

Crossing the Bridge: The Educational Leadership of First Nations Women

by

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B.A., University of Western Ontario, 1976
M.Ed., University of Lethbridge, 1989**

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Requirements for the Degree of**

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ABSTRACT

In North West British Columbia, First Nations women are playing an essential role in a cultural shift that is positively affecting community health and the education of Aboriginal youth. Historically, the First Peoples of the North West coast were profoundly transformed by European contact. Policies, oppressions and disease disrupted lives and communities that had existed in stasis since time immemorial. The results, described by Thomas Berger as “third world” conditions, are predictable --young and old afflicted with addictions and dysfunctions. Recently, the dominant politics have begun to acknowledge the First Nations as having a legitimate voice in the social and political processes that concern them.

This research is one part of the national multi-disciplinary study, *Coasts Under Stress: The Impact of Social and Environmental Restructuring on Environmental and Human Health in Canada*. In this phase of the larger project, the importance of the educational and community leadership of First Nations women is recognized as they struggle to break cycles of dysfunction that afflict their communities. Increasing enrollment of coastal youth and adults in secondary school and college programs, and in educational programs on reserve over the past decade is one sign of positive change.

The main purpose of my study is to explore the role of First Nations women in supporting social and educational opportunities in their villages and in society-at-large. The central research question asks what supports and barriers First

Nations women encounter as they assume leadership roles within their villages and without. A purposive sample of seven women joined the research conversation, involved because of the formal leadership roles they have assumed, and because of their perceived influence on the general health of their communities and the region. Their responsibilities represent a wide spectrum of educational and community leadership, and counter a prevailing stereotype of First Nations people generally and women particularly.

Carefully chosen qualitative research methods were employed to ensure consistency with Kwakwakawakw practices and protocols. Sustained dialogue was used as a way of drawing on the historical and cultural tapestry framing the research question. Given the hermeneutic nature of the study, the individual narratives became the heart of the study and a voice-centred relational data analysis followed. Analysis based on a theory that characterizes human beings as interdependent, historically and culturally contextual and embedded in a complex web of intimate and larger social relations resonates with First Nations ontology and epistemology.

The narratives reveal detailed historical and cultural data, providing for enhanced cultural understanding and knowledge-based theory building. In addition to the contextual material, the narratives provide direction for Aboriginal and cross-cultural research protocols as well as an opportunity for the interested reader to “listen and learn” as Joseph Couture propounds. The stereotypes that continue to confine and condemn Aboriginal women are rightfully eroded by the life histories themselves and their illustration of the process of reclamation of Aboriginal identity. Finally, further evidence is offered for Sylvia Maracle’s assertion that Aboriginal women have been leading community development initiatives for the past thirty-five years. Education and health are the primary beneficiaries of their efforts.

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It was because of the First Nations students at Port Hardy Secondary School on the northern tip of Vancouver Island that this study began at all. Puzzled and intrigued about the dual lives they led, I wanted to learn more about their culture and how the school might better accommodate them. The quest led me to First Nations women who are in leadership roles in the school and community. Each, in her turn, offered gifts of time, knowledge and wisdom.

My husband Dennis has, in so many ways, provided the foundation upon which this research was undertaken. He has offered unfailing encouragement, technical assistance and caring support whenever I needed it. He is an integral part of this endeavour.

The dissertation has, at its heart, the narratives of seven courageous First Nations women, whose generosity, intelligence and fortitude have enriched my life in ways far beyond expectation. We can all learn from their stories. This dissertation is dedicated to them.

CHAPTER ONE

STRONG WOMEN'S STORIES

In my lifetime, we have moved from people with crippling problems to communities that are slowly healing and reshaping our future. I have witnessed tremendous community development in the past thirty-five years, and much of it has been led by women.

Sylvia Maracle, 2003

Introduction

There is no question that the First Nations people of northern Vancouver Island, British Columbia (BC) have had their lives and their culture profoundly transformed since contact with Europeans over two hundred years ago—villages burned, children taken, totems stolen, customs outlawed, promises broken —these and other oppressions have disrupted lives and communities that had existed “since time immemorial” (Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996). Federal policies of assimilation were imposed as recently as thirty years ago. The consequences are well known - parents and grandparents who do not know how to parent, young and old afflicted by addictions, “third-world” living conditions on many reserves.

What has emerged over the past few decades, however, is the remarkable resiliency of these people to survive, and on their own terms. Communities of people who were uprooted from traditional lands have created new homes on land to which they had been forcibly relocated. Despite the resistance of European museum curators, stolen treasures have been repatriated. Children of residential-school parents have found ways to pursue artistic and academic dreams. People have conquered devastating addictions to assume community leadership. Some

have also overcome continuing government patriarchy to become self-supporting, even wealthy.

Ongoing issues, as in other parts of Canada, revolve around treaties that were entered upon a decade ago, when the intransigent province of British Columbia government was required by a Supreme Court of Canada ruling, *R. v. Sparrow*, to acknowledge the concept of Aboriginal rights (Roth, 2002). Given that most Canadian treaties were disregarded, the North West coast Nations were ironically spared these historical indignities. Nevertheless, current BC land claims have seen marginal joint progress although a number of First Nations are well along in the treaty process.

Local Education Agreements have been established with school boards in a number of coastal communities since 1996 when each First Nation was given responsibility for its federal education dollars. Some Bands have proceeded with plans to build their own schools with their education funding, rather than continue to contract out to local public school boards. Bands are also learning how to use their newfound political power to enhance entrepreneurial opportunities with forestry and fish farming conglomerates and the provincial government all of which covet use of their traditional territories.

Problems remain, but these new realities are being shaped by Aboriginal people who have escaped cultural annihilation and are now taking charge of their own lives—and, by consequence, the health of their families' lives and communities. And the timing is right in that, for the first time in Canadian history, the dominant politics have shifted, at least in theory, to acknowledge that the First

Nations have a legitimate voice in the political, economic and social processes that concern them.

First Nations women feature strongly in the renewal of their Pacific North West communities, based on the numbers of them who hold job positions in Band offices and in health and educational facilities. These women have educated themselves formally or acquired useful skills through work experience, allowing them to assume important community positions. It is not only the women with formal education and qualifications who are making a difference. They have taken on immense responsibilities to their communities as well as their own extended families in the knowledge that judgements are being made on their very public actions. As Lowe (2001) contends, “[we] carry the weight of our people’s future on our shoulders, seeking to understand this colonial society imposed on us, so that we can one day free ourselves and our lands from degradation and destruction and rebuild happy, healthy communities” (p. 9).

Maracle (2003) believes that it was the women who, thirty-five years ago, saw that their energies and dreams needed to be collectively directed towards community development, and undertook, both on their reserves and in urban areas, to create informal networks over “tea and talk”, networks that became the bases for formal and informal Aboriginal community organizations today (p. 72). That these women did not have the formal titles of leadership did not detract from their impact on the Aboriginal community. While in the present day, more women have assumed formal leadership roles as elected Chiefs, Councillors, Treaty Negotiators, educators and in community political organizations, it is the vision,

knowledge and passionate commitment of women in both formal and informal leadership roles who continue promote the health of their communities in creative and holistic ways (pp. 76-77).

Crossing the Bridge

Between one of the villages, and the town it lies within, flows a healthy salmon river; a single-lane bridge over this river represents the only physical connection between the two communities, given that the village is situated between the river and the sea. In 1997, the local high school established an off-campus school in the village because of the many students who, having finished their elementary school studies at the reserve's Band school, choose not to cross the bridge to attend secondary school in town. Conversely, there are townspeople who assert that they have never 'set foot' on the bridge, despite long-time residence in the town.

The bridge is a metaphor for the distance, the gap in our understanding of each others' perceptions of the physical, cultural and spiritual worlds, and differences in time as well as space. The bridge is a reminder that the First Nations are a separate and distinct people. It is also a link between our worlds.

Different Worlds

For eight years, I was the secondary school principal of a small school of 520 students in a rural BC town that is on the territory of three First Nations tribes. A number of First Nations people, from the three reserves and elsewhere on the Central Coast, live in the town. Despite a school population that included 18% Aboriginal students, in 1994 there was little evidence of their presence in the

school when I arrived. Their graduation rate was minimal; few Aboriginal faces looked out from the gallery of graduation photographs. There were three First Nations staff members, Home-School Coordinators, whose main responsibility was to observe attendance patterns, distribute attendance cheques and act as the ‘bridge’ between school and home.

I came to the region with some knowledge of the Kwakwakawakw First Nations of the Pacific North West but it was gained solely through museum displays, books and documentary films; I had much to learn. Because of an internationally-owned copper mine in the immediate area, there were twenty-three other distinct cultures and nationalities represented in the school as well, providing an unexpectedly multicultural and cosmopolitan flavour to a small rural school.

In the intervening years since 1994, I have observed First Nations students dressed in regalia, dancing and drumming at Potlatches and other community celebrations and events. These students, to my eye, present themselves during these cultural activities in a profoundly different manner from the way they deport themselves at school, despite their academic successes or lack of them; carriage, expression and sense of confidence translated into dance are visibly and fundamentally transformed. I know that they are living in two very different worlds. They cross the bridge daily and it is not a simple matter.

John Gibson (2001), in his memoirs of life as a social worker with Aboriginal peoples in BC in the 1950s and 1960s, paints an exquisite portrait-in-miniature of the lives that many First Nations school children “on reserve” lead:

His granddaughter comes in and throws her schoolbooks on the table. She sits in the corner, abruptly subdued by [her grandfather's] silence. She has come in a small orange bus from the modern world of the public school and is now in the land of her parents. It has taken her only half an hour to cross nine centuries. (p. 89)

As a secondary school principal, my prime responsibility was to the students and the children of the local communities. That meant getting to know the adults whose facilitation of students' learning is essential to their well being and success. I became aware of the numbers of Aboriginal women who were directly or indirectly involved in their communities in ways that positively affected the children of our high school. As I came to know these women as professional colleagues and friends, I grew intrigued by their passion for their children, for students generally and for education, and I admired their strengths.

When the opportunity arose to learn about these women, most of whom lived in their villages rather than the larger community, I asked them to participate with me in the telling of their stories and the historical and cultural context in which they lived. The question that I presented to them was: What supports and barriers are encountered by First Nations women leaders as they work to enhance the health of their communities and of the larger region? In doing so, I spoke of my observations of their important social and educational contributions, and of my admiration for their strength and vision.

Each woman responded by telling her story in her own way. Despite the hardships, loss and pain that each of them has endured, every story is infused with

love and hope, courage and determination, in a variety of voices and from different perspectives. These are strong women, telling strong women's stories, proof that "Native women are actively shaping a better world for future generations" (Lawrence and Anderson, 2003, p. 11).

Background to the Study

This research is part of the national study *Coasts Under Stress: The Impact of Social and Environmental Restructuring on Environmental and Human Health*, a major interdisciplinary undertaking funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) and the Natural Science and Engineering Research Council of Canada (NSERC) and other partners, including First Nations organizations. Intent on embedding their natural and social sciences work within the historical, economic and lived realities of the coastal communities involved, *Coasts Under Stress* researchers "ranged widely across a great deal of intellectual and empirical territory . . . to capture both the dramatic and more subtle forms of restructuring and their impacts on socio-ecological health" (retrieved from [http:// www.coastsunderstress.ca](http://www.coastsunderstress.ca), March 13, 2006).

The narratives of my research provide a historical and contemporary context for the well-documented ill health of many coastal British Columbia (BC) First Nations tribal communities and their members. These people have endured draconian government policies governing restructuring practices, both direct and indirect, for almost one hundred and fifty years. It is useful to hear from First Nations representatives themselves perceptions regarding the supports needed so that their communities and families may regain health. While focused

on one particular geographical area of the BC North West coast—Vancouver Island North—the lessons offered are transferable to rural and remote First Nations communities on BC’s coast and elsewhere, as all have suffered under similar policies and practices. Connections between the narratives of this study and other contexts will be made by readers as they identify similarities between these descriptions and their own situations.

Coasts Under Stress defines social-ecological health as “a human, community and environmental condition that sustains quality of life (as considered acceptable by any given community) and environments and promotes resilience in response to stressors” (Dolan et al., 2005). One of the purposes of the major study is to develop policy alternatives to “alleviate or reverse many of the negative impacts and encourage positive ones” that is, to foster the return of all coastal communities to a healthy state. The women in this small narrative study offer themselves and their life stories as models of resilience and healthy living. Their expressed needs--if they are to continue their work with children, youth and elders--could translate easily into appropriate policy alternatives, if the will exists in the larger political arena.

Purpose and Significance

The purpose of the study is to place First Nations women’s narratives in their rightful context, permitting the voices and experiences of these women to be heard as part of the public discourse; respecting Aboriginal epistemologies and ontologies through recognition of the legitimacy of storytelling is equally important. As Freed-Rowland (1993) notes “there are few stories or academic

research about contemporary North American Indigenous women” (p. 12). These are critical times in British Columbia. Land claims and emerging political agendas have riveted public attention while highlighting public ignorance, much of which is couched in terms that stereotype Aboriginal women (Harris, 2002). A second purpose is related to the stated concerns about First Nations students and their poor graduation rates in the regions high schools. Educators must be aware of the historical and cultural context from which these youth come in order to meet their needs fully. It is my intention to pursue educational research with First Nations youth on the conclusion of the current study.

In my search of the literature, I found that very little has been published specifically on Canadian First Nations women and their issues although a number of women have completed unpublished theses and dissertations in Canada. Most of the North American literature focuses on politics and governance, generally male-dominated topics, and, not surprisingly, looks back on the many tragedies and indignities suffered by the First Nations people since contact.

While this literature has begun the important process of understanding between our nations, I focus on the community work of contemporary and future-oriented First Nations women, about whom I found a few published texts (Anderson & Lawrence, 2003). Therefore, I invited seven women to the research conversation because of the community leadership roles that they have assumed and because of their importance to the growth and health of their communities and the region. I also invited them because their formal and informal positions, within their communities and without, counter the prevailing stereotype of

Aboriginal people generally, and First Nations women particularly. Their omission from the public discourse, despite their accomplishments and personal sense of purpose, is an oversight that needs to be addressed and rectified.

I also wish to explore feminist theory in an Aboriginal context. These leaders are stepping beyond the social and political boundaries currently limiting many Aboriginal women, yet, prevailing postmodern Western feminist theory appears neither to fit nor benefit them.

Local Definitions and Descriptions

Given my focus on the First Nations of Vancouver Island North and the Central Coast, I must clarify the various terms used to denote groups of tribes which reside there whose language was exclusively oral before contact. In old anthropological texts (Boas, 1921), the tribal peoples, from Cape Mudge to Oweekeno village in Rivers Inlet, are called the “Kwakiutl”, an Anglicized version of what the early Europeans thought the Native peoples were calling themselves. The name, as pronounced, sounds like and is sometimes spelled ‘*Kwa’giulth*’ or ‘*Kwa’gul*’. Recently, the tribal groups’ name was changed on formal documents to the ‘Kwakwakawakw (*Kwok-wuhk-kyuh-wuhk*), a name which means “*those who speak Kwa’kwala*” and other dialects, the name of the group’s language. The spelling of these terms varies with the user, and, in the tradition of those with oral histories and heritage, various spellings are acceptable. My spellings in this document vary depending on the usage and wishes of the storytellers.

Regarding the sixteen Kwakwakawakw tribes who reside in the geographical and linguistic area, Nuytten (2003) notes that the dialects of the individual villages can be different and the cadences quite different. He explains, for example, that the people from Rivers Inlet sound, to many others, as though they are “singing” their language. Even many words are different--but all Kwakwakawakw people understand one another (p. 18).

These few examples demonstrate the semantic and technical complexities, and the importance of paying attention to language usage. I use a wide variety of labels and spellings, because of current common and historical usages and because the effects of colonial impositions regarding naming and language are multiple and varied. For example, the modern use of the ubiquitous word Band, as in ‘Band Council’ rather than ‘tribe’, is a European invention.

Definitions and Semantics

The use of accessible and meaningful language is of paramount importance to me. Writing a dissertation that meets with academic approval and is, at the same time, clear and accessible to the lay reader presents a dilemma with which I struggled throughout. The participants give me on-going advice on this problem and that of proper and preferred terminology. For example, in my readings, I found contradictory information regarding the correct terminology to use in the description of ethnicity and heritage. Lowe (2002), a self-described Slavey Indian, writing for a student-run university newspaper, states, “ I will not be using the words Aboriginal, First Canadian, Native Canadian, First Nations, or any other term used by white scholars so as not to offend” (p. 9). She chooses to

use the word, “Indian”. Her terse declaration leaves non-Native researchers like me searching for acceptable descriptors. On the other hand, Indigenous scholars that I have cited here do use these and other labels. Is it appropriate for me to use the term ‘Indian’ too?

When citing others, I have used the terms employed by the scholars themselves, including upper and lower case letters. Elsewhere, I have used the adjectives Aboriginal, Indigenous and Native, but spelled with a capital letter in order to offer respect. Interestingly, I have noted that the words Aboriginal and Native are also used as nouns by some Aboriginal researcher and writers.

The Canadian Aboriginal scholar Wyrostock (1997), in her doctoral dissertation, refers to her women participants using the specific terms they use for themselves, and by the term, First Nations, a usage common only in Canada: “By First Nations people, I refer to women who consider themselves to be of Native or Aboriginal background, whether they be Status, Non-status, Treaty, or Métis” (p. 5). Clearly, the labels given to Aboriginal people by the conquering nations have held great import for these people, and not without reason. Terms used in the past, such as ‘half-breed’ and ‘squaw’, distinctly derogatory, still resonate in my own childhood memories.

Freed-Rowland (1993), a Native American scholar, chooses language and labels to add layers of meaning to her study. She explains that she deliberately uses the dichotomous positioning of such terms as ‘whiteman’ and Native American. Her intention is

to bring into the foreground the continuing realities for North American Indigenous women/peoples in the language and labels that have been taught to us . . . In Indian Country, we know ourselves in our own languages as People of the First Nations. Others know us as People of the Fourth World (Freed-Rowland, 1993, p. 3).

Freed-Rowland is determined to use a wide variety of 'labels' for the naming of Indigenous peoples "so as to bring the uninitiated into the language, the sensibilities and the politics of our landscapes" (pp. 3-4), to sensitize the non-Native reader to the power of words that name.

The term, 'Indian Country', that Freed-Rowland (1993) uses, is not often heard outside the reserve. She defines the term as "a state of mind" as well as a non-particular geographical location where Indigenous people reside or gather (p. 3). Berger (1999) identifies the historical genesis of the term "Indian Country" as the Great Plains west of the Mississippi, a region thought to be uninhabitable by those American politicians--Jefferson, Madison, Monroe, et. al. - who proposed and adopted policies for the "Indian problem" of their time. They labelled the Plains region "Indian Country" in their discussions of the planned expulsion of the Indians living on the Atlantic seaboard for the purpose of freeing up land for European settlers at the beginning of the nineteenth century. The Cherokee, Choctaw and other tribes east of the Mississippi were required to leave their farms and orchards, and to walk with their few possessions to "Indian Country" along the "Trail of Tears", where many perished (Dickason, 1992). It is somewhat ironic that Indigenous people have themselves appropriated the term. I have noted

that the phrase is used in the Pacific North West in a symbolic manner, much as the term ‘Turtle Island’ is used to represent the world.

