Weaving Hi*stories*

by Annika Benoit-Jansson

Bachelor of Child and Youth Care, University of Victoria, 2016

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

MASTER OF ARTS

in the School of Child and Youth Care

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Abstract

My mother grew up in a family of 11 siblings, all born in 11 years and 11 days, in a small town in Nujio'qonik, Ktaqmkuk (Bay St. George, Newfoundland). Our family is French, Mi'kmaw, and Irish/English, and are some of the best storytellers I know.

Through a series of semi-structure interviews with ten of the siblings, this research project set out to study family stories, passed down through generations, and the importance these stories play in fostering connections. The project continued an ever-growing process of building-up our own stories and understandings of our connection to home, to Nujio'qonik, to who we are and where we come from, and is set against the backdrop of complicated personal and community journeys of identity and recognition of Ktaqmkukewey (Newfoundland) Mi'kmaq people.

At the core of the research, I was looking to study connection and stories, and, just like a story should be, the process was one of twists and turns, weaving and unravelling, re-building and re-telling. As this abstract gives a glimpse of, this thesis is not so much a clean summary of the results and findings, but rather a story in itself – a story of the process of finding connections and yet not studying them, of taking the data from the academy and re-creating a collection of stories that no longer exist in this space.

And, like so many good stories I have heard, there's a trickster, in this case Blue Jay, who hops in regularly to remind me of what I am missing, to keep me laughing [often at myself], and to guide me through not only the research process, but the very words you are reading here now.

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Dedication

To my best-friend-cousin Marcus, to my Uncle Tomas,
to my nukumi and niskamij Pat and Charlie White.

You have all been such sparks of connection in my life – to family, to land, to stories.
I love you and I miss you.

Acknowledgments – Part 1

Before entering the body of my thesis, I would like to begin by acknowledging the peoples whose lands and territories I am so thankful to live, learn and grow upon. While I firmly believe – and attempt to practice - that this work should come first in whatever I do, I was instructed by the University of Victoria that if I would like to include the optional territorial acknowledgement on my title page, it must be "the official version, no variations" in order to be approved for my final submission to the Faculty of Graduate Studies.[1]

To me, a territorial acknowledgment is about situating not only the traditional territories I am located on, but also placing meaning to my positioning in these lands. There is something seemingly missing in a territorial acknowledgement, written by an institution, that is so de-personalized that I am not even allowed to edit it... that, I wonder, what is the point of a territorial acknowledgment itself?

I have been studying at the University of Victoria on and off for over ten years, and I was at first impressed by the idea of acknowledging territory in the institution. Over time though, as many Indigenous academics and people have noticed, the acknowledgement can seem to be became so systematized, so repetitive, so "read this official version," that it becomes simply that – words, but no action.

So here I am, on page viii, acknowledging first that an acknowledgment is not enough, that even if I do not know exactly how, every day my responsibilities as a visitor is to not just say what territories I am on, but to show respect, support, and uphold (as best I can) the peoples, histories, stories and cultures deeply embedded in the land and territories around me.

So, with that, I would like to begin this thesis by acknowledging the lək̓ʷəŋən peoples, and whose unceded lands and waters I was so privileged to grow up on, as well as the W̱SÁNEĆ peoples whose lands I visited regularly throughout my life. I spent over 20 years – most with very little understanding of the peoples on whose lands I lived, first a trespasser, then a visitor. As a student at the University of Victoria, and continuing part-time resident in Victoria, I still worry about how to try to contribute and uphold my responsibilities as a visitor, and I know I will continue to navigate those relationships throughout my life.

I would also like to acknowledge the Tla-o-qui-aht peoples, on whose lands I am so honoured and thankful to live with my family today. I am grateful every day to have been welcomed into the Tla-o-qui-aht community of Ty-Histanis, and getting to witness and partake in my children's love of their stories, language, culture and histories, grounded in their traditional territories, has given me an entirely new appreciation for my responsibilities to every day not only acknowledge the land, but to think about how I can support and care for the peoples and territories I call home.

[1] https://www.uvic.ca/students/_assets/docs/thesis-format-checklist-and-sample.pdf

Acknowledgements - *Part II*

To say it took a village to write this would be an understatement, as will become ever clearer throughout this thesis. I am so honoured to have had so much support and encouragement around me throughout the 5+ years it took to get to where I am today.

To begin, I am indebted to my participants – my mother and my maternal aunts and uncles, who were so patient and loving in the ways they shared their stories throughout our interviews, and in their love and excitement throughout the years of me sharing my dream for a book of stories that is now becoming a reality. I would be nowhere without them, and I am so thankful our relationships can continue to grow much past this Master's. I am also so grateful for all my relatives throughout the generations in the stories – the ones whose hard work, love and connections to Nujio'qonik led to the stories that I heard in my interviews.

I am also beyond thankful to all my family, who have encouraged and loved me throughout this process, even when – especially when – I felt frustrated and defeated. Their words influenced this process more than I will ever know [though, perhaps Blue Jay does].

To my parents, Cecilia and Mikael, who shaped so much of who I am today, and the connections to family, history and place that I carry – thank you. And of course, thank you for encouraging me to get the Master's finished, and doing whatever you could to help me remove any barriers I was facing in doing it.

To my husband, Hjalmer, I could not have done this without you, and I am so thankful for your patience and all the times you told me to put the work aside for now – and then to get back to it when I needed to. I love you, and I am so grateful to have you by my side.

To my kids, Huumiis and Cinkwa, thank you for always asking me to read you "grammy stories" before bed (and in the morning, and in the afternoon...) and for reminding me throughout my Master's of what the real point of it all is. Thank you for listening and re-listening, with so much attention, to all the versions of the stories, and for making me laugh throughout the whole process. yaʔakuks siiẇa.

To my supervisory committee, Jennifer White and Janet Newbury, thank you for your patience and love the entirety of my years-long Master's process, and your excitement when I wanted to try out something new. Your supervisory style should be an example for others; even when I was behind on my work, I never felt judged but rather always supported and cared for – I am so incredible grateful for all you both did to support me.

And to everyone else around me, my parents-in-law Jessie and Trent, my brother-in-law Timmy, my grandparents Sven-Erik and Doris, my extended family and my friends – thank you from the bottom of my heart. Knowing I was surrounded by so much love and that my thoughts and ideas were valid – even when Blue Jay needed to jump in at times and suggest other possible interpretations – was what kept me going and also kept me grounded in 'the real world' and all the beauty and excitement in the adventures of our lives.

Chapter One: Beginnings

Introduction

My name is Annika Rita Doris Benoit-Jansson; my Mi'kmaw name is Sisip Eksitpu'kjij. I am a woman from multiple ancestries and places, and am proud to carry many of these places in my names. While I focus in this thesis primarily on my Mi'kmaw/French/Newfoundland ancestry, I want to begin by highlighting my father's family as well, whose ancestry and story are just as important to who I am.[2]

Annika is a name to honour my Swedish ancestry, and I carry my father's last name – Jansson, through my Farfar (paternal Grandfather) Sven-Erik Jansson's side. Doris Jansson (nee Lindberg) is my Farmor's (paternal Grandmother) name. My Farmor grew up with her twin sister and parents in Dalarna, central Sweden. Her father worked at the saw mill and was an active musician who played a multitude of instruments. While he died relatively young, some of his instruments have remained in the family and I am honoured to have been chosen to take care of – and attempt to play – both his banjo and violin.

My father – Mikael Jansson – was born in Eskilstuna, Sweden. He and his two younger siblings grew up in several different cities in Sweden as they relocated for my Farfar's work. One constant for them was the family farm near Mariefred, where the kids spent most of their summers growing up with their paternal grandparents. I was honoured to visit this farm with my parents when I was a teenager, and the new owners let us explore the property. It was clearly a place of joy for my father. Stories are not as common in this side of my family, yet being at the family farm spurred a whole host of family stories, connections and memories to emerge.

[2] I was inspired by Nuu-chah-nulth academic Tommy Happynook's 2022 dissertation, in which his expanded self-location highlighted all sides of his ancestry with pride, in a way that can at times seem foreign in short self-locations that I have heard in the academy.

When my father was 16, he immigrated to Montreal[3] with his father, who had secured an engineering job. A year later they moved to Oakville[4], Ontario, and then the following year to Edmonton[5], where they were joined by my father's mother and siblings. Over the next decades, my father spent several years in Edmonton, as well as time in Sweden completing his mandatory military service. He then moved to London[6], Ontario to complete his Master's and PhD, before moving to Victoria[7], BC in 1991, where he met my mother, and a few years later I was born.

My mother, Cecilia Benoit, grew up the third youngest of 11 children, all born in 11 years and 11 days, in the small town of Stephenville in rural Ktaqmkuk (Land over the waves – Newfoundland). I carry her father's last name – Benoit. Joseph Benoit was French and Mi'kmaw, and grew up in a large family in an area known as "Savage Cove" and later "Back of the Pond," in Nujio'qonik (Bay St. George), where they were fishermen/farmers. In 1941, Joseph and his family were forcibly moved from Back of the Pond, in order for the establishment of a US military base. The "Pond" was dredged to make a harbour, and the families were moved to the other side of the Base, into what would become Stephenville, NL.

I also carry my maternal Grandmother's first name, Rita. Rita Lafitte was born into a large family, who were also fishermen/farmers, at a place called Fox Island River. Fox Island River is on the island of Ktaqmkuk, across from the Fox Island, where the community initially

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[3] Montreal is located on the traditional territories of the Kanien'kéha (Mohawk) Nation, and known as Tiohtià:ke in the Kanien'kéha language (Delaronde & Engel, 2015).
[4] Oakville is located on Treaty 14 and Treaty 22 lands, both signed with the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nations. It is also the traditional territory of the Haudenosaunee and the Huron-Wendats (Debwewin Oakville, 2022).
[5] Edmonton is located in Treaty 6 territory, an important gathering spot for various nations including Tsuut'ina (Sarcee), nêhiyawak (Cree), Anishinaabe (Saulteaux), the Nakota Sioux, the Dene, the Niitsitapi (Blackfoot), and the Métis peoples. Edmonton is also known as amiskwacîwâskahikan in the nêhiyawêwin (cree) language (Edmonton & Area Land Trust, 2020).
[6] Western University is located on the traditional territories of the Anishinaabek, Haudenosaunee, Lūnaapéewak and Attawandaron peoples, and is located on the treaty lands covered by London Township Treaty, the Sombra Treaty and the Dish with One Spoon Covenant Wampum (Western University, 2023).
[7] Victoria is located on the unceded traditional territories of the Lekwungen (Songhees and Esquimalt) peoples, as well as the W̱SÁNEĆ peoples.

formed before they were moved across the water to their current location. Fox Island River is only about 30 km away from Stephenville, but in those days the two communities were worlds away. From my understanding, Rita's father was French from France (Saint Pierre and Miquelon), and her mother was French/English.

Rita and Joseph raised their eleven children in Stephenville, where Joseph worked a variety of jobs as an artist, sign-painter, photographer, tradesman and carpenter. Rita grew a large garden and kept the house running and full of love. They were proudly Catholic, worked hard and pushed their kids to the education they themselves did not receive as children.

My mother Cecilia loved school and went on to complete two undergraduate degrees and a Master's degree in St. John's, NL, followed by a PhD in Toronto[8], before moving to Victoria, BC where she met my father.

I spent most of my life in Lekwungen and W̱SÁNEĆ territories. I was privileged to live a comfortable upper-middle-class life, an only child of two academic parents who studied sociology, with a heavy focus on social inequities and social determinants of health.

While I did not grow up with a lot of family stories from my father's side – from what I have seen, the family are just not storytellers – I nevertheless grew up proudly Swedish, hearing/understanding the Swedish language spoken by my father and my grandparents. We celebrated many Swedish traditions around the holidays, and my paternal family carry many subtle Swedish values, particularly around humility, group cooperation and praise.

My mother's family, on the other hand, are avid storytellers, of both the good and bad in the family. We spent many summers in Ktaqmkuk, and I grew up with a strong sense of 'home' as connected to the places that I visited – both physically and in the stories my mother's family

[8] Toronto is on the traditional territories of the Huron-Wendat, the Seneca, and the Mississaugas of the Credit (Howard & Bobiwash, 2012).

told – that were a part of my ancestral homeland. Identity, though, was more complicated. I was proudly a Benoit, but being born/growing up outside of Newfoundland also made me an outsider. My family is defiantly French, but did not speak much about being Mi'kmaw beyond whispers, until I was in middle school and we joined the local Mi'kmaw organization in Nujio'qonik. Nujio'qonik Mi'kmaw identity is complex, and is in a period of revitalization and discovery, after many years of being silenced to various degrees in different families. Making sense of this identity, within a family of people doing the same, while also unlearning lies that were told to them for decades by education/government, has been a slow and messy process for me.

In 2014, I moved back home to Nujio'qonik for a year, re-connecting with my family and the places my family calls home. I had the honour of joining the local drum group, spent months learning the Mi'kmaw language, and learned a lot of what it means to be from Nujio'qonik. I noticed though, that as we re-vitalized our culture, at least in that time, in many ways we were looking to mainland Mi'kmaw traditions, and there was a need – at least for me – to look at what is means to be *Nujio'qonik* Mi'kmaw.

The desire to look for the nuances of a culture, that I see as tied to a place and born from an interweaving of Mi'kmaw and French, led me to this research. I was drawn to stories as they are themselves sites of nuance and at times irresolvable tensions, and, inspired by this complexity, as well as by the connections I have to my own memories of hearing family stories growing up, I formed the research question:

What are stories that we were told by our parents and family, and that we tell our children, grandchildren, nieces and nephews, that connect us/them to Nujio'qonik, to family, to past, present, and future – and, in these times of the COVID-19 worldwide pandemic especially, what importance do these stories play in fostering connections?

As evidenced in the question itself – my life today, and the todays of the last five years that I have been working on my Master's degree, have enriched and evolved the questions that I was asking to form the one above.

