutherlands developed from her marriage to John's wife's brother, whom she has since divorced. When I spoke with Hannah, she had been attending ceremony with the Sutherlands for the past six years.

Hannah's relationship with the Sutherlands can be described in the Omushkego language as *nichishannanitok* which can essentially be translated to an extended family. In Cree, we say *nichee* to describe our relationship to our "blood friend", and so, from a

traditional Western perspective, *nichishannanitok* in Cree would most closely resemble the description of a conventional nuclear family. *Nichishannanitok*, referring to an extended family, goes beyond the Western definition of this concept to include not only those we are related to by blood such as our uncles and aunts but also those within our clans and community whom we have an interdependent relational network. Hannah's relationship with the Sutherlands then is understood from my teachings as *nichishannanitok*.

In speaking with Hannah, it became pretty clear to me that she holds the Sutherland family in the highest of regards. They have been her teachers and mentors in a journey of learning more about who she is as an Anishinabe woman. Taking part in ceremonies with the family has built a bond based on love, responsibility and accountability. Through these ceremonies and the relationships she has built with the family, she has been able to heal a great deal from the past events in her life. In fact, both John and Hannah spent considerable time discussing the healing element of ceremony with me. For this reason, I believe it's important to discuss this healing component a little further.

Minawachihaiwewin: Healing

Before Settlers arrived on Turtle Island ceremony was a way for our people to renew their spirits as well as their commitment to the community through a continual and cyclical process of learning and growing on both a personal and collective level. Alfred expands on this statement as he reflects on the meaning of ceremony for our people:

It (ceremony) creates and strengthens the connections between people, fostering relationships of mutual support and caring. Ceremony keeps people connected to their past as well; it preserves memory. It reminds us of our responsibilities as human beings, and, in the face of cyclical and sometimes harsh existences

as we confront the political and economic realities of our lives, its rituals reiterate that the underlying force of the universe is love. Ceremonies remind us, too, of the beauty and power of nature and of how we should try to live in accord with the laws of nature.⁹³

While ceremony, today, remains a way to gather and ground ourselves as Nistam Eniniwak in addition to renewing our responsibilities in the community, it has increasingly become a way for some of our people to heal from the deep psychological and emotional wounds colonialism has lashed into our minds and hearts. Of course, in the past, ceremony was used as a pathway towards healing for our people. At present, however, the healing which is needed in our communities is rooted in different grounds and is needed on a much larger and deeper scale. In a way, ceremony as a renewal process has taken on two meanings for our people today. It is a way to renew ourselves by constantly growing as Nistam Eniniwak in addition to renewing our spirits from the devastating experiences of colonialism. Really, it has become imperative for our people to revive and maintain our ceremonies in a colonial reality where we continue to confront ideological and psychological struggles. As Alfred argues:

How can anyone confront the depressing, disintegrating reality of this world without the restorative strength provided by spirituality? How can we imagine and work for a better existence in our own lives and for that of the world as a whole without the loving and natural reminders that our Onkwehonwe ceremonies give to us? I don't know that it is possible.⁹⁴

Because most of our people deal with some sort of psychological and spiritual dissonance at some point in their lives, ceremony can often become something that is seen as a way to heal from these wounds. This healing is something John and Hannah

⁹³ Op. cit., Alfred, (2005), pg. 249.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

spoke about as they explained to me how ceremony has changed their lives. As John tells me his family's story, he remembers a darker time. Like many of us, John grew up with the lingering feeling that something was missing in his life, something was missing in him. As an adult, alcohol became a way for him to momentarily 'forget' about this void as well as an attempt to fill it somehow. John would wake up many mornings after a night of binging only to wonder again what was missing in his life:

Late eighties, early nineties, I started drinking heavily and there's ways I tried to kind of, find how I could stop. I tried everything, like go to churches, go to meetings and stuff like that.⁹⁵

John's search for substance and truth was finally directed onto the right path when his mother told him about the ceremonies she had been attending in surrounding communities. As John says, he went because "I was wondering, there has to be more".⁹⁶ As John began attending these ceremonies with his mother, he felt as though he had something he could root himself into for the first time in his life. Through ceremony, he started to identify himself as an Anishinabe man and what that meant in terms of his role within his family and community. As he simply puts, "There are good things in those ceremonies. So I just kept on going".⁹⁷

While ceremony became a way for John to heal from the deeper causes of his addictions, it became a much larger part of his life as an Anishinabe man. For John, ceremony is a way for him to heal from the experiences he had growing up in a colonial reality in addition to reclaiming the identity, spirit and life that was stolen from him from birth:

⁹⁵ Op. cit., John Sutherland.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

I stopped doing, drugs and alcohol because of it. Because I think that's the reason why I need that. That's why I'm going to the ceremonies all the time. I'm scared that I might go back to my old ways [...]. When I was young I tried to find who I am. I used to say "There has to be more to this life, what I am right now?" Like I said, I was trying everything when I was younger, like going to churches and stuff like that".⁹⁸

John's story is something many of us can relate to. The search for a deeper meaning of who we are is something I believe many of us go through. We are so bombarded with false definitions of who we are as Indigenous peoples throughout our lives that it is easy to get lost in the flux of all of this. For example, growing up I attended a French Catholic school with children who were mostly French Caucasian Canadians with the exception of a handful of kids including myself who were either Asian or Native. At school, I was constantly told in one way or another by kids on the playground and teachers in the classroom that Indians were uncivilized savages who were saved by colonialism. In this environment, I was led to believe our ways of knowing and living were pre-historic and the people who came here helped us evolve by integrating us into a more efficient and productive society. Even though I knew this could not be right, I nevertheless kept my silence and internalized a great deal of shame and embarrassment.

In the third grade, a teacher once told me I was Metis in front of the entire classroom because I was half French and half Native. Not only did she not care that I was Cree but she also showed no understanding or respect for what my family had taught me about who I am. I left school that day wondering what the hell a Metis was and feeling utterly embarrassed that my teacher made me feel as though I did not know who I

⁹⁸ Ibid.

was and where I came from. This was an internal struggle I was going through in private and my teacher had just exposed me in front of all my peers.

Back on the rez, I had a hard time fitting in because I was not Indian enough. Perhaps this was because of the fair color of my skin or because I only visited on weekends and lived in a middle-class neighbourhood in town surrounded by White people. Whatever the reason was, the kids on the rez had their own idea of what an Indian was and this included being tough and resilient, not showing anyone your feelings, being a risk-taker, smoking, drinking and doing whatever drug was available and popular in the community. We were just kids but we had come up with a fairly precise definition of what it meant to fit in and be a real Indian. I tried being this tough person but failed miserably. When I started experimenting with drugs my parents quickly intervened. In the end, this is what separated me from the rest of my friends in the community. I actually had people in my life who were grounded and could help me along the way and redirect me onto the right path.

Amongst all these definitions of being, none of them were even close to the teachings I eventually learned and continue to learn on who we are as Omushkegowuk people. None of these ways of being and living were connected to the teaching of awuwanainithukik my grandmother taught me as a young adult. Some of us are fortunate enough to be grounded in our ancestral teachings while we are growing up and are thus able to confront the false definitions of what it means to be Indigenous in a more confident and assertive manner. Many more of us, however, are increasingly becoming disconnected from these teachings and thus internalize what other people tell us we are,

even when it's our own people! No wonder many of us end up coping with such psychological dissonance with substance abuse.

In *Native American Postcolonial Psychology*, Eduardo and Bonnie Duran discuss the relationship of psychological trauma caused by colonialism and the alarming rate of substance abuse within Native American communities. The Durans' analysis is particularly relevant to this conversation since they specifically look at, among other things, the loss of ceremonies and rituals within Indigenous communities which initiate our people into adulthood and thus define our roles and responsibilities within the community:

One of the devastations of the colonization process for Native Americans has been the systematic destruction of the initiation ceremony. Even though some tribes retain some of these ceremonies, many tribes do not, and this fact contributes to the problems facing the modern lifeworld. Females are more fortunate because even though they may not have a formal ritual, natural processes have a way of performing the initiation for them.⁹⁹

The combination of the loss of ceremonies and the effect of the Settler's economy divesting the male's traditional role within the family and community have contributed to what the Durans call the "ceremony of alcohol":

The warrior has become someone who can only function within the ceremony of alcohol. The nurturing male has become destructive to the sacred trust that was given to him-the family, community, and relationship with the sacred.¹⁰⁰

Throughout their discussion, the Durans seem to speak more directly about the effects of colonial psychological trauma on Indigenous men since they do not go through the natural and biological ceremonies of moon time and giving birth that women do.

⁹⁹ Duran, Eduardo and Bonnie Duran. 1995. *Native American Postcolonial Psychology*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, pg. 42.

¹⁰⁰ Op. cit., Duran, Duran, pg. 39.

From the Durans' perspective, these natural processes have helped Indigenous women remain connected to their roles and responsibilities within the community. This is something Knowledge Holders have discussed with me before and which makes sense if you think about the initiation component and thus the responsibility that is at the core of these natural processes. Still, there is no doubt that Indigenous women have become weakened by the ceremony of alcohol and drugs just as the men in our communities have.

In *Colonialism and State Dependency*, Taiaiake Alfred expands on the Durans' discussion of substance abuse within Indigenous communities in two important ways. Firstly, he expands on the Durans' idea of the loss of initiation ceremonies by focusing on our separation from our ancestral land bases which consequently inhibits us from living out our land-based practices and spiritual ceremonies:

This is a major effect of colonization: denial access to land-based cultural practices leading to a loss of freedom on both the individual and collective levels equating to the psychological effect of *anomie*, or the state of profound alienation that results from experiencing serious cultural dissolution, which is then the direct cause of serious substance abuse problems, suicide and interpersonal violence.¹⁰¹

By centering on our ancestral relationship with the land, Alfred identifies how our disconnection from such a profound relation impinges on many aspects of our ancestral ways of being and knowing, including our ceremonial life. In referencing to the Durans' work, Alfred states that the disconnection from the land and the subsequent deculturation of our communities has led to self-hatred amongst many of our people.¹⁰²

¹⁰¹ Alfred, Taiaiake. 2009. *Colonialism and State Dependency*. Prepared for the National Aboriginal Health Organization Project Communities in Crisis, pg.16.

¹⁰² Op. cit., Alfred, (2009), pg.4.

Secondly, Alfred builds upon the Durans' argument of gendered self-hatred.

While the Durans focus on the strength natural processes have in preventing Indigenous women from adopting destructive behaviours such as physical and sexual violence and substance abuse, Alfred alludes to the different ways men and women cope with self-hatred. From Alfred's perspective, men exhibit more of an externalized form of self-hatred by channelling their rage in an external fashion with Indigenous women and children becoming their targets.¹⁰³ Women, on the other hand, are more likely to internalize their self-hatred by engaging in behaviours that are self-destructive to their own well-being.¹⁰⁴ While Alfred would no doubt agree with the Durans' perspective on the power of natural processes within Indigenous women's lives, he provides a more comprehensive argument as he acknowledges how women are nevertheless affected by colonial mindsets and thus also suffer from self-destructive behaviours. Alfred's more inclusive discussion of self-hatred and resultant destructive behaviours is most likely grounded in the foundation of his argument that our disconnection from the land and thus our Indigenous existences result in self-hatred and self-destructive behaviours within our communities, regardless of our gender. While women still go through the cycle of natural processes which initiate us into womanhood, many of us are lacking the teachings, many of which are grounded in ceremony, to understand the responsibilities and roles which accompany such processes because of our disconnection and alienation from our land, our Mother Earth.