The Academy in Canada has chosen to use the word ‘Aboriginal’ to refer to all First Peoples including the Inuit, the Métis and the First Nations. Politically, the First Nations continue to be referred to as “Indians”. The term “Indigenous” is an international term common in the literature of the United Nations and used to identify First Peoples in other countries such as Australia, Japan and Scandinavia.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Historical and Cultural Context

Thomas Berger is an internationally recognized Canadian lawyer and judge, who, among many other professional pursuits, has specialized in Native rights and human rights for Northern peoples. He issues a challenge to our postmodern society:

Native people are still here and they have never surrendered their history or identity, although Europe has cast a long and terrible shadow over them. Today, they are emerging from that shadow and they have a tale to tell, not only of subjugation but also of survival, for they still live among us and they have a claim on our consciences, a claim that we should honour the principles by which we profess to live. (Berger, 1999, p. xii)

In his essay, “A Long and Terrible Shadow”, Berger passionately and cogently describes the historical context of Indigenous peoples in the Americas from first contact to the present day. It is an essay that reminds us of what has been perpetrated through ignorance, arrogance and greed. The importance of knowing and understanding this history is emphasized because we of European descent must eventually confront and respond to the questions, “By what right did we take their land and subjugate them? Having done so, by what right do we now claim that they should assimilate? Does justice have any claims on us today” (Berger, 1999, p. xi)?

Berger (1999) lists some of the pervasive attitudes that have permitted non-Natives to avoid this confrontation: “that land can be taken from a people if we deem them or their use of land to be deficient; that all cultures should be judged by our own; that injustice, if it is of sufficiently long standing, need not be addressed” (p. xii). In fact, as Ommer and Turner (2006) relate:

It is accepted that, like those elsewhere in the world, Canadian First Peoples based their survival and well being on complex, sophisticated, and highly variable socio-cultural and economic systems. These always involved kinship networks, reciprocity, wide-ranging alliances, and trading patterns, shared and apportioned harvesting areas, and culturally prescribed sanctions against greed and waste, operating at both the family and community level (p. 4).

This is not a description of deficient peoples. The settler society’s claims on the land were clearly made without understanding or the will to understand.

Berger (1999) claims that, five hundred years later, “the moral and intellectual distance between those of us of European descent and Native people often seems as great as ever” (p. x). It is, perhaps, because of the mutual misunderstandings of the fundamental philosophical tenets which underpin this “moral and intellectual distance” that Native and non-Native alike continue to be challenged. Berger speaks of profound ontological and epistemological differences between Indigenous peoples and Old World explorers, adventurers, traders, settlers and immigrants, differences that are in evidence today.

Ojibway scholar and Order of Ontario recipient Basil H. Johnston's (1992) writings lend weight to Berger's (1999) findings:

How does the general unwillingness of white society to acknowledge that North American Indians have different values and institutions that have not lost their relevance and application despite five hundred years of cultural and technological advances, bear upon their affairs with the First Nations' peoples? (In Ross, 1992, p. ix)

Unfortunately, the impact of this lack of acknowledgement bears heavily upon current affairs. One tangible example of conflicting conceptual frameworks that continue to challenge Canadian political and economic systems is the private versus communal land tenure issue. The belief of many tribes, that land is not owned by individuals but shared by all, has led in the past to the naïve signing of treaties that devastated traditional lifestyles (Dickason, 1992). This particular issue is at the heart of any future resolution. Berger (1999) elucidates these philosophical differences to make a strong case for the legal concept of Aboriginal title and rights, upon which, he says, restitution must be finally made. Berger insists that we come to a tacit understanding (Polanyi, 1967) of Aboriginal world-views and values so that justice can at last be rendered.

Rupert Ross (1992) in his brilliant interpretation of the Aboriginal mind set related to the Canadian justice system and world view, *Dancing with a Ghost*, offers his readers an opportunity to enhance mutual understanding in his "personal, decidedly unacademic attempt to deal with our communication failure" (p. xiii). Ross acknowledges that his attempts are "unsophisticated guesswork . . .

for I suspect that it is virtually impossible to climb inside the world-view of another culture” (p. xxiii). But he is compelled to try.

A Brief History of the Americas.

The multitude of tribes and clans that populated the continent before European and Russian contact lived lives proscribed by their geography and ontology. They were as diverse as any nations throughout the world. The past five hundred years in the New World, since first contact in 1492, have wrought their devastation in a multiplicity of ways upon the First Nations: the sophisticated cities and cultures of the Mayas, Incas and Aztecs of Central and South America eradicated by the Spanish in the sixteenth century; the Iroquois Confederacy of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries manipulated by opposing French and British forces in the struggle for dominance in eastern Canada and the United States (Dickason, 1992). (In an ironic turn, political concepts conceived by the Iroquois were adopted in the American Constitution while Eurocentric patriarchal governance models were imposed upon the Iroquois themselves).

The self-assimilated Cherokee of Georgia were forced from their farms and orchards to ‘Indian Country’ along the “Trail of Tears” in the early nineteenth century; for the Beothuks of Newfoundland, contact resulted in extinction through war and disease by the mid-nineteenth century (Dickason, 1992). The experiences of the Pacific North West and Northern First Peoples have been marginally less devastating, perhaps because they experienced two hundred fewer years of contact. And, as Berger (1999) contends, the European of the eighteenth century was a different kind of man than the sixteenth century explorer, and thus dealt

with the First Peoples he encountered differently if not more humanely. At the very least, the Native peoples of the Pacific North West anticipated the presence of the white man. Still, the historical records of the colonizers are widely available; stories from the First Nations' perspectives are largely missing (Churchill, 1993; Freed-Rowland, 1993; Sutherland, 1995; Snider, 1996; Wyrostock, 1997; Berger, 1999).

Information that does exist relating to First Nations women is typically found in historical treatises written by male anthropologists from information supplied by local ethnographic informants, typically men (Reid, 2004). From the Eurocentric perspective, only the Native men would have been deemed worthy of intellectual interest. A well-known example is anthropologist Franz Boas' (1921) study of the Kwakiutl Nation in Fort Rupert (*Tsa'kis*), Northern Vancouver Island. In an unusual attribution in the title of his book, Boas acknowledged the Kwagiulth George Hunt as an essential collaborator in his research.

Freed-Rowland (1993) believes that there are reasons beyond those of gender bias for the dearth of historical records on or by both Indigenous women and men:

[Research with Native peoples] is not in the same popular or academic demand as other emerging literature and research on other marginalized groups because it focuses on the relationship of the governments in the United States and Canada to their internal nations—as no different from their practices on South, Central America, the Pacific Islands, and

corporate efforts on other places to colonize—“domesticate” the women and “Western bureaucratize the men” (p. 21).

She charges political interference and cover-up in the actions of North American governments in their treatment of Native women and men. Frideres (1993) concurs with Freed-Rowland’s perspective but implicates religious groups as well:

A symbiotic relationship emerged between various churches and the state [with respect to civilizing and Christianizing Natives] . . . when the churches were being frustrated in their efforts to Christianize Natives, [c]hurch officials felt that because certain Native cultural components were incompatible with Christianity, they should be eradicated. They therefore convinced the state to pass legislation outlawing a variety of dances and other ceremonies that were an integral component of Native culture, for example, the potlatch. (p. 4)

Frideres’ (1993) example describes the churches’ influence on Canadian government decision-making and also demonstrates that their role in the colonization of Native peoples was not an indirect one. The October, 2005 Canadian Supreme Court ruling acknowledges the churches’ culpability, one that requires financial redress.

It can be argued that the state, in this case, the Canadian government, has fostered the subjugation, domination and exploitation of the North West Coast Aboriginal peoples through official policies, most of which are still in place. The Indian Act of 1867, amended in the 1890s and again in 1911 to give enhanced

coercive powers to the federal government, is still the relevant statute of the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (DIAND) in 2004 (Frideres, 1993, p. 4). The fact that Native peoples were not allowed to vote in provincial elections until after World War II, except for Nova Scotia, and did not receive the federal franchise until 1960 meant that they were deliberately given no voice in the political structure that colonized them (Frideres, 1993, p. 6). The Canadian government, contends Freed-Rowland (1993), has no wish to dredge up its record or current stand on the matter. I hypothesize that, because of a brutal history of forced assimilation together with the imposition of Eurocentric, male-dominated forms of self-government on most reserves in Canada, it is the women and children who have suffered and continue to suffer the most.

Historical Contexts from Aboriginal Women's Perspectives

Jamieson (1986) claims that “to be born poor and Indian and female is to be a member of the most disadvantaged minority in Canada today—a citizen minus. It is to be victimized and utterly powerless, and to be, by government decree, without legal recourse of any kind” (p. 128). The political, economic and social status of modern Aboriginal women, as described by Jamieson, is a direct result of the colonization of the Indian that occurred in North America upon contact, exacerbated by European attitudes to the gender roles. Maori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2002) attests to a similar gender imbalance in New Zealand:

The process of engendering descriptions of the Other has had very real consequences for indigenous women in that the ways in which indigenous

women were described, objectified and represented by Europeans in the nineteenth century has left a legacy of marginalization within indigenous societies as much as within the colonizing society. (p. 46)

Tuhiwai Smith speaks to the uneasy relationships between Indigenous men and women because of the colonized male attitude that leadership and other public activities are in the male purview only. In New Zealand, this has resulted in Maori women making claims to their *Waitangi* Tribunal that the Crown had ignored their chiefly and sovereign status (*rangatiratanga*). Tuhiwai Smith bases the problem on the misinterpretation of the Maori word *rangatiratanga* by the English colonists, that is, their presumption that chieftainship and sovereignty are naturally male (p. 46). The recent New Zealand film, *Whale Rider* (2003) has, at its conceptual heart, the colonized attitude of a modern Maori man who resists a young woman's leadership in his community, despite abundant signs acknowledging her special status. The film's wide distribution and broad global appeal may have been due to an enhanced emancipatory, feminist sensibility. Modern Maori women are working together to reclaim their histories as well as status and culture through the politics of self-determination.

In his seminal work, *The Rebirth of Canada's Indians*, Cardinal (1977) illustrates how the "uneasy" relationship between Aboriginal men and women in the last generation was exacerbated by the policies and programs of the federal Department of Indian Affairs (pp. 33-35). Calling both Indians and white people victims of government public relations ploys, Cardinal denounces the "high-minded creators" of unworkable Indian programs by saying that "what they are

accomplishing, very successfully indeed, is the creation of tension on reserves, of schisms between Indian leaders and their people” (p. 33). It is clear from Cardinal’s characterizations of the Indian leaders as male—an unspoken assumption in the 1970s—that the schisms to which he refers are between the empowered Indian men and the Indian women and children on reserve. Cardinal also notes that similar concerns were discussed in the 1700s and the 1800s and “we’re still talking about them in 1976” (p. 36). And in 2005. The policies and “ploys” of colonization continue in Canada.

Wyrostock (1997) defines colonization is “a psychological event occurring over unbounded time in the psyche of an entire culture group” (p. 19). The processes of colonization have profound consequences not only on the psyche but on governance, social institutions, life-styles, resources, economy, spirituality and autonomy of the colonized. Fundamental to explanations of the effects of colonialism is the colonizer’s greed for land (political expansion) and wealth (concomitant cheap labour). The privatization of the North American land, alone, has affected every aspect of Aboriginal life. In resettling Native populations under the direct control of the Canadian government, the women whose societies had traditionally been egalitarian and matrilineal, came under a capitalist structure which presumed the central superiority of men in all aspects of life, whether oppressors or oppressed; profit, not subsistence, became the driving force behind all public activity. Aboriginal women became particularly vulnerable in the new order.

Sutherland (1995), an Aboriginal scholar, offers the following theoretical hypothesis for the inequality of modern Canadian Aboriginal women, both inside and outside their communities:

Aboriginal women are the citizens of colonized First Nations, and due to the colonized positions of those First Nations, suffer from dependency and underdevelopment. . . . Colonization has had a particular effect on aboriginal women, altering social relations to their disadvantage . . .

Aboriginal women are structurally discriminated against because they are Indian, that is, because of their race . . . [and] structurally discriminated against because they are women, that is, because of their gender. (p. 8)

Sutherland also contends that capitalism requires what Marx calls a ‘reserve army’ of labour, one that maintains low wages and increased profits. She describes Aboriginal women as over-represented in the ‘reserve army’ as well as in other marginal class positions (p. 15).

Marx (1906) believed that “an industrial reserve army” of unwaged workers was the key to a thriving capitalist economy. He wrote that “the veiled slavery of the wage workers in England needed, for its pedestal, slavery pure and simple in the new world” (p. 737). The willingness of the reserve army to take a temporary or seasonal job, often away from home, maintains low wages and increased profits for the landed classes, and maintains division and tension within the working classes. Examples are readily apparent today in Asian sweat shops and with Mexican migrant field workers.

Cleaver (1979), in his analysis of Marx's magnum opus, *Capital*, relates Marx's theory to colonialism:

Over and over again, we see how the key to capitalist colonial expansion, beyond the initial rape of local wealth, lay in its ability to separate labour from land, and other means of production, and thus create a working class, both waged (working in the factory or on the plantation) and unwaged (working to reproduce itself as a reserve vis-à-vis the unwaged). (p. 76)

Marx's nineteenth century theory resonates today. Cleaver (1979) describes the modern world-wide army of local and immigrant reserve workers which can be easily assembled when it suits capital's purpose. He believes that keeping the reserve army in poverty is a main aim of capitalism, as their willingness to take on seasonal work for low pay "holds down the wage demands of more powerful workers" (p. 166).

The numbers of old and young Aboriginal women in the canneries of the North West coast during the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries is an example of such a reserve army, one which worked long hours for low pay during the season; fifty cents an hour in the 1940s (personal conversation, February, 2003). While the jobs are far fewer with the closure of most of the canneries, fish packers continue to employ women of the North West coast.

Sutherland (1995) maintains that, in the past, the Canadian government deliberately targeted Indian women in order to "achieve their goals of assimilation and cultural genocide [because] they are the reproducers of future generations of Indians. Moreover, Indian people have bought into the strategy, and have

internalized it, as a result of their colonized mentality” (p. 21). The loss of Department of Indian Affairs status resulting from marriage to a non-Native man prior to 1985 is a prime example of this discrimination as is the fact that prior to 1985, non-Native women *gained* Indian status when marrying an Aboriginal man. Even after 1985 and to the present day, the grandchildren of Aboriginal people who lost their status are not ‘Indian’ under federal government policy, a reality of which most people are unaware. The policy of assimilation continues. Sutherland’s is a damning indictment indeed.

Cultural/Spiritual Context

First Nations people cannot be separated from their cultural context, either from an academic or a lived perspective. Ross (1992) characterizes culture as ever-evolving:

It is not only impossible to define any particular culture comprehensively, with either clarity or accuracy, it is also inconceivable that any culture should complete itself. Adaptation, evolution and, on occasion, revolution will continue to modify it. This is probably nowhere more true than in the case of the aboriginal cultures that are currently colliding with post-industrial, western societies across this continent (p. 185).

While Ross (1992) refused to define individual cultures, Wyrostock (1997), in her study of First Nations women, employed a generic definition drafted in 1871 by E. B. Tylor: “Culture . . . is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, laws, customs, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man (sic) as a member of society” (p. 5). By this definition, a people *are* their culture,

not merely practitioners of the culture. But as Aboriginal identity is always congruent with and inseparable from 'tribe' (Highwater, 1981), it is apparent that Taylor's definition of culture, as comprehensive as it is, leads to very different understandings in Western and Aboriginal thought. For example, Native American philosopher and historian Jamake Highwater (1981) in his insightful explication of the world views, life styles and beliefs of North American Indian, *The Primal Mind*, contends that "the highly individuated egocentricity of the Western soul is alien to Indians . . . thus, the peoples of various cultures do not simply see events and objects differently from one another, but they also understand themselves in quite different ways" (p. 169).

Raised in a dual cultural orientation, Highwater (1981) brings to his essay an ability to see through more than one cultural window and offers his perspectives of the Western emphasis on individuality and the Indian sense of sacredness in the collective. His unique worldview allows him to clarify and celebrate cultural differences while at the same time "transform[ing] a generalization into a cultural metaphor" (p. xii).

Highwater (1981) describes the foundations upon which Aboriginal culture is based:

The Indian individual is spiritually interdependent upon the language, folk history, ritualism, and geographical sacredness of his or her *whole* people . . . The relatedness of the individual and the tribe extends outward beyond the family, band or clan to include all things of the world. Thus nothing exists in isolation. Individualism does not presuppose autonomy,

alienation, or isolation. And freedom is not the right to express yourself but the far more fundamental right to *be* yourself. (p. 172)

For Highwater, the concepts of culture and spirituality are inextricably interwoven as are the notions of individuality and tribe.

Since the beginning of time, First Nations people have practiced a spirituality that encompasses deep respect for ancestors, for the physical world and all creatures within, for songs, stories and dances, and for all activities that bond members of the community together. “*We are all related*” (Highwater, 1981, p. 189).

Spirituality is also inextricably bound to Aboriginal concepts of health and illness. Locust (1988) states that wellness is perceived in the context of harmony of the spirit, body and mind, while illness is thought to result from disharmony (in Wyrostock, 1997, p. 16). Healers enact rituals that restore harmony and balance to community members. The sweat lodge ceremony is a well-known example of a healing ritual.

Wyrostock (1997) claims that “this Spiritual world view historically provides First Nations people with a unifying means of making sense of self and all the world around. . . . To purge this Spirituality from the First Nations people has had catastrophic effects which have a resounding impact to this very day” (p. 19). I believe that it is this loss of ability to make meaning of daily life that is at the heart of unhealthy communities.

Ross (1992) supports the view that it was the deliberate purging of Native spiritual resources by the colonizers that has led to current ills:

. . . after our arrival on this continent we did everything in our power to prevent Native people from maintaining and utilizing their own social and spiritual resources, everything we could to stop them from responding to problems in the ways they thought were most appropriate. We outlawed and denigrated their healing techniques, requiring instead that they utilize ours and, in the process, break more of their ancient commandments. More to the point, we did so just at a time when the clash between our two cultures guaranteed that these problems would be at their worst. (p. 181).

Ross' (1992) and Wyrostock's (1997) perspectives are echoed by Native American Paula Gunn Allen, a Laguna Pueblo woman, who speaks to the critical importance of placing Indian women's stories in their rightful spiritual context, especially considering that they have not been acknowledged as part of the Euro-American history and literature:

Context is important to understand our stories, and for Indian people that context is both ritual and historical, contemporary and ancient. We are contemporary because we survive in the face of a brutal holocaust that seeks to wipe us out, and our context is as much historical as it is tribal. Like tribal history since contact with Europe, tribal aesthetics are closely tied to what our stories mean. The stories in the oral tradition follow certain aesthetic processes that differ from the processes employed in the modern Western tradition (In Freed-Rowland, 1993, p. 2).

Gunn Allen speaks to the spiritual, historical and tribal contexts without which the women's stories that follow have little meaning.

Maori academic Stewart-Harawira (2005) states that the “interactive nature of the relationship between the spiritual and physical worlds is articulated through indigenous narratives” and that these narratives form part of the experiential knowledge underpinning “indigenous cosmological and ontological knowledge” (p. 38). She also notes that the Western mind frequently interprets the stories as myths. Stewart-Harawira emphasizes the importance of narrative to Indigenous peoples.