I currently live in my partner's community of Ty-Histanis, Tla-o-qui-aht Territory (near what is known today as Tofino, BC). My husband, Tlehpik Hjalmer Wenstob, is Tla-o-qui-aht and Norwegian. Our children, Huumiis (age 6) and Cinkwa (age 4) are growing up surrounded by the stunning lands and waters I am so honoured to now also call home. Together, we are learning the Nuu-chah-nulth language, and I am surrounded by the countless stories from Hjalmer's family – stories of past adventures, stories of times long ago, stories of contact between cultures, and stories of the places we live and learn in. The land and culture that I am so thankful to be a guest in, is so rich in stories, and has provided a grounding and hope for my research – even though we are across the continent from my other home.

The ideas of connection/disconnection, of home and place, of land, family and stories – they have all informed – and been informed by – my research. And then, in 2020, midway through my Master's, the COVID-19 pandemic hit, and these questions were never clearer in my mind, yet the answers were even more convoluted.

It is from and into this complexity that this thesis is born. In the following chapters, I will discuss the research I undertook, as well as the literature review, methods, findings, and conclusions. While as an academically-trained writer, I would like to say that this path will be linear and clear, as the one who undertook this research, all I can say is that we will have to see.

"That, my dear academically-trained writer, has to be the longest introduction I have ever read," xaašxiip[9] says as he hops up on my desk.

"I think all you actually need is a one-liner:
My name is bleep, I'm Mi'kmaw. I would like to acknowledge the traditional territory of the _____ where I am located today."

xaašxiip continues. "That's how it's done, you know. Short and sweet and to the point. I am Indigenous, I have authority. Boom.

I mean, not to be controversial, but it seems these days people seem to be saying it and they have not an ounce of ancestry – and especially not an ounce of community connection they're claiming – and they still get away with it."

I look at the window at the wintery day and sigh. "I know, that's why I'm struggling. I mean, you pointed it out to me before, I didn't even include a self-location in my proposal, even though it's always positioned as paramount in Indigenous methodologies. I just struggle with the dichotomies – Indigenous/not, Authentic/not, Status/not. I feel like the academy can jump so quickly to just a stamp of approval of legitimacy – or not – and that's that. And yet, isn't the whole point, the real reason behind the self-location, to situate the research? I feel like that one liner you gave me, it feels both real and fake, at the same time, even if every word of it is true."

xaašxiip tilts her head, looking at me, waiting.

I continue. "I guess I just thought, if I gave more of a background, more of a history instead of simply 'this is where I'm from,' full-stop, the reader can get a glimpse into where I come from, and how that both connects and disconnects me from the research I did."

"Oh, like a story." xaašxiip smiles.
"You know, my little academic, 'the truth about stories is, that's all we are.'"

And with that xaašxiip fluttered away, laughing and chattering about how smart they were, coming up with a line like that.[10]

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[9] xaašxiip is the Nuu-chah-nulth word for Blue Jay. Over the course of the research and thesis, Blue Jay was also referred to as *tities* [de-de-ess], the Mi'kmaw name for Blue Jay, as well as simply Blue Jay. For the final steps of this thesis, xaašxiip is the one who was with me for the writing – a nod, I think, to the territory and land I'm honoured to be writing on.
Pronunciation wise, xaašxiip is one of the more difficult Nuu-chah-nulth words to pronounce. For an audio guide, see:
https://www.firstvoices.com/explore/FV/Workspaces/Data/Wakashan/Nuučaaṇuł/ƛaʔuukʷiʔath%20ciqyakquuki/learn/words/f7621a2c-fc86-4011-ab45-07296b1af2c6

[10] The line *'the truth about stories is, that's all we are'* is of course not the words of smug xaašxiip, but rather the famous lines of the Cherokee Author Thomas King (2005, p. 2).

Introduction – *Part II*: A Story of the Research Beginnings

As discussed in the previous section, I began this research with an interest in stories of land, place, culture and connection, that were clearly grounded in the Nujio'qonik (Bay St. George) area. Initially, my plan was to spend a few months in Stephenville and the surrounding communities, working with Elders and Knowledge Keepers to look at stories of that place. I had received approval from the local Friendship Center and the Cultural Center (both of whom I had established long-term relationships with previous to my Master's degree), and I was excited to begin the first steps of the research.

[Un]fortunately, that was 2020, and before long we were all shut down in our homes due to the international COVID-19 pandemic. Newfoundland had some of the strictest travel restrictions in Canada, and it was nearly impossible to figure out the logistics of travelling to the province. In addition, my own personal ethics of conducting research with often older people, and people with various health conditions, meant that I did not want to begin the research while the pandemic was in full-force.

Yet, as is the case with all academic research, while we may have our ideals for ethical and community-grounded research, the logistics of time limits and deadlines continue, which Castleden, Morgan and Lamb (2012) point to as a key consideration for graduate students' capacity to do ethical community-based research.

While I, stubbornly, wanted to find a way to continue on my plan, thankfully xaašxiip was not constrained by COVID-19 safety measures. They were there, way closer than 6-feet, as I stressed and struggled to fit my research in the parameters of the pandemic.

Finally, xaašxiip wisely asked in summer 2020: "Do you know what makes some of the very best stories?"

I was a little miffed, of course, I was supposed to be the 'master' in stories, wasn't I? Except I couldn't be; this pandemic was stopping my research. Why was xaašxiip rubbing salt in the wound?

xaašxiip watched my face scrunch up before continuing on. "Where would Glooscap be without the lightning?[11] What if Noah had ignored the water? What if your children's ancestors hadn't listened to the earthquake and prepared for the muułšiƛ [flood tide][12]? We are living in one of those moments in the history books, the ones your grandkids will interview you about for their class projects in 50 years. And you're sitting here, tearing your hair out, trying to ignore it? I mean, I know academia creates silos and ivory towers, but for once, they aren't immune to this. Covid means you're not even allowed into the tower – why are you creating another imaginary castle right here at home?"

It took a while longer than I would like to admit to pivot – as was the word of the time – but slowly, my research evolved and grew. I came to appreciate the fact that I was writing and researching at a time, as my then three-year old daughter, Huumiis, put it, that 'the world was sick.' COVID-19 had effectively shuttered large aspects of our normal lives, and while challenging for adults, I saw my two children so seamlessly seek out – and find – connection in others ways. Video calls became a crucial way for my children to see their grandparents, and stories – always present in my family – emerged as a connection in new, and old, ever important ways. As xaašxiip counselled, I decided that, instead of trying to navigate around COVID-19, my research would be firmly contextualized within this time – when the world is/was sick. I was pushed to think about questions of connection and disconnection not only conceptually, but also

[11] Augustine (n.d.)
[12] Bill (1913); Paul (n.d.)

to engage with these ideas experientially in real time as I worked through my research during the changing times of a global pandemic.

My focus on stories that centered our *identity* as Nujio'qonik Mi'kmaq became more of a focus on ideas of *connection.* I was inspired by questions I looked to answer in my own life: how do we foster connections for our children, for ourselves, for our family? How do these connections change over time, across place, across histories, through challenges?

My participants changed as well; I looked to some of the relationships that I already had in Nujio'qonik; relationships that meant I could have conversations over the phone instead of in-person. My mother comes from a family of eleven children, all of whom are still living, and I worked with my committee and the UVic ethics review board, and of course my family, to find a way to ethically conduct research with my own relatives. I received approval in summer of 2020 from the local People of the Dawn Friendship Center in Stephenville, Newfoundland, as well as the University of Victoria Ethics review board.

By the time I began my interviews in spring 2021, my research centered on questions of connection through stories:

What are stories that we were told by our parents and family, and that we tell our children, grandchildren, nieces and nephews, that connect us/them to Nujio'qonik, to family, to past, present, and future – and, in these times of the COVID-19 worldwide pandemic especially, what importance do these stories play in fostering connections?

In the following sections, I begin with a literature review to situate the research within the academic writing of my disciplines. This is followed by a methods section in which I further elaborate on the mechanics and steps I took in my research, and then a review of the findings and results.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

xaašxiip hops up on my shoulder.

"What are you writing?" xaašxiip asks.

"Oh, I'm trying to review what I know already – or maybe what others seems to know already - about place and home and land and stories, to contextualize my project." I hesitate, "the problem is, I don't know where to start."

xaašxiip quirks her head. "You remember the story of your grandfather coming home from the dance?"

xaašxiip continues on, not needing an answer, knowing the story is important whether I'd heard it or not. "Your grandfather, he was just young. A teenager, off to his first dance. On the way home, giddy from dancing with girls, he somehow lost his way. It was a dark night, he could barely see, and all of a sudden he felt something, someone tugging his trouser leg. He tried to pull away, tried struggling, tried running, but nothing worked. Now your grandfather, he knew what was happening. How many times had his mother warned him of the fairies on the bog? Everyone knew not to go there at night. But your grandfather, he kept his head on him, he remembered his grandmother telling him about tricking the fairies, and he reached up and turned his hat around, showing respect, and confusing the creature. And all of a sudden, he was free. You can bet he ran home fast after that. As fast as his legs could carry him."

I smile, remembering my mother telling me this story, on those many nights before bed.

I hesitate though, "But xaašxiip, that's not really a <u>literature</u> review, is it?"

xaašxiip cocks his head… "Is it?"

After xaašxiip finishes the story, I sit, waiting, thinking, struggling to write. What is a literature review, really? Am I trying to find a place for my proposed research within peer-reviewed sources published by academic writers? Within the literature about my community? Within the stories in my heart and the hearts of my family? How do I write this literature review, without the clarity of the reasons why? I want to ground my work not only in the formal academic literature, but also in the rich multi-layered stories grounded in land, community, family, and culture. From a community-based participatory research perspective, uncovering and looking at what the academic literature says is only half of the review; often the researcher/team

also assesses what the community already knows, and what the community participants want/need (Coughlin et al., 2017). From that perspective, would the stories I collect not also be part of the [literature? information? knowledge?] review?

"Can a literature review include my findings?" I ask xaašxiip. "Can it evolve as my research grows?"

xaašxiip laughs and replies, "How should I know? You're the all-knowing scholar! You're half way to being a 'Master' even!"

Not knowing, then, where to start this literature review, I will begin with a short history of my home and then move into an exploration of place and stories. From this, I position my research as important, both in the context of my home and in the context of the discipline of Child and Youth Care (CYC).

Steps Back – Understanding the History of Nujio'qonik

Mi'kmaw oral traditions emphasize that Ktaqmkuk has always been a part of Unama'ki, the Cape Breton district of Mi'kma'ki (the Mi'kmaw homelands), and was often used as summer hunting and plant/berry gathering territories, as well as year-round homes for many people (Anger, 1998). Western Ktaqmkuk remained largely unpopulated by European settlers well into the 19th century, although over time French fur traders came to live in Nujio'qonik. Oral histories tell that the Mi'kmaq had fairly good relations with the French settlers (Jackson, 1993), and there was widespread intermarriage (Tanner, 1998). Battiste (2014) notes that the Mi'kmaq historically "included those who married from outside of our ancestry, so long as these individuals followed the rights and responsibilities associated with being Mi'kmaw" (para. 10).

Adapting to new situations has always been central to Mi'kmaw culture and is deeply ingrained within the Mi'kmaw language, which centers on flux and relationships (Sable & Francis, 2012). In the English language, grammar is structured around nouns, yet in most Indigenous languages, including Mi'kmaw, the focus of the language is on the verbs, creating a different sense of permanence and relationships (Little Bear, 2004; Sable & Francis, 2012). Nevertheless, as more and more industries began to emerge in Western Ktaqmkuk and the settler population moved there, land competition became a major problem and traditional Mi'kmaw lifestyles became increasingly difficult to maintain (Robinson, 2012). Increase in settler population also led to a strict hierarchy of class, status and race: the ruling English at the top, then the French, and the Mi'kmaq at the very bottom (Robinson, 2012). Yet, when Newfoundland and Labrador joined Canada in 1949, the politicians at the time decreed that the Indigenous peoples should not be included under the Indian Act as they were already on their way to being 'civilized' (Tanner, 1998).

In 2007, after decades of fighting for recognition, an Agreement-In-Principle (AIP) between the Federation of Newfoundland Indians and the Canadian Federal Government created the Qalipu Mi'kmaq First Nation Band (Tulk, 2008). The AIP gave members access to some federally-funded programs, and registered members as "Status Indians" under the Federal Indian Act (Robinson, 2012). Nevertheless, the AIP did not allocate any land rights or subsistence rights for the Qalipu Mi'kmaq First Nation members (Federation of Newfoundland Indians & Her Majesty the Queen, 2007). In addition, the criteria for acceptance into Qalipu, as "deemed legitimate by state agencies... [has been] challenged by existing Mi'kmaw political organizations, such as the [Mi'kmaq] Grand Council (Robinson, 2014, p. 383). Nevertheless, the

subsequent response to achieving federal recognition was immense – over 100,000 applications, leaving the Qalipu Mi'kmaq First Nation Band in turmoil (Rollman, 2013).

Instead of celebrating that so many Ktaqmkukewey Mi'kmaq wanted to learn about and re-claim their culture, the federal government and the Qalipu council came out with new directives and processes in an effort to reduce numbers (Rollman, 2013). These new directives created excessively rigorous bureaucratic requirements for self-identification and connection to community, unheard of in most if not all other federally-recognized First Nations across Canada, which many people have not been able to meet. For example, in order to meet the government-imposed criteria to prove self-identification, individuals needed to show that they had identified as Indigenous on *government* documents prior to 2008 (as opposed to through community recognition). Robinson (2014) highlights "the inherent irony here [whereas] the governments responsible for the suppression of all things Mi'kmaq are now demanding that proof of being Mi'kmaq was miraculously retained over time and can be retrieved upon demand" (p. 392).