An inclusive discussion such as Alfred's helps us better understand the lives of women within our communities such as Hannah, who discussed her transition from a life

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

of self-hatred and self-destructive behaviours to that of embracing her Anishnabe identity through spiritual ceremonies. Hannah is someone who was not grounded in her Anishnabe teachings while she was growing up. She too, like John, dealt with the negative experiences in her life with alcohol and drugs. I met Hannah, who is the director of the community's health clinic, one Friday afternoon at her office. While I was home, I spent many hours at the clinic using their exercise facilities. The women working at the clinic greeted me with cheerful smiles and enthusiastic hellos upon every visit. It seemed to me like a fun and friendly environment to work in. As I spoke with Hannah it became clear that having a supervisor like her certainly contributed to this positive ambiance. Hannah is someone who immediately makes people feel right at home. She is personable, engaging and jovial. She has a great outlook on life which is infectious to those around her.

While Hannah is now in a good place emotionally, she too spoke to me about a time of despair in her life. As an adult, Hannah desperately wanted to become the parent she never had as a child. Once she became a mother, however, she began reproducing the same life she had growing up for her children. Because of this experience and her present role as the health clinic director, Hannah spent a great deal of time discussing the importance of healing on a personal and communal level:

It must be because I find that so many people are addicted here because they don't speak up to stuff that happened to them when they were younger. You know it's so weird that some people think that oh well I was neglected when I was a kid so what it shouldn't be bothering me. But it should be bothering you if you were neglected. You know a lot of our people, even myself, we were neglected as kids. Our parents went out and drank or they would come home and drink and bring these strange men who would bother us. These are all the issues that I brought with me. I told myself I would never bring my kids up the way I was brought up.

And for a few years I did. And that's when I started getting into my culture, to find out my identity. Because I knew I wasn't White but it's like I knew I wasn't Indian. I just wish I could go back in time. Because now that I know who I am I wish I could go back in time and I'm pretty sure I would do things differently then knowing how stronger of a person I am. I think that I got that strength back through my culture [...] I know that when I started dealing with my sexual abuse, I was worried that people might talk about it. But then I was like shoot if they want to talk about it, they can talk about it all they want. You have to release it. You are trying to get rid of it and you can't control what comes out of your mouth. I don't want to carry it around anymore.¹⁰⁵

Like John, ceremony has become meaningful in two different yet connected ways.

While ceremony has become a way for Hannah to cope with the abuse she experienced as a young girl and the subsequent addictions she developed as an adult it has, on a more holistic level, become a way for her to be connected to who she is as an Anishinabe woman. You see, the healing John and Hannah receive from ceremony is not mutually exclusive from their commitment to learning their Anishinabe teachings. Rather, the two occur simultaneously. There is a reason why AA meetings and the Settler's religions did not work for John. Neither of these institutions was able to help him figure out what was missing from his life since he was really searching for what it means to be an Anishinabe man. Through ceremony with his mother and nichishannanitok he was able to begin this learning process. The more John and Hannah become connected to who they are as Anishinabe people, the more they are able to heal from their past experiences, abuses and addictions.

Now that Hannah is living a healthier and more balanced life, she continues to see ceremony as a way for her to take time out of her hectic schedule to renew her spirit. It has become a way for her to maintain balance in her life emotionally, spiritually,

¹⁰⁵ Op. cit., Meyers.

mentally and physically. When I ask Hannah how she feels today in regards to having reconnected with her Anishinabe teachings through ceremony, she tells me “I think that I know now when I’m really stressed out that there’s help out there”.¹⁰⁶ When I ask John the same question, he thinks for a moment and says “I feel more respect. Especially respect towards women. Respect to our Mother Earth. Almost respect for anything [...]. Total in who I am.”¹⁰⁷

Ketipimatisicik: The Living People of the Future

In thinking about the Sutherland family’s story, I am always reminded of the clear mind and heart April had when I spoke with her. The more I have thought about our conversations, the more I am convinced that April’s experiences are one of the most important parts of this story. Because she was so young when her family began reconnecting with their Anishinabe teachings through ceremony, she has a much different story than that of John and Hannah. April’s story is one based on the positive energy and strength that is formed when someone grows up in a family who is rooted in their ancestral teachings and ways of living. From this upbringing, April has grown into an Anishinabe woman who believes that being a mentor and passing down Anishinabe teachings to the coming generation is her primary role and responsibility in life. In turn, this has prepared her for the struggles she faces living in a contemporary capitalistic colonial society.

In speaking with April, she told me that although she understood how ceremony was a way of healing from addictions for many people, including her uncle, she did not

¹⁰⁶ Op. cit., Meyers.

¹⁰⁷ Op. cit., John Sutherland.

personally view her relationship with her spirituality in such a way. To April, Anishinabe ceremonies are a lifetime process by which she can renew her spirit and grow as an Anishinabe woman. When I spoke with her, she proudly declared she grew up the “traditional way” allowing her to build strength, self-confidence and self-worth which many of our people lack.

Throughout our conversation, April continually referred to her relationship with her grandmother and the teachings and life lessons she learned from her. Going back to the substance abuse issue, Taryn made sure to teach April about the origins of abusive and addictive behaviours within our communities. Moreover, April was taught that living a balanced ceremonial life required her to be substance free. While April does not condemn the consumption of alcohol, she has chosen to live a substance free life:

My grandmother would always talk to me and teach me the teachings and how to be wise about what you do and she always told me not to drink or do drugs. She taught me a lot of teachings. That’s mainly the way I learned from watching and listening to the teachings she told and all the stories she told. Ever since I’ve been young I’ve only drank once when I was twelve and I didn’t even get to the point where I was drunk. I just had a few sips of beer. I took that as a learning experience, I tried it and I look at it as a mistake and remember. I never tried drugs because the teachings I guess are a way to talk to us and tell us how, especially when you have the traditional life, you’re not supposed to drink or do drugs.¹⁰⁸

John and April conveyed to me how they have invited people into their ceremonies even though they may consume alcohol or drugs. They do not place judgment on these people especially because John was once in a position where he was affected by addictions. Once these people do enter into ceremony, however, they must respect the people and the sacredness of the ceremonies.

¹⁰⁸ Op. cit., April Sutherland.

All of this put aside, what becomes more important about April's restriction of alcohol and drugs is that she did not use these substances to fill a void in her identity and spirit. Rather, she grew up being proud of who she was as an Anishinabe person, "I'm proud of my culture and my ways and I don't let anything like that [criticisms from outsiders] put me down".¹⁰⁹ As I think of April's upbringing, her character and life purpose I am reminded of the teachings and influence her grandmother continues to have on her. Through her relationship with her grandmother, April developed a sense of being and connection with the physical and spiritual world. Though John and Hannah eventually reached this point in their lives, they went through a time when they did not have this grounding and connection to their ancestral teachings.

John, Hannah and I have all used either alcohol or drugs to "forget" or make up for the lack of self-confidence, self-worth and self-respect we had growing up. While I never reached the point of desperation John and Hannah traveled to, I can without a doubt relate to their memories of desolation and self-destruction. Though we are all very different people with different life experiences, we are united in that we did not know who we truly were as Nistam Eniniwak for a portion of our lives. The only difference between me and John and Hannah is that my parents intervened in my adolescent years.

Like so many other of our people, we were consumed by fear; fear from external sources telling us we were 'savage Indians', fear from confronting the realities and abuse we suffered from growing up and fear of facing up to psychological and emotional strain we had built up over the years. April, however, was never consumed by such fears. Of course, growing up in the world we live in today, it would be hard to believe April was

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

insensitive and completely indifferent to external influences and criticisms. April, however, was grounded in something solid and sacred which she truly believed in and was most importantly proud of. While she had hard times, doubts, anger and frustration, she remembered her grandmother's teachings. Now, she believes her responsibility is to continue the mentoring role her grandmother began so that more of our people will grow up knowing where they come from, who they are as Nistam Eniniwak and what their responsibilities are as they proceed on into the future. She wants all of us to be proud of who we are just as her grandmother did:

She (Taryn) taught her children and grandchildren that her way of life is something to be proud of. She reaffirmed that the Creator was central to practicing traditional beliefs and ways of life: '... don't be shy to be traditional ways, to play your drum, light your sage, light your sweet grass, to put your tobacco down even when a lot of people are there. That is the trail that we have been given to use. Don't ever be shy.'"¹¹⁰

¹¹⁰ Frost, Michelle. 2001. *The Lived Experience of a Traditional Female Ojibway Elder*. Thunder Bay, ON: Lakehead University, pg.63.

Chapter Four

Kanakituk Ishkotano: The Fire Keepers

The Sutherland family huddled around their fire, hoping that one day their fellow nichishannanitok would join them. While some people were upset at the sight of the fire, others saw the light peek out from afar and joined them for a while. Sadly, not every one stayed fore their role of keeping the fire soon became too much for them to handle with their busy schedules. They had other more ‘important’ things to do with their time so they went back to their old ways. The Sutherland family, coming closer together upon their friends’ departure had no hard feelings. Perhaps they were scared to confront their past or just blinded by the things surrounding them they thought. In any case, the Sutherlands know far too well how keeping the fire is something which cannot be forced upon someone. It is a responsibility one must willingly take on. They will continue to nurture and raise up their fire so that one day it will awaken the people around them.

And They All Lived Happily Ever After...

In the previous section, I wanted to tell the Sutherland family’s story from a place of honesty and clarity. As I let the story unfold, I wanted to focus on the inspirational and empowering aspects of this tale of reciprocal ceremonial regeneration. Through this family’s story, the spirit of awuwanainithukik comes alive as they translate their Anishinabe teachings and values into real actions creating a life of lasting change and purpose. In sharing this story, I hope it opens people’s minds and hearts to the real

possibility of regenerating our ancestral ways and values in today's modern colonial society just as Summer's community's story had taught me a few years ago.

To come to an end here, however, would be dishonest and unrealistic in terms of the challenges we face today after generations of oppressive colonialism and psychological trauma. The process of regenerating our ancestral ways of living is not one which can be done easily. Rather, our people must be prepared to be determined, committed and resilient for there are challenges to come ahead from both external and internal sources along this journey of cultural regeneration. Externally, I am referring to both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people who continue to present us with ideological challenges founded in colonial thought through social institutions and interactions we deal with on a daily basis. These are the systems and patterns of interaction which have become normalized within our communities through the band council system, various political bodies and funding agencies as well as other social institutions such as religion and Western-based education. Many of us have become slaves to this system, investing our hopes and efforts for the future well-being of our communities, while the real things which matter to us as Nistam Eniniwak such as the land, language and ceremonies become fading memories.

When I speak of internal struggles, I am referring to the fear I have been speaking of throughout this thesis we as Nistam Eniniwak have internalized from the generations of oppression we have endured on religious, political, economic and cultural fronts. And so, when we speak of regenerating our ancestral wisdom and practices, we must acknowledge how we continue to struggle with internalized ways of thinking and doing things which are foreign to our Nistam Eniniwak worldviews but have nonetheless

become common to our daily lives whether we live in urban areas or on the reservation. Having reflected on these challenges for some time, I now see these external oppositions as somewhat trivial and marginal in comparison to the struggle of overcoming a paralyzing fear which has been passed on for generations in our communities. Still, it is this fear which often prevents us from having the strength and courage to confront these external sources in the first place. In order to have an all-encompassing discussion here with you, I believe it's necessary to look at both of these sources of contention given that our ability to confront them head on will depend on us overcoming a deeper psychological struggle at the individual level. In the end, it is this internalized fear we must conquer in order to embrace the ways of our ancestors and to begin living the good life according to awuwanainithukik once again.