Despite the tragedies experienced by the Kwakwakawakw people of the Pacific North West, the robustness of their culture and spirit is such that their stories and their symbology continue to identify the geographical area today for Native and non-Native alike.

Politics

Historical geographer, Cole Harris (2002) describes colonialism as increasingly being seen as:

a culture of domination, a set of values that infused European thought and letters; led Europeans confidently out into the world; stereotyped non-Europeans as the obverse, the negative counterpart, of civilized Europeans; and created moral justification for appropriating non-European lands and reshaping non-European cultures. (p. xxiv)

He fears for British Columbia’s future as the largely immigrant population becomes frustrated about treaty and other issues, and tends to see solutions to the “Indian question” in an agenda which includes assimilation and citizenship, symptomatic of a continuing colonial attitude (p. 298).

Harris (2002) understands this prevailing view. Immigrants and their ancestors established themselves in BC through hard work and without special rights and, from their perspective, believe that Native people should do the same. Harris claims, however, that

none of us has a crystal ball, yet the political implications in British Columbia of a return to a politics of assimilation seems clear. Particularly now, thirty years after the defeat of the [federal] White Paper, Native people will view assimilative policies as disastrous anachronisms. If such policies are vigorously pursued, Native people will resist them with all the weapons at their disposal. (p. 300)

While this dilemma is a political and social one, it is also representative of a deeper division. It is symbolic of a grave and potentially unsolvable impasse in the relationship between colonizer and colonized—the unwillingness or inability of the majority of BC’s “settler society” to understand the unique and distinctive claims of the Native people, and the unwillingness or inability of this dominant culture to see through the eyes of the Other. As Harris (2002) claims, “most British Columbians do not know Native people, do not understand the circumstances of being Native in British Columbia, and respond to Native issues with (generally pejorative) cultural stereotypes in mind” (p. 299).

Harris (2002) believes that the politics of difference is the only real alternative to the inevitable social disruption, but understands that this is unlikely to prevail given the current and historical preference for assimilation in BC (p. 301). His sympathetic efforts to propose a post-colonial land policy (featuring

generous land allocations) as a solution to the impasse are based on his extensive historical and geographical research and the apparent willingness to listen and to understand a worldview very different from his own.

On a more hopeful political note than Harris (2002) offers, the recent approaches to federal and provincial policymaking have shifted the country's politics surrounding the First Nations. Dudziak (2000) notes that it was the Aboriginal rejection of the federal policies of assimilation, articulated in the White Paper of 1969, that forced a policy redirection to include the redressing of past wrongs and outstanding grievances. The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples in 1996, established in 1991 to find solutions to the difficult relationships between the First Nations, the Canadian government and society, also marked a change in the relationships although, again, it was recognized that the sweeping changes recommended would take time to achieve (Castellano, 2000, p. 22). While it is also clear that little has yet changed, Dudziak (2000) states that "it is important to note the 180-degree turn in public and policy discourse that has occurred in this period, away from assimilation towards notions of self-government (p. 234). Weaver (1990) sees the incremental increases in joint policy formulation and joint management arrangements as providing the foundations for a fundamental political change (p. 15). Events in 2005, including the Kelowna Accord between federal government politicians and BC Aboriginal leaders give further cause for hope, despite the apparent indifference of Steven Harper's Conservative government.

The courts have also proven to be a new ally for Aboriginal peoples. Until the late 1980s, most Canadian court decisions ruled against Native court actions. Since that time, however, in both provincial and federal courts, important decisions, including *Mi'kmaq* and BC fishing rights, the acknowledgement of Canada's fiduciary responsibility to Native peoples, the *Delga'muukw* decision and federal *Nisga'a Treaty*, have provided both legal and moral support (Frideres, 1993, pp. 326-327). Despite this, Robert Nault, then Minister for the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (DIAND) failed to adequately consult with First Nations leaders when his department attempted to amend the 1876 Indian Act in 2002 (personal conversation with First Nations Band Administrator, 2003).

It should be noted, however, that analysis of the *Nisga'a Treaty* by an Indigenous scholar reveals that at least one of these Canadian court rulings has required extraordinary compromise on the part of the affected nation. Stewart-Harawira (2005) characterizes the ruling:

Concluded in 1998 after twenty years of official negotiations and over one hundred years of struggle by the *Nisga'a Nation*, the resultant treaty provided for the full incorporation of the *Nisga'a* people into Canadian society. In return for voluntary relinquishment of 93 per cent of their traditional territories, the right not to pay taxes, and the compensatory settlement sum of approximately NZ\$200 million or roughly NZ\$11 per person, the *Nisga'a Nation* were granted aboriginal title . . . some rights with respect to trapping, wildlife and migratory birds outside this area, and

the right to pay taxes and receive citizenship entitlements to training. In return, the Federal [sic] government of British Columbia achieved the complete extinction of aboriginal title over 28,751 square kilometres of Nisga'a traditional territories and accrued more than NZ\$1billion of foreign investment that had been waiting in the wings. (p. 47)

Stewart-Harawira also notes that the negotiation of a "limited, Western-style government for the Nisga'a Nation simultaneously affirmed the dependent status of aboriginal peoples" (p. 47) in addition to commodifying relationships between governments. Her facts and interpretations dilute the victory claimed on both sides of the Nisga'a ruling.

At the provincial level, the BC government of Gordon Campbell reported that, in the Fall of 2004, it is close to reaching agreements with four Native bands. British Columbia, a province without signed treaties since James Douglas' tenure as Governor in the late nineteenth century, and already eleven years into treaty negotiations with the province's First Nations, has recently developed a "New Relationship" framework document which promises government-to-government negotiations with the First Nations. Surprisingly, the document acknowledges that "the historical Aboriginal-Crown relationship in British Columbia has given rise to the present socio-economic disparity between First Nations and other British Columbians" (Willcocks, Victoria Times-Colonist, August 20, 2005).

Announcements of this kind have been made many times before without results meaningful or helpful to the First Nations (personal conversation with First Nations Band Manager, August 22, 2005). However, the current initiatives may

have been prompted by a Supreme Court of Canada ruling in the Fall of 2004 that requires a “duty to consult First Nations” before making decisions affecting lands that they have claimed, a judgement which has the potential for profound economic ramifications for all Canadians (Isaac, Knox & Bird, 2005).

Accordingly, Aboriginal peoples of Canada may yet be acknowledged as worthy of political respect and attention, for economic reasons if not social ones. The outcomes of the latest federal and provincial government pronouncements on Aboriginal peoples will be worthy of the nation’s collective attention.

These brief examples are illustrative of an important factor in any attempt to understand and collaborate with the people of the Canadian First Nations. Unlike other cultural groups, the First Nations are not demanding ‘equal rights’ in Canada’s “settler society”, but wish to be treated as distinct nations with “the political means to look after their cultures and manage their land” (Harris, 2002, p. 322). In his interpretation of Aboriginal desires, Harris echoes the arguments of Berger (1999) and the conclusions of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996).

In the political landscape of the Maori in New Zealand, Tuhiwai Smith (2002) has an optimistic view of the future, perhaps because the Maori appear to be politically and academically further along the road to self-determination than are most First Nations in Canada. She also notes the escalating Indigenous political activities on a world-wide scale, including at the United Nations, which are fuelling further initiatives of Indigenous peoples everywhere (p. 110). While the politics of self-determination appear to lead the way, social justice,

community health and education matters, and gender relations are receiving local and national prominence in the media and in scholarly works. Dudziak (2000) hopes that this movement will have a positive impact on Canadian Aboriginal peoples, including women: “It is in this context of shifting paradigms that much can be learned from actual policy practices concerning the possibility that Canada can move beyond a colonial ethos in its relations with aboriginal peoples” (p. 235).

Research Practices in an Indigenous Context

I contend that research with Aboriginal peoples must proceed from a deep understanding of the historical and cultural contexts from which the participants come. In the British Columbia context, this also implies knowledge of the relationships between the First Peoples and settlers since contact, given that there has been a dearth of treaties and ongoing frustrations on both sides. The Delga’muukw (2001) Supreme Court of Canada ruling was the first to acknowledge that the oral traditions of a BC tribe were, in fact, evidence of the tribe’s history, as legitimate as written documents in any court claim (Roth, 2002). The ruling is evidence that, in Canada, Aboriginal voices are only now being heard and understood by eminent jurists; the reactions to the ruling by those whose interests are threatened by the precedent-setting case suggest continued collisions and clashes. In addition to the legitimization of oral traditions, the drive for self-government is slowly moving towards fruition via the BC treaty negotiation process, set in motion eleven years ago. Since the goal of Aboriginal peoples has never been to participate fully in the dominant society (Berger, 1999;

Harris, 2002), there is a desire to remain distinct people, governing themselves on their own lands but the Eurocentric value-set has, to this time, mitigated against mutual understanding in these political, cultural and human realms (Berger, 1999, p. 82).

These examples—Delga'muukw (2001) and goals of self-government—illuminate only two of the contextual realities of which a non-Aboriginal researcher must be aware when attempting to bridge the disparate worlds. Further distinctions are required in research with Aboriginal women. Writing in a global context, Narayan (1989) echoes Berger's (1999) contention when she states that living culturally distinct and separate lives is the goal of women in some cultures; therefore, non-western epistemologies must be identified and negotiated.

Praxis-oriented research presumes that theory building occurs within a context that confronts and is deeply respectful of the experiences of people in their daily lives (Lather, 1986). Researcher and researched both play crucial roles in sharing understandings and meaning making. Lather proposes the unorthodox notion of “catalytic validity”, representing “the degree to which the research process re-orient, focuses and energizes participants towards knowing reality in order to transform it . . . ultimately, self-determination through research participation” (p. 68). The critical feminist practice appears to have resonance within the Indigenous context.

Theoretical Constructs

There are Indigenous academics who believe that current liberal feminist theory continues to perpetuate colonialist assumptions inherent in its goals and

languages (LaDuke, 1993; Freed-Rowland, 1993; Sutherland, 1995). Gretchen Minakutsik Freed-Rowland (1993) believes that until feminists realize the need for “a saner and organic transformation . . . Native American women will have to continue on alone” (p. 53). Specifically, Freed-Rowland (1993) urges that mainstream feminist rhetoric includes a concern for cultural and historical context, and that there be a greater awareness of and sensitivity to an adversarial language “which creates images of war, of lines drawn, of us against them, of exclusivity. . . . From a Native American woman’s worldview, mainstream discourse is still too superficial, narrow and culturally inappropriate” (p. 54). She proposes “research which includes the continued deconstructing of taken-for-granted cultural/class/gender assumptions and expectations embedded in the paradigm—metaphors and structure of the dominant languages of the Euroamerican culture including the academy and religions” (p. 252).

Linda Sutherland’s (1995) study focuses specifically on the historical context in which Indigenous people, particularly the women, are positioned. Her study of Canadian First Nations women posits parallels between Indigenous ‘third world’ class structures in the capitalist, colonized areas of the globe, and the “internal colonial position of the fourth world Canadian First Nations” (p. 9). She believes that theories such as those of Marx and Foucault, which analyze inequality in capitalist systems, are gender blind, and that feminist theory “does not adequately address the particular situation of Indian women or women of colour” (p. 11). In fact, Sutherland maintains that while mainstream feminism provides a theoretical explanation for sexism, this is inadequate because the state

is viewed “as a solution to gender inequality, not a contributing cause of gender inequality” (p. 133). She proposes a socialist feminist ideology that will encompass race, class and gender in its descriptions and explanations of women’s circumstances and that of other oppressed Indigenous people (p. 137). Concomitant social analysis and resistance to delegated authority structures are essential first steps to transformative social action.

Freed-Rowland (1993) believes that, for Aboriginal women, “theory and praxis are not separate from daily lives. Instead these are experienced as a web of meanings to be interpreted, negotiated and acted upon as a way of living” (p. v). She therefore, lauds feminist participatory research as “a model for breaking down Eurocentric-male dominated process” (p.vi). Narayan (1998) contends that feminist epistemology, with its focus on women’s knowledge, is analogous to the attempts of oppressed groups and third world historians to restore to colonized peoples the value of their differences and the richness of their cultures. (p. 257). She warns, however, of the threat of converting Western feminist themes and insights into dogma, given the political problems that are posed for non-western feminists (p. 258).

Lather’s (1986) liberatory pedagogy does not describe all women’s realities. In my readings of women of the underclass (hooks, 1984), I heard ‘voices’ that defined participation and equality *within* the prevailing culture. Living culturally distinct and separate lives, as some research participants are doing, is a goal of some women. Therefore, non-western feminist theoretical constructs may arise in their narratives (Narayan, 1998; Munro, 1998).

Paolo Freire's (1995) seminal work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, was recently re-issued in a twentieth century anniversary edition. In the Forward to the original edition and the revised edition, Richard Schaul acknowledges his excitement at Freire's "process of reflection which is set in a thoroughly historical context, [and] which is carried on in the midst of a struggle to create a new social order and thus represents a new unity of theory and praxis (Schaul, 1995, pp.13-14). By Schaul's definition, Freire's theories, and more, his practice in a lifetime of working with the oppressed of the world provide a conceptual framework within which North American Aboriginal people may find heart and hope. Freire (1993) claims that "human activity consists of action and reflection: it is praxis; it is transformation of the world. And as praxis, it requires theory to illuminate it. Human activity is theory and practice; it is reflection and action. It cannot . . . be reduced to either verbalism or activism" (p.106).

Freire (1993) believes that oppressed people must be involved in their own transformation processes. For a revolutionary to play the role of activist is not enough; it is tantamount to the facilitators of the revolution assuming the role of oppressors themselves. In no way must the praxis of domination be allowed to be sustained (p. 107). He warns of the dangers of the oppressed merely imagining that they have acquired power, leading to the possibility of aspiring to "revolution as a means of domination, rather than a road to liberation" (p.108). Both Freed-Rowland (1993) and Sutherland (1995) decry the actions of the Native 'elites' who have imitated and assumed the role of the federal government within their

reserves, a condition of which both these Aboriginal scholars despair, given that it is being labelled “self government.”

Freire (1993) asserts that true revolution always presumes “courageous dialogue”, by which he indicates simultaneously occurring action and reflection (p. 109). Such dialogue is the “essence of revolutionary action” (p. 116). So, people who are overthrowing their oppressors will learn both dialogue and use of power. And since with liberation comes the need to maintain that state, dialogue must also be ongoing (p. 120). Canada’s First Nations are a people struggling under direct oppression, some of them displaying elements of “false consciousness” Lather (1986), Freire’s “status-quo preserving myths” and “muted voices (Gilligan, 1982). In the past, they have demonstrated little obvious ability to transform their world by their own labour, a condition Freire defines as enslavement.

The words of Michel Foucault (Cain, 1993; Grimshaw, 1993; Ransom, 1993) hold meaning for the Aboriginal feminist scholar and non-western intellectual. While positing that the academician needs to be a “remover of road blocks” for peoples with vulnerable localized and popular knowledges, Foucault argues that “re-emergences of suppressed knowledges are keys to a multi-faceted, post modern politics of refusal at the site of power”, in other words, for a critical discourse (Cain, 1993, p. 87). Cain theorizes that Foucault’s indirect recognition of the “extra-discursive” also offers to subjugated peoples a means to recognize unformulated experience. Cain asserts that this means “it is not just that already formed discourses are politically repressed, but that the play of relations of

domination and subjugation means that some experiences do not as yet have a voice at all” (p. 90). Foucault’s unique perspective of genealogy, his method of researching history as a means of “tracing the descent of ideas”, provides an inextricable connection between power and knowledge, one that he acknowledges as essential. What genealogy does:

is to entertain the claims to attention of local, discontinuous, disqualified, illegitimate knowledges against the claims of a unitary body of theory which would filter hierarchies and order them in the name of some true knowledge . . . it is really against the effects of the power of a discourse that is considered to be scientific that genealogy must wage its struggle.

(Foucault, 1980b, pp. 83-84)

The contextual, historical and social concerns and limitations outlined by LaDuke (1993), Freed-Rowland (1993), Sutherland (1995) and other Indigenous scholars are confronted directly within Foucault’s theoretical construct. Foucault’s concern for suppressed discourses provides a sturdy framework for further research with Indigenous peoples.

For Foucault (1977b), politics is the starting point and “theory is practice, not a translation or interpretation of it” (p. 208). Because Foucault sees power as productive, not repressive as in the conventional view, and because power always generates resistance, he does not think of political change in terms of emancipation from oppression but as the transformation of political relations “through the production of new discourses and so, new forms of power and new forms of self” (Ramazanoglu, 1993, p. 24). This perspective, gained through

reading both Foucault and a number of analyses of his body of work, has revealed to me an unexpected affinity and connection with the research. Grimshaw (1993) notes that “Foucault constantly points out in his writings how traditional emancipatory theories have been blind to their own dominating and oppressive tendencies” (p. 56). She quotes Sawicki (1991) who argues that feminists’ recognition of these tendencies is crucial for those who would avoid being implicated in many forms of domination and repression themselves. My own voice is affirmed on this matter.

Foucault (1988) also offers a warning and the evidence of his belief that “everything is dangerous.” He is tentative about the notion of liberation as being necessarily the precursor to equality or freedom.

I’ve always been a little distrustful of the general theme of liberation. . . I do not mean to say that liberation or such and such a form of liberation does not exist. When a colonial people tries to free itself of its colonizer, that is truly an act of liberation, in the strict sense of the word. But we also know that, in this extremely precise example, this act of liberation is not sufficient to establish the practices of liberty that later on will be necessary for this people, this society and these individuals to decide upon receivable and acceptable forms of their existence or political society. (pp. 2-3)

In his final writings on ethics and the care of self, Foucault argues that “a study of ethical praxis and thinking that is different in many ways from dominant Western traditions is an important exercise in defamiliarization” (Grimshaw, 1993, p. 64)

and, ultimately, a morality and power that is directed upon oneself. As Grimshaw notes,

given the ways in which women have often experienced severe difficulties in achieving any form of personal autonomy, these notions of self-mastery, self-transformation, the active creation of the self, the concentration on practices of the self and the care of the self, might seem to be ones which could be congenial to feminist thinking (p. 65).

Freire, the passionate activist and Foucault, the consummate theorist, strengthen and sustain the traditional warp and weft of this study. Various Aboriginal scholars supply the colour and the texture, and together weave a theoretical tapestry that frames and supports the narratives.

The Research Question

Kirby and McKenna (1989) speak of the need to do research that is honourable, that is, egalitarian research that gives priority to the voices of participants and “adheres to principles of women’s movement activism and academic rigour” (p. 21). Honourable research also requires “purposeful recognizing/embracing the contradictions and questions that often make us most uncomfortable” (p. 31). This study will contribute to that academic discourse by collaborating with participants to determine:

What supports and barriers are encountered by First Nations women leaders as they work to enhance the health of their communities and of the larger region? Other questions of significance emerge as the women identify their concerns, their stories.

Storytelling as Legitimate Research

Peter Cole (2002) is a contemporary Aboriginal scholar, teacher and poet who chronicles his frustrations with western epistemologies and practice. In his academic publications, he elucidates his knowledge and beliefs through metaphor, storytelling, and through forms and language that require his non-Aboriginal colleagues to learn and to comprehend in an unaccustomed way (best read aloud):

The means of transportation I have chosen for this article

As well as my doctoral dissertation

First peoples' knowings as legitimate discourse in education: coming home to the village

Besides language is a canoe

Constructed not from the forest nations but from words

And the gesturings of those words and the spaces around those words

The idea of chapter is anathema to who I am as an indigenous person

It implies western order and format as “the” legitimate shapers of discourse . . .