In addition, a checklist and subsequent point system was established to assess connection to community, which made it nearly impossible to achieve the required total number of "points" for membership. Through this process, we now have families where some siblings with the same biological parents have Indian status and others do not. There are over 10,000 people who were initially awarded status, and then, after the process was revised, it was abruptly taken away from them. We have families torn apart by secrets exposed in the application process, only now to be told they are not deemed 'Indian enough' for status. One of the most influential members in the fight for status since the 1970s was rejected – because he moved away from Newfoundland due to his health conditions. My mother and I were told we are not 'culturally connected' because we

did not specifically state that we share the berries that we pick. Six of my mother's eleven siblings were eventually approved.

I have noticed that throughout this process, identity and connection to land has often become closely tied to government-imposed legislated categories, and in turn dichotomies – status or not, full-blooded or not – leaving little room for intersecting identities. Palmater (2011), a Mi'kmaw scholar, writes extensively about the ways that First Nations status identities, as regulated by the federal government, lead to a loss of connection for First Nations people – to home, to family, to land. McAffrey, a Cree Métis scholar, suggests that while it is crucial to acknowledge and resist these legislated identities, we should also look to "land and the traditions and history related to the land" (n.d., as cited in Kouri, 2011, p. 88) in thinking about original identity.

I will expand more on the connections between land and stories in the following sections, but it was important for me to begin with this backdrop of some history of the Nujio'qonik area in order to demonstrate the importance of my research in this particular historical time and the place of my ancestors. As of 2023, the last steps of the Qalipu application process have been finalized, although there are currently on-going court cases fighting the enrollment decisions. While many of our community members are fighting the legislated identities through legal means, I wish to look to bolstering our identities and connections to place, family and time through an examination of stories, grounded in one particular family. I see my work as a form of resistance, but more than this, I see my work as a building-up of our own stories and understandings of our connection to home, to Nujio'qonik, to who we are and where we come from.

The Study of Place

The study of place, and the inclusion of place within social science research, has evolved extensively in recent decades. Tuck and McKenzie (2015a) outline how critical place inquiry has been informed by Indigenous studies, environmental studies, decolonizing theory, critical geography, spatial theory and new materialist theory. By critical place inquiry, Tuck and McKenzie (2015a) refer to "research that takes up critical questions and develops corresponding methodological approaches that are informed by the embeddedness of social life in and with places, and that seeks to be a form of action in responding to critical place issues such as those of globalization and neoliberalism, settler colonialism, and environmental degradation" (p. 2). The authors propose different definitions of place, many of which contradict and build on each other. When thinking about Indigenous peoples, Tuck and McKenzie (2015b) highlight that place can often become romanticized when seen within Western frameworks and worldviews, which suggests "a misunderstanding of the nexus of Indigenous identity and land" (p. 51).

"Hold on a second," xaašxiip hops up on the desk. "nexus of identity? That sounds fancy, but who are you writing that for? The participants in your research? Yourself? Maybe you need to include a dictionary when you send out your thesis, just in case...

Or better yet, have you thought about writing in a way that people can understand? Or do academics just write for other academics?"

I give it a minute, and then concede. "You're right, again. I mean, I'm quoting others saying these lines, and they do sound so smart when they *say them, but perhaps I really should find a way to better bring them in line with my writing in the rest of the paper, in a way that – ideally – my family could also understand without needing to read a whole stack of other academic papers just to understand the jargon of that discipline."*

xaašxiip smiles, and then flutters off. "Sorry to interrupt your train of thought, continue on..."

Alright, back to thinking about ideas of place.

In my research, I was inspired by Sable and Francis (2012), who discuss how within Mi'kmaw language and worldview, our relationships to the land become those of family and kinship; many locations in the land, as well as plants and animals, are seen through language as animate and kin. Land, then, is not simply a geography; land is a web of relationships. Land is also in flux and changing all the time, a notion grounded within Indigenous languages (Little Bear, 2004). Seneca writer Geoman (2013) suggests that "the stories that connect Native people to the land and form their relationships to the land and one another are much older than colonial governments" and that "stories create the relationships that have made communities strong even though numerous atrocities and injustices" (as cited in Tuck and McKenzie, 2015b, p. 28).

"Wait, wait, wait, now. Sorry to interrupt again, but really... that header – The Study of Place"
xaašxiip laughs. "You were trying to talk about land without talking about stories?"
"No, no, not really" I stammer. "I was just, trying to use headers to organize my thoughts"
"Oh" xaašxiip says. "Yeah, those boxes fit real well in Indigenous methodologies eh?"

The Study of Thinking about *and with* Place and Stories

Again, I return to xaašxiip's story of the fairies. Where was I going, talking about place as a definition, not a relationship, not a story? Salmon (2012) argues that "to [Indigenous people], the land exists in the same manner as do our families… the river, and the sky. No hierarchy of privilege places one above or below another. Everything is woven into a managed, interconnected tapestry" (p. 27, as cited in Tuck & McKenzie, 2015b, p. 51). Simpson (2014) looks to stories to think about how we can re-imagine relationships with the land, with our families, communities and cultures. She emphasizes the importance of these stories for children

in order for them to grow up immersed within Indigenous worldviews, to see realities outside of the current systemic and colonial struggles.

From a CYC perspective, stories have a long and lasting importance both in practice and in research. Bristow (2016) argues that at our core, "Child and Youth Care Practitioners are story tellers. It's how we reflect on our practice and it's how we go about explaining 'what we do' to those outside of our community" (p. 30). Similarly, Krueger (1997) discusses how stories can be a crucial way for practitioners to come to understand their own work, as well as the youth and families they interact with. Huber et al. (2016) emphasize how stories are crucial in education and work with young people, as they can illuminate learning and connection from the heart as well as the mind. In turn, Woodard (2006) argues that storytelling can have "a powerful and very positive influence on the lives of kids" (para 2).

It is not only within practice that CYC authors discuss the use of stories, but they are also seen as crucial within teaching and research (e.g. de Finney et al., 2019; Vachon, 2021; Vachon, 2022). Formal "life stories" play a role in fields of child protection and adoption, and researchers have looked at new and creative ideas to allow children to process and re-tell their own life stories (e.g. Moore, 2019).

Throughout my review of many CYC authors, it is clear that the theme of stories has for decades been a strong component to CYC practice, with Burns (2005) emphasizing that "storytelling has been part of the child and youth worker (CYW) repertoire of skills since the beginnings of the profession" (p. 50).

It is within this tradition of stories in CYC, as well as across the interdisciplinary literature, that I situate my research, thinking about the importance of stories in connecting children, youth and families to place, land, history and time.

Chapter Three: Methodology

The methodology I have drawn upon for my Master's thesis is multi-faceted. First and foremost, I have grounded my research in the blanket that I created in my first semesters of my Master's degree, where my own identities are interwoven.

Figure 1: The physical blanket that grounds my research methodology

Each piece of material in the blanket represents part of my ancestries/identities, and is woven together with a frame of the colours of my Mi'kmaw dancing regalia. Included within the blanket are fabrics from Sweden, fibers/medicine from Nuu-chah-nulth and Lekwungen territories, medicines that I harvested in Nujio'qonik, and important fabrics to recognize people/events in my life, such as one of my children's baby blankets. The blanket exists as both a physical object and

a metaphor, grounding my research methodology within my identities, without the existence of a hierarchy. If any single strand is missing in the blanket, the overall blanket cannot exist as it is now; similarly, each part of my research methodology is crucial for thinking, doing and understanding the research I conducted.

In designing this methodology, I draw from Rosborough's (2012) thesis, in which she uses a Kwak'wala button blanket to structure her research, looking to the process of creating the blanket as a guide. In situating my research as both written and spoken stories, as well as relational connections, I emphasize the importance of stories beyond simple strings of words, to think about the interwoven aspects of the stories rather than the data to be derived from them.

The Frame

Just as I created the blanket's frame out of the colours of my Mi'kmaw dancing regalia, my methodology is grounded in Indigenous methodologies, which center Indigenous worldviews, in this case Mi'kmaw, in the research design. Key to Indigenous methodologies are aspects such as accountability to the community, relationships continuing before and beyond the research project, reflexivity, participant/community ownership over the data created, and the inclusion of land and spirituality (Baskin, 2011; Hart, 2009; Kovach, 2009; Wilson, 2008). Also integral is that the research is driven by and of benefit to the community (Kovach, 2005). Just as I did in my blanket, I have woven these ethical commitments throughout my research design.

As both an outsider and an insider in Nujio'qonik, I have spent time in-community leading up to this project and

"winapi! nagaasi! wait, wait, wait. What in the world is 'in-community?'"

I had not even noticed xaašxiip was behind me, I had been on such a writing roll. Or maybe xaašxiip was always there, I am not too sure.

"Well it's like, when you're like, you-know, in-community?" I tell her, a little bit hot at being interrupted. "I mean, everyone says it."

"In-community, what exact community?" xaašxiip asks, and then pushes on. "In-community, as opposed to what? In-nature? In-off-reserve? In-the ground? In space?"

"Uhh" I stammer. "Well, my professor said it was when you weren't in the university. Like, she acts one way as an academic, one way 'in-community'"

"Ohhhhh, I get it." xaašxiip smiles. "Of course it's an academic term. The university can't be a community, they're what? An exclusive club? An elite society? A high-class guild? Oh, perhaps a posh brotherhood?"

"All right, all right," I respond, "give me back my thesaurus. I get it."

But of course, xaašxiip won't let me leave my embarrassment there.

"Let me tell you a story, a story of the Ivory Brother/Sister/Binaryhood and the elusive 'community' that is everything else.

This one time, not so many years ago, I was working in-institution [why doesn't that flow like in-community?]. I was making this just most magnificent shiny thing. It was beautiful, and we had all the students come help me, and all these kids, and, it was just, it was like a community – but don't worry, I'll call it an exclusive club, because you know, I know communities can't exist within the Ivory, it's only when you decide to study and spend time with the others, the lessers, that's when we get community. So yes, our beautiful Society was going great, or so I thought.

Until one day, some fight happened, I don't remember how it started, but the lady in charge was mad, let me tell you. She wanted me to leave, to go make my work somewhere else. And she had her list of complaints, and most were not valid, but you know, I tried listening, tried to fix it.

And then, she looked at me, and she spit out the words that were meant to hurt the most:

'You have to leave, community is mad at you.'

And you know, I think it would have made most people cower, but me? I just laughed. What community?

And right then and there, I picked up my phone. And right in front of her, I called the Chief of the local Nation, and asked him – are you mad at me or upset with the work I have done? Please tell me.

*And would you know it, he wasn't upset. Nor was the Chief of the other local Nation. Or the Friendship Center. Or anyone else I could think to call, any of the 'communi**ties**' I am honoured to be a part of.*

Because it wasn't community, it wasn't those 'in-[this fictional all-encompassing] community', it was just a person or two, who didn't have the guts to come up and have a real conversation."

xaašxiip winked at me, waiting.

I sat there, thinking. For a long time, I thought about it.

What is a community? There certainly isn't the *community. Fast and Kovach (2019) posit that "Indigenous community(s) is not monolithic nor static and arguably the term "Indigenous community" is problematic in its assumption of political, social, and economic homogeneity" (p 22). Archibald and Parent (2019), in their discussion of Indigenous storywork, present a definition of community as quoted from the Government of Canada Panel on Research Ethics: "Community – describes a collectivity with shared identity or interests, that has the capacity to act or express itself as a collective … A community may be territorial, organizational or a community of interest" (p. 11).*[13]

And yet this idea, of shared identity or interests, seems to me often to be translated as this beautiful idea of "community" where everyone gets along and thinks the same and believes the same. I know that myself – and it seemed like many of peers – were lulled into this idea of cohesive, encouraging and loving communities by academia, which sure weren't as romantic as they sounded in the literature when you were the one working/living/loving in them.

What is a community? I mean, people have debated that for years (see, for example, Bradshaw, 2008). Is it geography? Is it shared identity? Shared beliefs? Shared interests?

How can I simply throw out the term, research driven by and benefiting the 'community' to encompass all these ideas?

I don't know the answer. But I know that I grew up around academia, in the city, and looking back, I believe that I had two key ideas of community – quaint rural communities brought together by geography, and then urban communities of a bunch of people who think, live and believe like you do [and sadly, often look like you do], but certainly above all – they agree with you on core beliefs, because if not, why would you stay friends with them? There's no need for that toxicity in your life. Plus, if you're too lonely, there's always the internet; there, the algorithms will bring you closer to everyone who believes like you do.

Which brings me to now. What is a community?

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[13] The full quote/definition of Community from the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, and Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada can be found here: https://ethics.gc.ca/eng/tcps2-eptc2_chapter9-chapitre9.html?wbdisable=true

I still have no idea. But after living in a few small communities, I feel like there is something to being driven up the wall by the guy who runs the hardware store, yet still having a cup of coffee with him and bickering about the world. There's something to the way that you might think different from buddy-what's-his-name down the road, yet you still wave when they drive by. There's something to the way you ask for a few eggs from a neighbour, because the store is a half-hour drive away.

There's something to being needed, and needing, and seeing someone for who they are – annoyances and all.

I look at xaašxiip. "So, after all that? Where does that leave me? What in the world is a community, really?"

xaašxiip just smiles, as always, and then twirls and flies away.

As both an outsider and an insider in Nujio'qonik, I have spent time ~~in-community~~ in Ktaqmkuk leading up to this project, specifically in Stephenville, NL, and at the Mi'kmaw cultural center in the town of St. George's, both located in Nujio'qonik. I spent a year living there with my family in 2014/2015, plus many extra months before and after, learning about the land and culture, building relationships, and in more recent years, discussing ideas for my research with Elders and Knowledge Keepers. As Kovach (2009) emphasizes, this work begins many years before our project, as we learn from our families and Elders, and continues on throughout our lives. In previous iterations of this proposal, I wanted to open the research up to the broader Nujio'qonik community, yet with the COVID-19 pandemic that required us all to remain in one geographical place, the context of my research had to shift. I chose therefore to ask my family to be a part of my research, as the relationships in person, over time, were already formed, and I could build on these relationships to conduct the research virtually.