The Master's Puppet: The Band Council System and Government Funding

Going home quickly reminded me of how consumed our communities have become with the band council system and the so-called reparations that are promised at the end of this road. The discussions I had in school with my classmates quickly became alive within the people around me, right down to their physical and emotional health. As I went home to talk about cultural renewal and regeneration, many people turned their heads away thinking I was naïve or idealistic for thinking about such things when our community's economic well-being was at stake. It was somewhat discouraging at first but I soon realized I was on the right path as I spoke with my grandmother over tea once I returned home at the end of the day. Even though we differ in our spiritual beliefs, we share a common concern for the well-being of our community and believe this depends on regenerating the values and practices which make us who we are as Nistam Eniniwak.

My thoughts on the band system were first articulated to me by Taiaiake Alfred in *Peace, Power, Righteousness: An Indigenous Manifesto*. In Alfred's second book, he provides a detailed analysis of how the band system and other affiliated political bodies can never truly achieve the goals we as Indigenous peoples have set out for ourselves:

The structural integration and professionalization of Native politics within a bureaucratic framework controlled, financially and politically, by the state is the main reason for the persistence of the colonial mentality[...] This dependence imposes a set of parameters that constrains the actions and even the thoughts of those working within the system.¹¹¹

In speaking with John, Hannah and April, it became apparent to me how our community's involvement in this system affects the regeneration of our Nistam Eniniwak ceremonies in two ways. In one way, people become entrenched in this system as they believe it will 'solve' the problems going on in the community. Ironically, their time and energy becomes directed and committed to the band system and its' affiliated programs leaving little time left over to maintain and renew their relationships with their families, communities and the natural and spiritual world. As John told me in one of our conversations, many people come to ceremony on one or two occasions only to go back to their old lifestyles and routines. John suspected, among other things, this was because people, over generations, had redirected their familial and communal responsibilities towards their roles within the band council system.¹¹² Hannah agreed with this statement saying she herself sometimes waits too long before renewing her responsibility and

¹¹¹ Op. cit., Alfred, (1999), pg. 70.

¹¹² Op. cit., John Sutherland.

commitment through ceremony because of her demanding position as health clinic director.¹¹³

Time constraints put aside, there are many people within our communities who have busy schedules yet maintain a commitment to regenerating their Nistam Eniniwak ways. Basically, it all comes down to how one chooses to spend their time based on what is important to them and their families. As this thesis has shown thus far, the situation becomes much more complex however, when we consider the psychological investment our people have put into Settler worldviews and structures, in this particular instance, the band system. People who have worked for the band system or have had family members who worked in the system know far too well what I'm talking about here. As Alfred argues, there is a fine line between playing the system and being played by it.¹¹⁴ Unfortunately, the majority of our people who are involved in the band council and affiliated political bodies end up being co-opted within a colonial system which is founded on a Western rights-based discourse and not in our Indigenous worldviews of responsibility and accountability. In the end, it is up to us as individuals to free ourselves from this hegemonic system:

Freeing ourselves from co-optation comes down to acknowledging the unbalanced power relation that we exist within (and not making excuses for its continuation); and holding ourselves apart from the institutions and people that actually constitute colonialism. Colonialism is not an abstract notion, but a set of real people and relationships and structures that can be resisted and combated by placing our respect and trust where it belongs: in indigenous people, relationships, and structures.¹¹⁵

¹¹³ Op. cit., Meyers.

¹¹⁴ Op. cit., Alfred, (1999), pg. 79.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

I have often echoed these words to family and friends whom occupy roles within this colonial space. Time and again, the conversation is quickly directed to the issue of economic subsistence, which brings me to my second point. In today's modern capitalistic and technologically advanced Western society, the issue of economic self-sufficiency has become a leading priority within our communities, no matter where we are on Turtle Island. This self-sufficiency, however, is quickly taken to the next level to keep up with mainstream society by envisioning monetary dominance. It is true, today we must think about these economic issues in order to be realistic about the future of our communities. As Alfred argues, in the world we live in, it would be naïve to discuss our goals as a Nation without focusing on the issue of economic self-sufficiency.¹¹⁶ In discussing these issues of an economic nature, however, we must ask ourselves how these are related to regenerating our Nistam Eniniwak philosophies and values. Must we rely on economic means to regenerate ancestral wisdom and practices? Did our ancestors rely on such economic means to maintain and renew their responsibilities and roles within the community? Will our preoccupation with economic gains compromise our integrity with our ancestral relationships and processes which define us as Nistam Eniniwak? Ultimately, how can we work towards attaining economic self-sufficiency within our communities while simultaneously upholding our Indigenous teachings?

At present, when the issue of cultural regeneration is brought up within either academia or within our communities, there is often a discussion on how we can do this in a realistic manner considering the economic constraints which are placed on us. For example, at present, the Sutherland's story of reciprocal ceremonial regeneration is one

¹¹⁶ Ibid, pg. 63, 136, 154.

which is becoming more common across Turtle Island. As many of our people are working to regenerate their ancestral wisdom and practices, they have been reconnecting with people from neighbouring communities and thus re-establishing a historical kinship network. Through this process of cultural regeneration, the question of monetary support often becomes a leading concern on people's minds. The costs of modern travel, honorariums, accommodations and meals quickly add up when thinking about the cyclical nature of our ceremonies. In many communities, the response to such a pressing issue has been to utilize governmental funding to our best advantage.

As I mentioned earlier, as the cultural coordinator at the Constance Lake health clinic, John had access to funding for what the funding political bodies call "cultural activities". From 1998 to 2002, John financed the travel expenses and honorariums for his mentors from Sagi and other ceremonial people he met through his travels. His friend Miles, who holds ceremonies in Hornepayne, helped out with the costs by also utilizing government funding from his own community:

[...] Around 1998, the band here wanted a cultural coordinator. So I applied and I got the job. That's when I started to do ceremonies around here and Duck Bay. I would bring in medicine men. I would bring in spiritual people. They were from outside. Some were from out West. Some were from further West like Saskatchewan, something like that. I used to pay for their travels and honoraries to come. We used to bring them three times a year. Yeah, spring ceremonies, and that's a four day ceremony. Summer ceremonies are four days and fall ceremonies. They would come and do their ceremonies and we would learn lots from these people. They were in their sixties when they first come here.¹¹⁷

Like all funding from the government, however, it was temporary. When the money ran out, John's source of funding for ceremonies came to a closing.

¹¹⁷ Op. cit., John Sutherland.

Not much has changed at the health clinic in terms of ceremonial regeneration since the funding ran out in 2002. When I asked John if the clinic has continued its' support of spiritual ceremonies within the community, he simply recalls how the clinic held sweatlodge ceremonies once a month for five months at one point the year prior. For the past five years, however, ceremonies have not been readily available through the health clinic. In speaking with Hannah, I discovered the clinic received funding from NAN (Nishnawbe Aski Nation Tribal Political Organization) the previous year, which supported the sweatlodge ceremonies John mentioned in our conversation. When I asked Hannah whether the clinic was involved in holding ceremonies in the community, she blatantly and honestly responded: "No, in the clinic? No".¹¹⁸ As Hannah told me, she sent a grant proposal to NAN but had not received a response at the time of our meeting.

All of this put aside, Hannah recognizes the inherent problem with depending on government funding to support ceremonial regeneration in the community. As Hannah tells me, the funding is on a short-term basis leading them to endless hours of proposal writing dominated by irrelevant questions and criteria only to wait weeks and months even before they hear a response from the government. This waiting period often results in people putting their projects on hold ultimately leading to the stalling of cyclical events such as spiritual ceremonies. What is more important, as she says, is that the government does not have an understanding or respect for our culture and thus the central importance our ceremonies have within it, in a cyclical fashion.

¹¹⁸ Op. cit., Meyers.

While government funding has impeded the health clinic's efforts, the Sutherland family remains committed to the process which has become central to their everyday lives by finding ways to bring their mentors into the community:

I try to have ceremonies and we don't depend on the government.¹¹⁹

Now that he (John) doesn't work there (health clinic) anymore and that program is not running anymore we still try. Every time we have a little money we'll try to get them down. It's really hard though, you know how like everything costs money.¹²⁰

Unlike the health clinic, they do not regard government funding as the sole source of support for their ceremonies and really, in a large sense, for their way of life. While governmental funding surely made things easier for them for a while, their dedication, determination and perseverance to live a Nistam Eniniwak way of life has led them to find other ways of renewing their ceremonies and keeping in touch with their mentors. And so, while we can debate whether the utilization of government funding by the Sutherlands was strategic or compromising by legitimizing a system which essentially oppresses our people, the point here is how they do not let it control their lives or determine their futures.

In many ways, the Sutherlands' attitude reminded me of Leanne Simpson's words in *"Our Elder Brothers: The Lifeblood of Resurgence"*. In this particular chapter, Simpson offers what she calls a radical approach to the consideration of government funding. While she acknowledges how some communities have successfully utilized funding to their advantage in some instances, illustrated here with John's example as the

¹¹⁹ Op. cit., John Sutherland.

¹²⁰ Op. cit., April Sutherland.

health clinic's cultural coordinator, she argues that we must begin to think of cultural regeneration in more creative and authentic ways in order to create meaningful and lasting changes in our communities:

In pre-contact time, we did not rely on “funding” to support the cultural aspects of our lives. Grandparents were willing to teach their grandchildren their culture. Communities, clans, and families, supported and took care of their Knowledge Holders. The beauty of our knowledge systems, even in a dominant, capitalistic, commodity-based reality, is that they do not cost capital to maintain. We do not need formalized, funded projects to link youth with our Knowledge Holders; we simply need the will.¹²¹

Just as the Sutherlands' story has shown, it is crucial that we begin to think and act according to our ancestral teachings since our dependence on governmental resources will inevitably let us down, whether its due to funding running out or the parameters restricting us from doing the things we believe will truly help our communities. Equally importantly, however, the unchallenged dependence on such funding continues to legitimize a system which oppresses our worldviews and our historical roles and responsibilities as the Original Peoples of this land.

As I mentioned, it is absolutely crucial we consider the different circumstances in the society we live in today, particularly when it comes to economic issues. By the same token, we must also acknowledge how it is entirely possible to regenerate and maintain our ancestral ways of knowing and relating to one another in today's society, even when we must do this by connecting to other neighbouring communities. This is something I believe many of our people have forgotten at present in the midst of the band council system and a commodity-driven capitalistic society. Oddly enough, many of our people

¹²¹ Op. cit., Simpson, (2008), pg. 77.

have resided with the fact that it may be, in the end, easier to follow the Settler's ways than to work towards regenerating our ancestral wisdom and practices. It is true, as Alfred would say this is the path of least resistance¹²² and in many ways, one which takes less dedication, commitment and spiritual strength. The Sutherlands admit themselves that with the passing of Taryn in addition to the lack of funding, it is sometimes difficult to connect with their mentors who are currently up north and out west. When Taryn passed on into the spiritual world, John was still being mentored to become a Ceremony Holder. Since then, it has been much more difficult to continue with this learning process since his main mentor and teacher, his mother, is not alive anymore. Despite all of this, however, John and April continue to have hope and strength through the memory of Taryn's teachings and example.