The idea of paragraph is meaningless to my sense

Of oral contiguousness with the land with the community with acting in the world (p. 448)

It is Cole’s “oral contiguousness . . . acting with the world” that Western intellectuals have not yet accepted as fully legitimate in the academy—thus his struggle and his use of “other means of transportation.” Transposing an oral

tradition to the larger society may never achieve complete legitimacy, despite the rulings of Canada's Supreme Court (Delga'muukw, (2001) but willingness to become better listeners and to actually hear what is being said is a good first step to a common ground of understanding between our nations.

In this context, the telling of one's story becomes a matter of great consequence, and it is up to those of us without a tradition of orality to appreciate the gift and to hear it. Cole (2002) illustrates the importance of mutual interrelatedness:

as first peoples of this land our responsibilities include
to take into accountability not just measurability
our relationships with the rest of creation
we follow our original instructions as orally passed on
as well as continually relearned in our ceremonies rituals daily
protocols
we work to regenerate mutual relationships interpenetrating considerations
ethics is not an add-on or a form to fill in
it is intimate integration with the deep structure of our understanding
of creation including its ongoingness its pre- co- and post-emptiveness. . .
do we dare move a stone knowing that it has a spirit
knowing it has been t/here a thousand millennia
do we dare dig into our mother the earth our earth the mother
even with our hands even with our thoughts our metaphors
and not remember we are all related (p. 457)

Cole's form, style and content challenge the Western reader to think in new ways.

Offering a personal narrative is a gift; it can also be a source of healing for the storyteller, one which Hannah Arendt says may be the sole method of doing research into circumstances which are so tragic that traditional analyses are inadequate. Arendt, a German Jew who has become one of the most influential and controversial political philosophers of the twentieth century, believed, like Walter Benjamin (1985), in the centrality of storytelling to her work, and that storytelling, not explanation, is the work of the political theorist ((Disch, 1994, p. xi). Arendt (1968) wrote that storytelling "reveals meaning without committing the error of defining it" (p. 105).

Living through the totalitarianism of World War 11, Arendt judged the social conditions of the time to be an "epistemological crisis . . . when we are confronted with something which has destroyed our categories of thought and standards of judgment" (pp. 108-113). In her analysis of the social and political conditions, and the inability of people to determine 'truth' due to an erosion of their critical faculties, Disch states that "Arendt made the provocative suggestion that it is by means of stories that one speaks to skeptical souls who are not inclined to take their facts nor truths at face value" (p. 115). In describing the concentration camps, Arendt set aside the literal idiom of social science for the resonant "voice of poetry" (p. 119).

Lisa Disch (1994) is an American academic whose long essay, *Hannah Arendt and the Limits of Philosophy*, attempts to repudiate those who malign Arendt's German heritage and charge her with reducing politics to a spectacle (p.

xi). Claiming that “storytelling both situates our theories in the experiences from which they come and engages an audience in a different kind of critical thinking than an argument does”, Disch agrees with Arendt that traditional belief in conceptual thinking rather than “old fashioned” stories became inadequate during the Nazi regime. “Thought and reality had parted company” (p.111). In any case, “disciplinary norms that accord greater credibility to abstract argument than to storytelling perpetuate marginality by defining knowledge in terms of an authoritative style of voice that is at odds with the socially conditioned hesitancy and deference of outsiders” (pp. 6-7). Disch notes that, in a traditional society, story-telling is a consensus-building practice that serves to hand down a common understanding of the meaning and purpose of life:

Contrary to these assumptions, Arendt argues that it was the very abstraction of moral categories that made it possible for the Nazis to supplant the familiar guideposts of moral life . . . [thus] telling stories is a way to remind ourselves of the reality to which our abstract concepts are no longer adequate, and to bring to light the discrepancies between those categories and our experiences (p. 111).

Given the belief of many Aboriginal scholars that their North American nations have survived cultural and spiritual genocide, Arendt’s determination, that storytelling is the sole objective way to investigate individuals’ survival through tragically transforming circumstances, offers a compatible methodology. (p. 126)

Semiotics

Semiotics is a framework that honours knowledge gained by the interpretation of signs, sign systems and the signification process. According to semiotic theory, we gain knowledge by ‘reading’ signs. It is an ancient science; Aristotle asserted that humans construct images or signs representing mental experience that cannot be interpreted apart from the social context in which they occur (J. Umpleby, 1992, p. 2).

By this definition, the people of the Kwakwakawakw Nations were sophisticated semioticians and epistemologists, a people with perceptual acuity, complex spiritual beliefs and abundant artistic talent. The Kwakwakawakw Nations have lived “since time immemorial” in a land abundant in the riches of the sea and earth. Historically, their’s has been a subsistence life style—fishing, hunting, trapping, gathering—but with minimal effort required to sustain life. Their lives were far richer than the common usage of the word ‘subsistence’ would suggest. Perhaps because of their generous environment, the Kwakwakawakw developed a complex artistic, cultural and spiritual life, a life which French anthropologist Lévi-Strauss characterized as “one of the most remarkable efflorescences of mankind” (In Berger, 1999, p. 145).

At the time of first contact, their histories, mythologies, beliefs and values were represented by poles and masks, jewellery and regalia, Big Houses and canoes, beautiful, complex and often designed on a grand scale. Their political and social systems were designed to support a consistent and stable society in which everyone’s daily needs were met. The Potlatch, while poorly understood by

Europeans intent on “civilizing” and assimilating the Native people, was itself the symbol of an epistemology that re-allocated wealth and provided acceptance for all in the nation. The signs of their greatness were all around them. Berger (1999) believes the collapse of their culture to be one of the great modern tragedies. Signs of their regeneration are in evidence, however, and are acknowledged in this study.

CHAPTER THREE METHODOLOGY

aboriginalizing methodologies

in creating a framework
 our educational frameworks are not imported from conceptual spaces
 or other western domains
 they are not semiotic xenotransplants tip-layered epistemes adventitious
 suckers
 this would be the usual site for parentheses encasing a published
 reference
 title punctuation year perhaps a superscript numeral
 alas I offer only experience upon which to draw
 in this instance it is my only referee
 I the unanointed paleo-subjectivity am not aware
 that persons high on the plateau of western knowing
 the *in alto cognoscenti* would call this practice unscholarly or “polemical”
 if in fact this article became becomes published
 alack we pre/preter/extra/alter literate autochtones with our transgressive
 praxes
 have only our experiences and stories to which we might allude . . .
 I will take time to consider and plan and implement a framework
 of some no little importance for the lives of many first peoples

(Peter Cole, 2002, pp. 451-452)

Methodological Challenges

I am theoretically and personally aware that there is a “depth of difference” between Native and non-Native persons regarding the ways in which we see the world (Wallace, 1999). Aboriginal researcher Gretchen Minakutsik Freed-Rowland (1993) asserts that one of the purposes of her research with Native American women “is to bring Eurocentric trained male scholars into the geography, the sensibilities, and the layers of meaning and contexts of my journey as a Native woman through the Academy” (p.1). Given the scant literature, one must pay special heed to Freed-Rowland and her peers who bridge these worlds daily, and who best understand the anomalies that exist.

In her study of Aboriginal education, Janice Wallace (1999) explores this lack of mutual understanding through the words of a Native Elder, Eber Hampton:

Native and non-native conceive of their meeting in different terms and do not understand the other’s actions, thoughts, or purpose. Their sense of time, of space, of energy, of humanity are all different. Truth, beauty, and justice are all marked . . . differently. Epistemology, ontology, and cosmology are all different. The European segments his thoughts, stories and speeches in three and the Native in four. The list goes on and there is at once the richness of opportunity and the difficulty of communication.

(in Wallace, 1993, p. 305)

Wallace (1999) believes that one of the reasons that we have not worked well together in the past is because of the dominant society’s lack of understanding and

acknowledgement of the profound differences in ‘ways of being’. She is, however, optimistic that we can, with ‘courage and care’, mine the rich opportunity that now presents itself.

Feminist belief, that there is no single, objective reality, underpins Wallace’s call to action. Guba and Lincoln (1994) describe multiple realities as “apprehendable in the form of multiple, tangible mental constructions, socially and experientially based, local and specific in nature” (p. 110), a definition that demands a willingness on the part of the reader to pay acute attention and make her/his own meaning.

Aboriginal researcher, Couture (1991a) contends that “indigenous knowing and knowledge, as in past eras, remains necessary to survival and enhancement of Native personal and communal identity . . . [and] the Native American has skill and an understanding to share with North Americans, and so, with all mankind” (pp. 55-56). He believes that a “sharing of secrets” could result—not in a bereft Native, but in the non-Indian acquiring the knowledge which would then make them “trustable—for in a sense, they would no longer be non-Indian!” (p. 67). Couture’s sense of humour and irony pervade his serious intent.

Rheault (2005) concurs but with reservations, stating that:

Some are of the opinion that we should begin to share our various traditions and Teachings with others, while some are of the firm belief that any written discussion of philosophy or worldview amounts to a desecration of sacred oral teachings. I wish to be clear: I find myself

somewhere between these opposing groups. It is my firm belief that the time has come for the sharing of various Aboriginal philosophies, and I thank my Teachers for their encouragement in this matter. However, my Teachers have also taught me that sacred oral Teachings, because of their dynamic nature, must continue in an oral fashion in Ceremony so that their unique quality can be preserved. (p. 2)

Perhaps it was with this awareness that every woman I invited to the table agreed to share their stories with me. The names of other women were also offered as possible participants. In any case, the stories were accompanied by meals together, laughter and, in some cases, ceremony.

Knowledge, as constructed by First Nations women will, because of my deep implication in this study, be interpreted by me as I attempt to make meaning through my own experiences and feminist frameworks while understanding that such knowledge is never value-free. Therefore, commensurate with this interpretive feminist filter is the need for a dialogic research design (Lather, 1986) that adjusts and corrects inaccurate interpretations and irrelevant theories. This interplay should result in mutually heightened understanding and awareness of the differences in the epistemological and ontological knowledge in this cross-cultural endeavour. As Maori scholar Stewart-Harawira (2005) demonstrates, “the hermeneutic epistemological model most recently developed within Western philosophical thought is an articulation, albeit in reduced form, of concepts and understandings that have always existed in indigenous epistemological and ontological thought” (p. 46).

Linda Tuhiwai Smith is a Maori theorist who is helping to articulate these differences as well as intersections of similarities with Western research traditions as she advocates for research practices that are respectful in an Indigenous context. In her seminal work, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, Tuhiwai Smith (2002) condemns a Western academy that, having written all the rules for Indigenous research, has not paid careful attention to what is being said. In an example of epistemological subtleties, she describes the Indigenous “sense of history” as one derived from “a very powerful need to give testimony to and restore a spirit, to bring back into existence a world fragmented and dying” (p. 28). Tuhiwai Smith maintains that this understanding of history is much different from the Western *discipline* of history; “and so our accounts collide, crash into each other” (p. 28).

Tuhiwai Smith (2002) denies that the ‘decolonization’ of methodologies and the theories that inform them means a rejection of all Western knowledge (p. 39). Describing Western research as historically “objectifying the Other”, she instead advocates that Indigenous peoples develop a critical understanding of the technical and more importantly, the conceptual tools of research so that participation, control and self determination are the outcomes (p.40). There is evidence that some BC Bands are moving in these directions, including some Kwakwakawakw tribes.

The Importance of an Appropriate Research Design

Freed-Rowland (1993) contends that a complex, interdisciplinary theoretical and methodological approach is crucial to create the larger context through which to understand the relationship between the underlying cultural and language assumptions of the dominant Eurocentric culture and the absence of Native American women's life stories in the literature, and why they need telling in their own words (pp. 30-31). Our hegemonic assumptions about whether the telling of these stories constitutes valid or useful research is a good place to start.

In the struggle to honour the storyteller without imposition and to speak through plain language to their needs, feminist critical theorists have been experimenting with designs that move research in methodologically innovative directions. "Rather than establish a new orthodoxy, we need to experiment, document and share our efforts towards emancipatory research . . . and praxis-oriented inquiry" (Lather, 1986, p. 69). Whether, in fact, it is an emancipatory framework that is required in research with Aboriginal women is one that they will determine themselves. Tuhiwai Smith (2002) condemns a Western academy that, having written all the rules by which the indigenous world has been theorized, has, until now, remained impervious to the resulting silencing of Indigenous voices (p. 29). This is an error I am determined not to make. I am experimenting, documenting and sharing but I do not assume that the women who have shared with me wish to be emancipated as defined in Western terms.

Story Telling and Oral Traditions

In Canada, the precedent-setting *Delga'muukw* (2001) ruling by the Supreme Court of Canada was the first to acknowledge that the oral traditions of a BC tribe were, in fact, evidence of the tribe's history, as legitimate as written documents in any claim (Roth, 2002). The ruling is evidence that, in Canada, Aboriginal voices are being heard and understood by eminent jurists; the reactions to the ruling by those whose interests are threatened by the precedent-setting case speak to continued clashes.

Tuhiwai Smith (2002) also emphasizes the importance of maintaining the orality of the culture. She evokes story telling and the perspective of elders and of women as an integral part of all Indigenous research. "Each individual story is powerful. But the point about these stories is not that they simply tell a story . . . new stories contribute to a collective story in which every indigenous person has a place" (p.144). Stories pass down the beliefs and values of a culture and, as a research tool, represent a "useful and culturally appropriate way of representing the 'diversities of truth' within which the story teller rather than the researcher retains control" (Bishop, 1996, p. 24). Readers are urged to "de-colonize" themselves as they read the stories for their deeper purpose and meaning. The process is intended to be ongoing, communicative and interpretive (Code, 1993).

While it should be required reading for all feminist researchers, Tuhiwai Smith (2002) has written her book for Indigenous researchers for whom storytelling is "a focus on dialogue and conversations amongst ourselves as indigenous peoples, to ourselves and for ourselves" (p. 145) although she does not

seek to exclude non-indigenous researchers from the Maori Academy. Self-determination is, for Tuhiwai Smith, a central tenet in the Indigenous research agenda (p. 117).

My own researcher role, as a non-Indigenous person, demands self-reflexivity and sensitivity to my Eurocentric traditions and values, and the differing worldview of my friends and colleagues who shared and who continue to share their stories so generously with me. I was particularly conscious of the need to have each woman tell her story in her own way, without comment from or analysis by me during the telling, in order to retain her own voice (Gilligan, 1982). Indeed, I quickly learned that my initial plan to use a semi-structured interview format detracted from the integrity of the narrative. From the interview and the on-going conversations that often ensued, from the transcripts to the crafting of their story, each woman had control of the language and the intent; they were active participants in the telling and in the scribing.

Kathryn Anderson (1999) acknowledges that “oral interviews are particularly valuable for uncovering women’s perspectives” and “provide an invaluable means of generating new insights about women’s experiences of themselves in their worlds (p. 11). A proponent of sensitive, active-listening techniques, she encourages the interviewer to learn to construct a thoughtful environment and an open attitude to what is being said, given that the researcher is an active participant in qualitative research. One of her beliefs is that “an oral interview, when structured by the narrator instead of the researcher, allows each woman to express her uniqueness in its full class, racial and ethnic richness (p. 2).

Because there is a tendency for the interviewer to leap to interpretation through existing theories during the process, Anderson counsels her full immersion in the interview, to understand the story from the woman's perspective: "When the woman, and not existing theory, is considered the expert on her own psychological experience, one can begin to hear the muted channel of women's experience come through" (p. 20). Urging the researcher to remain attentive to the moral dimension of interviewing and to follow the narrator's lead, Anderson suggests that she not intrude into areas that the narrator has chosen to hold back (p. 24). Anderson's suggestions and concomitant purposes made eminent sense to me; while following them fully remained elusive, I conducted each session with this sage advice in mind.

I have known each of these women for over ten years. I do not believe that I would have been able to hear these deeply moving stories but for the long-standing relationships that we have developed over the years. Our relationships began when I came to the region as principal of a North Island public secondary school but moved beyond the professional as, over the years, I was welcomed into cultural events and into homes and hearts. The study was undertaken with women who wanted their stories to be told, but who said that they had neither the time nor the inclination; Sarah, the 86 year old Elder, has, for years, thought about leaving her story and the story of her family for posterity. The reasons ranged from the capturing of history for future generations to the dispelling of stereotypes in society-at-large. As one woman said simply, "I want people to know who we are" (personal conversation, February, 2004).

I accept that the need to engage in a discourse which will illuminate our epistemological, ontological and semiotic differences, believing as I do that new understandings and connections will emerge which will benefit the Academy as well as the community. Engaging in this discourse in a manner that is at once methodologically robust and culturally sensitive has, however, presented a challenge.

How can I, a woman of European ancestry relate the public, private and personal circumstances of First Nations women to current feminist critical theory research, and do so in a way that accounts realistically for these differences? Do the participants view themselves as ‘oppressed’, as characterized in much of the feminist discourse about marginalized women? Do they feel subordinate or dispossessed in the context of their own communities or in the leadership positions that they have assumed? What do they want for their communities and themselves? Change of political, economic and social status, I hypothesize, but not assimilation or integration in the dominant culture having withstood the attempts of federal government agencies to do just that. These and other questions surfaced for me as I read the feminist literature of the past twenty years, searching for a conceptual fit.

Mindful of the worlds that the research participants are bridging, I was aware of and accounted for “differing socially constructed value bases of ‘family’ and ‘education’ and of what constitutes ‘knowledge’ and ‘being’ in each sphere” (Ribbens & Edwards, 1998, p. 7). Through heightened self-reflexivity, a theme constant in all feminist research, I honoured these women. And, in order to fully

acknowledge myself as a participant in this undertaking, I also became a storyteller, offering my ruminations to the creation we have made together.

Ghostwriting the Stories

Two of the stories in this study are presented in the first person, the point of view preferred by these storytellers. Even so, I was involved in the telling, drawing the stories together in a sequential manner and thereby superimposing my sense of written structure on the whole. Five women and I came to consensus on their stories written in the third person; in other words, I was their “ghostwriter”, and, as such, as much an implicit presence in the written text as I was present at the oral telling of them. I define ghostwriting as writing for someone else.

Rhodes (2000) has written extensively of interview-based research practices that position the researcher as ghost writer. He maintains that the dialogic nature of this act of research and the truth of the resulting text is based “on consensus rather than universality” (p. 523) as I would so attest. Interview-based research requires that the researcher take “active responsibility for the reflexivity of their textual practice ... and account for and accept their role in the (re)presentation of others” (p. 523). Writing from the position that “researchers are themselves “textual practitioners” (p. 513), Rhodes defines (re)presentation as both a presentation, that is, a model for the real and a representation, a reference to something outside of itself. He has determined that (re)presentation “enacts an approach to writing that professes a profound agnosticism towards the relationships between writing and reality” (p. 515).

In openly declaring my role as ghostwriter for five Aboriginal women, I acknowledge my part in the creation of the narratives offered and accept the concomitant responsibility and reflexivity that follows as Rhodes' theoretical approach and practice, supported by other researchers (Richardson, 1992; Cherryholmes, 1993; Kilduff, 1993; Silverman, 1993; Fox, 1995; Albrow, 1997), requires.