I met with the head of cultural programming at Stephenville's People of the Dawn Indigenous Friendship Center (PDIFC), my original research partner, to discuss my research and ideas, and received their approval and interest in the project, as well as offers of continued

support if required. I think it is important to emphasize though that while I situate the context of my research within the Indigenous Mi'kmaw communities of Nujio'qonik, and the colonial histories of the area, I am not focusing on collecting particular collective Mi'kmaw knowledge, culture, arts, spirituality, or traditions; my research is focused on the importance of stories in the context of a group of siblings of mixed Indigenous and European heritage, in my extended family, grounded in a particular place - Nujio'qonik.

Over the trajectory of the research, while I continued to speak at times with employees at the PDIFC, I was encouraged by them to focus the primary community and context of the research towards that particular group of siblings I was interviewing. I was reminded again of the ethical importance of ensuring that my research benefited the participants. As such, the methodology of grounding the work in the stories and knowledge of the place was not a straightforward process, but rather a reciprocal one – the methodology led to the stories, and the stories informed the methodology.

This focus on stories is grounded in Indigenous methodologies, which also draw heavily from stories – personal stories, cultural stories, participants' stories, community stories (Kovach, 2009; Simpson, 2011). Stories are also very important within Newfoundland culture across diverse backgrounds (Anger, 1988; Newbury, 2007). In looking to balance these many types of stories, I have found incredible inspirations. It is important to note that all the work that has come before me is crucial to my ability to write and research using Indigenous methodologies in the academy. I drew inspiration from authors such as Q'um Q'um Xilem (Jo-Ann Archibald) (2008), a Stó:lō woman who integrated stories throughout the research for, and writing of, her book *Indigenous Storywork: Educating the Heart, Mind, Body, and Spirit.* Similarly, Sylvia Moore (2017) draws from Crow as trickster and storyteller to guide the telling of her research

project, *Trickster Chases the Tale of Education*. She emphasizes that this way of presenting stories as learning is deeply grounded in Mi'kmaw culture and knowledge. Finally, Susan Dion (2009) emphasizes through her own story, as well as the writing of children's stories, how stories have the possibility to bring forth hope and new possibilities for identity and connection for the next generations.

The Blanket's Woven Strips

Each strip of the blanket tells a different story, provides a new learning, a new idea, in connection with the others. In this section, I explore some of the academic strips that I draw from, which informed – and in turn were informed by – the research project itself.

Autoethnography. I drew from my own story throughout my research, as I believe my own story is integral to how and why I conduct the research. As discussed above, this reflexivity and self-location is crucial to Indigenous methodologies; as Whitinui (2014) emphasizes, "Indigenous autoethnography seeks to strengthen and clarify how we as [I]ndigenous peoples want to live in the world today" (p. 481). Throughout the research, I kept a journal of my thoughts and ideas. I then spent time reflecting on them – silently, loudly, as words written, thought and spoken, alone and in conversation, in order to "connect the personal with the cultural by placing an understanding of the self within a social context" (Lichtman, 2013, p. 107).

Narrative. Additionally, my methodology drew from narrative techniques that center the use of storytelling, conversation and attentive listening in research (Riessman, 2007). As I learned over the project, my final focus was less on meaning, as I wanted to leave the meanings for the readers to discover and grow. Rather, I drew from techniques of narrative interviewing

(Anderson & Kirkpatrick, 2016), in which the goal was to "generate detailed accounts rather than brief answers or general statements" (Riessman, 2007, p. 23). In doing so, I acknowledged and appreciated that the journey of weaving together stories is as much as part of data analysis as it is part of the final product (James, 2017).

Participatory research. Participatory research involves community members in all aspects of the research (Cargo & Mercer, 2008; Coughlin et al., 2017). It attempts to negotiate and balance power between community members/participants and academics. This can be difficult to accomplish in practice (Cargo & Mercer, 2008), and requires navigating the difficult balance of respecting participants' knowledge, input and guidance, while simultaneously not taxing them and "demand[ing] too much of them in terms of time or energy" (personal communication, J. Newbury, January 21, 2023).

While I strove to include participants in the research as much as possible, as their stories and thoughts are the essence of the research, this was challenging at times, particularly within the constraints of a Master's level research project, as is discussed by Castleden et al. (2012). I am not a fully funded researcher – nor was my research funded by more than a couple small bursaries that covered printing/mailing costs. At the same time as my Master's project was going on, my husband Hjalmer and I: had a baby, raised the baby and our older toddler, carved/raised four čiinuł (totem poles), purchased/opened and ran a successful art gallery, co-wrote and published a peer reviewed article, managed our son's serious medical condition, moved towns, completed a North Island College certificate in Nuu-chah-nulth Language Revitalization, and wrote three self-published Nuu-chah-nulth children's books – all while doing the myriad of things it takes to make a living, keep a household and raise children – and of course, make it through the global pandemic.

I did not share this list to brag – in fact, I think most of my peers led similarly busy lives, and I think this busy life balance is one carried by many graduate students. My point is only that while I built my methodology believing in and wanting to espouse community participatory research values, I would not want to argue that I was able to fully seek and apply input regarding the areas and structure of the research from participants throughout the research project, from the initial recruitment to reviewing interview transcripts, to a draft of the final thesis, although I did try my best.

That being said, as I discuss throughout the thesis, the participants' impact on the questions, stories and overall sense of 'ownership' of the data and results strongly reflected the values and ideas of community participatory research which grounded my methodology.

Decolonization theory. Maori author Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) wrote that "'[r]esearch' is probably one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous world's vocabulary" (p. 1), emphasizing again for me the crucial role of accountability and reciprocity in research.

These thoughts on the dangers of research were compounded by my own thoughts on the dangers I perceived of research that involved interviewing people at the Master's level, where the vast majority of Master's research projects I read culminated in the *thesis....* the thesis that – while of course rightfully gaining the pride of the writer's family and friends - then lived (died?) on the D-spaces[14] website, rarely to be read, let alone cited, again.

xaašxiip bursts out laughing.

"What a positive little Master's student you are, no wonder it took you 5+ years to write your thesis." xaašxiip can't stop laughing. "And you little hypocrite – didn't you interview like your entire family?"

I couldn't help but smile.

[14] University of Victoria's online database for Master's theses and Phd dissertations

"Alright," I said, laughing, "I'll back off/up a bit and give context to that argument."

When I was in the first year of my Master's program, I was asked – repeatedly - about what kind of change I wanted to see/make in the world, and how I could design a research project to address that. This might be the case in all Master's programs, or perhaps it was particularly acute in Child and Youth Care (CYC), where most students were also practitioners, and therefore had been exposed to, and wanted to try to address, issues and challenges – both individual and systemic – that children, youth and families were facing.

When I got to my Ethics form, this was also clearly the goal though – one of the questions asked me to:

> Identify any potential or known benefits associated with participation and explain below
> Keep in mind that the anticipated benefits should outweigh any potential risks.
> □ To the participants
> □ To society
> □ To the state of knowledge

And I felt so lost, because I believed in good research, of course, and research that made a difference and didn't hurt people, but, as I discussed in the previous section, how likely is my research to benefit the state of knowledge, let alone the people I am directly talking to? I mean, I do envision ways that I could contribute to people through small research projects, and perhaps in a round-a-bout way, my research could inform my work, and in turn families I work with. Yet, I felt like the pressure was on to – and therefore the expectation from students that they could – create research that could impact the people and families – and of course importantly Systems – that Child and Youth Care practice is focused on.

And, I mean, honestly, it can feel like Systems barely listen to large-scale national studies – why would they listen to an (understandably small) sample size thesis research project?

This of course, is not a challenge that only I have faced, but one that Hoskins and White (2013) discuss as particularly relevant in CYC, wherein "for students who are building their careers as counselors and researchers, the idea of dipping into a person's life only to scramble out post data collection, can be particularly problematic in terms of their own desired professional identities" (p. 183).

And that, my dear xaašxiip, that's where my cynicism lies. Not because it is impossible for a project to make change – believe me, I've been debated on this topic, and I do concede that is has happened and can be done – but rather, the expectation that all students can and should try to make change with their research. I mean, back to my cynicism again, isn't a Master's research project kind of just an exercise to try out – and ideally prove - that I can do my own research project?

To return to that Ethics application:

> Identify any potential or known benefits associated with participation and explain below

Keep in mind that the anticipated benefits should outweigh any potential risks.

 To the researcher: I will [ideally] receive a Master's degree and learn about how to do research, in part from troubleshooting all the mistakes that happen in this one.

 To the participants: you may enjoy our conversations and at the end of the research, you will have a book of stories to share with your family.

 To society: if anyone was to search through D-spaces and read my Master's thesis besides my committee, (close) friends and family, the reader may think about new ways of how stories can be a resource in times of connection and disconnection and pose questions for practice and professional development in thinking of stories and connection

 To the state of knowledge: Does anyone actually read a Master's thesis? Well, beyond those that have to. So, if I am good enough at writing, perhaps one of my committee members might be inspired to inform their peer reviewed research by questions posed in my thesis, and inform how Child and Youth Care thinks about family stories as a site for connection/disconnection for children in care and other children/families we work with – not just the stories, but also how they are collected and shared. But honestly, does anyone actually read a Master's thesis?

Of course, perhaps, my research will inspire my ideas and they will grow and I will do more research and eventually have a project big enough to inspire change, or be published, or so forth – so again, I'm not saying impossible, but still, xaašxiip, I feel so much more free in the honesty that first and foremost, the Master's is for me, and instead of lying and pretending I can make change, I can choose where I want to go with that.

And of course, being me, I chose to prove myself wrong, and created a 165-page book of short stories for the Benoit/Lafitte family, which is inspired by – but not included in – my thesis (more on this later).

"Ahh," xaašxiip smiles, "and that's why we're here, me laughing at you, writing a thesis full of positivity and change."

Alright, where was I? Back to decolonization theory.

My methodology embodied a decolonial approach through my hesitancy – and in turn internal ethical debates - on the ethics of research. In addition, I drew from decolonization theory, which aims to reduce the harms of colonization, in my preparation for research. This process ensured that I had a thorough understanding of the implications and histories of colonization in Canada and Ktaqmkuk. In particular, I read extensively on the history of Mi'kmaw in Ktaqmkuk. I also looked to Palmater (2011), a Mi'kmaw scholar who explores the impacts of legislated identities (e.g. Indian status) in determining how we think of ourselves and

our community as belonging or not. This is crucial in the context of the Qalipu application process. I was also inspired by Tuck and Yang's (2012) posit that decolonization is *always* about land; part of the analysis of my research involved questions about how access to land impacted the stories and connections shared in the interviews.

The blanket methodology I outline above was constantly evolving and growing over the course of the research I did. I was taught that in Mi'kmaw, the word for blanket is anquno'sun, which refers to the folding over of layers, to [our] roots woven in baskets, to cloth and our relationships with European people. The physical blanket that I created in designing the research project contains medicines, stories, love, laughter; similarly, the blanket methodology grounding the Weaving hi*stories* project is much more than a series of steps – it is everything in-between, the weaving of different ideas, as well as the many limitations and gaps where the light shines through.

Chapter 4: Methods

The Process of Weaving of the Blanket - Sharing Stories

Grounded in – and informing – the methodology above, my research project involved inviting the 11 children of Joseph Benoit and Rita Lafitte (my mother and her 10 siblings), to be interviewed in a 1-2 hour long recorded phone call. All the interviews were recorded by myself and then transcribed. Prior to the interview, I provided all the participants with a consent form and overview of the project, as well as the preliminary questions I would ask. I then went over the consent form with each participant and left time for questions about the project. In total, ten of the eleven siblings agreed to be interviewed, with each interview taking between 45 minutes to two hours. None of the ten participants wished to remain anonymous or use a pseudonym in the final publication.

I received ethics approval in 2020 and conducted my interviews in Winter/Spring/Summer 2021.

I relied heavily on the Conversation Method (CM), as described by Kovach (2010), a form of unstructured interviews grounded in Indigenous worldviews. This focus on stories draws from both narrative interviewing techniques, as well as an Indigenous worldview of stories and storytelling. As Kovach (2010) explains, data is collected as stories, whereby a "[s]tory is a relationship process that is accompanied by particular protocol consistent with tribal knowledge identified as guiding the research" (p. 42). For me, this protocol included providing tobacco ties to participants to honor the relationship and knowledge that was being shared with me. There was also an interesting ebb and flow – a *conversation* - of allowing participants to talk about whatever they wanted to share, but also myself as the interviewer contributing to the story, as is typical in the cultural context in which my relatives and their stories are grounded in. When I

think of Newfoundland storytelling, at least in my family, half of it involves the debate and adding-to of stories that grow within the story-telling relationship. As an interviewer, I tried to find a balance between listening and engaging, that created a glimpse of that storytelling culture. I also did not envision these stories as monolithic tales for me to go find; rather, these stories evolved within the web of social relationships and land. Van Den Hoonaard (2012) discusses how in-depth interviews are "more accurately described as 'generating data' than 'collecting data'" (p. 105), as stories evolve through interaction.

Initially, xaašxiip had suggested questions that she thought I should ask, including:

1. What was it like when you were growing up? What memories stand out for you from your own childhood?
2. What work did you do when you were young? What did play look like back then?
3. Do you remember doing things together as a family? Particular family traditions?
4. What stories do you remember being told about your mom's life when she was growing up? Your dad when he was growing up?
5. Do you remember a lot of sickness when you were a child? How did your family deal with sickness?