As Simpson points out, this more radical and authentic approach requires a strong will because it is based on building and renewing the relationships which make us who we are as Nistam Eniniwak with one another and the natural and spiritual world. This becomes much more difficult when we consider situations such as the Sutherlands' experience of connecting with people from other communities. As the late Vine Deloria once said, it requires a level of responsibility and accountability which external sources of 'support' do not demand of us:

Until Indians accept responsibility for preserving and enhancing their own knowledge of themselves, no institution can enable them to remain as Indians [...]. The cultural revival and integrity of the American Indian community depends on the cultivation of a

¹²² Op. cit., Alfred, (2005), pg. 40.

responsible attitude and behaviour patterns in the communities themselves.¹²³

As for the health clinic, the fact they do not provide ceremonies for community members troubled me at first. For some reason, I thought it was such a shame to think of how this social institution had abandoned their efforts of regenerating ceremonies in light of the lack of funding. I began to wonder whether this had a direct impact on the people within the community who wanted to take part in their ancestral ceremonies, to heal and reconnect with their Nistam Eniniwak identities. For a moment, I found myself caught up in this colonial way of thinking, inhibiting me from seeing the bigger picture and the real possibilities which stood in front of our community. It is almost as though I had briefly forgotten about the story the Sutherlands had told me and what I had set out to do in the first place. Upon further reflection, however, I soon realized that if there were indeed these people within the community, they had the Sutherlands to turn to for support. In the end, it's not the abstract institutional structure of the health clinic which is creating change within our community, it is the people; Taryn, John, April, Hannah and others who are dedicated to this pathway of awuwanainithukik. These people are taking it upon themselves, despite of their busy schedules and what other people think, to help each other along this journey while inviting and supporting others who wish to join them.

As Alfred says:

People, not the system, must be the focus of the movement for change because, after all, it is people who make empires; systems and structures are only the theoretical constructions we use to understand the dynamics of psychology manifesting and people interacting in public and private ways.¹²⁴

¹²³ Deloria, Vine Jr. and Clifford M. Lytle. 1983. *American Indians, American Justice*. Austin, Texas: pg. 250, 252.

¹²⁴ Op. cit., Alfred, (2005), pg. 105.

Following Alfred's line of reasoning, I began to think more about the people. What might inhibit these people from reaching out to the Sutherlands for help and support? As Alfred says, it's really about understanding the psychological dynamics which are manifesting in people. Linking this back to my time in Constance Lake, I reflected on the ways of thinking our people have become accustomed to and really, controlled by. Once again, I was brought back to the influence of religion. Whether I spoke with people in the community who followed a Settlers' religion or their ancestral ceremonies, time after time, religion became a topic of conversation. This soon became a concern of mine as I reflected on how the influence of religion becomes implicated in the process of reciprocal ceremonial regeneration taking place within our communities today.

Who Said Anything About Black Magic?

"I'll talk to you about black magic."¹²⁵ Black magic, I think to myself. I was talking about *midwin*!

The first time I tried to talk to people in my community about *midwin*, I was repeatedly faced with stories and thoughts on black magic and witchcraft. It was almost as though I was talking to anthropologists who were observing the 'exotic' Indigenous culture. Of course, many of our people including those who are ceremonial believe in the power of bad medicine. John, for example, recounted stories of his mother's life while I visited with him, one of which involved bad medicine. Minutes earlier, he seemed frustrated, baffled even, as he explained to me how many people in the community are truly and sincerely afraid of their ancestral ceremonies. He attributed such fear to the

¹²⁵ Op. cit., Edgar Sutherland.

relentless invasion of Christianity and residential schools in the lives of Indigenous peoples. Yet John's story moments later about his mother reveals he himself believes in the strength of bad medicine.¹²⁶

Of course, some people's criticisms of *midwin* are rightfully justified. As Alfred would argue, we must acknowledge the "colonial stains on our existence"¹²⁷ and thus recognize how Christianity has affected our teachings and ceremonies. Many people within our communities are reluctant to partake in their ancestral ceremonies for they believe they are now somewhat inauthentic from the historical effect of Christianity. Vine Deloria Jr., who spent much of his life discussing the issues related to our spirituality, makes a convincing statement in opening his last piece of writing, *The World We Used to Live In: Remembering the Powers of the Medicine Men*:

Even on most traditional reservations, the erosion of the old ways is so profound that many people are willing to cast aside ceremonies that stood them in good stead for thousands of years and live in increasing and meaningless secularity. The consumer society is indeed consuming everything in its path. It is fair to say that the overwhelming majority of Indian people today have little understanding or remembrance of the powers once possessed by the spiritual leaders of their communities. What we do today is often simply a "walk-through" of a once-potent ceremony that now has little visible effect on the participants. The exercise of spiritual powers still continues in some places but lacks the definitive intensity of the old days. Like Christian sacraments, the mystery is largely gone, and in its place is the perfunctory recitation of good thoughts not unlike the mantras of self-improvement books and videos that remind us we are our own best friends.¹²⁸

Speaking with people in my community, however, it became quite apparent how their criticisms of *midwin* were rooted in their upbringing in residential school and not one

¹²⁶ Op. cit., John Sutherland.

¹²⁷ Chapter title in Taiaiake Alfred's, *Wasase: Indigenous Pathways of Action and Freedom*.

¹²⁸ Deloria, Vine, Jr. 2006. *The World We Used to Live In: Remembering the Powers of the Medicine Men*. Golden, Colorado: Fulcrum Publishing, pg. xvii-xviii.

grounded in a historical analysis of the effects of Christianity on our people's spiritual ceremonies. Moreover, the individuals I spoke with made it clear they never have and never sought to make ancestral Nistam Eniniwak ceremonies a part of their lives because their Christian upbringing taught them this was unholy, pagan and superstitious.

John's belief in bad medicine, however, comes from a place far different than those in the community who are religious due to his profound knowledge of Anishinabe ceremonies. While John acknowledges our ceremonies can and have been used in immoral and cruel ways by some people, he knows they are truly intended for the good of our people and communities. And so, while John knows the fears of many community members are somewhat legitimate because of the existence of bad medicine, he knows far too well the origin of this fear has much deeper roots entangled under the now decapitating residential schools across Turtle Island.

Being aware of this history, it remains a peculiar experience to listen to our older generation refer to *midwin* as a form of black magic. Some claim to not believe in it at all yet they tell stories of black magic which they have been told by their parents and grandparents. Others turn their heads away in response to their children or grandchildren's questions about *midwin*. Keeping their silence has perhaps become a way of coping with a painful past while others believe speaking about this Indian religion is a sin as they were repeatedly told and punished in residential school. Whatever the case may be, this experience remains a peculiar one to a young Cree woman such as myself who has become more connected with her true Nistam Eniniwak teachings in her late adolescent and young adult years.

Such an experience leaves me sad at times while frustrated and even angry at others. Angry at whom you might ask? Where should I start? It is to some authority figure, in my community's case, the tradesmen who first established the Hudson's Bay Trading Company and religious missionaries who established various residential schools, contributing to the annihilation of my people's lifestyles and worldviews as they attacked our language and our ways of relating. My anger is then directed towards the Canadian government and, now living in Seattle, the American government and any political body in this modern colonial reality we live in which continues to oppress the Original Peoples of the lands they now call 'rightfully' theirs. The list continues with various corporations extracting the last bit of resources on our lands and so on but there seems to be no tangible person or group I can physically confront in my everyday life. People seem to blame it on some higher authoritative structure renouncing any kind of responsibility they may have in perpetuating the oppression of our people. Dare I even say I am sometimes frustrated with my own people at times, even the older generation who have adopted a colonial mindset? To be completely honest there have been times when I have felt frustrated with these people. I often think this stems from my young age and the impatience that sometimes accompanies this.

Understanding has become the flipside of this frustration and anger. In terms of the oppressive authorities, I have had to think about what is really and truly important to me as a Cree woman in order to avoid being consumed with this anger and frustration. Rather, I have learned to concentrate on the positive aspects of cultural regeneration taking place in many of our communities today. In relation to the people in my community who remain in a comatose state and who have yet to awaken from the

colonial trance they are consumed with, I have had to remind myself of the atrocities and the psychological trauma which is rooted in these people's familial lines. I cannot even begin to imagine what it might have been like to live in a time when our people lived in fear of, really, being kidnapped from their homes to be brought to a strange and unfamiliar environment where they could not speak their language or practice their spirituality while simultaneously being subjected to manual-labour type tasks and abuses of all kinds. Yet, my mother, aunts, uncles and grandparents lived through this time and its' effects have somehow found their way to me and are now making their way to the generation which follows me.

I have also had to remind myself of a time within my own life when my spirit was stifled by colonial lies. One particular moment while I was growing up will always stand out in my mind. This particular instance is a pretty accurate snapshot of the attitude I took on when I was young. My mother, younger sister and I were driving home after spending the summer in Toronto. I must have been in fifth or sixth grade. It was one of those chilly late summer nights in August. The air was fresh and telling that a new season was coming upon us. I, like most of our trips, was lying down in the back seat gazing at the stars. Night was always my favourite time to travel as a young girl because I could lay back, stare at the stars and daydream for endless hours. I felt like I was the only person in the world.

My mother had left her job as a teacher in the only public school in the small town outside of our community, Hearst, to further pursue her Master and Doctoral studies in education at the University of Toronto. As a special education teacher, my mother had realized how the mainstream education system was not conducive to Indigenous ways of

learning. In discussing my mother's program and future goals, I asked her why she found it necessary to create Indigenous-based education programs for our people. Of course, this was a question which required an extensive and complex answer. As my mom referred to the history of assimilative processes our people have lived through, such as residential schooling, I arrogantly shut myself off to what I now know were words of clarity and wisdom. Being the know-it-all I was, I responded by saying all our people had to do was secure a job and take care of their families instead of drinking all day and being lazy. Here I was emulating the colonizer by foolishly buying into the solution to the so-called 'Indian problem'. Basically, I wanted our people to become the noble Indians the government wanted us to become. At that particular moment, my mother was somewhat overtaken by her emotions. She was obviously hurt, frustrated and angry at the disrespect I had presented to her, our family, our community and our ancestors. I think she might have lost hope for just a moment.

There are a handful of situations like this which unravelled between my mother and I while I was growing up. At one point I think she finally decided I would one day, as parents say, "know better" and become humbled by our history and culture. This is not to say she completely gave up on me. Rather, the frustration and anger she sometimes displayed became less frequent. She became more patient and understanding in responding to me in these discussions we had and in turn, I began to listen more closely to what she had to say. At present, I am trying to learn and practice the patience and understanding my mother taught me as a child.

Quite frankly, I had adopted a colonial mindset though I did not think of it in these complex ideological terms as a child. I was simply made to feel ashamed and

embarrassed to be Cree at times and so embracing my French Canadian ancestry became a way to cope with this humiliation and insecurity. This was no doubt because I had no knowledge of my people's history and culture and was simultaneously flooded with propaganda, lies and judgment of who I am as a Cree person. It became easier for me to believe the 'Indian problem' and to become a part of the status quo in the small French rural community I so desperately wanted to fit into when I was young. I had built an alter-ego, if you will, as a strategy to bury my emotions. I, like many of our people today, was simply ignoring a painful past which was breaking my spirit. Being so young and disconnected from my Cree roots, I did not know where this pain mentally, physically, emotionally and spiritually within me, my family and my community came from. I was comatose struggling to be awakened.