Research writing, then, has ethical considerations as we see the practices of writing as one where the writer is in a position of social power through being able to produce written (re)presentations. This acknowledges that any text written about others is not a straightforward telling of their story, that the text contains contradictions and elements that are textually suppressed (Cherryholmes, 1993), and that an exposition of the subtext of how the narrative was constructed undermines the agenda of the explicit text (Kilduff, 1993). Together these points indicate that a written story is representation of an episode of a person's life. (Rhodes, 2003, p. 523).

Anonymity and Confidentiality

I offered confidentiality to all research participants. Furthermore, to do so, I eliminated certain data from the study when requested by any of the women.

The nature and narrow geographical locus of the study is such that issues of anonymity needed to be addressed. The high profile of these Aboriginal leaders and the positions that they occupy mitigate against anonymity. I asked each woman what her wishes are in this regard, anticipating that some would request

that their given names be used and other, that pseudonyms be used, as was the case.

Designing the Study

In the struggle to honour the subject without imposition and to speak through plain language to the “felt needs of the group” (Lather, 1986), feminist critical theorists are experimenting with designs that move research in methodologically innovative directions. Lather (1986) claims that research which employs ‘praxis-oriented’ enquiry methods furthers “the emergence of subjugated knowledges” (p. 84) and focuses on “critiquing the status quo and building a more just society” (p. 51). These intents move beyond the interpretive paradigm to reveal an epistemology which assumes that researcher and participant interact in a collaborative, contextualized, joint exploration for theory and meaning. Theory, methodology and epistemology are inextricably linked.

I embarked on this study with concern; my intents were honourable but I feared potential imposition of my Western value system, and worse, unconscious misappropriation of the data. Gebhardt (1982) notes, for example, that “what we want to collect data for decides what data we collect; if we collect them under the hypothesis that a different reality is possible, we will focus on the changeable, marginal, deviant aspects . . . all the facts unfit to fit” (p. 405). This awareness was particularly troublesome to me given the accepted social definition of the First Nations people as a marginalized group. Other *a priori* constructs of mine may have affected both the collection and interpretation of the data. For these reasons, I offered to the participants the opportunity to respond both to their

interview transcripts and also to the crafting of the narratives. In my research design I had to account for personal biases, empirical accountability and the unique stories of the participants.

Components of Research-as-Praxis

Patti Lather (1986b) has focused on issues in the field of emancipatory research, a critical process that is characterized by “negotiation, reciprocity and empowerment – research as praxis” (p. 257). One of her stated purposes is that a social science would allow us not only to understand the maldistribution of power and resources underlying our society but also to change that maldistribution to help create a more equal world. Research that is explicitly committed to critiquing the status quo and building a more just society – that is, research as praxis – adds an important voice to that ferment (p. 258).

Praxis-oriented research presumes that theory building occurs within a context that confronts and is deeply respectful of the experiences of people in their daily lives. Researcher and researched both play crucial roles in finding ‘new ways of knowing’, a flexible and democratic methodology which addresses some of my concerns.

Reflexivity

Harroway states that “the production of theory is a social activity which is culturally, socially and historically embedded, thus resulting in situated knowledges” (In Ribbens and Edwards, 1998). Feminist scholars have rightly stressed the need for reflexivity in methodology and epistemology. Lather (1986) acknowledges, however, that guidelines for operationalizing reflexivity in critical

inquiry are rare, and offers suggestions based on the work of other theorists (Gramsci, 1975; Fay, 1975; Comstock, 1982; Bernstein, 1983). Given that critical inquiry endeavours to develop an understanding of the worldview of research participants, then a dialogic research design is central to this understanding, acting as a corrective to the researcher's preconceptions (Rhodes, 2000). Also, critical inquiry is a mutually educative enterprise, cast against a historical background in which both participants, researcher and researched, can see the potential for transformation, such as in a mutual search for contradictions, a critique of ideology and a theorizing of research data (Harding, 1992; Stanley and Wise, 1993; Maynard, 1994). The critical responses of the participants who have been provided with an inviting environment in which to react, will attest to the validity of the emergent theory (Lather, 1986, pp. 63-64). If these components are in place, Lather believes that "dialogic research design allows us both to begin to grasp the necessary conditions for people to engage in ideology critique and social interaction, and to distinguish between what Bernstein calls 'enabling;' versus 'blinding' biases on the part of the researcher" (p. 64). I will use the academic strategies that ensure my lens is an 'enabling' one. I also acknowledge my personal role.

Reciprocity

If critical praxis-oriented research produces emancipatory knowledge that empowers the researched, I wonder whether the participants in my study see the relevance of these particular knowledges. I believe that they are doing the work they do for their communities as well as for professional and personal benefit; I

also understand them to be among those best situated to understand the undeniable effects of past and current oppressions upon British Columbia First Nations.

The dangers of assuming that an emancipatory framework is universally applicable is highlighted by Mauthner and Doucet (1998):

Feminist qualitative researchers have highlighted the difficulties involved in hearing and theorizing the ‘muted voices’ of women’s lives in ‘private’ domains when the facilities for hearing are predominantly mainstream public language, concepts, and theories (Devault, 1990; Edwards and Ribbens, 1991; Gilligan, 1982; Graham, 1983; Smith, 1987; Stacey, 1981; Westcott, 1990). However, it can also be difficult to hear stories which might contradict dominant feminist understanding such as those within an equal rights framework. (p. 137).

The conclusions of these feminist researchers echo those reached by Freire and Foucault.

Narayan (1998) states that “confronted with a powerful traditional discourse that values woman’s place as long as she keeps to the place prescribed, it may be politically counterproductive for nonwestern feminists to echo uncritically the themes of western epistemology that seek to restore the value, cognitive and otherwise of ‘women’s experience’” (p.259). In any case, feminist epistemology is neither a homogeneous nor cohesive enterprise. Harding (1986) notes that its practitioners differ significantly both philosophically and politically.

Acknowledging these epistemological complexities, I wanted to build a maximal degree of reciprocity into the research design. I was already well known professionally by the participants. Several of them worked under my direct supervision; others were parents of children in the high school where I was principal. It was because of my long-term relationships with and admiration for them that I embarked on this study.

History and constant research involving First Nations peoples of the geographical area illustrate the need to build relationship based on trust – trust that is neither easily nor quickly given. Perhaps for that reason, recent studies focusing on the lives of First Nations women are few. I was most fortunate to have known the women in my study for ten years and believed myself to be in an open, respectful relationship with each of them – a fertile ground for a high degree of reciprocity and research-as praxis.

Kushner and Norris (1980) identified as a goal of their research, moving participants from articulating what they know to theorizing about what they know, a process they call collaborative theorizing (p. 27). They posit that this is accomplished by negotiating all but the final drafts of the report, effectively giving the participants a role in negotiating the meaning of the research. Lather (1986) believes that dialectical practices “guard against the central dangers to praxis-oriented work: imposition and reification on the part of the researcher” (p. 59). I also tried to avoid the danger of romanticization of the subject that Narayan (1998) warns against.

Validity

In addition to relying on participants' responses and reactions to the data for tests of truth, traditional concepts of validity can be utilized as long as they are "appropriate to an interactive, dialogic logic" (Reason and Rowan, 1981, p.240). Guba and Lincoln (1981) believe that techniques of triangulation, reflexivity and member checks are minimum requirements for new paradigm research, that is, qualitative research. Lather (1986) recommends multiple data sources, methods and theoretical schemes "which seek counter patterns as well as convergence" (pp. 66-67). She offers another test of the validity of critical research--the assurance that emancipatory theory is being constructed, revised or confirmed in the process of "ceaseless confrontation with and respect for the experiences of people in their daily lives" (p. 67). This includes sharing data, analysis and theory-building efforts with participants. Lather cautions researchers to be alert for possible "false consciousness," a phenomenon that can result in participants' identification with unsuitable ideologies and a distortion of face validity in the study. She proposes the unorthodox notion of "catalytic validity", representing "the degree to which the research process re-orient, focuses and energizes participants towards knowing reality in order to transform it . . . ultimately, self-determination through research participation" (p. 68).

Data Analysis

All researchers come to the task, consciously or not, imbued with personal conceptual frameworks. These are the filters through which we hear our participants and make meaning of our data. The challenge for the researcher is to

be aware of and account for each decision in the process. Heightened self-reflexivity was especially essential in my study where cultural differences, lost histories and ‘muted voices’ could have resulted in inaccurate interpretations of the words. I counted on the women’s input to avoid such errors, information which I did receive.

Mauthner and Doucet (1998) are concerned that, because data analysis is “the site where their stories and ‘voices’ become transformed into theory, that the strategies that are used be given more attention than has been typical in the feminist literature” (p. 140). In an extensive search of the literature, Mauthner and Doucet (1998) have found few examples which describe how practically to operationalize the general methodological principle of listening to the collaborative voices of participants and researchers, especially in the data analysis process (p. 120). Useful theoretical texts focused on the ‘new paradigm’ give no explication of transcription analysis or other practical strategies (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983; Miles & Huberman, 1984; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The feminist literature has been equally quiet in this regard, despite the vulnerable relationship of data analysis to ultimate knowledge and understanding.

Mauthner and Doucet (1998) adapted the ‘voice-centred relational method’ of analyzing data, developed in the early 1990s by Carol Gilligan and Lyn Brown at the Harvard Project on Women’s Psychology and Girls’ Development. They were concerned that “in analyzing data we are confronted with ourselves and with our own central role in shaping the outcome (p. 122).

Gilligan and Brown (1992) recast psychology as a relational practice and therefore, build into their method a way of maintaining both 'voice' and listener. This method is grounded in clinical and literary approaches (Brown & Gilligan, 1992), interpretive and hermeneutic traditions (Brown et al., 1986; Brown & Gilligan, 1990), and relational theory (Belenky et al., 1986; Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Miller, 1986). Relational ontology characterizes human beings as interdependent, historically contextual, and embedded in a complex web of intimate and larger social relations (Gilligan, 1982), which is consistent with Aboriginal ontology.

While acknowledging that every researcher will adapt method to their own circumstances, Mauthner and Doucet (1998) describe their data analysis process as consisting of four readings of the narrative: the first for stories, plots, characters, recurring metaphors and contradictions, and importantly, the researcher's own relationship with the speaker, the text, and the theoretical and epistemological interpretations that emerge. The second reading focuses attention on the active 'I', with a coloured pencil physically tracing the use of personal pronouns in order to determine "how she speaks of herself before we speak of her" (Brown & Gilligan, 1992, p. 28), how she voices her own sense of agency. Mauthner and Doucet (1998) characterize the reading for the personal pronoun as a feature that distinguishes the voice-centred relational method from grounded theory methodology, which is focuses more on the action/interaction than on the person (p. 130). The third reading, also traced using a coloured pencil, pays attention to relationships, private, public and personal (Ribbens & Edwards,

1998). In the fourth reading, people are placed “within broader social, political, cultural and structural contexts” (p. 132).

Unlike thematically-based methods of data analysis, the voice-centred relational method avoids traditional coding methods, thereby enhancing reciprocity and reducing the potential effects of researcher bias. Predetermined categories would, by definition, direct the data analysis process by reflecting the researcher’s theoretical and ontological framework. Also, by tracing voices instead of linking themes, the uniqueness of each woman’s voice within her own social and cultural context is maintained (Mauthner & Doucet, 1998, p. 134).

Consistent with the work of Gilligan and Brown (1992), I do not believe that the women with whom I had the privilege of working are representative of all Aboriginal women or even ‘successful’ Aboriginal women. What is important is that I have learned from this group of women and what I learned is worthy of the attention of others. (p. 23).

Sustained dialogue with each woman led me to converse with other community members. Drawing on the cultural and historical tapestry within which each woman is positioned enhanced my commitment to the contextual nature of knowledge (Narayan, 1998). These unstructured interviews, the partaking of food in social settings and celebrations--a First Nations tradition--allowed the stories and issues to emerge. Throughout, I attempted to retain the reflexivity required of a critical feminist interpretive study, given the potential for my western theoretical and ontological biases to mute ‘private’ voices (Gilligan, 1982).

Limitations of the Study

To repeat, the women of this study are not to be considered representative of Aboriginal women generally. These women, however, represent “success stories”, as defined by our postmodern world. Each has attained career status that has augmented her own life and that of her family and community. Some have come to their positions through great personal effort and struggle; others have achieved a formal education far beyond that of most of their family and community members, and society-at-large.

Each woman talks about her life in her own unique way, without recourse to information or evidence from others, without triangulation and with little emphasis on socio/political ramifications. Thus, the stories stand alone, not as truth but, rather, as the perspectives of First Nations women leaders.

In all cases, these women do not represent the stereotypically passive life cycle attributed to First Nations women since contact. These women are healthy, strong, highly competent and financially comfortable; they are role models for their communities, although not always fully acknowledged or appreciated by them.

A Purposive Sample

In my work as a secondary and elementary public school administrator, I became aware, over time, of the strong leadership of a number of Aboriginal women on the North Island. I grew to admire and respect these women for the roles that they had assumed. Were their roles similar to my own, as a female school administrator? What bearing did the official status as ‘Indians’ have on

their lives and on their work? Had they been they supported or mentored? What barriers did they face in their work and their private lives?

At first, I understood their importance as positive role models for the students and for myself as we participated in a government-sponsored role model program at the high school. Later, I appreciated their uniqueness to the still-common experiences of Aboriginal women. Accordingly, I invited several women to participate in the study. Later, with some participants' suggestions to talk to women with differing histories, backgrounds and experiences, I invited ten women in all to the table and was able to engage seven of them in the discussion. Two of these women moved away from the North Island and one who had been suggested to me by a participant chose not to become involved.

I acknowledge the importance of the historical and cultural context for the villages on the North Island, as provided by the participants. I trust that these narratives, set within their specific contexts, offer insights and opportunities for enhanced understanding of the past and present realities of Aboriginal life in the Pacific North West.

Personal Biases

Given my personal and professional relationships with these women, I acknowledge the bias I bring to the study. I have worked with their children and grandchildren for ten years; I know of many of the insults, injustices and tragedies perpetrated on them by government officials and townspeople recently and in the past. I know about continuing Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (DIAND) practices that serve to prolong frustration and despair. I

have participated in celebrations and memorials, Potlatches, feasts and funerals, weddings and naming ceremonies. I am not dispassionate about these people and their future. They are neighbours, friends and colleagues. I have, however, through thoughtful research design, analysis and participant collaboration, done my utmost to reflect and illuminate their stories, while acknowledging the relationships we share (Rhodes, 2000).

As I contemplate my relationship to each of them, it becomes clear to me that these women are walking personal and career paths that bridge several different worlds in the work that they have taken on, and in the roles that they have chosen to play. I have had to engage in theoretical preparation that privileges and pays respect to these women who are so uniquely and interestingly positioned in these competing worlds. From my feminist perspective, I have participated in the telling of their narratives in a manner that, I trust, illuminates their unique experiences and worldviews and educates us all.

CHAPTER FOUR

ELDER SARAH TELLS HER STORY

A well-crafted story shares with the most elegant theories the ability to bring to light a version of the world that so transforms the way people see that it seems never to have been otherwise. Under certain conditions, a story can be a more powerful critical force than a theoretical analysis (Disch, 1994, p. 106).

Prologue

Anthropologist Martine Reid (2004) attests to the “real and symbolic powers” of women of the Kwakwakawakw society, powers that go well beyond their role as perpetrators of lineage. She acknowledges, however, the incidental and incomplete data on First Nations women, reporting that few biographical accounts exist in the entire North American literature (p. x). By the 1970s, when Reid began collecting biographical material for her own research, very few First Nations women had written their own autobiographies (p. xxiii).

Reid (2004), a protégé of Wilson Duff (1964) notes that Theisz (1981) suggests distinguishing between biography/autobiography and narrated Indian autobiography, that is, original bi-cultural compositions, by referring to the latter as “bi-autobiography” (p. 233), presumably for the purpose of delineating and defining a unique written form. More importantly, re-naming the form also acknowledges that the interviewer/recorder/editor makes choices that inevitably colour the narration, and that the storyteller may have edited the account for her own purposes. As Reid states, “Whether narrated or written, autobiography is not someone’s life but, rather, an account or story of his/her life . . . a story of a story”

(p. xxii). Certainly, the stories in this study meet Theisz' definition as bi-autobiographies.

Aboriginal women have been marginalized socially, economically and, as Reid (2004) notes, they have been marginalized in the academic literature. Ribbins and Edwards (1998) in their text, *Feminist Dilemmas in Qualitative Research: Public Knowledge and Private Lives*, outline the particular dilemma facing all feminist researchers who undertake to bring to the public debate the private narratives of marginalized women: How do we “represent the voices of the women in our research . . . in a way that is faithful to their experiences and language, but does not position them as ‘other’ and reproduce hierarchies of power and knowledge” (p. 19). While acknowledging that researchers always infuse the stories they relay with aspects of their own identity, Mauthner and Doucet (1998) believe that there are ways of working within this dilemma through scrupulous use of data analysis methods that retain the unique voice of each participant (pp. 18-19). This is the strategy I have undertaken as outlined earlier.

Thus follows my reconstruction of the narratives of seven Aboriginal women, collected over a three year period and, in some cases, the result of on-going conversations and social chats that proceeded naturally from the interviews initiating the study. In each case, after collaborating with participants about their transcripts and making the requested changes, I scrutinized each transcript and all field notes four times, each with a different lens, as described by Mauthner and Doucet (1998). The intent of this method of data analysis is to focus the reader's attention on each woman's unique voice—her personal story (how she speaks of

herself before we speak of her), relationships and cultural context rather than allowing the ubiquitous thematic approach of qualitative methodologies and my own Western biases to dominate. The reader will also benefit from the historical aspect of the narratives, including, for example, little known information about daily life at the residential school, made more poignant through the voices of those who were there.

Into the Narratives

Rhodes (2000) acknowledges the importance of “ethical considerations as we see the practices of writing as one where the writer is in a position of social power through being able to produce written (re)presentations.” (p. 523). The reader also has a responsibility to bear these limitations in mind.

The women whose stories follow are at the centre of their own narratives at this juncture, although I acknowledge my abiding presence in both direct and indirect ways. Their unique narratives are offered so that readers might interpret for themselves these Aboriginal women’s ways of knowing and of being in the world—leading, it is hoped, to an understanding that emanates directly from the personal stories and not from common stereotypes and colonial histories.

The narratives begin with the two first-person accounts, one by Sarah who provides, in addition to her own story, a broad historical and cultural context given her 86 years of healthy perspective. She spent four years in residential school, from the time she was twelve until her sixteenth birthday. Before that time, she enjoyed a traditional Kwagiulth childhood in the company of her family and extended families.

One of Sarah's sons, who was present during some of our conversations over tea and Chinese food, contributed valuable stories of his own. His remembrances reveal glimpses of his mother and paint a picture of life growing up on the North West coast. His first-person contributions are presented in italics.

The second story—Karen's—is one of personal courage and professional success in the face of family hardships. Karen, whose childhood was spent away from her family in a residential school, offers us a window on her life in the school and devastating impact of federal residential school policies on her family and her generation, policies that were still in place in the early 1980s in remote areas of BC. Karen acknowledges that she is affected still by her childhood experiences.

Sarah's Story: A Personal Narrative

The Early Days

I lived in two places, Alert Bay and Fort Rupert because my father was a fisherman. We started in March for whatever was coming. We had to be ready, get the gear ready for halibut fishing time. So we were moving about quite a bit.