I of course, wanted to go way deeper, and developed the following interview guide:

Research Questions	Interview Questions	Considerations
What stories do we tell our children about being from here, from Nujio'qonik, Ktaqmkuk?	**Knowing that this interview was coming, you may have been thinking about your family stories: stories from when you were growing up, stories you were told by your family, stories you tell each other, your own children and nieces and nephews and other relatives.** **What stories do you remember that you would like to share with me today?** (seek as much detail as possible, to provide a full picture that might include: who were part of the(se) story(ies)? Where did the events recalled take place? When did they occur? who told the participant the story(ies)? Who did he/she tell? How did they feel hearing the story before, how they feel now, how they feel telling the story?)	How the stories relate to cultural contexts How the stories relate to historical contexts How the stories relate to present-day contexts What assumptions about place and land are in the stories? How does the participant talk about their identities? Do their identities shift over stories – are some identities stronger in different stories? How old were they when this story took place/they were told the story. What was their developmental levels at the time? Details that seem significant, and any missing details? How the story is told, the meanings, the mood, the perspective, and the time frame. How is the story framed? Stories are more than a string of words – what else is in the telling? Metaphors and word choices
What stories connect us to place, to history, to time, to family?	**Why do you think these particular stories were the first ones that come to mind?** **Do you think they have any particular importance to ideas of connection – to family, to land, to history? Are there other stories that are important for**	

	connection to where you grew up – Bay St. George? **Do you think stories had any importance to how you connected with land and sea in Nujio'qonik (Bay St. George)?** **And do you think stories had any importance with how you connected to your family and your family history?** **And with how you see your identities?**	Changes over time (which of the above details change as well? Which did not?) Collective (family) stories? How might their stories inform each other's? Individual stories? How might they differ from collective stories?) What discourses do they engage in? (Do race, gender and class play a role? Cultural connections/disconnections?)
What stories do we draw on in times of disconnection and change?	**Are there any stories you've recalled during these times of the COVID-19 pandemic?** **Are there particular stories you draw in challenging times such as these that isolate us from each other?** **Are there stories you share with your siblings and other relatives when they are undergoing times of disconnection and change?**	What assumptions are embedded within their answers? What assumptions are embedded within my questions? What assumptions am I making based on my previous knowledge/relationships? What am I missing? What is lost in the telling of stories? What is gained?
How do these stories resource us in times when these connections to place and each other are disrupted?	**What do you draw from these particular stories during times of disconnection and change?**	The context of our interview versus how stories are usually shared.

And I, of course (after a first interview filled with a lot of confused silence and clarification questions from the participant), ended up drawing as much from xaašxiip's straight-forward questions as from my interview guide.

"You know why you were so lost?" xaašxiip asked me, after she finished reading my draft to date.

"No" I laugh, used to this by now. "But I bet you do."

"You're a typical academic, you just assume I know what you mean by a simple term like 'stories' – and in turn, you assume you know what you mean." xaašxiip smiles. "I think you were attempting to go for some big, culturally significant stories like Creation stories and stories so old that all of a sudden your participants would miraculously start speaking fluent Mi'kmaw."

I blush, embarrassed.

"I mean, it's not your fault. I think you read all about how to ground your research in Indigenous methodologies and stories – and you heard all my brilliant thoughts about mythology as methodology.[15] *I mean, like we've talked about, what is a methodology? A 'system of ways of doing, teaching, or studying something' according to the Cambridge Dictionary.* [16]*And if that is not a definition of a culture's creation stories, I don't know what is."*

"And I think that's what you wanted to find, and instead of saying that, instead of designing your research to delve into archives and ask specific questions, you tried to sneak it in, and in turn fell flat on your face."

I take a second, but then I'm laughing. "I mean, I would argue I tripped more than face-planted, but I agree. I was again, going for that romanticized idea of 'traditional stories,' and in-turn I almost missed the magic of stories. I almost missed the magic in the telling, in the sharing."

"But thankfully, I have you xaašxiip. You always reminded me that stories are sacred, and that stories lose something in the telling, which is not to be taken for granted. Thankfully, I had you to gently – or not so gently – push me in the right direction."

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[15] Wenstob (2017)
[16] https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/methodology

Chapter 5: The Methods – *Part II*

Data Analysis Stage

This is where it all got (more) wonderfully messy.

I entered the data analysis stage with 234 pages of transcriptions, very few 'independent' stories, and my wonderfully academically-trained brain, which loved to see themes and patterns.

Enter: Thematic Analysis, which Riessman (2007) explains "is probably the most common method of narrative analysis and arguably, the most straightforward" (p. 53).

I tried, at first to find the themes – and I did find some.

Connection – and disconnection – to land were key themes that I identified within the stories. Within all the participants' interviews, land – including specific places, particular waters, the flow of the weather and seasons – was a central player in most of the stories. As Tuck and McKenzie (2012b) explain, "relationships to land are familial, intimate, intergenerational and instructive" (p. 57). In the stories and interviews, it was clear that the large majority of my aunts' and, especially my uncles,' childhoods were spent outdoors. In nearly every story that was shared with me, there was extensive time spent describing the setting – the landmarks, the locations, the environments – and those settings greatly influenced the stories. There was often a connection between generations spent learning and living in the same places and same waters, and the stories overlapped with older stories. There was also an overall flow that was clear as the stories wove together – the seasons shaped the land, the land shaped the stories, the stories flowed with the seasons.

When the participants talked about adventures they had on the land – whether it was fishing, trapping, exploring, etc. – they were often alone or with other children, and I repeatedly

asked “and how did you learn how to do _____; how did you know what do to when _____ happened?” The answer, again and again, was that they just learned on and with the land. They often spoke of stories they had heard, and perhaps they had asked relatives questions or been off in the country with their father/uncles now and then, but those stories were filtered through the participants’ own stories of noticing the land, trying out different strategies, learning from their mistakes and trying again.

While the participants spoke at length of places and relationships with the Nujio’qonik areas, there was also a strong emphasis on the disconnections and changes between their generation and their parents’ generation, in large part due to the arrival of the American Base in Stephenville in 1941. When my grandfather Joseph was growing up, he lived with his family in an area called ‘Back of the Pond’, which was one of three sections of houses that made up the area now known as Stephenville. The entire Stephenville area was a small fishing/farming community, of approximately 1000 residents in 1935, with nearly all of them identifying as Roman Catholic and French-speaking (High, 2002). The agricultural land in Back of the Pond was some of the best in Newfoundland, and so the primary income streams for most families, my grandfather’s family included, were farming, fishing and working in the lumber woods in the winter (High, 2002).

Figure 2: Part of my grandfather (Joseph Benoit)’s property at Back of the Pond, 1943 (Benoit-Penney, 2017, p. 131)

Figure 3: Part of my great-grandfather (James Benoit)'s property, the family farm, 1943
(Benoit-Penney, 2017, p. 126)

Then, during World War II, the United States Air Force needed a way to refuel their airplanes before crossing the Atlantic, and made an agreement with the then-British colony of Newfoundland to make a base in Stephenville. But in order to make the airport and harbour that they wanted, they completely changed the land. They took what was the "large pond, with just a little brook that went into the ocean, and they dredged the whole thing to make a harbour*"* (participant 8). They blasted the landmark "Indian Head" mountain and the small brook to make a deep channel, and both flooded and dried up different parts of the land. The pond, which previously had been above sea level, was dredged to become more than 15 feet deeper, and the entire landscape of the area became practically unrecognizable to the families that had lived there (Benoit-Penney, 2017).

And to do that, they had to get rid of the families who called Back of the Pond home. All the families were given a lump sum compensation, and moved across town. And seemingly overnight, this small fishing/farming town boomed. Thousands of new residents – from various social/cultural backgrounds – moved to the previously tiny town, new job opportunities arose,

many new diseases and social issues became entrenched in the community, and more than half the area – including all of 'Back of the Pond' – was blocked off from non-US army base personnel (High, 2002). In the participant interviews, this change was discussed as both positive and negative – good in terms of employment opportunities, and bad in terms of the pain of being completely – and in ways irreversibly – removed from the land that family had lived on for generations. The changes made for the Base completely changed the landscape, and I noticed how some of the stories, particularly my Grandfather's fairy stories, seemed to be forever locked into that Back of the Pond area; they never came back into the new Stephenville.

While Stephenville as an urban location still filled participants' stories – land in an Indigenous perspective is of course not simply green spaces but everything else in an urban space as well (Tuck and McKenzie, 2015b), the stories in my interviews clearly outlined a strong and clear line of before the Base and after the Base – even though none of my aunts and uncles were born before that Base was built.

These lines of disconnection run throughout my family stories – and lack of stories. I had gone into the research listening for and thinking about older Mi'kmaw stories from Nujio'qonik, looking for "stories that connect... [us] to the land and form [our] relationships to the land and one another [that] are much older than colonial governments" (Geoman, 2013, p. 28, as cited in Tuck & McKenzie, 2015b). And I did not necessarily find those, at least not those Creation stories and time immemorial stories that I found in some of my literature reviews (e.g. Atleo, 2004; Sable & Francis, 2012). This could be for many reasons, and was likely at least in part because of the strong Roman Catholic religious background – both in the family and in the schools – that the participants grew up in. The disconnections also ran through in the ways that participants knew and thought of themselves as Indigenous – not with any pride or shared family

stories, but with a lot of silence and attempts to distance themselves from the racial slurs and discrimination they faced. Robinson (2014) highlights how this denial of Mi'kmaw identity was particular prevalent in Stephenville after the Base arrived, as there was an increase in available wage-based jobs, but they would not hire Indigenous people.

And, in many ways, the attempts to distance themselves from any outward Mi'kmaw identity were "successful" for my family to find and hold employment - due to aspects of privilege they held such as the land they were relocated to, their mixed race, and the job opportunities they had when they could speak English.

Throughout the interviews, these lines of both connection and disconnection wove between the participants' individual stories, and the stories as a whole.

Gendered impacts on place, space (private and public) and memories was another key theme that I identified, right from the beginning of the interviews. Of the participants, six are male and four are female, and the differences in their experiences growing up were immediately apparent. The boys' childhood memories centered largely on fishing, hunting, and exploring the land, while the girls spoke more about inside household chores and school. There were areas of overlap – often involving berry picking, play or church – but the division between genders was clear. I repeatedly heard phrases such as "you did have your traditional roles. Where we were expected, for example, to cut the hay, to you know, say, go fishing. And the girls didn't take part in that" (participant 6) or "I don't know nothing about any of that stuff... we girls never had nothing to do with the outside chores" (participant 3).

As well as the particular activities that the participants did as children, there was a clear difference in concepts of "freedom," whereas many of the men spoke about all the work they had

to do, but also how “times were so free” (participant 1) back in their childhoods. There was a fondness that many of the male participants remembered of the chores they had to do as children and the adventures they had while fishing and hunting. On the other hand, the girls often spoke about how the “housework never ended” (participant 9), and how they relished the moments when they were ‘free’ to play outside for a while – although never allowed to travel as far nor for as long as the boys.

In addition, in thinking of gender, it became clear very early on in the interviews that although my grandmother Rita was a constant presence in the children/family’s lives, stories about her or stories that she told were not shared in the interviews as often as stories about my grandfather Joseph. I hypothesized that in thinking back 50+ years, many of my relatives were thinking about the big adventures that often involved being out in the country/in the workforce, which at the time was much more relegated to men’s work rather than women’s work (George, 2000). Benoit (1990) examines how the patriarchal influence of the church and family led to strict gender-roles in the French-speaking Bay St. George area. On the one hand, it could be seen that women were ‘stuck’ at home while men worked away from home; yet, Benoit emphasizes how in asking women about their own lives and work, it is clear women did have extensive roles and influence in the community, as mothers, caregivers, midwives and subsistence workers. Bringing in a gendered lens to the interviews, I began to ask specifically about the women (mother, grandmothers) in the participants’ lives, and quickly began gathering many more examples of more mundane – but equally influential (and hilarious) – stories of my grandmother and great-grandmothers.

"Hold up now! That’s a great gendered analysis and all, but did you seriously just jump over the fact that someone else – with your last name! – has talked to women to hear their own stories in the same place that you did your research?” xaašxiip asked me, clearly following along closely as I write one rainy day.

I laugh. "Well, I wasn't sure if I'm really supposed to say it. It's my mum actually – she's the one that did that research. She actually did research on women's stories in Newfoundland for ages, which I never really realized until I started doing my own thesis and seeing her work cited. And then, just last week, I found her Master's thesis, you'll never guess what it was about. She went back to Stephenville, and interviewed women about their memories and stories about life in 'Back of the Pond' – and then in Stephenville after the Base came in."

xaašxiip just looks at me, and then laughs, and laughs and laughs.

"You mean to tell me, my little academic researcher, that you went in to study stories – and yet you don't even see the beauty in the story of you setting out to do kind of the same thing that your mum, oh so many years ago set out to do, in the same place, holding those same (albeit different) stories.... what do you mean, you don't know if that should be included?"

I ponder xaašxiip's words. "Yeah, I guess you're right. That does make a pretty cool story, in its own way. There's another one like that too, that came out in the interviews, of how my aunt – who butted heads with her dad (my grandfather) and his beliefs/expectations – she ended up following nearly his exact same career path, in a round-a-bout way, and they were both expert sign-printers of their times, although in totally different provinces and historical periods. And she said she'd never really thought about it that way, until I pointed it out – just like you just did for me, xaašxiip."

"Oh, and another thing that came out in the interviews – my uncle, he had interviewed his uncles for a class project back in the 70s, and he found the recording! And another sibling, she found the technology to fix up the recording and she sent it to me on a cd! And I got to hear my great-uncles answering – and often not really answering – my uncle's questions, just like I was doing today."

xaašxiip just looks at me, winking. waiting.

Darn, he was right, again. What was I missing, in my analysis? What stories were being left behind? Why was I attempting to redo an analysis of land, and gender, and every other theme that was emerging – when it had already been done? Some of it by my own mother, when she was a Master's student herself in the 80s.

It took me a while to heed xaašxiip's advice, per usual. For too many months and a few too many incredibly kind (often unanswered) emails from my supervisor, I continued to try to draw apart stories and study those themes. And I made very little progress.

Until, finally, thankfully, xaašxiip and I had another chat, and I ended up typing the following journal entry:

Feb 11, 2022

Why is this taking me so long?
Why is this taking me so long?
Why is this taking me so long?