Franz Fanon was one of the first writers to explore the deeper psychological effects of colonialism in Indigenous peoples. While his work is largely based in the experiences of the Algerian struggle for liberation from French colonial rule, his exploration of this psychological dimension is pertinent to Indigenous peoples' experiences on Turtle Island. Fanon's analysis is wide-ranging as he explores issues of a more emotional nature in *Black Skin, White Masks* moving on to how this psychological trauma creates challenges in efforts to decolonize in *The Wretched of the Earth*. Taken as a whole, Fanon's works allows us to better understand the fear, insecurities and shame I am talking about in relation to my and many other Indigenous peoples' experiences growing up. In sum, these emotions and fear have been described by Fanon as an inferiority complex by which we internalize the Settlers' views of our culture and

supposed innate inferior nature.¹²⁹ As Fanon would say, strategies of coping with this fear and inadequacy often lead us to emulate the Settler's culture in light of the dying memory of our own.

It becomes a lot easier to understand the experiences of those in our communities who are still trapped in this emulative reality when we think about our own personal experiences and struggles. While some of us have bought into being the 'good Indian' or 'Noble Indian', others have bought into the persona of the tough and invincible Indian on the rez. Many of us have become so caught up in performing these roles we completely forgot who we are as Nistam Eniniwak and even just as ourselves. Under these circumstances, we end up abandoning both our cultural values and our unique personal traits in favour of playing out these stereotypical roles which carry no substance to our community life. This inevitably exacerbates the insecurity we develop growing up as we end up abandoning any effort to nurture our own personalities and strengths. We become so preoccupied with performing and emulating these characters that it ends up disturbing a crucial moment in our character development as children and young adults.

Still, understanding and remembering this psychological dimension of colonialism can be difficult when we interact with people in the community who are so caught up in performing these roles. Even as an adult, there have been some occasions where I have not displayed the humility I should have in dealing with these types of situations. Of course, it is important we stand up for what we believe in which sometimes lead us to act in ways that may come off as disrespectful to others. As an Elder once told me however, leave your ego at the door if you want people to truly listen

¹²⁹ Fanon, Frantz. 1967. *Black Skin, White Masks*. New York, NY: Grove Press, pg. 13.

to what you have to say, that way all minds will come together.¹³⁰ Thankfully, I have been reminded of the importance of these values by the example and mentorship of others. In the past couple of years, I have been fortunate enough to be surrounded by strong Indigenous women and men, both young and old, keeping me grounded and accountable to my Nistam Eniniwak teachings. More recently, my relationship with the Sutherlands has acted as a continuous reminder to the values of understanding, respect and humility. Along with my niece, blood relatives, these are the people I follow as I move forward on my journey.

The frustration I sometimes feel towards people who are still controlled by a colonial reality is not the only one of its kind. What I mean by this is that this group of people often harbours feelings of frustration towards people, such as the Sutherlands, who are on the path of regenerating their ancestral wisdom and practices. The Sutherlands have certainly endured a great deal of judgment, criticisms and ridicules themselves since they have regenerated their Anishinabe identities through ceremony. Of course, not all people will approach the Sutherlands with harsh comments. Rather, many people choose to keep their opinion to themselves in public while they secretly judge behind closed doors. These secret judgments, however, often sprawl around the community in the form of hurtful rumours. Many times, these rumours have found their way to the Sutherlands themselves:

When I was growing up a lot of girls used to go to the Gospel Church and they would say mean things about us and call us devil worshippers, I would hear that a lot.¹³¹

¹³⁰ Leroy Little Bear. "Native American Political Philosophy"-IGOV 540. University of Victoria. March 2006.

¹³¹ Op. cit., April Sutherland.

Other times, people choose to express their judgment by shaming or ridiculing the Sutherlands:

Ya, I know a couple of people like that. They follow their ways and they just say “No you’re way is wrong, you’re supposed to do it this way, you’re supposed to pray this way”. All of it is like this is how you’re supposed to do it. I don’t know why they’re like that. [...] Sometimes when I’m in school some students or at the store, they all make comments. Like, there might be a poster in the store saying that there’s gonna be a pow-wow coming up and they’ll make little remarks saying, I don’t know how to explain it, like someone would say “Are you going to put on your grandmother’s dress on and go hop around on the pow-wow grounds?”, you know things like that. Ya, I heard a lot of that growing up and I just learned to ignore it.¹³²

At times, this judgment has translated itself into threatening actions directed towards the family. John and April told me about a particular protest which took place in Duck Bay, the family’s traditional grounds, by Pentecostal community members from Hornepayne, a neighbouring Anishinabe community. As John recalls, he and his family patiently waited until the protesters left upon which they proceeded to carry on their ceremony. This experience, however, left Taryn quite shaken. In the end Taryn, with the support of her family, decided it would be better to carry out ceremonies in her own backyard in Constance Lake. Today, the Sutherlands continue to practice on their land in Constance Lake as the new Chief in Negagamisis, who is religious, has restricted them from practicing on their traditional land in Duck Bay.

In spite of all this, the Sutherlands remain understanding and forgiving of these situations and realities. As I mentioned, John understands the role Christianity and residential schools have played in the rejection of our ancestral ceremonies:

¹³² Op. cit., April Sutherland.

Church has a lot to do with it I guess. And, I guess, like they say, it's from the residential school, early missionaries and stuff like this. That takes from our ceremonies. And they put it in their head.¹³³

Perhaps this understanding is why John has come to a place where he can, in a way, brush off the comments and rumours he hears about his family while maintaining respect for those who spread these rumours around the community. More importantly, however, John knows what he is doing is good for him and his family and in the end that is all that really matters to him:

But I always think that's their problem and not mine. I know what I'm doing. I know it's good and it's good for my family. [...] I never say any bad things towards them or anything like that. I keep on doing what I'm doing.¹³⁴

Of course, the Sutherlands are only human and, like me, do in fact get frustrated with people's attitudes and comments at times. Because of her grandmother's teachings and the way she related to people, April sometimes has a hard time comprehending why people would be so judgmental towards her family:

People shouldn't be doing that because in our traditional ways we don't criticize other cultures because everybody is praying to the same person. There's no right or wrong. It's just that we as Native people are asked by the Creator to follow the traditional ways. [...] They should be open-minded to everybody and their ways of praying. That's how I feel and that's the way my grandmother taught me too. She taught me that no one was better, nobody was less, everybody was equal. Even if you're just a drunk or a bum on the street, that person is still worthy, that's what my grandmother would say.¹³⁵

¹³³ Op. cit., John Sutherland.

¹³⁴ Op. cit., John Sutherland.

¹³⁵ Op. cit., April Sutherland.

While April feels frustrated with judgment which often lurks in the community, John expresses his frustration with the lack of interest amongst community members to connect to their Nistam Eniniwak identities. He confesses he is particularly disheartened by the lack of interest amongst the men in the community.¹³⁶ John is even more discouraged however, by the fact there are often more White people at the ceremonies he attends in Western Canada than Indigenous peoples. As he thinks about this he sighs and says “These people are looking for spiritual ways too I think. I guess we’re all looking for good life”.¹³⁷ Still, his spirit is dampened for a moment as he wonders why his own people will not embrace their spiritual ways.

Even so, the Sutherlands would welcome any one into their ceremonies, whether or not they were from the community or had previously said unkind things about their family:

No matter how much others will criticize you I won’t hate you. I will still welcome you if you want to come to a sweatlodge or ceremony. I’ll help you through it.¹³⁸

Anybody, anybody, even, not just this community, outside and stuff. White people or anybody who wants to learn.¹³⁹

As I think about the understanding, respect, forgiveness and generosity this family has I, like April, innocently wonder for a moment why it has not been returned to them by many of their fellow community members. Have the teachings of mutual understanding and respect been buried so deep that many of our people have completely forgotten about what this means for the survival of our ways and all our relations? As I reflect on this in

¹³⁶ Op. cit., John Sutherland.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Op. cit., April Sutherland.

¹³⁹ Op. cit., John Sutherland.

relation to our community I realize that while not all, many people who criticize the Sutherlands for practicing ceremony do in fact speak their Indigenous language and/or have cultivated an intimate relationship with the land. Many of these individuals have committed much of their lives to maintaining and regenerating Indigenous customs such as the language and have consequently, learned the importance of understanding and respect through these pathways. When it comes to spiritual ceremonies, however, this understanding and respect is somehow displaced.

The point here is not that all of our people should be practicing ceremony to connect with their ancestral roots. This is something which cannot be forced upon someone and which takes time, responsibility and a commitment to our reciprocal relationships with all of our relations. It is a life journey whereby one is continually learning about their relations and their role within the totality of creation. People on this journey have often told me it is one of great difficulty as it involves sacrifices and a level of commitment many of our people are not accustomed to today. While many of our people will never understand such as process or welcome it into their lives, there must be a mutual respect and understanding between those who do take part in our ancestral ceremonies and those who do not. What is even more important is that these two groups of people come together to fight for the survival and regeneration of their Nistam Eniniwak ways in whatever way they can based on their own upbringing, the community they come from and even their personal strengths and passions. Yet, the religious element has made this equation much more complex. Christianity has been such an influential force on our people particularly through the establishment of residential schools, that such an understanding and respect in relation to spirituality has sometimes

become rare within our communities. Without a doubt, this is connected to the history of our people being led to believe they had to surrender their “superstitious and pagan beliefs” to become civilized¹⁴⁰ and hence acceptable for the new Western Christian order which was sweeping over our land at the time.

Of course, many people would argue this understanding and respect can never truly be attained from those in the Christian camp since the very essence of this religious order places judgment on any other faith or spirituality which does not follow Christian doctrine. If other people’s stories, values and beliefs do not fit into theirs it must, by deductive reasoning, be unholy and outright wrong. And so, while the existence of mutual understanding and respect may not always be present within our communities at this point in time, situations like the one which occurred in Duck Bay while Taryn was still alive must not be tolerated, especially on our ancestral and ceremonial lands. It is absolutely crucial that we are able to go to our ceremonial lands and carry out the ceremonies our ancestors passed on to us without the fear of being attacked, especially by our own people.

From this particular story that John shared with me, it became apparent how the influence of Western-based religions continues to pose a challenge for those such as the Sutherlands who are regenerating their Nistam Eniniwak ways through ceremonial regeneration today. While the judgments and criticism can, in a way, be brushed off by the family, situations such as the one which occurred at Duck Bay continue to pose challenges of a real and physical nature. In another sense, John has also observed how the religious influence has affected people in the community from approaching him and

¹⁴⁰ Deloria, Vine Jr. 1994. *God is Red: A Native View of Religion*. Golden, Colorado: North American Press, pg. 247.

his family for guidance and support to reconnect with their ancestral ways and values. Many community members have approached John with questions regarding spiritual ceremonies yet they do not accept John's invitation to join him and his family in a ceremony.¹⁴¹ John speculates this decline in invitation is partly due to people's fear of bad medicine, or as they say, black magic and witchcraft, a statement which is later reiterated by Hannah.