In the winter time, we would settle down, in the time of telling stories – about how we went to the Quattse River where I would fish with my grandparents. My father would be fishing halibut and then, after that was over, we got ready to go gillnetting up in Smith Inlet. I don't know when my father started to use small boats instead of seine boats. I never wrote anything down. We moved between Alert Bay and Fort Rupert and it was good to go to Alert Bay because I got the chance to go to day school at St. Michael's [Residential School].

I did go to school. I told [my son] that they used to line us up and take turns reading. I knew how to read and I knew how to say English words but I didn't know what they meant. My sister took me [to school]. They were starting to worry about me, being twelve years old. They probably said, "This is a good place for her to go" and it's a good thing they did because we were locked right in there. We weren't allowed to come out at all. My parents and my sister wanted me to be on the safe side of life. And my older sister, she was already there and she was the one to speak for me when I got to the school. I had my menstruation and I didn't know who to tell about that and she talked for me. I didn't know how to talk for myself.

It was a good experience. It was really something else from being in my parents' home. I don't know the words for it but it was something else. That's when I started to get the training – to be responsible. They put me on staff and I was responsible for shining the tumblers and making the table clean. It was an honour. And the lady matron in the kitchen, she told me to behave myself. She said, "Don't spoil the [family] name Martin. It's a good name." My sister, she had a good name. I don't know why she said that to me but she always watched us in everything we did, like baking bread.

The people in the residential school treated us well. It was 1931, when I was twelve. Most of the people were English people and they still had the English accent. When I went to school, the teachers said I had caught the accent. I went to school for four years, until I was sixteen. I had to leave school on account of some people, like the Haida and people from the North, needed space at the school.

I was crying. I knew I hadn't learned enough and I was really feeling sorry for myself. I didn't show anybody I was upset. Oh yes, I talked to the matron – she was from England – and she said, “Maggie (she called me Maggie), would you rather stay here than go home?” And I said that it was alright. There's lots of kids needing to come. So I lost my chance. I envied those who stayed over eight years in school. They went up to the higher grades, like Elizabeth. She got grade twelve. And someone talking in Alert Bay said that she had stayed eight years. Oh what a lucky girl. If I had stayed eight years – and I've always said this to people – I would have been a better educated person. People say to me, “Don't say that. What you have you can share.”

Experience, as we all know, is the best teacher. If I didn't have those experiences, I would have been empty-headed. I had such times though. They were hard. I used to cry every night. There were a lot of things that I didn't understand, like why people were mean. Instead of helping me, they were just trying to hurt me more. I went through that. I learned from the hard times I had; it made me stronger. My husband told me about steel, how they would test it to see how much it could stand. That's how our lives are. We're tossed around and pulled this way and that.

I got a lot of good out of my experiences. I learned a lot from them – out of all the hard times I had. Whatever else I say, I want to help people who are going through the same thing. My heart is going out to people, to help them in the same way. They are preparing for the future. I couldn't talk to anybody, way

back. I was too scared, too timid. I think that I didn't know enough to really talk heart to heart with anybody.

Family

Grandmother Sarah wanted us to know this is where we're from – she even took us out to places to show us. She took a whole bunch of kids – her grandchildren out – and if she hadn't done that, I wouldn't have known who I was. It was very important for the First Nations people to know who they were and who their relatives were. That's why they kept talking to us.

There weren't many cars in those days so everybody walked to the store, and chiefs from the other villages, they would be sitting on the sidewalks and they would talk to us and say good things to us and say how well trained we were and how lady-like. There are drastic changes now-a-days. In my day, we were never allowed to go out of the house by ourselves, to be free to do whatever we wanted to do. They tried to keep us under control. Same at school. That was the best place for me to be. A lot tried to go outside the fence but the principal was always looking out of the window. If we would go outside the fence, we had to go to the office. If we were extra bad, they would strap us, strap our hands. The principal did that. That's why kids are the way they are now-a-days because the kids aren't disciplined. That's what they do, that's what they do.

I was twenty-one when I got married. I really didn't want to get married. Well, I really loved and respected my parents and I knew it was what they wanted and I wanted to relieve them of the worry, for me to be married. And they

approved of his father because of his good background, because of his people – good, hard-working people. Especially my father approved.

I have three girls and seven boys. One boy died. He was shot here in Port Hardy.

I don't remember having a hard time. I know I worked hard to keep everything going. But I didn't feel I had a hard time or that I was overworked or anything. When my sister realized that our mother was not strong enough to do all the heavy work, she just pitched in right away and did it. Whatever she could do, she did. My older sister didn't go to school. She stayed home and I think she got married.

I did most of the work [in my house] – I never forced my children to do the dishes. I don't really remember, maybe I was strong then but also, they didn't do the dishes properly. They didn't do the dishes the way I wanted. I know that was the reason. But [my son] did do the dishes.

Son: We did do the dishes and help her bake. I remember punching dough. We did a lot of punching dough. My brother and I did a lot of that. Other big chores we did were cutting wood. My Dad was working at that all the time. He'd cut enough for us to last the winter and then we'd cut enough for us. Then he'd cut a pile for our neighbours to steal. They were poor. He told us not to let it bother us when they sent their kids over to take some wood. He told us not to bother them, to let them do that. I thought that was really nice of him. So he was a good guy, a good father.

He didn't teach me anything philosophical. He was hard working and that's what I got from him. When he did work, he was devoted to the job. I think that's because that was what the world was like then. If you knew how to work hard, you would survive in this world. I know all my brothers did. They survived in it very well.

We had stories from our Mother all the time. She read books, her voice were clear and she sang. So I think her philosophical Christian morals were there all the time. They weren't just dropped into us. There were stories she read to us from the Bible. She had a book. She borrowed it from a Seventh Day Adventist. Our sister has it now. It's tattered and worn. We've heard the stories from it over and over again. We used to ask Mum to read our favourite parts. Every brother would have a favourite part; mine was the battle of Jericho. I liked that. Also she had a book of Christian stories. And it was good. She read a lot of that to us. All in all, there were five or six books she read to us and I mentioned the Bible story book because it was the most exciting. I don't think we wanted to hear just the Gospel. We wanted to hear the stories.

That's what Mum did for us. My brothers and I have these certain characters because of what she did when we were young. One time I counted twenty-seven pots in our house down by the beach because of its leaky roof. I counted twenty-seven. Mum was reading us stories on this really stormy night. It was raining hard and we had to keep getting pots out to catch the rain dripping and they all had a different tone and Mum read to us because we didn't read and

she did. So we were all in the living room having stories read to us. I think they were kind of comforting in hard times. We didn't know we were poor.

One thing my Mother did was, she was consistent. She was consistent. She knew what was going to happen. Mother didn't stray left or right. She had this mission. And we were brought along in it. And when we got older and moved away, she continued with it so that validated everything she taught us, that she stuck with it all those years. But we had to go out and get a little soiled in society ourselves, went our different ways, had our own problems, but when we all came back, it was with a success story.

There was a lady who [recently] came from Alberta looking for me. She came to my house and said she wanted to meet the mother of [this son]. Because there's something different about [son] she said. When I first came home to Fort Rupert, I didn't know the people and there was this meeting at the Inn. This lady came up to me and asked, "What did you do, what did you do to your family?" I thought there must have been something bad. "I don't know," I said. "Well," she said, "They're so different." There's a lot of that.

When we had the funeral for [my son] when he got shot, we had the funeral at Fort Rupert. And this minister's wife from the United States, she came up to me and asked, "Where did your family get their education?" I didn't know what she was talking about. "Maybe it was just the way they dressed. What made you think that?" I asked. I couldn't tell if [she asked if] they went to university. But it is appearance and you can see it in us.

I never left my children. Their father was always away fishing but the only time I was ever away was to attend church. We all went for comfort, for strength. I never went out to wild parties. I always came home. I believe my behaviour had a lot to do with the way they are today. I yelled and I got mad, mad at them and everything though. There were times when I had problems with them. Our neighbours would always come around when we were sitting around and reading, and they would call them out. But whenever their Father would come home from fishing – instant obedience. I'd have been yelling all day.

I didn't hear anything about God from my Mother at all. I never heard from her but I went to Sunday School. There was one lady who came from Vancouver and she was from Winnipeg and she came from a very fine home and a very educated family and she was willing to come and stay here where Natives are. She loved us. She did more for me – she helped me to read, she showed me how to do things. She really loved me and she more or less introduced me to Christianity. She was a most wonderful person and the people who went to the same church as she did were the most wonderful examples of Christianity – so kind. Some of the church people were somewhat different. I had to go to Pentecostal because there was no more Apostolic Ministry there.

There's a difference in their behaviour, Apostolic people and Pentecostal. They didn't treat me like I belonged and they still don't because I didn't become Christian through their ministry. I became Christian through the Apostolic faith and this mission and we learned a lot from them. Jesus was the Son of God. He was meek, full of Grace and Truth. Apostolic people were like that. They even

took me in and my parents allowed me to stay. They were examples that stayed with those who became Christians through them – also the Four Square church – that stayed in Fort Rupert after the second World War was over. They were so real and genuine and showed so much love towards us. They never forced anyone to support them. Tithing was never mentioned. We didn't know the blessings that come from giving that the Bible teaches us; that I experienced later. That the money in our wallets is blessed just by supporting the work of the kingdom of God on earth. Ministers asked for support in their work; some are local, some are world-wide. We should be able to figure out the need to ask for help, especially those that have a family. We never lose by giving to the needy, God said. It's like lending that will be paid back to us.

There were translators of hymns, directed by the first missionary, not one but maybe four more Kwakwakawakw Elders after the missionaries settled and started teaching. The foundation in Alert Bay that was called 'Home School' was built quite a ways apart. It seemed very quiet and students were well behaved. They came from homes that were well disciplined, as if they came from strict parents so as not to disgrace their family name. Like any other kind, they were not rich but made the best of what they had. They were loving and kind. There were no actions of pride to be seen. Drastic changes are here [now], as if people were moved to a distant land.

We used egg crate boxes to furnish our bedside are for little stuffs, covered with pretty cloths, also our windows. Houses were not insulated. Newspapers and cardboard were used to paste on walls. We had no choice but to

accept the condition of our homes. When our stove was on by seven AM, we welcomed the heat and sat around the stove, waiting for the water to boil for tea or whatever we had. Then we were ready to go out in the wind and snow and ice in the winter. We didn't mind any weather conditions because we lived with it every year.

There was money in clam digging. We each had our little sacks. Our age group stayed together to gather in the cold and windy night. If the tide was low at night, we had our kerosene lamps to show us what we can't see at night. The men diggers took our sacks to buyers in the skiff anchored out, waiting. We each got our receipts. Our hands were wet and cold so we warmed them up inside our house. We were healthier and happier. On *Tsa'kis* [Fort Rupert] beach we had to walk quite a ways down to get where our clams are. And to think I used to jump from one rack to another when we played around.

We played outside a lot in winter. We played on ice, we broke icicles, we filled clean dishes with clean snow, some sugar and cream or milk. There was never a dull moment. Evenings we got together to play games and have a tea party. We appreciated life a lot and got a lot of happiness out of it - games [such as] one would hide a safety pin while we hid our faces. Then we'd go looking for it. Christmas season we'd have parties. I loved the smell of apples and oranges and candies. We gave presents of a hat or whatever we had. There was no store – we didn't see a lot of money. Most of our Dad's money went to potlatch and feasting.

Our Mother didn't welcome drinking in our home. Our Dad celebrated with his friends. Our grandparents were quiet. We were spared from seeing wild parties that we didn't miss. Fort Rupert was clean as if we had a caretaker. Only God knows how many cows roamed around here. They went around for miles. They were huge. When my Mother got my attention to behave, she would say a cow was up in the attic. Cows came near our houses at night to graze.

Spring and summer we played baseball, hide and seek – anything we could find to do. Westerlies always started to blow at noon and blew on diapers and sheets on the line. We would sit behind the *Gukwdzi*, the Big House, from the wind, enjoying the sun. The month of May was time to move on to harvest halibut, June to move on to the canneries for sockeye season. In July to fall, fishing—to Bones Bay, Glendale, Alert Bay. It kept women busy. While men fished different kinds of salmon in November and December, we went drying and smoking salmon in December and home in time for Christmas. When my sister and I were very small, I remember Shushartie Cannery and Koprino-Stump Cannery at Smith Inlet. We had many experiences because our father was a smart man. I believe it's due to his mother's talking to her three sons. When their father died, she continued on. We cannot learn without a teacher. God spans those He loves. Do we love our children enough to correct them?

In all your ways, acknowledge your father. He will direct your path as it is written for us. Our family learned from teaching at home. Another reason I'm thankful is that the words we heard were never mixed with pride. Our mother

taught us never to make fun of the unfortunate and that we reap what we sow. We never saw our mother hating anyone.

There were times I stayed with *Wa'tso'oka*, my grandma when my parents went somewhere. There was no pension in those days. Once a month they got what was called 'relief' – six dollars each. Bags and bags of groceries were delivered. What I remember is that bread was only ten cents each. A yard of cloth was only ten cents. Just imagine – all the rest was as cheap. That was their happiness of support. They always remembered to invite about three bachelors for a good meal. I remember peeled and cooked potatoes steaming always with the rest of the food. In better summer days, my step-grandpa would take me along to Hardy to Cadwallader's store to shop. I went to their kitchen to help with the dishes. Pioneers.

There were missionaries who always came to Alert Bay. We were sent to the holiday schools— to Thetis Island or other places. Some were closer to home. We went to their camps for ten days and had to pay twenty dollars but Mum wasn't able to afford it for me and [my brother]. I went to see them and asked if I could go and work, and they let me come. I had to do extra Sunday School stuff at the camp so I lost some play time while I was there.

I wanted to be there. It was a lot of fun. And then Mum was able to afford for [my brother] and I to go because [another brother] was older. But Mum sacrificed a lot for us to go, money she didn't really have. But it was important for her that we got this type of stuff – exposure to Christianity. And they were really good because they didn't drum it into you. It was a part of a fun time. They had

horses, a model car from 1919. They'd teach us how to start it and go riding around.

I left here and I went fishing. We traveled far to fish and I liked that – Queen Charlotte Island, around Vancouver Island. We went to places that people from home weren't going to. I was fifteen, I think.

Alert Bay was too confining. It was the same old thing. I was fishing, making money. I started when I was twelve with my uncle but he didn't make enough money for me. I didn't like that. We worked so hard but we weren't getting ahead. I figured if a person worked that hard, they should get a promotion. It was family. It didn't happen though. I quit. No more. My two cousins were getting favourable spots on his boats. At least this is how I thought at the time. And this Yugoslav came by and I got hired by him.

I had my own place then with another guy in town. We were sharing a duplex. When I went with the Yugoslav, right away I got a good position. Just from what I told him. He took my word for it. I wanted to pay him back for giving me a job. And I worked for him for six years. Following that, I told him I think I'll move on. But he taught me so much, like how to fix a seine net. Everything I did, he taught me how to do it. He had a son, a younger son but he taught me everything about fishing. But he was a lousy fisherman – he didn't make big money. I didn't tell him where to fish. One year we went to Johnstone Strait and I said to him, "I think I know how to catch this fish," and he said, "Why didn't you tell me this last year?" I don't know why.

When the first tide comes in, it pushes against Vancouver Island and when it goes out, it pushes out from the shore. That's when you set. That makes a whole lot of sense, when it's pushing away from the shore. So he said, "Where do you want me to set then?" I said, "I think the time's going to be an hour and a half and there's a line of boats and each is going to take a half an hour so you get into the line up after the third boat."

The second year I fished, we had a cook, a Yugoslav cook. When we were in Prince Rupert, he lost a bottle of whiskey and pants and watch and money, and he accused me of stealing them. I already had my own timepiece. We were down in our quarters down in the foc'sle and he was telling me, "I think you stole everything. I want you off this boat." I saw my job going out the window. So I went to the skipper and said that the cook had accused me of stealing this and this. And I told the skipper, "You give me a hundred dollars every time we come to shore. I drink like a fish but I buy my own booze." The cook came up and said (and the cook was from his home town in Yugoslavia), "If you don't fire the Indian, I'm leaving." And the skipper said, "I think you'd better pack because I don't think he stole it." That was something. I woke up. He trusted me. I felt like a million dollars. I felt sorry for the old guy but it was my job and I wasn't going to lose it. . . That was my best experience.

[My second husband] trained in Bible College. He was our director. He was always directing the singing. I play piano. The Seventh Day Adventists wanted me to play the piano. We traveled a thousand miles by road and a thousand by air in the States. They were trying to get us. They came to the house

two or three times, to get us to go. So we finally decided to go. The Seventh Day Adventists are different from the way my church was. I met a lot of people, a lot of friends. I went across the desert to New Mexico and Mexico City the time before that. [The head of the Seventh Day Adventists] wanted to take us around the world. I don't know what he saw in us.

There is something special and unique about Mum and how she is. Where she grew up, where she came from and what she did all those years. I don't think she appreciated the church being there.

I can trace it to my parents, the way they brought us up, and my grandparents on both sides. They really trained us and talked to us. We never went to other villages. We can understand now—we spoke Kwa'kwala. Kingcome and Oweekono, we understand each other but it's not exactly the same. We understand them but it's a different dialect. The people from the South were different because they lived near cities all their lives. They were loud when they were singing. The sound of the Quatsinos' voices is different too. They are not the same as the Kwagiulth. . .

Yes we also had our own gifts and qualities in spite of the cold weather as we are having now. It all reminds me of our past and treasured memory. Education and Christianity dimmed a lot of my interest in our culture.

Commentary

Educational Leader, Life-long Learner

Sarah represents the life-long learner and teacher, in both her worlds. Fully fluent in both Kwa'kwala and English, she has shared her extensive knowledge both formally and informally far beyond the reach of her own large family. Her active presence in her community is very important considering that, as Turner et al. (submitted) have determined, “cultural and linguistic diversity are being lost at an even faster rate than biological diversity.”

As pointed out by Sarah, her interest in the world beyond the reserve was stimulated by an English woman whom she calls her missionary mother. After an early childhood full of games, discipline and joy, four years of residential school stimulated her desire to learn about books and the piano so much that, seventy years later, she still rues the day she was forced to leave. Sarah continues to look constantly for opportunities to learn and to teach.

As an Elder in her community, Sarah's traditional status as a repository of the tribe's genealogy, and of the Kwa'kwala language attests to her “real and symbolic power” within her society, as described by Reid (2002). Sarah's understanding of correct tribal protocols and behaviours, disseminated by her at community gatherings, are based on cultural as well as spiritual and religious foundations. Her extensive knowledge and the ability to articulate it clearly bestows upon her an authority already enhanced by her great age and her traditional role of Elder. Accordingly, she is often called upon to clarify cultural,

political, historical and social matters as well as offering cross-cultural prayers at meetings and ceremonies.

It is in this context of status and attributed power that I understand Sarah to be an educational leader in her community. She is pleased that she is called upon to perform many symbolic and useful functions both in her village and in society-at-large (within schools and with government officials at all levels, for example), but she considers these tasks part of her function and her due as a valued Elder of the tribe.

Sarah's formal education in English and her devotion to her Christian faith have been inextricably linked since her childhood. She says that this has "dimmed her interest in her culture" over the years but, from my observations, she is a regular presence at weekly Elders' gatherings, workshops and conferences, Potlatches and other tribal ceremonies, and political gatherings of the tribe.