I cannot do justice to the stories. I just, can't. How could I? How can I? They are filled with so much love, so many laughs, so many truths. How do I give them to the university while keeping them sacred?

I just. don't. know.

Why is this taking me so long?

I want to make something groundbreaking! A new methodology. A compilation of stories - nothing else - so clever that the academy will be forced to accept only that.

And yet, the stories weren't… perfect enough? Weren't 'true' enough? Weren't 'cultural' enough?

And yet, they are perfect.

How do I go about taking the truths from these stories? Who am I to take out the truths from these stories?

What do I lose in the telling? What is even left in the breaking them apart?

So, I won't break them apart.

Data analysis: keeping stories together, grouping by general themes, re-writing the stories for family to read.

Can a master's thesis really do "good work?" Doubtful. Ethical systemic change? I had to argue the importance of my topic in both my proposal and ethics, and yet… really, what change can a master's student make? Isn't a masters, when you get down to it, just an exercise to learn/prove I learned how to do research?

And that's the line I'm hitting, the pain I'm hitting. How do I possibly do my participants justice, and also appease the academy?

So, I will start with doing my participants justice. I can't make systemic change, but I can try to do justice to the stories, their stories, our stories. Not the academy's stories. So, I will write the book for them, for me, for us.

So, I will write the book for them, for me, for us.

Chapter 6: Data Analysis – *Part II*

A book of stories to read to our children, of times before in Nujio'qonik, Ktaqmkuk

On my second run at data analysis, I began around the same spot, looking at themes that had arisen in the interviews, but I returned to my methodology of weaving. xaašxiip had reminded me of the sacredness and wholeness of the story, and instead of breaking the stories apart to look for data points and individual findings, I wanted to find a way to build them up as stories. If something was lost in the telling of the story, could something be captured in the re-telling?

While I – at first – thought I may be unique in my quest for storytelling as part of the research analysis/findings stage, instead of as primarily a data collection tool, I found a space in the literature existing for this already. As previously discussed in my literature review, stories and storytelling have long been highlighted and valued within Indigenous methodologies. More and more, researchers are presenting stories in their publications – not only as examples, but as knowledge in and of themselves. Thomas King (e.g. 2005) and Leanne Simpson (e.g. 2011), both trained academics, are immediate names that come to mind, who have both, in their own ways, used creative writing and stories to discuss their research and findings in new – and old – ways. Pedri-Spade (2016) shares personal stories as a "critical reflection of the meaning and consequences of 'Indianness'" (p.86). Instead of choosing to dissect the stories to explain to the reader how to think, she posits that "in many Indigenous knowledge systems, stories are knowledge in their own right; they are not simply anecdotes or pieces of "data" that must be manipulated through western theory or analytical devices in order to become knowledge" (p. 86).

In my re-view of the literature, I was pushed also to think not only of the importance of stories, but also on the question of how to give the findings of the research back to the

community/participants themselves, in ways that would benefit them. Christensen (2012) discusses how during community-based participatory research, while the setting/ideas/culture of participants/collaborating community is often "paramount to shaping the direction, form, and design of the research project, the actual modes of dissemination [can] appear to be taken for granted... as [researchers] turned to standard methods of research communication such as journal articles and policy reports" (p. 233).

So, with a belief in the stories as knowledge, a desire to think of the stories holistically instead of as data points, and a drive to disseminate the research to the participants in a meaningful way, my second attempt at data analysis began.

I started with the 234 pages of transcriptions. Each participant's transcript was coded a particular color. Instead of looking for words/sentences, I looked for larger chunks of 'stories' within each transcript, and then I grouped similar stories from the different participants together under a story theme. Originally, xaašxiip suggested creating three good stories (themes) – "*we're keeping our expectations and outcomes realistic here, remember? This is just a Master's research project"* – but organically, the stories began to flow together. In the end, I had eleven sections, within which there were larger stories and quotes from all the participants. The story themes were:

1. The field outside of the house/Introducing the Family
2. The girl's work
3. Fishing and the boy's work
4. Fox Island River (Grammy Rita growing up)
5. Back of the Pond (Grandfather Joseph growing up)

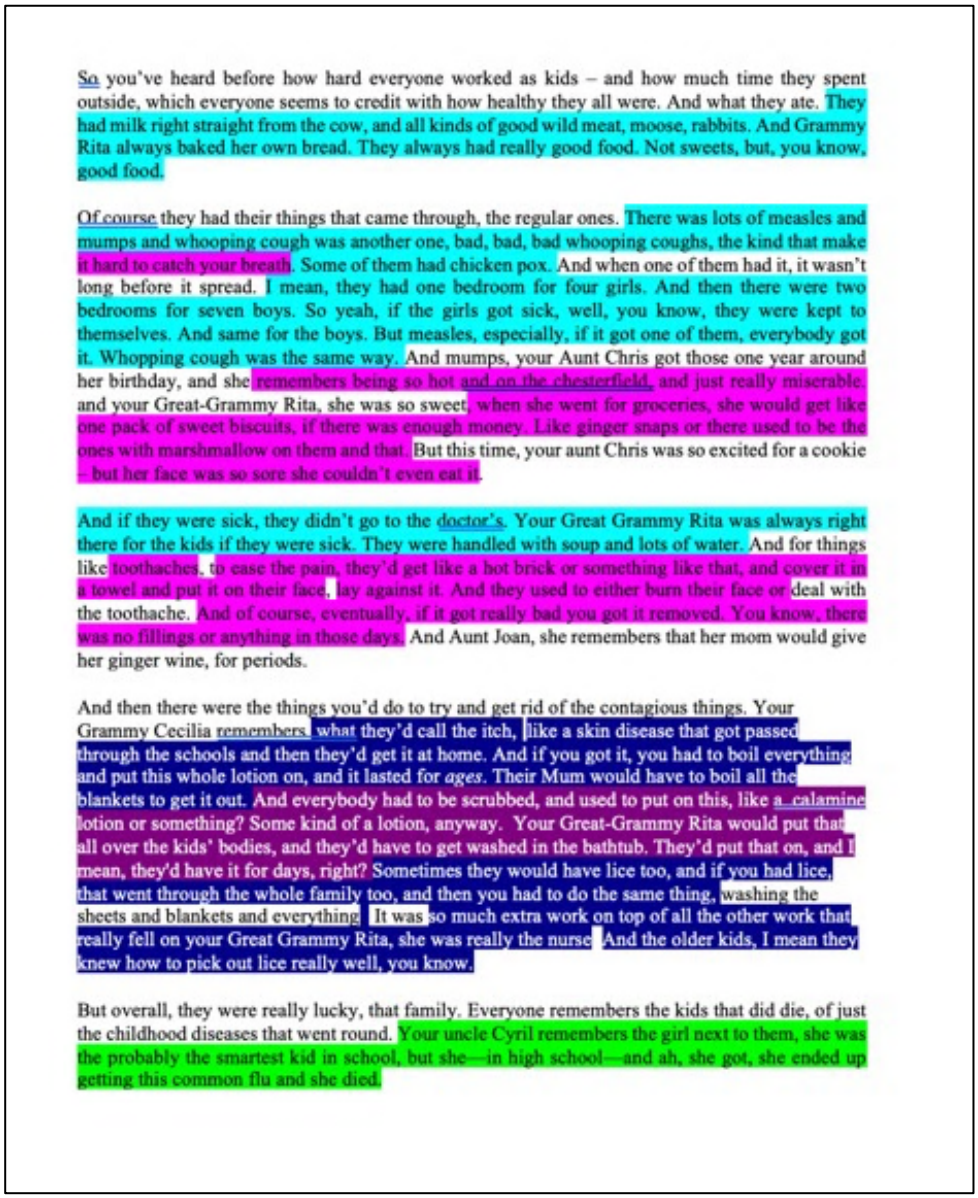
6. Berry picking/Bogs
7. Sickness and pandemics
8. The American base moves in
9. School
10. Fires
11. Storytelling

Then I began to weave the stories together. I initially tried to maintain an objective, omniscient voice, but xaašxiip gently reminded me one day that I was – again – losing something by trying to forget myself in the storytelling. xaašxiip asked me who was I writing for? Who had my relatives been talking to? Where was the living room, the conversation? Was this a thesis for the academy, or for my relatives?

Eventually, drawing from my methodology that centered self-location and myself in the research, I began writing the stories as if I was reading them to my children. Just as in the conversation method interviewing, my voice was a part of the writing, and I became a narrator of sorts, weaving together the words of different relatives into stories that had a flow and rhythm. I kept the words of the participants as quotes whenever possible, though I did change the verb tense and pronouns as needed.

Eventually, I had over 200 pages of the participants' voices ebbing and flowing, weaving together with my own voice as well. As I wove the final draft, I italicized the participants' words to create a cohesive story – yet also honour my relatives' direct quotes. In figure 4 below, I have shown the first draft with colour-coded segments (each a different participant), and my own

words in black and white. In the subsequent figure 5, I provide the same page as shown in the final draft of the book.



So you've heard before how hard everyone worked as kids – and how much time they spent outside, which everyone seems to credit with how healthy they all were. And what they ate. They had milk right straight from the cow, and all kinds of good wild meat, moose, rabbits. And Grammy Rita always baked her own bread. They always had really good food. Not sweets, but, you know, good food.

Of course they had their things that came through, the regular ones. There was lots of measles and mumps and whooping cough was another one, bad, bad, bad whooping coughs, the kind that make it hard to catch your breath. Some of them had chicken pox. And when one of them had it, it wasn't long before it spread. I mean, they had one bedroom for four girls. And then there were two bedrooms for seven boys. So yeah, if the girls got sick, well, you know, they were kept to themselves. And same for the boys. But measles, especially, if it got one of them, everybody got it. Whopping cough was the same way. And mumps, your Aunt Chris got those one year around her birthday, and she remembers being so hot and on the chesterfield, and just really miserable. and your Great-Grammy Rita, she was so sweet, when she went for groceries, she would get like one pack of sweet biscuits, if there was enough money. Like ginger snaps or there used to be the ones with marshmallow on them and that. But this time, your aunt Chris was so excited for a cookie – but her face was so sore she couldn't even eat it.

And if they were sick, they didn't go to the doctor's. Your Great Grammy Rita was always right there for the kids if they were sick. They were handled with soup and lots of water. And for things like toothaches, to ease the pain, they'd get like a hot brick or something like that, and cover it in a towel and put it on their face, lay against it. And they used to either burn their face or deal with the toothache. And of course, eventually, if it got really bad you got it removed. You know, there was no fillings or anything in those days. And Aunt Joan, she remembers that her mom would give her ginger wine, for periods.

And then there were the things you'd do to try and get rid of the contagious things. Your Grammy Cecilia remembers what they'd call the itch, like a skin disease that got passed through the schools and then they'd get it at home. And if you got it, you had to boil everything and put this whole lotion on, and it lasted for *ages*. Their Mum would have to boil all the blankets to get it out. And everybody had to be scrubbed, and used to put on this, like a calamine lotion or something? Some kind of a lotion, anyway. Your Great-Grammy Rita would put that all over the kids' bodies, and they'd have to get washed in the bathtub. They'd put that on, and I mean, they'd have it for days, right? Sometimes they would have lice too, and if you had lice, that went through the whole family too, and then you had to do the same thing, washing the sheets and blankets and everything. It was so much extra work on top of all the other work that really fell on your Great Grammy Rita, she was really the nurse. And the older kids, I mean they knew how to pick out lice really well, you know.

But overall, they were really lucky, that family. Everyone remembers the kids that did die, of just the childhood diseases that went round. Your uncle Cyril remembers the girl next to them, she was the probably the smartest kid in school, but she—in high school—and ah, she got, she ended up getting this common flu and she died.

Figure 4: First draft with colour-coded segments

Chapter 7
Tuberculosis and the Snow Plow

Have you heard the story of when they all went to Corner Brook to get tested for TB – tuberculosis? That's a good one.

So you've heard before how hard everyone worked as kids – and how much time they spent outside, which everyone seems to credit with how healthy they all were. And what they ate. *They had milk right straight from the cow, and all kinds of good wild meat, moose, rabbits. And Great-Grammy Rita always baked her own bread. They always had really good food. Not sweets, but, you know, good food.*

They were really healthy kids, but of course they had their things that came through, the regular sicknesses. *There was lots of measles and mumps and whooping cough, bad, bad, bad whooping coughs, the kind that make it hard to catch your breath. Some of them had chicken pox.* And when one of them had it, it wasn't long before it spread. *I mean, they had one bedroom for four girls. And then there were two bedrooms for seven boys. So yeah, if the girls got sick, well, you know, they were kept to themselves. And same for the boys. But measles, especially, if it got one of them, everybody got it. Whopping cough was the same way.* And mumps, your Great-Aunt Chris remembers that she got that one year around her birthday, and she can still *remember being so hot and on the chesterfield, and just really miserable.* And your Great-Grammy Rita, she was so sweet*, when she went for groceries, she would get one pack of sweet biscuits, if there was enough money. Like ginger snaps or there used to be the ones with marshmallow on them.* But this time, even though your Great-Aunt Chris was so excited for a cookie *–her face was so sore she couldn't even eat it.*

Back then, when they were sick, they didn't go to the doctor. But your Great-Grammy Rita was always right there for the kids if they were sick. They were handled with soup and lots of water. And Great-Aunt Joan, she remembers that her mom *would give her ginger wine*, for periods. And for things *like toothaches, to ease the pain, they'd get a hot brick or something like that, and cover it in a towel.* And they would *put it on their face and lay against it. Your Great-Aunt Chris remembers it was always so hot, it felt like it was either burn their face or* deal with the toothache. *And of course, eventually, if it got really bad, they had to get it removed, there was no fillings or anything in those days.*

And then there were the things they'd do to try and get rid of the contagious things. Your Grammy Sis remembers how the kids would get *"the itch," a skin disease that got passed through the schools and then they'd bring it home. And if even one kid got it, they had to boil everything and put this lotion on, and it lasted for ages. Their Mom would have to boil all the blankets to get it out. And everybody had to be scrubbed, and they used to put on this, like a calamine lotion, or some kind of a lotion, anyway. Your Great-Grammy Rita would put that all over the kids' bodies, and then they'd have to get washed in the bathtub.* And it would go on for days, weeks. *Sometimes they would have lice too, and if they had lice, that went through the whole family too, and then they had to do the same thing,* washing the sheets and blankets and everything. It was *so much extra work on top of all the other work that fell on your Great-*

Figure 5: A page in the final draft showcasing the italicized/non-italicized formatting

Gathering, checking and weaving

Throughout the analysis process, it was crucial for me to remember that I could not represent another's story perfectly, as simply the act of writing it down can change the meaning (Kovach, 2005). At first, I attempted to check back with participants about what exactly had happened in a story, but in true Newfoundland fashion, it became quickly clear that the "truth" was an elusive marker that I could never reach with enough fact-checking. Instead of searching for a singular truth, I began to write in the spirit of a pile of relatives gathered together around the fire, all adding and correcting each other in their memories of events – and perhaps a few embellishing for the sake of a good story.