April has a unique outlook on the situation which I found thought-provoking:

Because okay, when I was growing up a lot of girls used to go to Gospel Church and they would say mean things about us and call us devil worshippers, I would hear that a lot and maybe, I think that's what's stopping them is because they're thinking that we're thinking the same thing, no we're not going to want you to come into our sweatlodge because you've been following the Church and we think that you're the devil. That's what I'm thinking because they've been hearing that so much from their Church or whatever it's staying in their head. I'm just wondering if that's what they're thinking about all traditional ways too.¹⁴²

April's point of view makes a great deal of sense to me as I reflect on the role of binary judgment in Western thought and, in this case, particularly Western religious thought. I had always thought the experience of being judged time and time again by both non-Indigenous and Indigenous peoples played a significant role in deterring many of our people from reconnecting with their ancestral history and culture in that the repetition of rejection creates a fear, an anxiety even, of again being rejected. I, myself, had this fear as a teenager when I was searching to learn more about who I am as a Cree person. When I first approached people, I was consumed by shyness, fear and even intimidation

¹⁴¹ Op. cit., John Sutherland.

¹⁴² Op. cit., April Sutherland.

of being rejected once again. It would have been that much more painful because I was reaching out to my own people, Knowledge Holders, asking them for help and guidance.

April's thoughts, however, add an entirely new understanding to the meaning of judgment within this context. From April's perspective, the thinking patterns our people have developed in a Western colonial-based society become the central focus of the discussion. April recognizes how our people have become so accustomed to the judgment which is entrenched in Western thought by suggesting religious people in our communities automatically assume all spiritual ways and thus followers of these ways are judgmental in some way or another. This fear of judgment is something to be considered when we ask ourselves why so many of our people are reluctant to reach out to others in order to learn more about their Nistam Eniniwak culture. When it comes down to it, it's all about this learned way of seeing things in the world which creates this paralyzing fear inhibiting us from reaching out to people for support and guidance.

This fear also sheds light on why so many of our people choose to criticize and judge those who practice ceremony instead of trying to understand their ways. It is easier for them to judge than to put themselves in a vulnerable position and one which might obliterate a value and belief system they have adhered to their entire lives. Many times, it is this path of least resistance which is taken within our communities. Having been on this path when I was younger, I know the one I am on now requires more dedication, commitment and accountability. The strength, respect and humility I feel now from being connected to my ancestral Cree roots though make this journey so much easier than the path I was once leading simply because I feel more complete in who I am today. I only wish I could express that in some way to others who are taking this path of least

resistance right now. Sometimes, however, we know people get in so deep that it's hard for them to truly hear what we are saying. Oftentimes, these people have the added burden of living with substance addictions. It is to these people I want to turn to now.

“There Has To Be More To this Life?” : The Party Life

While many people in the older generation have been affected by religious influences through residential schools, religion has lost its appeal and authority amongst the younger generation in Indigenous communities. This is not to say there has not been some sort of generational effect. Taking myself as an example, although I have not ascribed myself to Christian doctrine, I have nonetheless been affected by its' influence from my grandmother's upbringing and experiences. Rather, what I'm directing my attention to here is how many people of my generation are not devoted to Western religion like past generations and have thus not bought into the stories of black magic and pagan beliefs fabricated by the Church.

In the previous chapter, I spoke about substance abuse in relation to the process of *minawachihaiwewin*; healing. Through John and Hannah's stories, it became quite apparent to me how reconnecting to their Anishinabe teachings through ceremony had become the only way they could heal from the sources of their substance addictions. They too, just like those who are consumed by religious influence, had fears they had to confront and continue to heal from. Today, we find many people within our communities coping with this fear with the 'relief' and temporary amnesia alcohol and drugs provide them, perhaps learning this survival mechanism from their family and friends. The origins of these addictions are extensive in both their scope and history, some of which I have discussed in detail in the preceding pages. The bottom line is, however, that it can

all be traced back to the fact our people have become disconnected from our Nistam Eniniwak teachings and identities in a world which devalues and outright attacks our worldviews, histories and experiences.

In the last section, I spoke about religious people in Constance Lake and surrounding communities, who ridicule and criticize the Sutherlands' spiritual ceremonial life. In some instances, these people have taken these criticisms to a point where they prohibited the family from carrying out their ceremonies on their traditional lands, such as the case with the protest in Duck Bay. In terms of people who are suffering from addictions within the community, this particular challenge of ideological differences and conflict is not particularly relevant to this conversation. Rather, the challenge here emanates from this group's inability to reconnect with their ancestral wisdom and practices despite of the support and guidance they receive from people such as the Sutherlands. As I've mentioned earlier, both John and Hannah were once part of this group of people who suffer at the hand of substance abuse. And so, they both understand how this added challenge of alcohol and drug abuse makes it much more difficult to awaken your Nistam Eniniwak spirit and embark on a path of healing and resurgence. As John told me however, ceremony was, in the end, what helped him and continues to help him overcome the source of his addictions as it grounds him in his Anishinabe teachings, something he was missing his entire life:

Yeah, there's lots of it [alcohol and drugs] that's going around the reserve and they don't want to give that up because they're addicted. I mean that's how I give it up, it's through spirituality. Because you have to have something to believe in eh? You have to have something to grab onto. If we don't have that we become suicidal.¹⁴³

¹⁴³ Op. cit., John Sutherland.

Unfortunately, not everyone is able to leave their old lifestyle of partying and substance dependence as John and Hannah did. As John points out, in letting go of a life consumed with addictions, one has to have “something to grab onto”. In a larger way, in letting go of a life consumed by certain beliefs, values and practices, it is not enough to simply renounce such a worldview. Rather, the individual needs something else to be grounded in and guide them as they heal and move forward.

When I spoke with April, we talked about how substance abuse is becoming such an alarming concern within our communities that it is affecting our children before they enter high school. I remember, myself, being presented with the opportunity to experience with various drugs at the age of eleven. By the time I was thirteen, I had already experienced with some of the most toxic substances which were popular and available at the time. About fifteen years later, I now hear my family talk about how children in the third grade or younger are already beginning to experiment with whatever drug of popularity is available within the community, not to mention that these available drugs are of a more toxic nature. How can people even have a chance when they are presented with such addictive substances at such a young age?

During our conversation, April recalled a time in her early adolescent years when she remembers losing many of her childhood friends to alcohol and drugs:

[...] I remember when we were about fourteen there were about sixteen of us girls who started drumming and wanted to drum. And it narrowed to four because we lost them to alcohol and drugs. Like they would drink and do drugs and then they would come back but we would make sure that they were like really off of it, you know what I mean? And then, they just kept doing it and we were like they're abusing the drum so we (April and her grandmother) told them, we let them go, and we told them when

you're ready to come back there will always be a spot here for you.¹⁴⁴

Sadly, none of the girls came back even though April and her grandmother were kind, understanding and willing to help them. In the beginning, as April told me, they gave them a couple of chances. At a certain point, however, they realized the girls would only change when something inside of them would change; something only they themselves could do. This was a difficult decision for April because she had been friends with these girls from a very young age. Unfortunately, many of these friendships have ended over the years since they have taken different paths into their adult lives.

It's difficult to see this particular group of people struggling with their internalized fear through alcohol and drugs. As April's story of the drumming group shows, dealing with people with addictions in ceremonial regeneration has the added difficulty of disrespecting sacred objects. As April was taught, to live what she calls the traditional way, one must be free of such controlling and toxic substances. Although the Sutherlands would never turn anyone away due to their addictions, there comes a point when they must consider the honouring and respect of sacred objects and bundles. When John was recovering from his addictions, he had the constant example and support of his mother, Taryn. This familial mentorship and guidance no doubt helped him through this difficult process. This made me think whether the group of girls April spoke of had this same support at home or whether they were simply returning to an unhealthy living environment where this help and love was not available to them. Worse yet, I wondered whether the example which was being shown to them was that of alcohol and drug consumption.

¹⁴⁴ Op. cit., April Sutherland.

April had the constant example and mentorship of her grandmother while she was growing up which supported her growth into a confident and strong Anishinaabe woman who has a sense of familial and communal responsibility. The mentorship of an older woman was no doubt a large contributor to how April now sees the world and her role within the flux of her family, community and the natural and spiritual world. John, on the other hand, did not speak to me about his relationship with his father or how it contributed to how he has come to understand his role as an Anishinaabe man. Rather, his mother, Taryn, is the person he spoke about throughout our conversation as he remembered his path of awakening and re-strengthening as an Anishinaabe man. While the presence of a woman mentor for young girls and a male mentor for young boys is no doubt crucial to the upbringing of our coming generations, the Sutherlands' story shows that in today's circumstances, as in the past, both men and women can be mentored by people within their family, community and across communities regardless of their gender.

Of course, the teachings a young girl learns from a woman will differ from those she may learn from a male making this same-gendered mentoring relationship an important one within our communities of the past, present and future. However, as John's life journey shows, sometimes our most valued, supportive and loving mentors may be people from differing genders than our own. Taryn was the person who ultimately led John and helped him on his path of healing and resurgence. While Taryn could not provide all the teachings a man could to her son, she introduced him to men she knew would be able to carry on that mentoring role while also giving him the strength he needed in building relationships with these men.

Reflecting on the girls April spoke about and in turn about the Sutherland family's experience as a whole has made me consider the role of family, the extended family in particular, within our communities and how this is related to the teaching of awuwanainithukik. It is with this sacred relational network, the nichishannanitok, I want to complete our discussion. After all, the family is what I opened this discussion with by talking about my grandfather's influence in my life. And so, coming full circle, it only makes sense to come to a closure with a reflection on the role of our nichishannanitok.

Nichishannanitok

In opening this discussion, I introduced myself according to my Omushkegowuk Cree teachings by honouring the land I come from and my relational network, such as my parents and grandparents. In our Omushkego language, we complete this introduction by saying "egonegemaga kanaspatiwakik" meaning these are the people I follow. In living according to the wisdom of awuwanainithukik, I am constantly reminded of the importance of the relationships I have with my nichee, my blood relatives and my nichishannanitok, my extended family, including those in the natural and spiritual world. In living according to my Cree values and beliefs, it is these relationships that nurture my understanding of this worldview and how they can be translated into real actions in my everyday life.

As I bring my thoughts together on the teaching of awuwanainithukik and the transmission of our Indigenous knowledge systems today, my primary concern with the role of family in this process comes from two sources. To begin, many Knowledge Holders regard the family as the primary social unit within our communities as it is

through these relationships we are first loved and mentored to follow the Nistam Eniniwak way. Following this teaching which can be found across Turtle Island, it becomes a second priority of mine to address how the role of nichee and nichishannanitok within our communities has changed dramatically over the last few generations. Through various colonial measures such as the changing economy and the influence of Christianity, our traditional forms of families and their sacred roles within our communities have been affected and even attacked at times. For this reason, a discussion on restoring its' ancestral role in teaching and mentoring our people must take place when we have a larger conversation about regenerating our ancestral wisdom and practices today. This becomes a difficult process when we consider how Indigenous peoples today are increasingly born into families and communities who have lost memory of their ancestral teachings and ways of living.

The reality of this became apparent to me through the various conversations I had with people in my community. As I spoke with my grandparents and Edgar, I soon realized they were encouraged by their families to follow the White man's religion while they were growing up. As my grandma says, "We were born with religion".¹⁴⁵ The more I spoke with my grandparents the more I understood how the resistance against Western religion had more or less faded away by the time they were born. In the first half of the twentieth century, Western religion had already become entrenched in the minds of my ancestors living in the swampy lands of northern Ontario. A generation later, my grandmother continued this cycle by encouraging her own children to follow the Catholic

¹⁴⁵ Op. cit., Moore.