Aboriginal Attitudes towards Formal Education

Sarah's concerns about the education of children is consistent with the beliefs and efforts of each person in this study. There is an understanding that Indigenous knowledge must be transmitted to children and youth for the culture to survive, but also, an acknowledgement that formal schooling is necessary for "happiness" in a modern world.

All of the women have demonstrated the qualities of life-long learners, from the acquisition of university and college degrees and credits to constant self development on-the-job. They are role models for the youth of their respective communities. Several of them are directly involved as teaching assistants and

support workers in area school systems. As one of the women said, [Education] will give our children “a shot at happiness.” How education is delivered in the future will be a factor in the promise it holds for First Nations parents for their children.

Schissel and Wotherspoon (2003) observe that “Aboriginal people’s expectations are high that education carries with it the means to improve their life prospects” even while acknowledging that changes to the delivery of schooling must be made (p. vii). BC Ministry of Education statistics (2004/2005) confirm low Aboriginal secondary school graduation rates compared with non-Aboriginal students in the province although these rates have begun to improve in the past few years. There has been a number of recent initiatives—local education agreements between school boards and Aboriginal groups in BC, and collaborative initiatives at school and community levels—that appear realistic and ethically sound, and which are beginning to make a difference.

It is my belief that Aboriginal education has to be enhanced in the context of social and economic opportunity, as well as in that of cultural justice and historical truths; intellectual capacity must be developed on reserves so that cultural self-determination can be achieved. Schissel and Wotherspoon (2003) contend that “it is not possible to develop an adequate understanding of Aboriginal education and future prospects without sensitivity to this broader framework that examines the points where people’s lives, identities, options, and choices intersect with social, economic, political, and historical forces” (p. 29). They acknowledge culture and “deeply rooted structural inequalities” as critical

contextual elements in the efforts to understand current Aboriginal educational and social experiences (p. 19). The ramifications of the residential school experience of the recent past vividly reveal the damage inflicted on individuals and communities when schooling disregards, intentionally or otherwise, culture, language and history.

Most of the women in the study were successful in gaining their education despite the unfamiliar, often unfeeling system, lack of resources and for some, estrangement from their families. Elder Sarah and the other six women are powerful role models and educational leaders by their example and their practice within their communities. With new insight, understanding and sensitivity applied to a reframing of formal and informal education for Aboriginal youth, the high expectations of Aboriginal parents and of Elders such as Sarah be met.

Sarah's greatest concern at this time of her life is that the village's children be properly cared for by their parents and that they be well educated in Band schools and public schools, learning the language and the rituals of the tribe, and of the larger world. She worries that some children are being left to raise themselves while parents "party". In the recent past, she has been actively involved in this regard, spending time at the local public elementary school, teaching interested children rudiments of the language and the culture. She now spends time in classes on reserve for adults who have indicated a wish to do the same.

Sarah's Faith

Sarah attributes her Christian faith to a white missionary woman whom she learned to call 'Mother'. Obviously well taught, Sarah has extraordinary recall of the Bible and often quotes appropriate readings from memory in every day conversation. Despite her positive childhood associations with white teachers and missionaries, she says that it is only in the past few years that she has begun to feel comfortable talking with white people because she believed white people to be very intelligent and she thought she was not smart because she hadn't received a complete education in the residential school. Sarah's appreciation for formal "white" education is obvious, a preference that I have noted in other First Nations families. This is likely connected to their desire to see their children cross the bridge comfortably between their two worlds.

Sarah's Christian devoutness is nested within her family's history as chiefs and tribal leaders. Her Father and his brothers were carvers, fishers and trappers of renown and wealth, and her Mother, the high-born daughter of a Chief. She remembers when, as a young child, she visited members of her extended family still living in the Big House although her immediate family had their own home. She knows the history of all the families living on her reserve and other North Island villages, the meaning of the totem poles in her village and the importance of traditional protocols. She wears her regalia at ceremonies in the Big House and sings the old songs and translated hymns in her native Kwa'kwala. Often called upon to say a prayer at cultural and community events, she has translated the Lord's prayer and some well known hymns into Kwa'kwala so all may learn to

speak and sing in their traditional language. Sarah appears to have no difficulty reconciling her Christian faith with her spiritual and cultural beliefs, although she says that her comfort with the latter is recent. She participates fully and wholeheartedly in both and appears to move easily between tribal celebrations and gospel meetings. While Tuhiwai Smith (2002) equates Christianity with colonialism (p. 171), it is not difficult to imagine inherently spiritual Indigenous peoples adding beliefs to their pantheon quite readily and without feeling any loss. Aboriginal scholar Couture (1991a), offers his opinion on Elder conversion:

I suspect that the traditional Elders' capacity to accommodate change upon contact with Western Christianity forms, readily led them to become Christian but in a way that allowed not only transformation of perception, but sustained a full continuity with the faith of the people. My hypothesis is that conversion was a simple instance of new growing out of old, forming a new syncretism congruent with their "faith", faith as experiential knowing, an integrating experience. Theirs is a faith founded in what they experience. It is also perforce a "knowing" which is ongoing, an open-ended task (p. 210).

Whatever the processes or rationale, Sarah's is a staunch faith.

Sarah's village, Tsa'kis, was the site of the first Hudson's Bay trading post and fort, called Fort Rupert, established on North Vancouver Island in 1832. Coal had been discovered nearby and opportunities were drawing Scottish miners and other settlers to the area. Remnants of the fort can still be seen at Tsa'kis. With establishment of Hudson's Bay posts in various parts of the land that became

Canada, Christian priests and missionaries were wont to follow. Linguist José Mailhot (1997) notes, in his highly descriptive historical study of the Lake Melville Innu in Labrador, that “the conversion of the Québec-Labrador Innu to Christianity was the result of concerted action on the part of missionaries and fur traders” (p. 14). Mailhot describes the arrival of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate who lived among the Innu and learned their language:

They definitely established themselves at Betsiamites (18862) where a reserve had just been created. From this residence they made their regular summer trips to the trading posts that the Hudson’s Bay Company then owned from the Saguenay and Lake St. John area all the way to the Strait of Belle Isle. Every post had its chapel (pp. 16-17).

With the advent of trading posts and missions, European customs such as wedding, baptism and funeral rites began to supplant or co-exist with traditional ceremonies as Aboriginal people were converted to Christianity. Socially, economically, and culturally, the old ways began to change.

Most of the BC residential schools established by the federal government in the early twentieth century were run by missionaries from the British Isles. Given the well-documented damage perpetrated by residential school policies, Sarah’s appreciation of her four years at St Michael’s is worthy of note. Despite the desolation she often felt while there, she believed it was important to become literate in the tongue of the settlers. She also credited her time at St Michael’s with teaching her the housekeeping skills and responsibilities that allowed her to find work and to raise her own family well. According to Sarah, the English

missionaries who staffed St. Michael's school in the early thirties treated their pupils kindly even while they ensured that no one escaped the confines of the school. Being strapped for going outside the fence was considered good discipline in those times, and Sarah believes that the school was the best place for her to be in her early adolescent years. Her conversion to Christianity changed her life and instilled in her a faith that has only grown stronger with the years. Times were hard and white people sometimes hurtful but Sarah speaks metaphorically about the tempering of steel—that she was made stronger by her experiences. I am reminded of Lather's (1986) concerns about the effects of "false consciousness" when I hear Sarah speak of her residential school experiences and of the "colonizing" she was subjected to but I understand that her faith is inextricably linked with her formal education, and about both, she is clear and unwavering.

Language

Sarah knows intuitively what Indigenous scholars have declared; to retain the culture, one must save the language (Reid, 2004; Tuhiwai Smith, 2002; Battiste and Youngblood Henderson, (2000); Cardinal, 1977). Elgersma (2001), in a report on Aboriginal Women for Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, quotes the Assembly of First Nations as saying that "our languages are the essence of who we are as First Nations. It passes on our culture, traditions, history, legends, and spirituality from one generation to another" (p. 2-1). Sarah is one of the few members of her tribe left who is fluently bilingual; most of those with whom she is able to converse in Kwa'kwala are Elders. While there are some youth and adults who are attempting to learn or to retrieve their language, the situation

appears dire on the North Island. Individuals and consortia are creating curriculum and offering programs but most young children are not learning the language at home, and their schooling, both in Band and public schools, is primarily in English. Repeated attempts to offer a language program in the local secondary school timetable confirmed for me that, in the late 1990s, few adolescents were interested. According to the Assembly of First Nations (2001), the shrinking population of speakers of Aboriginal languages has significant implications that go beyond day-to-day communications.

Among Aboriginal females registered under the Indian Act, Elgersma (2001) reports that women over 65 years of age number 9,520 out of a total of 252,825, four percent of the total population. Of this age group, five percent speak English and their Aboriginal language, 28.5% speak English only and 59.4% speak only their native tongue. In the 15 to 19 age group, 2.8% speak both languages, 71.1% speak English only and 23.7% speak only their mother tongue. Sarah's deep concern is warranted, as confirmed by data collected in Canada's 1996 Census.

On the North Island, the Chiefs and Elders often conduct traditional Big House ceremonies in their language, replete with full regalia. I have been present at Potlatches when Chiefs spoke English only at meal breaks. The efforts of the Kwakwaka'wakw people to maintain the culture and identity through ritual, song, dance, dress and protocol are strenuous. Given that daily lives of the majority of the people are lived in the language of the colonizers, it may not be enough. And if the language dies with the fluent Elders, will the culture and its traditions

survive? Sarah's son believes that traditional activities bereft of language will result in a static culture. And, as he says, living cultures must evolve (personal conversation, June, 2003)

Sarah has witnessed great changes since her birth. She met anthropologist Franz Boas and his translator George Hunt in the 1920s and teaches researchers in the twenty-first century. She lived much of her life without electricity and has used the internet. She raised nine children to be intelligent, contributing members of their communities. She has moved constantly across the bridge of time and space, belief and place throughout her long and creative life and continues to do so.

CHAPTER FIVE

KAREN, GAIL and MAGGIE TELL THEIR STORIES

Introduction to Karen

Karen's first-person narrative is by a middle-aged professional woman whose experience of residential schooling was very difficult for her and her family. Despite the trauma of the experience and the family relationships that accrued, she pursued further education and responsible careers, and has created a loving and supportive home for her own family.

Karen is a "status Indian" who was born on the Central Coast, and educated at a residential school before moving with her family to Vancouver Island North. She spent ten years as a young adult in Vancouver before settling back on the North Island. Karen is a much respected, hard-working financial manager for a North Island Band, a position she has held for the past eleven years. Her reputation as a leader and administrator is such that Karen takes on the acting role when the Band Manager is away. Before assuming her current position, she worked for another Band in various capacities, including that of Band Manager. The proud mother of a son who has recently completed his Master's degree, she is also a grandmother highly involved with her grandchild.

Karen, Band Councillor with her own Band wishes to improve the economic welfare and future of her people. She is concerned about the cutbacks to Band health programs that the federal government is making without consultation. These are affecting Band members in small but hurtful ways. For example, Band members must now pay to have their eyes checked, a service that has been

provided free until recently. Other health services require payment up-front with reimbursements later. This prevents some members from accessing services that they require. The Chiefs are attempting to deal with these issues but meanwhile, people are suffering and Karen fears that more cuts are coming. She is also concerned about other issues. Treaty negotiations will one day be completed and she has questions about whether Bands will be able to pay for municipal and other services. Strategic planning in her Band is helping to address some of these and other questions. Karen talks of a life full of family, professional and political responsibilities.

First Person Portrait of a Resilient Family Woman

I was deprived growing up and I was determined that my son would not be deprived. So he had everything; he was spoiled. There was a turn around in both our lives when I got my life straight and quit drinking. For a year, I was really down and, looking back, I saw that when I was down, he was down. When I made amends for my actions, I saw that he was up. Parents make such a difference to their children's success. My son wanted to be a success, in school and as a person. But from the time he was five until he was seventeen, he was bullied by other kids, at school and on the 'rez'. These kids were jealous of what he had and of his success. He moved away from Port Hardy at seventeen to attend his first year of college in Duncan. Recently, some of the kids have apologized for the way they treated him. Everything stems from the parents. My son was thinking ahead and it was worth it to him to leave to achieve his goals. He has finished his Master's degree now.

My Dad went to St. Mike's (St. Michael's Residential School). He spent eight years at St. Mike's but he graduated. He went to school for three hours a day and had to work four hours a day on the school's farm, looking after the cows and chickens, gathering eggs and working in the farm's garden. I went to St. Mike's too, for seven years. I learned independence, cleanliness, punctuality, organizational skills and how to use them. At St. Mike's, it was "do it or else." My son didn't go to residential school but he suffered the effects of St. Mike's through me. If I see that something has been moved in my house—if a plant has been moved—I have to put it back where it belongs. I can't stand it not being where I put it. I don't want anyone touching my stuff and it's hard for me to change, to be more flexible because of the way I was trained at St. Mike's. And cleanliness—everything had to be spotless. I am just starting to be able to be more relaxed about having everything in its place.

We lived in Rivers Inlet and my parents were forced by the Indian agent to send me to the residential school by the Indian agent. That would have been in 1960 because I left St. Mike's in 1967. The Indian agent said we had to go so we were sent by steamboat. He said it was the law; all children had to go to school and there was no school in Rivers Inlet. We only went home at Christmas if our parents could afford to pay for our travel. We were home for two months in the summer.

My sister and I went to St. Mike's in Alert Bay but they separated us. We had different dorms and could not be together. We would see each other during meals but at separate tables. We went out to the playground at different times so

we hardly ever got to be together. The system changed in later years where we could play together. I think they were just being mean. I remember that we were each given a number, just like they do to people in prison, and that number was on everything—clothes, socks, towels, But I can't remember what that number was, even to this day. I felt like a prisoner—I had to be in the residential school for ten months every year from the time I was six.

When I left school at thirteen or fourteen, my Dad had moved the family from Rivers Inlet to Port Hardy, to the Cadwallader lands in the Fort Rupert reserve, to a dingy little house. I remember that I was driven to this house and I was told, "This is where you get off." I did not recognize the person who was hanging out the clothes when I arrived. It was my Mother.

The house was small, two bedrooms and a living room and another small room and there were thirteen of us who lived there—ten of us children, my Mum and Dad and my Granny. I had to sleep in a bed with two other sisters. And we had such a beautiful Big House in Rivers Inlet with three bedrooms and a laundry room and a playroom. Dad didn't want any more of his children having to go to residential school so he moved to Port Hardy so that the last four could go to school there. I had a sister who went to Port Alberni Residential School and a brother who was next leaving the residential school and I went to Vancouver. Dad wanted to reunite the family, for us all to be together. I felt it was the worst move he could have made.

I could not develop a relationship with my Mother when I got out because there were too many of us and she did not have time. Dad was always away

fishing, to make money to support the family. I became like a parent to my younger siblings and the only skills I had were those I learned at St. Mike's which were to keep everything clean and tidy. I was so used to structure. It was hard to go from a place where everyone had to sit still at the table while someone dished up food for you, to thirteen people needing to eat. I did make the change of putting food on the table buffet style and letting everyone dish up for themselves.

I didn't have any skills and I didn't know about boys; we had no guidance counselling at St. Mike's. I was scared because now I could walk anywhere; I was not confined like I had been for so long. I found out that there was a whole world out there. Except for a trip to Steveston in my Dad's boat, I had only known about Rivers Inlet and St. Mike's. At school, I met up with prejudice and got involved with alcohol and drugs—marijuana—and sex. At home, I was busy being a mother to my siblings.

I can't think of anything useful I learned at St. Mike's except independence. I can't remember learning anything. Even at thirteen, I thought I was dumb and no one at the school was caring or told me I could learn. I failed grade three because I was told I was not fast enough. What I did was fall into the system—I did what I was told, when I was told for survival. I left school with really low self esteem.

The only thing I remember was waiting to be whacked. We sat in rows being quiet, wondering when we were going to be hit. I didn't suffer sexual abuse and wasn't really beaten badly like some people at school, so when they talk about court cases, I don't really fit any of their categories. But I think that

everyone who was at residential school should have a settlement because we all suffered mental abuse. But I survived. I still have some social dysfunction but I'm working on it.

I left home at seventeen. I was tired of being responsible for the kids and I had been drawn into 'rez' life. I started sneaking out of the house and learned to be rotten and disobedient. And as I went down, school went down and my grades went down. There was no room for me to grow—I was stuck in the partying life.

I used to have dreams of getting a Dogwood Diploma [BC grade 12 graduation]. When I was twenty-one, I lived in Vancouver and went to an all-Native program at King Edward High School where I received my grade 12. I never wanted to come back to the North Island when I quit alcohol. I had no friends except family. It's still like that. I'm happy now, being at home, in peace and quiet. I visit with family on the phone, often for two hours at a time.

And now I'm involved in the politics, being on Council. Some people are bringing up my past. I really didn't want it to resurface but I have nothing to hide. People are saying that I shouldn't be on Council because I will steal. I had been wrongfully dismissed as Band Manager and no one would meet with me or have a legal discovery which I wanted. Finally my lawyer told me he had to close the case because nobody would talk. And now people in Fort Rupert are bringing that back up. I was a hard person back then and I had Council behind me for eight years. Then I was fired and left my partner and I became a hidden person. I'd rather not be involved in Band politics so why I allowed myself to be talked into running for Council this time, I don't know. My son told me that they needed me

on Council and I would make a difference. I love working for the G-N Band. I'm so happy working there. I've worked there since leaving Fort Rupert. I started in July 1994 as a corporate secretary and then in Housing. Then the acting Band Manager at the time trained me for the financial position.

I acquired the skills I have now on the job, through experience. In 1983, when I left my partner and moved back to Port Hardy with my son, the Kwakiutl Band gave me an interview for a bookkeeper's position and I got the job. I would work in the morning and go to the college in the afternoon to learn book keeping. I just jumped in. I had some office skills because I had been a receptionist in Vancouver and also wrote a lot of letters as a corporate secretary. My partner didn't want me to be out in public though—he was very jealous. He wanted me to be a stay-at-home Mum. So I left. I had a fear of moving back to Port Hardy but I did and supported the two of us on \$500 every two weeks. I don't know how.

And I've learned everything else also on the job. I went to the college for a year. I really wanted a diploma that showed how much I knew. I took Office Management and found it so easy. I had pretty much taught myself all the things I needed to know. And when I worked as a Band Manager, a lot of people helped me learn what I needed to know. A man from a local construction company taught me a lot about housing construction. Things at the Band office happened in cycles and once I got to know what the cycles were, it was easier to do the job. It is a very complex job.

I think politicians think with their heads. I think with my head then my heart. I'm a people person and I don't like it when Council wants to just fire

someone without looking for other ways to solve a problem. I know the right thing to do. I do regret it that I listened to people who told me to run for Council but I'm on Council now so I will do the best I can for the people. But I have made a difference. I know that people say, "Go to Karen. She'll get things done." I'm not a quitter but I want to be part of a team. I'm not feeling good about some things that are happening—some ethical problems.

So people say that I have the experience and knowledge, even though I'm the greenest on Council. The Chief was going away for two weeks starting in February and the Council voted unanimously to have me as Acting Chief, even though many of them have been on Council for many terms and I'm in my first term.

Many men who used to be involved in the fisheries and forestry are now retraining and re-educating themselves for alternate careers at the local colleges. The men on Council have been very supportive of me. They are always complimenting me. Maybe because I mostly listen and then try to analyze and summarize what's been said. Then I give a summary of what I have heard.