Many of the participants spoke to the "truth" of the stories, by reminding me throughout the interviews that "[they're] not sure [they] can answer anything, but, it's just from memory" (participant 2), and adding caveats such as, "like you know, she used to say that stuff but I don't know if it was true or not" (participant 3). Another participant contextualized my search for the truth by reminding me that "I would say about all of these stories that, you know, there are probably 11 versions of them" (participant 9).

Instead of attempting to fact-check for the 'right' answer, I tried to embrace the debate and conflicting memories, just as my participants did. For instance, see the following excerpt (figure 6) about the tuberculosis and the snow plow incident. For context, from what I have heard, this story took place when the eleven siblings were growing up, and the whole family was on their way to (or maybe from, depending on who you ask) the closest big town of Corner Brook in order to be tested for tuberculosis [get "the scratches"], because their uncle who lived with them had tested positive:

So it was twelve of them. Maybe *15 of them? Great-Grandfather Joseph and Great-Grammy Rita, and one of the Great-Great-Grandfathers. And Great-Great-Uncle Bill—and Great-Great-Uncle Remmy in the front seat. In the front—no, it wasn't that many, that is a lie, Grammy Rita wasn't there,* or maybe she was*. Great-Grandfather Joseph was driving, and Great-Great-Grandfather was there, and maybe Great-Great-Grandmother too?And of course Great-Great-Uncle Remmy who was very sick in the front of the truck.*

Anyways, however many it was, they were all in your *Great-Great-Uncle Wilson's truck, the one that died at sea. That's another one that died young, Great-Great-Aunt Bertha's husband, died out fishing*.

But yeah, it was his truck. And he had one of those big boxes on the truck. Like you see them today, campers, that go over the top of the truck? And eleven kids in the back.

Your Great-Aunt Joan remembers that she was in back, all of the kids were. And a few of the older boys were on the top, the part built out over the cab.

And it was the middle of the winter, with a big blinding blizzard on.

They were on their way back, and they were coming through *Stephenville Crossing, and Great-Grandfather Joseph couldn't see a thing.*

And there was a tractor coming the opposite way, or parked on the side or something, and the tractor's blade was right up in the air.

And it depends on who you ask what happened next. Either the tractor, when he passed them, *he didn't see them, and he dropped the blade and it cut the camper right in two.* Others remember the tractor was parked on the side of the road, and it clipped the top of the camper.

But anyways, either way, the result was the same – the kids went flying.

All of them were thrown out into the snow bank. Good thing it was a snow bank though. Their dad wasn't going very fast now, just a little tiny bit. But it was just where it hit, it was a wonder no one was killed.

But they did all go flying. Some people went farther, *maybe because there was a sleeper at the top of the camper, so probably people were in the bunks, and then there was other ones below.*

Your Great-Aunt Joan, she's *thinks her jaw was broken*, and maybe a few other things. She was right upset too your Grammy Sis remembers, *really shook up*.

Great-Uncle Paul was all black and blue, and his face got all injured.

And then your Great-Uncle Herman, no one could find him. He remembers that him and his sisters - Chris and Sis - *were playing. And he was leaning against the side of the camper box, and then suddenly half the box was gone. And he just went up the air. He was the littlest one, and I don't know if he flew the farthest? Or someone remembers that he had actually fallen and rolled up and went underneath the truck after it was stopped. Or maybe it was over by the tractor.* Wherever it was he ended up, *it was like he had disappeared, he gave them all a good scare.*

But eventually they found him, and then they all got taken back into the hospital and checked out. *And your Great-Aunt Chris remembers they actually got a treat, which they never really ever got. She got a bottle of Crush, Fanta Orange Crush. And a Cherry Blossom bar, which was these sweets that came in a little box, they're a little chocolate with a cherry inside.* Your Great-Uncle Herman remembers the treat too, a treat for being so brave. So that was pretty special. And in the end, the best thing they all remember – *no one had TB*!

Figure 6: A page in the final draft as an example of embracing the debate and conflicting memories

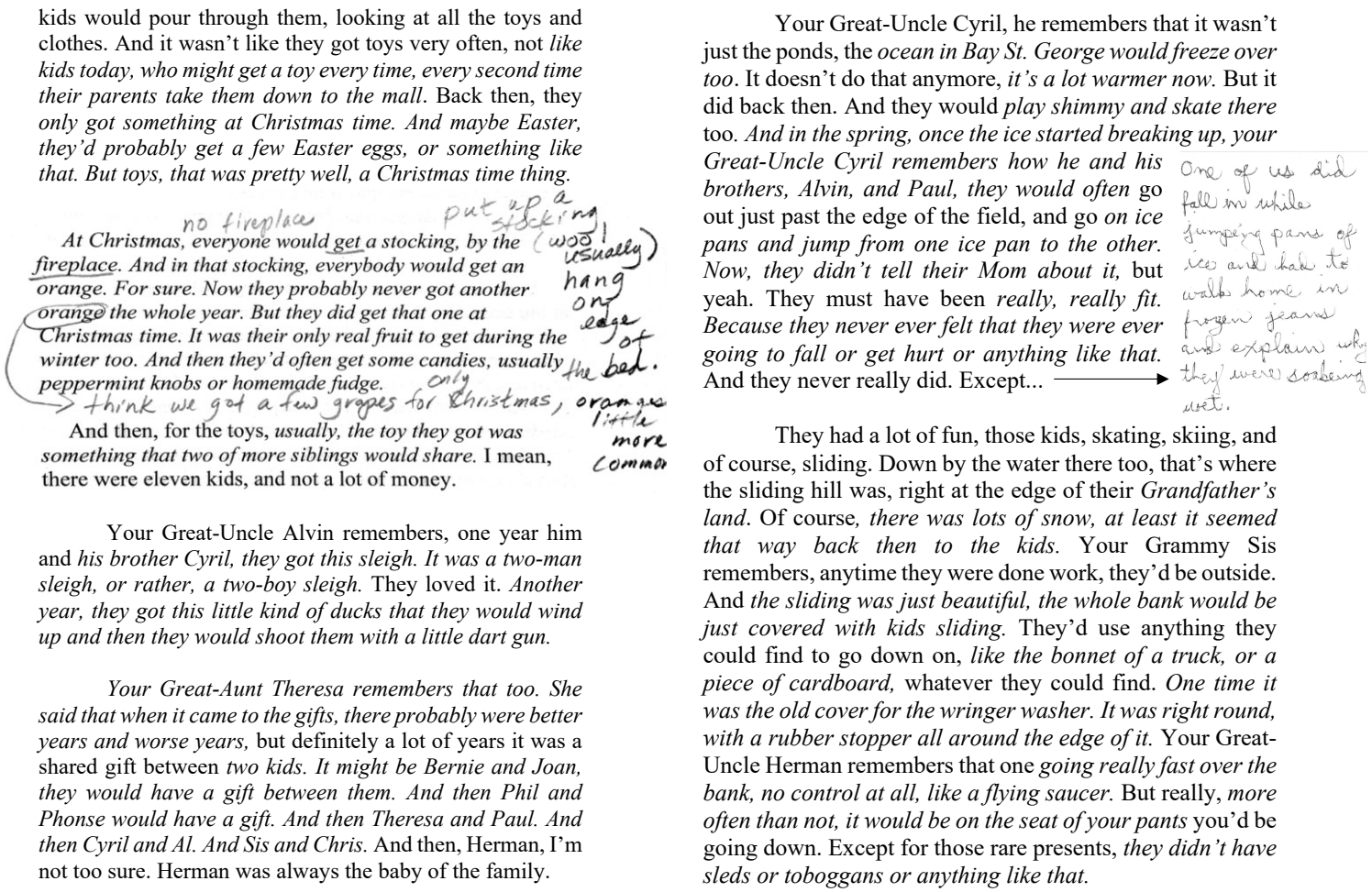
In my explorations of "the truth," participants also reminded me that the best stories were not always the most truthful. One of the participants spoke at length about the "art of storytelling" which to him was a lost art. Not because we no longer told stories, but because the art of the story, the excitement mixed with the teaching, was not done anymore, now that we had television and the internet. But stories back in the participants' childhoods, they were remembered as "really entertaining... especially if there was several of the uncles together. Then of course [the story] got stretched a little more, and a little more.... It was a lot of fun, [not just the story but] the experience of being there all together and everything" (participant 1).

This balance between the 'truth' and the 'storytelling,' was not so much a line that I tried to balance evenly, but rather a line that wove in and out of the stories. This was the case in the participants' individual words, in the interaction between the different participants' recollections, and in the process of weaving them all together with what I – as the researcher – understood from the interviews.

The final first draft

Once the final first draft was completed, I had a book of eleven short stories with the following chapters:

I had the book printed by a professional printer, and I sent a physical copy to all ten participants, with a letter asking them, if they wanted to, to read the book and make any changes. I offered several different possible ways to make changes if the participants desired, including calling me directly, or sending me back the book with their written edits, using the postage stamps I included in the package. I supplied post-it notes and included 'note' pages after each chapter, and explicitly wrote in the letter that any and all changes were encouraged. I heard back from 5/10 participants, and I added their edits into the draft – sometimes as typed changes, and sometimes as images of their handwriting added directly onto the pages.



kids would pour through them, looking at all the toys and clothes. And it wasn't like they got toys very often, not *like kids today, who might get a toy every time, every second time their parents take them down to the mall*. Back then, they *only got something at Christmas time. And maybe Easter, they'd probably get a few Easter eggs, or something like that. But toys, that was pretty well, a Christmas time thing.*

no fireplace put up a stocking

At Christmas, everyone would get a stocking, by the fireplace. And in that stocking, everybody would get an orange. For sure. Now they probably never got another orange the whole year. But they did get that one at Christmas time. It was their only real fruit to get during the winter too. And then they'd often get some candies, usually peppermint knobs or homemade fudge.

(we usually) hang on edge of the bed.

think we got a few grapes for Christmas, only

And then, for the toys, *usually, the toy they got was something that two of more siblings would share.* I mean, there were eleven kids, and not a lot of money.

orange little more comma

Your Great-Uncle Alvin remembers, one year him and *his brother Cyril, they got this sleigh. It was a two-man sleigh, or rather, a two-boy sleigh.* They loved it. *Another year, they got this little kind of ducks that they would wind up and then they would shoot them with a little dart gun.*

Your Great-Aunt Theresa remembers that too. She said that when it came to the gifts, there probably were better years and worse years, but definitely a lot of years it was a shared gift between *two kids. It might be Bernie and Joan, they would have a gift between them. And then Phil and Phonse would have a gift. And then Theresa and Paul. And then Cyril and Al. And Sis and Chris.* And then, Herman, I'm not too sure. Herman was always the baby of the family.

Your Great-Uncle Cyril, he remembers that it wasn't just the ponds, the *ocean in Bay St. George would freeze over too*. It doesn't do that anymore, *it's a lot warmer now.* But it did back then. And they would *play shimmy and skate there* too. *And in the spring, once the ice started breaking up, your Great-Uncle Cyril remembers how he and his brothers, Alvin, and Paul, they would often* go out just past the edge of the field, and go *on ice pans and jump from one ice pan to the other. Now, they didn't tell their Mom about it,* but yeah. They must have been *really, really fit. Because they never ever felt that they were ever going to fall or get hurt or anything like that.* And they never really did. Except...

One of us did fall in while jumping pans of ice and had to walk home in frozen jeans and explain why they were soaking wet.

They had a lot of fun, those kids, skating, skiing, and of course, sliding. Down by the water there too, that's where the sliding hill was, right at the edge of their *Grandfather's land*. Of course*, there was lots of snow, at least it seemed that way back then to the kids.* Your Grammy Sis remembers, anytime they were done work, they'd be outside. And *the sliding was just beautiful, the whole bank would be just covered with kids sliding.* They'd use anything they could find to go down on, *like the bonnet of a truck, or a piece of cardboard,* whatever they could find. *One time it was the old cover for the wringer washer. It was right round, with a rubber stopper all around the edge of it.* Your Great-Uncle Herman remembers that one *going really fast over the bank, no control at all, like a flying saucer.* But really, *more often than not, it would be on the seat of your pants* you'd be going down. Except for those rare presents, *they didn't have sleds or toboggans or anything like that.*

Figure 7: Two pages with participants' edits included in the final version of the book

This process of checking back with participants to allow them the opportunity to add/omit/change parts of their stories is an important component of the conversation method (Kovach, 2010). In addition, I felt an ethical obligation to not present the stories as absolute 'facts' but rather as a book that can grow and change, and having the participants edit their stories was an important component to this.