Church though I never felt such pressure from my mother while I was growing up. On the other hand, I did not grow up with our Cree spiritual ceremonies either.

The family I come from has affected the way I was able to connect with my Cree teachings when I was younger. While I have friends who grew up in families who are ceremonial, I did not know about the diversity and sacredness of Nistam Eniniwak ceremonies until the latter half of my adolescent years. I am not however mad at this past or condemning to those in my family who did choose to follow the Catholic religion. Rather, I understand the history and psychology behind this. While religion did affect us in some ways, we still had the language and the love for the land through my grandparents' example, and for this I am very thankful. Still, as Nistam Eniniwak we should be able to take part in all pathways of connecting to our teachings and identities no matter where we come from. Yet, how do we do this if we are born into families and communities who are disconnected from these pathways of wisdom?

The truth is it is exceptionally difficult to do this if you grow up not knowing anything about your history and culture while simultaneously being flooded with lies about who you are. While many people grow up becoming more curious and aware of their history, it is often challenging to approach those who can help you along this journey of learning and resurgence. From April's experiences in our community, when people come from families that do not speak their language or practice their ceremonies, they feel somewhat shy and intimidated to approach her and her family for help and support:

Ya, I think that there are some people on the reserve that want to come to these things but they don't have family who are into it so they just don't want to say anything because they're too shy or they don't have the courage to approach the people that might be

able to help them. They might think that we're going to reject them but that's not the case. In the training that I'm taking we're learning a lot about traditional values and I hear from maybe two, maybe four girls "I would like to do that but I never grew up seeing that."¹⁴⁶

From April's passage we begin to understand how the existence of ceremony, language and land-based practices within our communities is, in the end, simply not enough to ensure the coming generations will be connected to their history and teachings through these pathways. The process becomes complete only when we have a kinship network, our *nichishannanitok*, who mentor us through stories and example thus bringing these teachings and history alive. This becomes ever so important as we think about the mentor-learner relationships which must be established with people from birth.

Moving into the future, the well-being of our communities is threatened as our children continue to be born into families who are disconnected from their *Nistam Eniniwak* teachings. This becomes particularly relevant if we think about the development of the adoption of Settler views within our communities over time. While my grandparents' generation may have adopted the Settler's religion, they grew up in a time when the Cree language and ways of connecting to the land were central parts of everyday life. Today, however, the world is much different from the one my grandparents were born into considering technological advances, globalizing networks, market growth and specialization and the strong influence of pop culture, not to mention the growing relocation of Indigenous peoples to urban areas. These factors combined with the increasing loss of Knowledge Holders and their memory of our ancestral ways make the situation we are facing today one of alarming urgency. Restoring the role

¹⁴⁶ Op. cit., April Sutherland.

families have in regenerating our ancestral ways is one of our greatest challenges as we move forward on this path of resurgence. When I think about my responsibility as a member of the Moore family and as a member of my community, both within Constance Lake and across Turtle Island, I know my greatest duty will be as a mother, auntie and grandmother by ensuring I pass on what I have been taught to the children and grandchildren who will follow me.

The loss of our Indigenous knowledge whether we are talking about our languages, ceremonies or land-based practices and the subsequent repercussions of this in both our people and our land, has led many Warrior scholars, Indigenous activists and Knowledge Holders within our communities to call for direct action from our people in creating meaningful and lasting changes.¹⁴⁷ Time and again, the central message from these people is focused on how we must begin to translate our ancestral teachings into everyday actions and lifestyles. Central to this resurgence is the reincorporation of the intimate relationships built on love, trust and respect which make up the kinship network we call *nichishannanitok*. At the heart of these intimate relationships, are the mentoring,

¹⁴⁷ Op. cit., Alfred, (2005).

Op. cit., Deloria, Vine Jr. and Clifford M. Lytle.

Op. cit., Alfred, Taiaiake and Jeff Corntassel.

Cheechoo, Jocelyn. 2008. "Living What I Love Most": Pp.139-148 in *Lighting the Eighth Fire: The Liberation, Resurgence, and Protection of Indigenous Nations*, edited by Leanne Simpson. Winnipeg, MB: Arbeiter Publishing.

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Op. cit., Simpson, (2008).

Cavender Wilson, Angela. 2004. "Reclaiming Our Humanity: Decolonization and the Recovery of Indigenous Knowledge": Pp.69-87 in *Indigenizing the Academy: Transforming Scholarship and Empowering Communities*, edited by Devon Abbott Mihesuah and Angela Cavender Wilson. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.

teacher-learner and elder-child interactions which ensure our people are rooted in their ancestral teachings and wisdom from birth.

The central importance of family is centered on the reality that it does not matter whether someone, as an individual, has an awakening and becomes committed to restoring their ancestral teachings if they do not have a relational network to guide them, teach them and support them along this journey. Of course, the individual awakening and reflection which is required to nurture one's personality and understand one's role in the community is of utmost importance in one's life. As the Anishinaabe writer and storyteller Basil Johnston says, historically, it was believed it was the individual's responsibility to understand one's strengths and thus direct their inner growth.¹⁴⁸ Still, Johnston proceeds by discussing the vital role families have within Anishinaabe communities in helping the individual prepare for this self-reflection and understanding. *In Power and Place: Indian Education in America*, Daniel Wildcat reiterates the importance of familial relationships in supporting the development of individual personalities and roles within the community:

Our ancient Native understanding begins with the necessary task-the problematic-of establishing what Deloria calls our personality: who we are. Learning comes early in Indigenous institutions, not through lectures but through experience: customs, habits, and practices. The primary lesson learned is and was that knowledge and understanding come from our relatives, the other "person" or "beings" we have relationships with and depend on in order to live.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁸ Op. cit., Johnston.

¹⁴⁹ Wildcat, Daniel. 2001. "Understanding the Crisis in American Education": Pp.29-39 in *Power and Place: Indian Education in America*, edited by Vine Deloria Jr. and Daniel Wildcat. Golden, Colorado: Fulcrum Resources, pg. 33.

Today, many people end up reconnecting with their ancestral teachings in their adulthood because they never had these mentoring relationships while they were growing up. In some situations, people end up reconnecting with those from other families and communities while their own family remains controlled by a colonial reality. In these cases, the people who become their mentors are considered, according to Omushkwogowuk Cree teachings, to be their *nichishannanitok*. In other situations, like my own, people begin to reconnect with their teachings at a later age, realizing the knowledge which stood before them while they were growing up. While they begin to connect with people outside of their immediate family they also begin to realize the knowledge their grandparents, parents, aunts and uncles had the entire time they were growing up. The disconnect which occurs in the mentoring relationships in these instances, however, is something which can be linked to both the teacher and the learner for both parties are led to believe that abandoning their own worldviews and practices in favour of those of the Settlers will inevitably assist them in succeeding on personal, educational and financial levels in the modern capitalistic society we live in today. And so, in thinking about my own upbringing, the disconnect which occurred between my generation and the older one is founded on the fact that both my grandparents and I were led to believe I had to be educated in the White man's language and views in order to succeed in Canadian society. When approaching one's family at this later date, people soon realize, as I did, how much experience and knowledge their family actually has and, in turn, how receptive they are in supporting you through this learning process.

Whatever the situation may be in this awakening and reconnection process, I find it necessary to address the nature of mentoring relationships today in comparison to those

in pre-contact times. This is not to imply that once this relationship is restored that it takes on differing characteristics. Rather, what I am referring to here is how this mentoring relationship is first established into someone's life. As I mentioned earlier, the family is the primary social unit within our communities thus the place we first learn about who we are as Nistam Eniniwak. And so, in pre-colonial times, we were simply born into social units which nurtured and supported our understanding and respect of ancestral teachings through the aural tradition of listening to others' stories and observing through their example. In "*Philosophy and Tribal Peoples*", the great Vine Deloria Jr. refers precisely to the vital nature of familial relationships from the time one is conceived:

Beginning even before birth, people prayed for the unborn child in an effort to establish a family context into which she/he would be born. The pregnant mother visualized the heroic people that she knew, hoping her thoughts would help the baby develop while yet in the womb. Through the family, the clan, and society there was never a time when an individual Indian was not a part of the cooperative activities of others. It was believed that people are the sum total of their relationships.¹⁵⁰

Relationships with people and the natural and spiritual world are of utmost importance to the preservation and growth of our ancestral ways of living. While we may develop many relationships over our lifetime, it is those which are first established within the family from before birth that are central in ensuring our strong foundation in our people's teachings and thus in who we are as individuals.

In *Ojibway Heritage*, Basil Johnston dedicates a great deal of his book to the meaning and role of families within communities according to his ancestral teachings.

¹⁵⁰ Deloria, Vine Jr. 2000. "Philosophy and the Tribal Peoples" Pp.3-11 in *American Indian Thought*, edited by Anne Waters. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, pg. 10.

Throughout this book, Johnston articulates the integral role teaching has historically had within Anishinaabe communities.¹⁵¹ Like many Knowledge Holders, Johnston believes in the power of connecting the younger and older generations within our communities:

It was elders, grandmothers and grandfathers who taught about life through stories, parables, fables, allegories, songs, chants, and dances. They were the ones who had lived long enough and had had a path to follow, and were deemed to possess the qualities for teaching-wisdom, knowledge, patience and generosity.¹⁵²

Here Johnston highlights the responsibility we all have within our families and communities regardless of the other roles we might take on over our lifetime. As children, we are to develop the aural aspect of our oral culture by following those who came before us by listening to them and observing them. As John told me, this can also imply that we take on the role of helpers, which he called Skabish, in assisting our teachers as they mentor us in our ancestral ways.¹⁵³ Over our lifetime, as we grow as Nistam Eniniwak and develop our personalities, knowledge and roles within the community, we then become responsible in teaching the generation which follows us to ensure the well being and spirit of our community is passed on and grows. This was made apparent to me through April's thoughts on her role in life. As she reflected on the teachings her grandmother passed down to her, she inevitably saw her greatest role in life as a teacher and mentor for her own children and anyone else who approached her for help, thus continuing the reciprocity of the relationships which nurtured her learning and growth as an Anishinabe woman.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵¹ Op. cit., Johnston, pg. 69.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Op. cit., John Sutherland.

¹⁵⁴ Op. cit., April Sutherland.

At one point in this discussion, Johnston turns to the various stages in one's life. According to Anishinaabe teachings, the first seven years of one's life is experienced through the mentorship and teaching by women and Elders within the community.¹⁵⁵ As the children grow and enter into the second phase, the boys would customarily accompany the men in land-based activities such as hunting and fishing while the girls continued to assist the women and Elders in the community.¹⁵⁶ Through this process of learning and observing, people eventually reached a third stage whereby they become responsible enough to seek knowledge from others accepting accountability for their roles within the community. It is to this third stage that I want to explore a little more.

Today, the first two stages which Johnston refers to above are often omitted from one's life or at the very least they are compromised in some way because of the influence colonial institutions such as religion and education have had within our communities. As I've mentioned, the lack of mentoring relationships within our families and communities often leads people to reconnect with their ancestral teachings in their adulthood. John and Hannah are examples I have provided here in this thesis, however, this story is familiar to anyone who has worked with Indigenous communities. Furthermore, Indigenous scholars such as Makokis often speak about this reconnection to their ancestral roots later on in their adult lives whether it be through the language, land-based practices or spiritual ceremonies providing a more personal and realistic tone to the literature on resurgence.

The fact that many people, such as the Sutherland family, end up reconnecting with their teachings despite of a history of assimilation and psychological trauma is

¹⁵⁵ Op. cit., Johnston, pg. 70.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

telling of the strength of our ancestral spirits and our people. Still, moving forward on this path of resurgence we must envision a community where our children are born into families who will mentor them in their Nistam Eniniwak ways from birth. Currently, many people often begin learning about their teachings at this third stage in terms of having to seek out knowledge on their own without having the foundation provided to them in the early years of their life. This is something which is on many people's minds within my generation who grew up in families disconnected from their language, spiritual ceremonies and land-based practices. These people, having awakened from their colonial realities, often wonder how they can reconnect to their teachings when they do not have close relationships with Knowledge Holders such as Ceremonial Holders, Medicine People, Language Holders and so on.

Taking myself as an example, when I am home, I have the relationships with my family and community members. Even though I am currently living away from my community for educational purposes, I still have these people as a solid foundation in my life. Still, because I am only able to go home a couple of times a year I have come to realize it is absolutely crucial that I connect with people from the land I currently live on in Seattle. This has been a difficult process since I did not know many people when I first moved here. At first, I felt somewhat sorry for myself, often calling my mom to tell her I did not feel any type of connection to the Indigenous peoples around Seattle. After some time, I finally realized it was up to me to make a conscious effort to build relationships with the people here. Just as the Sutherlands shared with me, there were times when people were not receptive to me or my views. With time, however, I met people who were on the same path of resurgence I am trying to live in my everyday life,

by making the effort to connect with people, by attending communal events, by sharing my thoughts and concerns with people and by, most importantly, showing them my commitment through my actions. These people have been welcoming to me and have, in turn, connected me to others who are either like me, living away from home, or are from communities surrounding Seattle. To some people, this might seem too simple or idealistic. What about people who are unwelcoming or what about the financial constraints you might ask yourself? It is not until you take action that you realize the possibilities out there and the people who are willing to help you. All I can say is make the effort to go out of your comfort zone but make sure you are committed to this process and that you are ready to make sacrifices to take on the role of a helper within the community.

People often find this process difficult to begin, as did I. I have often heard people say I can't just go up to someone and say, "Can I go to a sweat with you?" or "Will you teach me a song?" In what Johnston defines as the third stage in learning, this is not how our people once approached others for knowledge nor is it how we should approach Knowledge Holders today. This is precisely how the way or the process by which we do things today becomes important in carrying on our ancestral teachings into the future. It is not simply enough to teach ancestral customs to our coming generation, but it is *how* we do this by upholding the ways of teaching and the relationships making us who we are as Nistam Eniniwak that will ensure we keep the authentic spirit of our ancestral ways for future generations.

In the end, it comes down to building and nurturing the relationships of our kinship network whether we are living on the reservation or in the city, whether we are a

part of an awakened family or not and whether we are away from our home community and land. It is through these relationships we learn and subsequently teach the essence of who we are as Nistam Eniniwak thus creating an interdependent network based on trust and accountability. As the Sutherlands' story shows, these relationships can also be built across communities and Nations as well. In fact, it is absolutely crucial we build these inter-communal relationships since, in some instances, this will be the only way some people, families and communities are able to restore their ancestral practices. For example, the relationships the Sutherlands built with their mentors from neighbouring and sometimes far reached communities have helped and guided them in regenerating Anishinabee ceremonies into our community for the coming generations. While many of their mentors were Anishinabe, many others came from other Nations. In discussing this with the Sutherlands, they felt as though this was not even an issue which needed to be brought up. In their experiences and teachings, the mentorship and support of all Indigenous peoples contributes to the regeneration and transmission of our Nistam Eniniwak existences. Ultimately, we must remember and re-honour the historical role our pre-colonial treaties had in protecting the people in our communities and our knowledge systems as we move forward on this path of resurgence:

Pre-contact treaties and international relationships among Indigenous Nations can provide us with contemporary models for Indigenous solidarity in both urban and reserve settings [...] Renewing our pre-colonial treaty relationships with contemporary neighboring Indigenous Nations promotes decolonization, and peaceful co-existence, and it builds solidarity among Indigenous Nations.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁷ Op. cit., Simpson, (2008), pg. 83, 84.

As I have learned from my own experiences both at home and in an urban setting, in addition to the Sutherland family's story, the process of building these relationships requires a great deal of patience and fortitude. Whether you are faced with people who do not want to hear your views or you are trying to find your way by connecting with peers and mentors who can help you and, in turn, who you can help, this is a life journey that is never-ending and which will present you with plenty of obstacles, frustrations and sometimes pain. As the Sutherlands' story taught me, it does not matter whether you are someone reconnecting with your teachings as an adult, such as John, or whether you grew up grounded in your ways, such as April, for both groups of people encounter difficulties along the way. Whether these difficulties present themselves in the form of us trying to break free from a history of band system and religious control or whether we are dealing with our own internalized fears, it is through these relationships we have with our nichishannanitok, with people and the natural and spiritual world, that we will find support and light at the end of the tunnel. It is through my intimate relationships with my nichishannanitok that I have come to a place where my mind and heart are open and free allowing me to truly see the future for all our relations.

Chapter Five

Closing Words

In opening this discussion I asked the following question: How can we begin to live according to our ancestral teachings in light of the loss of memory of our values and practices which has taken place over multiple generations? My understanding of this question and its' implication of cultural regeneration and knowledge transmission is grounded in my life experiences, those of other Nistam Eniniwak and the community-based work of Warrior scholars such as Vine Deloria Jr., Taiaiake Alfred and Leanne Simpson. Together this scholarship, stories and life journeys have nurtured my understanding that the historical and continuing impacts of colonialism can only be challenged from an authentic and committed position grounded within our Nistam Eniniwak worldviews. In coming to this awakening, the Omushkegowuk Cree teaching of awuwanainithukik has taught me how we must live according to our ancestors' values and beliefs in order to create meaningful and transformational changes within our lives.

As I reflected on this question of cultural regeneration and knowledge transmission, I was brought back to the reality within our communities, particularly those who have currently lost memory of certain elements of their Nistam Eniniwak existences. My community in particular, Constance Lake First Nation, lost the memory of our Cree and Anishinabe spiritual ceremonies by way of historical and continuing influence of Christianity and colonialism. While the focus throughout this thesis was on spiritual ceremonies, there are many stories of cultural regeneration which center-in on language and land-based practices. The concern for ceremonial regeneration here is directly

related to my community's historical experiences with colonialism and the subsequent realities taking shape in the community today influencing the younger generation.

It is true a discussion on spiritual ceremonies is one of a sensitive and sometimes confrontational nature within Indian country. I am not in any way claiming to be an 'expert' on this aspect of our communities nor am I calling for all Indigenous peoples to go to ceremony. Rather, what I have tried to accomplish with sharing the Sutherlands' story is to open up a discussion on how we can begin to live again according to our ancestral knowledge systems and practices despite of the years of colonialism. In being realistic, we must acknowledge we are all different, come from different places, have sometimes been affected by colonialism differently based on where we come from and have thus confronted the effects of colonialism in different ways. We are all united, however, in that our ancestral ways of knowing and being in this world have been affected and attacked. For most of us, this has resulted in a spiritual defeatism whereby we do not know where we come from and who we are as Nistam Eniniwak.

Simultaneously, we have attempted to emulate the identities and ways of the Settlers. In light of this, the future health and growth of our communities rests upon the regeneration of all pathways of learning who we are as Nistam Eniniwak whether it be through our ceremonies, language, land-based practices or any other of our ancestral customs.

A vast majority of the present literature on cultural regeneration within Indigenous scholarship speaks to this loss of memory however, I wanted to provide a real-life story of a family's journey of cultural regeneration, in this case, the Sutherland family's story of reciprocal ceremonial regeneration. In the end, the inclusion of community voices and experiences is what allowed me to convey the meaning of our

ancestral teachings. In the Sutherland family's story, the heart and spirit of awuwanainithukik becomes alive. While the Sutherlands are not Omushkegowuk Cree, the teaching of awuwanainithukik applies to all Indigenous peoples as it speaks to the power which lies in living according to our ancestral values and beliefs no matter where we come from on Turtle Island.

While this thesis shared an inspirational story of ceremonial regeneration, it was also written from a place of clarity and honesty in terms of discussing the larger religious, economic, political and psychological effects colonialism continues to have on our people. Some people have asked me how authentic the Sutherland family's story really is. While I have been appalled at such questions on some occasions, I have had to remind myself how this question is well-intended and quite justified in light of historical colonial impact. For this reason, I sincerely wanted to share their entire story illustrating both the positive and negative aspects. The truth is authenticity has often become synonymous with our culture being static and fixed in time. We must remember that regenerating our ancestral ways of being no matter where we come from or what our upbringing was will be a difficult life to lead in the society we live in today.

At the end of the day, the true meaning and wisdom of sharing this story became about the individual actions taken by members of the Sutherland family to regenerate their ancestral Anishinabe ceremonies. Here, the meaning of awuwanainithuk, the expression used in referring to the individual, became alive as Taryn, John and April sought to confront and heal from the generational impact colonialism has had within the minds and hearts of their family by regenerating their Anishinabe existences through spiritual ceremonies. Through actions founded in a commitment to our ancestral

teachings, we begin to see how the process of regenerating our ancestral knowledge systems and practices becomes just as important, or perhaps more important, than the content of the teachings themselves.

In the last section, I came to a closing by discussing how the relationships we have with our kinship network, our extended family, expressed in the Omushkego language as *nichishannanitok*, are at the heart of our ancestral processes of cultural regeneration and knowledge transmission. Through the Sutherland family's story and my own life experiences, I have come to understand how these relationships with our nieces, our blood relatives, our extended family within and across communities and all our relations in the natural and spiritual world create the pathway towards regenerating our ancestral ways of knowing and being in the world. As Taryn shared with Michelle Frost in the last years of her life, her primary concern in thinking about our communities was the loss of purpose and responsibility our people have in taking on the role of a mentor and teacher for our children. By teaching and mentoring her own children and grandchildren, Taryn ensured her ancestral Anishinabe knowledge system and practices would be passed on to the coming generations through a cyclical process based on relationships of accountability and reciprocity. When we see the Sutherland's story from this more holistic perspective, the meaning of *awuwanainithukik*, referring to the collective form of this teaching, comes to light as we begin to understand the purpose and sacredness of the web of interdependent relationships they have formed over the years. These relationships consist of people who have taught them, people they have taught, the younger generation who is yet to come as well as those of a more spiritual nature with the land, our Mother Earth.

If I have learned anything on this journey, it is how the relationships we have or can build upon are the heart and soul of creating resurgence amongst our people on Turtle Island. From this understanding, I know the greatest responsibility and role I have with my time here is grounded in my accountability to my family, my community and my ancestors who look over me. Whether it is through my role as a granddaughter, daughter, partner, community member, future mother, or even as a graduate student, I am always reminded I am here grounded in who I am as an Omushkegowuk Cree woman because of the people who came before me and who paved the way for me to carry on their Nistam Eniniwak ways of living. Like my dear grandpa, I will live in a way that will carry on their spirit for the coming generations.

Meegwetch, Misiweniwakomakanak.

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