O'Connor and Gibson (2003) also discuss how bringing results back to participants and community members as part of data analysis enables an increase in validity of the findings. Concepts of 'validity' were interesting in the context on my research; as I have discussed, the search for – let alone existence – of a singular or possible 'truth' was not a part of my final analysis. I found that using the term relatability, rather than reliability, was more useful when thinking about presenting the stories[17]. Christensen (2012) explores how storytelling, particularly in the research dissemination stage, can be a good fit for community-based research, as "researchers/practitioners explore methods to present findings in ways that *make sense*, that *speak to* and *speak with* the communities in which the research takes place" (p. 233, emphasis in original text). Through the process of checking back in with participants, the stories were able to grow and evolve to became more relatable – to the participants, to me, to the readers. Mucina (2011) explains that his understanding of stories is grounded in the idea that each reader takes from the story what they need and understand in that time; as such, relatability was key to my research. In the end, I was not seeking objective truths or generalizable data, but rather compiling glimpses into thinking about our identities, our land, our communities, ourselves... and our stories.

[17] This idea of relatability rather than reliability was initially suggested to me by a peer in one of my Master's courses. A. Abdel-Malek, personal communication, March 26, 2018

Chapter 7: Discussion

What are stories that we were told by our parents and family, and that we tell our children, grandchildren, nieces and nephews, that connect us/them to Nujio'qonik, to family, to past, present, and future – and, in these times of the COVID-19 worldwide pandemic especially, what importance do these stories play in fostering connections?

As I return to my initial research question, I see so many layers and levels to both the findings and the questions.

What are stories that we were told.... ?

As the analysis came to an end, I was left with a 5.5" x 8" book of stories that my children ask to hear most every night before bed. One hundred and forty-seven pages that are both finished and not finished, that are filled with laughter and heartache. Eleven stories, to be told, and re-told, and added to and (re)corrected.

At the end of the research, I was able to collect many stories that connect me, my family and my children to Nujio'qonik – and that teach us about our land, our history, our family, our values and our stories.

And yet, as the research came to a close and the book was [un]finished, I began to question whether the book should exist in the academy. As xaašxiip reminded me – who was I writing for? What benefit did the academy have with my family stories – and who was I to give them away?

"oh good, you decided to include my words again" xaašxiip laughs. "I was worried the reader was going to forget about me, even though you know, I'm still here, been here the whole time."

I laugh, "I know you have, you're always there even if you sometimes leave."

xaašxiip smiles. "Alright, carry on now, I'm sure we all want to know the groundbreaking answers you have found for us."

Groundbreaking answers. Those, for sure, were not in the stories. Or perhaps they were – are the stories themselves answers?

Either way, the stories now exist on paper in a way that they previously existed in our memories. And in so, as I see them, they are both powerful and dangerous. They exist, in our written word of today, in a new way of sharing even as our family is geographically distanced, separated by generations, by financial and logistical constraints, by traumas and fights and time. The book, the stories, will be sent around to all the cousins and relatives who want one, and as such, if I want to dream in an Ethics Application sort of way, can be shared with new generations and old generations alike.

And yet, as written down stories, there are dangers. Dangers that they remain stagnant 'truths,' without room for changes and growth. And danger that they could be taken up and used by others without my or the participants' consent, for other research or purposes.

For that reason, I decided that the book of stories – beyond the excerpts included above – would not be included as a part of my thesis. I am open to sharing them, if the reader would like a glimpse into our stories to contextualize my writing, or simply to enjoy a book of stories[18]. But I have chosen that they will not exist on D-spaces, they will not exist as a formal part of this thesis.

"ahahhahaha." xaašxiip is back again, or still.

"so now you think everyone is going to be flocking to your Master's thesis, stealing your data? I thought you said no one reads a thesis" xaašxiip laughs.

[18]abenoitj@uvic.ca

"I know, I know. I'm the master of hypocrisy." I smiled, thinking of the changes I'd made over the last 5+ years of my Master's.

With the stories themselves not a part of the thesis, though, what did I actually do with my Master's research? What groundbreaking answers did I 'discover'?

... what importance do these stories play in fostering connections?

My research is grounded in my self-location, as discussed throughout this thesis, which includes my background as a student in Child and Youth Care (CYC).

Within the literature I reviewed and drew on for this thesis, the importance of stories in various disciplines is well-established. In thinking of the field of CYC, there are so many examples and circumstances in which the themes of connection and disconnection inform our work – for example, in child protection, foster care/adoption, family separation, grief and loss, intergenerational trauma, and relocation.

While I would hesitate that my research – particularly at the Master's level – could provide answers, I wonder if instead my research could put forward questions that could inform our work as Child and Youth Care practitioners...

How do we listen to stories? Are we listening for facts? For relationships?

How do we collect stories? Particularly when there's physical disconnection, how to we share these stories with children and youth? How can we provide caregivers with not just facts on a child's background, but stories that are alive?

Who owns the stories that we are told, collect and share? What responsibilities do we hold to the storytellers, to the participants in the stories, to the stories themselves?

What could it mean for a child or youth to develop connections through stories, not only facts? What does it mean to know a place through a story, versus knowing a place through a history lesson?

How can we support children and youth in writing and sharing their own stories?

I also believe that there are some key lessons I learned in creating the book of stories, that could be applicable for practitioners to experiment with in CYC practice. Some of these have already been outlined in this thesis, such as leaning into the inclusion of conflicting accounts instead of searching for a perfect truth, encouraging stories to continue to live through visible edits in the margins, and a focus on the *sharing* of the stories as important points of connection beyond simply providing information.

In addition, in weaving the stories, I found it beneficial to look for shorter stories that were either suspenseful or humorous, and then build the context and other stories into them. This allowed me to share quite a lot of information of the land/family/traditions/experiences of the participants and their family members to situate the stories, and yet still maintain my young children's attention as I read to them.

A final note about these questions and learnings – and an important limitation to my research – is that in my interviews, as a Master's student, I explicitly chose to not ask or delve into any of the more potentially triggering or painful histories or secrets in my family – some of which I know, and many of which I am sure that I do not. This was done purposefully, as I did not feel that I had the ability to provide support to all my participants should I have actively

asked about specific traumas and pains in our stories. I was, of course, prepared to support relatives if stressful events did come up – and many of them did. But, returning to my ethics of the feasibility of impacting 'the state of knowledge' as a Master's student, I was very conscious of wanting to limit the amount of harm I was inflicting in my interviews.

That being said, stories of trauma and pains did come out, and some of them are in the book while others are not. It has been a balance to try to be honest to history and not excuse behavior and events in the past, while also not re-harm people in the re-telling, and make it appropriate for all family members. I do not think I perfected that balance, and it would be an important next step if I was thinking of adding this type of storywork into my practice. As a final series of questions:

How do we share about trauma and other hard events in a family's stories? How can we provide contextual factors – such as the impacts of colonization, gender discrimination, racism, etc. – to provide a fuller picture when speaking of particular struggles that families/family members have or pains they have inflicted? How do we create spaces of safety, care and respect for the storytellers, the listeners and the stories themselves when they involve trauma and pain?

... stories.... foster~~ing~~ connections?

As I discussed, through my research, I found and wove a compilation of stories, that now exist for and with my family. The 'data' – the stories – can provide in themselves connections when the reader is looking for them, in both the relationship between the reader and the listener, as well the knowledge shared within them.

I went into the research to collect stories, and I finished the research with a book. And yet, the book, the stories that are not a part of my thesis – and yet ground the entire thesis – are so much more than the stories themselves.

It seems like a cliché to say that "this is not the end of the research; this is only the beginning." There is always the next thing to study, the next bigger and better project.

And yet, I think that the book I created is not the end of the project, and yet it is completely the end of the research. The stories are not meant to be grown, added to, studied in the academy. The stories' role in the "state of knowledge" of the university end in this thesis.

Yet, the book, *the stories* are purposefully not supposed to end. I tried to make it clear that this book was not an absolute truth, but rather can always be added to or edited, they can always grow. I added notes about this through the book of stories - in my introduction, in my conclusion, in my visible edits and subtractions in the text.

If I'm honest, I think I emphasized the multiple truths in the book in part because I did not want to be accused of presenting a singular 'truth' or of silencing voices. And hopefully, I mitigated that as much as I could.

Yet, in the process, what was created was something that is alive in its own way, alive outside the academy, without needing the academy.

Research so often asks: how does the research give back to the participants?

My attempt to give back to the participants was in the form of the book. And whether or not it did, it is not for me to say. But every once in a while, I get a glimpse of the aliveness of the stories.

Not too long ago, I received an email from my aunt, about "Christmases of the Past." She had taken scans of the book's stories of Christmas, pasted them on holiday paper, and sent them

around to her siblings, children, nieces and nephews. And xaašxiip tentatively asked me if I was upset, because my aunt had not asked me for permission, though she had given credit. It was just a draft book, after all, did I as the academic feel like I should have had more control?

And I surprised myself, because although as a good academic I do love credit, I could see how my aunt felt ownership over the stories, they were hers to share. They were alive – outside of the book, outside of the Master's – and was that not the whole point?

The stories, they were alive in the subsequent family zoom call where my cousin asked a question about the Christmas story and all the aunts and uncles got in a lively debate over 'what actually happened.'

They were alive when my uncle, after making it clear that this was *his brother's version of events,* then laughed, told his brother to continue, and refused to tell us his own side, saying that was a story for another year.

The stories are alive in the telling of them – before, during and after the interviews – and they are alive in the connections I had and continue to have with my relatives.

Those connections are so much more than the stories – and so much within the stories. I could want to go forth and study those connections and how they are built, and how they grow. And I could ask my participants about their thoughts on connection and what I found and did not find in my research. There would be truths within that research, and yet, I wonder what would be lost?

My daughter, last fall, was out picking ẏaṁa (salal) berries with her father's family. And she turned to my in-laws, and started talking about how berries are different in Tla-o-qui-aht territory than in Ktaqmkuk, because her berries do not squish, but in Nujio'qonik they do. Because in one small paragraph, in one small book her mother reads to her, there's a story about

her Grammy picking raspberries. And raspberries were the only berries that the kids were paid to pick, and it was so hard because they were paid by the bucket but by the time they got home, the raspberries would sink to the bottom and they would only get half the money. And so, of course, various schemes arose to try and keep the berries from sinking, but mostly, they just would have to run as fast, yet as smoothly, as possible, all the way home.

I do not know how to capture that connection, and I do not know if I want to. I do not know even how much I just lost, sharing it in my thesis.

I do know though, that the stories I sought to find in my research, that I wove together into a book, I believe they are more than words on a page.

The stories are alive, and they deserve to live outside of my writing, outside of my thesis.

Chapter 8: Concluding Thoughts

As this thesis draws to a close, I am left wondering what exactly I am finishing. Did I write a thesis, or perhaps, as xaašxiip suggested, an anti-thesis? A toolkit? A personal methodology? Perhaps all the above?

In many ways, my thesis (?) is a reflection of the winding and weaving process that the research itself took. All too often, this was not particularly comfortable or easy to navigate, and it was easy to feel alone in that confusion as I read countless published academic papers and theses on seemingly successful and smooth research projects. Yet, Hoskins and White (2012) remind me that these challenges of research and interviews are common at a graduate level, because "[d]espite having a lengthy signed *Human Research Ethics Approval form*... real life human interactions tend to unfold in unpredictable ways, challenging the illusion of order and control and muddying the research waters no matter what" (p. 180).

In my process of writing, it felt incongruent to re-introduce that 'illusion of control,' to provide a polished account of the research, tied up with a neat bow. By the end of the research, I was striving to allow the stories to live as whole stories, as knowledge in themselves without the need to break them apart and analyze them for data points; it seems only natural that in my writing, I ended up attempting to do the same, to allow the research to also show up as its whole living self, even if that looked messy and unacademically polished.

xaašxiip reminded me countless times throughout the research, that the moments [or sometimes days, months] of not knowing, of questioning, of frustration and of fear, they were not moments to turn away from, but rather opportunities to embrace. They do, after all, make the best stories.

And really, at the end of the day, perhaps this whole thesis, in simply another story?

Epilogue

xaašxiip has been with me throughout my Master's degree, in most of my papers and assignments. I am so thankful, for xaašxiip's wisdom and humour, and his heavy dose of reality and cynicism when I needed it.

And I must tell you, coming into this thesis, I thought I was so genius, so original, in my writing with xaašxiip.

And I probably fooled you, I certainly fooled myself.

xaašxiip is of course real, and xaašxiip is of course a trope. You can choose how you see him. But how you see her matters, it matters in academia especially.

xaašxiip is my mum, my partner, my children. xaašxiip is my dad, my grandparents, my parents-in-law, my brother-in-law. xaašxiip is my aunts and uncles who I interviewed – and the ones I did not. xaašxiip is everyone who makes me me, everyone who I love so fiercely, everyone who drives me up the wall with their ideas, and makes me sit in awe of their ideas.

xaašxiip is all the people in my life, who I am not allowed to write about in academia. Who am I to say that my husband told me this? My mother suggested that? My child noticed this? My Master's is supposed to be *mine,* anything else is plagiarism, as was drilled into me every semester.

In the Nuu-chah-nulth culture I now live in, I have been taught that traditionally a family will have a speaker, who will share what needs to be said on behalf on the family members. It is an important job, it is a critical job, and for our family, most often my husband takes on that role.

Yet, when I started university, these connections to my writing were supposed to be limited to my dedication and acknowledgement sections. My family, my 'community', my support system – name it what you like, they were relegated to the side. Only my newborn was

allowed to be a part, unless we were going to a location that the insurance coverage did not allow… (that's a story for another time though).

So xaašxiip emerged. xaašxiip, who could poke fun at the academy, at my thoughts, at my attempts to 'prove' my identity. xaašxiip, who sits beside me as a write, asks me the questions I am too afraid to ask myself, and reminds me of humility, reminds me of truth.

And so now, reader, I am here to tell you that xaašxiip is not really me, or at least not entirely me. To what extent are my thoughts actually my family's thoughts, my communities' thoughts, xaašxiip's thoughts?

Honestly, I think only xaašxiip knows for sure.

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