I find it hard to accept compliments. Any compliments to do with me I find hard to accept, maybe because I have had to survive on my own, and when someone gives me something, I expect that they are going to want something back. So I am always suspicious and I never take a compliment as meaningful. I have a hard time accepting compliments. I don't feel I deserve them and I don't expect them. I want to be the same, to be equal.

Commentary

The Impact of the Federal Government Residential School Mandate

We learn from Karen how government policies regarding the educating of Aboriginal children affected every aspect of the lives of the People. As a tool of colonization, it was without peer, even in those schools where the sexual abuse of children was not practised. Children were taught the skills they would need to become labourers in white settlers' houses, fields, orchards and canneries as well as literacy and numeracy skills in English. Boys tended the schools' farms half a day, and the girls were taught home economics by learning to clean the school, and preparing meals for their peers. The children's unpaid labour maintained the residential facility. Use of traditional languages was punished and siblings were separated, in classrooms, dormitories and on playing fields, in order to eliminate family, language, culture and spirituality. Families were responsible for claiming their children at holiday times and returning them afterwards. Those families who could not afford to do so would not see their children for years. (Personal conversation, June, 2003). These were the policies and practices of assimilation, for the purposes of "civilizing" the Indians and eliminating the "Indian problem".

Karen exemplifies of the power of an individual to overcome devastating loss and unremitting hardship as a child and youth. She teaches us why it is that her Nation is not going away (Berger, 1999)—and why years of assimilation policies have been unsuccessful (Harris, 2002).

Karen's residential school experiences had a profound impact on her life as evidenced by her alienation from her mother, her difficult adolescence and the

family's move from their home village. However, unlike some First Nations women who have been unable to provide a stable home for their children because of dislocation, Karen was determined to be the best parent possible to her son. Her love and strong support of his goals provided him with the sturdy foundation upon which to gain graduate-level post secondary education and his own stable family and employment circumstances. Her son has now become a role model for his peers even though he was not supported by them as a youth.

Karen found the strength to complete grade twelve in a public school as a young woman and then committed herself to courses and on-the-job learning throughout her adult life. Hers is a story shared by many First Nations women of her age, and is, in itself, an inspiration to those youth who struggle to overcome an addiction-filled childhood to reach their own goals and dreams

It is tempting to hypothesize how Karen managed to prevail over her difficult childhood and adolescence, and what drives her now to contribute substantially to her community while managing a highly responsible career. Karen talks about the importance of structure in her life; her disciplined life style may have helped her to overcome the past—for her son and for herself. Ironically, however, her need for structure may be a direct result of her residential school education where she “learned organizational skills and how to use them”—the only thing she learned from the experience other than how to live independently and make her own decisions.

Despite a rich family life as an adult and a sense of pride in her work accomplishments, Karen acknowledges that “social” problems remain with her, a

legacy, she believes, of her time at St. Michael's. She left school with low self esteem having been treated as though she was not very bright and suffering other indignities. While she is a completely self reliant professional woman, she is still suspicious of the motives of others and prefers to spend her time alone when she can't be with family. She is surprised that her son was able to talk her into accepting a political role with her Band. Perhaps she is continuing to learn, about herself and about how she can contribute to the revitalization of her community.

Gail's Story

Introduction to Gail

Gail is a highly professional young woman in her early thirties who is married with two children. She has always lived on the North Island. Early in her career, she worked for a North Island public school district as a First Nations Home-School Coordinator at the secondary school level; she now holds two positions with her Band, Education Coordinator and Forestry Coordinator, the former a job for which she was recruited. In the first position, she assists students to access resources and support to attend post-secondary institutions; in the summers, she helps to support and create employment for Band members who want to work with forestry companies in the traditional territories, shake blocking and tree planting. Two thirds of the Band members are engaged in forestry jobs. Gail is an independent and capable person who works well with colleagues and with those she is assisting.

Gail's Childhood

Gail's comfortable and stable life with family and friends belies the challenging childhood that she experienced. She defines her early family life as dysfunctional. Her Mother was one of the Nakwaxda'xw people forcibly moved from their traditional village on the Central Coast by the federal government in the late 1960s. Her Mother doesn't talk about this time. She met Gail's Dad shortly after being moved to the North Island, a man who was considerably older than she was. With an alcoholic Mother and a Dad who was not much involved with the family, Gail found that she spent a great deal of her childhood acting as mother to a sister much younger than herself. Because her Dad was "a big junk collector", the house was very disorganized and messy. Community Homemakers used to come in to try and teach young Gail how to clean and tidy up the house. Later, she and her sister were apprehended by the Ministry of Social Services and placed in group homes because the household was living the way it was.

When she was fourteen, Gail met her son's Dad and thought she was in love. She wanted to move out then because her Dad didn't like the fact that she was involved with a boyfriend. She got pregnant and had her son at fifteen. She had been in the public school system throughout elementary and secondary school and she wanted to go back to finish her secondary education after the birth of her child. "My son's Dad didn't want me to go back to school, nor did his Mother, so I didn't have very much support from them". By this time, she was a ward of the court and in a group home. Before her baby was born, the

Ministry people were looking for a foster home that would accept Gail, her sister and her baby but they couldn't find one. It was when Gail was in hospital shortly after the birth that she accepted a placement in the home of a couple with their own ten month old child. This turned out to be an important decision in Gail's life: "[The lady] was wonderful; she helped me quite a bit and my daughter is named after her. She was very supportive. I could go back to school, and she even watched me do my homework."

Gail reflects on her return to school at a time when young mothers did not typically chose to do so. "It didn't seem tough. I was tired when I was up at night when he was teething or something, but I was always there, and having fun when I was going to school and being with my friends". Gail did graduate but acknowledges that it "kind of hurt a bit" that her son's Dad didn't bring him to her graduation—he didn't come at all. She believes that he was still "miffed" that she had gone back to school. Throughout her school year, he did not take care of the baby while she was at school. He did end up going back to school eventually and graduated himself.

What helped Gail to continue her education despite her partner's lack of support was "my son—I didn't want him to think of me as a failure". She also knew that if she didn't go back right away, she might not go back at all. "Graduating with my peers was really important to me too." Having the strong support of her foster family was important as well. At a young age, Gail was also gaining a sense of her own independence. Returning to school was "one of the first times I ever stood up to [the baby's] Dad."

Another barrier she encountered during this time was the racism she and her sister experienced, from both of the worlds she lived in.

There's still a bit of racism. My sister and I both especially, because you're white and Native. I'll go into my community sometimes and they'll go, "oh you go, white girl" and then, when I'm with the white girls, you know, it can be a bit difficult that way too.

Adulthood

In her work as Home-School Coordinator with public high school students, Gail did not talk very often about her own experience as a young mother except with girls in the same position as she found herself. "It was a kind of an embarrassment for me just because I was so young." She worries about the teenaged girls:

Some are having more babies at a young age, having one after the other and they're back at school . . . and unless they're getting support from home, they're just not trying hard enough. I don't mean to be judgmental like that but I think a lot of it is desire and I just don't know how to instill that [motivation] in them.

Gail thinks that refusing to give the young girls social assistance unless they are in school might help them to make it. "They'll think, 'They're going to cut me off if I don't go to school.' But if they can just get there, just get to school and get a bit of education, it will boost their self esteem . . . If they go back to school, they can do something with their lives." Gail tries to understand some of the reasons why these girls are having babies at a young age: "Somebody to

love. The older ones are looking after younger siblings and thinking, ‘Why not have a baby of my own? Might as well if I’m going to be looking after babies anyway.’ But I’m not sure [if that’s the reason].”

She believes that both the parents and the school each have responsibility for a child’s education—the parents, to get their children up and get them to school, and the school’s, to try and keep them there. You always hear parents saying:

They don’t phone me, I didn’t know my child was failing this course. And their attendance, I didn’t know that they were missing school.” And there are families, mind you, with no phone. But it’s really hard for parents to go up to the school; they don’t feel comfortable and I don’t know how to encourage that. For the students, once they get to high school, they’re on their own. There’s a few parents that know what their child is taking and know what their attendance is like, but once their child gets to high school, they don’t follow through with the child’s education.

Gail admits that she doesn’t know how to get parents to be more interested. “I don’t know if it’s because their education too is not at a grade twelve level. I don’t know if they think about it that way.”

Thinking about what might be better for students and their parents, Gail comments on an on-reserve school, administered by the public high school, that appears to be serving the community well:

I think it's working very well, especially for students who like the fact that they don't have to be there until nine in the morning and the teacher is really great, and parents can go down and have luncheons there. It's usually pretty packed. I don't know if it went to grade twelve, or if we had our own school to grade twelve, if that would help.

Gail's five year old daughter is already receiving a cultural education that Gail did not have. She took part in a traditional naming ceremony in the village, one that many community members and invited guests witnessed. At this time, she received her Indian name. Gail is glad that her daughter is growing up within her cultural heritage: "She probably knows more than I do. My Mum and my Mother-in-law both work with her when they have her. They try to teach her our language and she's very, very proud of that. She learns fast so it's really nice".

Gail feels very strongly about the potential of education to change lives. Her work in the secondary school and now, as her Band's Education Coordinator, demonstrates her commitment to learning and to formal education. At the time of her grade twelve graduation, she had a strong desire to attend post-secondary education but that has not yet happened for her. She has been married for a number of years now; she and her husband have a five year old daughter together as well as her son who is now working in the forestry industry. Still, she wishes she had more education. "I can't believe I've been [in this job] for eight years and haven't learned more. . . I've got to step back and

take a look at my future. I can't believe I'm thirty-four and don't know what I want to do."

Commentary

Social Dislocation of a Different Kind

A young professional in her early thirties, Gail did not spend years in residential school as Karen did. The government had changed their rules by the time Gail was ready for school and, in fact, by the time Karen's younger brothers and sisters were ready to attend. The policy change allowed families to voluntarily enroll their children in public schools instead of having to send them away to the residential schools that were still in operation. This resulted in a different kind of dislocation as a number of families moved from their home villages in Central coast regions such as Rivers Inlet and Kingcome Inlet to towns like Port Hardy so that their children could go to public schools rather than be apprehended by Indian agents. Families stayed together but often in reduced circumstances, and, as Karen relates, away from their family homes and their extended families.

Gail's childhood was difficult because her Mother and her extended family were forcibly relocated to the North Island from their traditional village on the Central coast, ostensibly so that the federal government could better look after the tribe. They were deemed by the government to be too isolated (personal conversation, May, 2003). There were not enough houses to accommodate everyone when the relocation occurred in the 1960s and when some members of the tribe tried to return to their village, they found that it had been burned down

behind them. Given that, more than forty years later, this case is still unresolved between the tribe and the government, the full story remains untold. The individual and family tragedies that occurred because of the government's action can only be speculated upon, but Gail's childhood was traumatic as it was for the many of the children whose parents and grandparents suffered this profound indignity. Gail remarks that her Mother "doesn't talk about this time". Out of my own family experience, I am reminded of soldiers returning from wartime reticent about sharing their shocking stories, resulting in withdrawal from interpersonal communication and abusive behaviour. From a twenty-first century perspective, it is difficult to speak of the federal government's decision regarding the Gwa'sala and the Nakwaxda'xw First Nations without feeling horror and great sadness,

As Karen's son suffered the effects of residential school through her own trauma, so Gail suffered from the dysfunctionality and dislocatedness of her alcoholic parents. Stripped of her home, her culture and connection to her village, Gail's Mother and her distant Dad provided little stability at home. At a very early age, Gail became responsible for her siblings and keeping the house clean and tidy. An early pregnancy added to her difficulties as her baby's Dad would not support her.

Out of this exhausting situation, Gail found the support she needed in a foster home, along with the determination to pursue her education for her son's benefit. She took advantage of the new home stability to go back to school and graduate, a noteworthy achievement for a young woman from such

overwhelmingly difficult circumstances. While she was fortunate to have found advocates, Gail's personal strength at fifteen years of age, and her determination to complete grade twelve was unusual at a time when many young mothers dropped out.

Empowering Self

Like Karen, having a child of her own to care for was the catalyst for Gail; formal education was seen as the means to a better life. Both women appear to have been inspired by their own children to create a better life for themselves than that which they had experienced. Each had the determination and the strength to leave behind a life style that was harmful to them.

Gail's high school diploma and her interest in education led to a paid position in the school system, in the same secondary school from which she had graduated. This successful experience led to her current formal educational leadership job in the Band office in her village where she supports and advises young Band members who wish to attend post-secondary institutions. Given her daily association with youth, it is easy to imagine that she has provided inspiration for many of her Band members.

By their actions and their words, both women believe that education is essential, for themselves, for their children and for all Band members. Despite the difficult circumstances and some continuing legacies of their early experiences, Gail and Karen offer evidence that it is possible to empower oneself. It requires such qualities as they have demonstrated—self-

determination, willingness to work hard and the maintenance of a healthy lifestyle.

Maggie's Story

Introduction to Maggie

Maggie is a highly educated, community health nurse, counsellor and Aboriginal woman who, for the past seven years, has been the First Nations Counsellor at a grade 8-12 secondary school on the North Island. An Elder and grandmother, Maggie brings to all students in the school a broad set of qualifications, skills, talents and experiences, including that of healer and cultural and language facilitator. Her very presence and the role model she provides have been critical variables in the improving graduation rates of the First Nations students at the secondary.

Maggie's Journey

When Maggie was thirteen years old, her beloved mother wanted her to marry a man whose father owned a fishing boat because “then you guys will have a fishing boat.” When Maggie chose not to marry at such an early age, her mother continued to make suggestions about men Maggie might marry. However, she did not want her daughter to marry Scottie because, even though she loved Scottie, she was afraid that he would take Maggie away from her village and from her. And for thirty years he did.

Maggie grew up in Alert Bay, on Cormorant Island off Vancouver Island North. Even though St. Michael's Residential School was only two blocks from her home, the Indian agent sent her away to the residential school in Port Alberni.

Maggie did not graduate from high school, but eventually married her husband and traveled extensively with him for a number of years, as he worked as a millwright--a trade he had learned in his native Scotland--as a miner in Indonesia and later, as a college and university student in Victoria. Scottie's student years came about because, after raising their family, and having her Native status restored, Maggie decided that she wanted to complete the high school education she had left behind many years before; Scottie himself been apprenticed in his mid teens. After graduation with her Dogwood Diploma and by now a grandmother, Maggie applied to Camosun College in Victoria, and there, with much struggle and determination, achieved her registered nursing diploma (RN), while Scottie went to college with her, to study Anthropology and History, adding to his extensive knowledge of the Kwa'kwa-ʼwakw tribes and their languages.

Encouraged to continue her nursing education at university, Maggie and a nursing cohort friend were both accepted at the University of Victoria (UVic). While she completed her Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BScN), her husband continued his studies in Art, History and Anthropology, unafraid to correct his professors when they needed to be informed on issues of Indigenous knowledge. After several years spent nursing at the Victoria Native Friendship Centre, Maggie returned to UVic to obtain her Master's in Counselling from the Department of Educational Psychology. She then applied for the Community Health Nurse position in her home village that had been advertised just as she completed her Master's degree. Despite the Elders' excitement at the prospect of having Maggie come home to minister to their health needs, the Band did not to

hire her. They did, however, hire her as a Health Transfer Coordinator for a contract of one year, only to have her contract changed to four months after a short time. Feeling unwanted and unappreciated, she applied for a secondary school counselling position which came up shortly afterwards and was hired immediately.

Maggie's educational journey to her current professional position has been an unusual one for any woman. The journey did not begin until Maggie was in mid-life, although she clearly had the full support of her husband. It began after family tragedies that might have weakened the resolve of many others. Because she had always wanted to be a nurse, and because she wanted eventually to return to her home village to share with the community her expertise and knowledge, she found a way to overcome the many obstacles she encountered on the way—teaching situations that did not meet her needs, colleagues and faculty who maintained stereotypes about Aboriginal people and family members who were not happy with her choices.

Unanticipated Barriers

Upon achieving so many qualifications relevant to the community nursing position to which she aspired, Maggie found that unanticipated barriers now confronted her. She became aware that the male-oriented governance model that had been imposed on her village by Indian agents long ago had resulted in a general lack of appreciation of women's knowledge, an attitude that Maggie encountered directly in her interviews for the community nursing position. Her educational achievements were questioned. "Why did you take all these courses?"

was one of the questions she had to answer. Work that she had completed on contract with the Band was found to be unacceptable. She felt undermined by some of the women as well, women who seemed to be favoured by the men who made the decisions. Later that summer, at a community ceremony, she felt publicly “put down” by a male relative who questioned her achievements based on her lack of fluency in the Kwak’wala language. Maggie was very hurt by the treatment she received and by the fact that she wouldn’t be permitted to share her knowledge with her community, especially the Elders. Her own health suffered to the point that she could hardly walk--fibromyalgia the doctor said. So when the school counselling position was advertised later that same summer, she applied for it and was hired, leading her to be thankful that “somebody wants me there--smart enough to take all I have to offer . . . I have this knowledge I can share.” She had never thought about being a school counsellor before but she found that she loved working with the students, she loved working with the people at the school, and she loved connecting with the Elders in their villages. “They’re very happy to see me. They accept me. They feel their kids are safe here. [They say], ‘Go see Dee-ya. Go see ‘Dee-ya’”. Maggie’s grandmother had once told her that the name ‘Dee-ya’ means ‘beloved one’.

So now, in her seventh year of counselling, Maggie still finds herself happy to go to work, but does hope, one day, to go back to nursing. Scottie continues to work alongside his wife, spending much time in the school, especially cooking and preparing for the noon hour Open Houses that Maggie holds in her room for all students, staff and community once a month. He also

helps with the daily Breakfast Club that Maggie's program, the school and the Parents Advisory Council have sponsored for all hungry students for six years. During these years, Maggie has found a way to share her knowledge with her home village. She spent two years as Chair of a tribal school board, a role she didn't see as really political but certainly challenging because, in her view, the councillors on the Board were not well educated and didn't really like the opinion of a woman.

Maggie did not set out to be a leader or role model, but she now guesses that she is. She has developed a program for students that reconstructs the counselling theories that she has learned in a way that "we used to have before, as coming to your aunt or your grandmother to confide in." Being an aunt or grandmother means sharing knowledge with the younger people . . . "so it's like [being] a guide", an Elder.

Maggie's Lineage

Maggie is descended both from Kwa'kwala tribes and distantly, from the Tlingit people of what is now Alaska. She was one of the first in the region to apply for and receive her Tlingit status card, which also gives her the right to American citizenship. Other family members have done the same since Maggie led the way.

Her North Island ancestors include her grandmother, Abusa, a powerful woman who, during her life time had eight chiefs' names, and her grandfather, Chief Jonathan Hunt, whose replica of his Big House is now in the British Columbia Museum in Victoria. It was from Granny Abusa that Maggie learned

the most as a young person, for example, “the importance of silence and being comfortable with silence because when the words are spoken, it has deep meaning.” She also learned a great deal from her mother, Edna Hunt from Tsa’kis, also called Fort Rupert. Her mother would say, “pity the person because she/he doesn’t know what they are doing.” Similarly, her mother-in-law, Jessie Sedgemore from Scotland has a similar saying, “They’re more to be pitied than scorned.” This seems so appropriate when dealing with people who have issues. Maggie’s father was Alfred Scow, a *Kwichwasutaneuk*, historically located in Gilford Island/Kingcome. Her lineage comes from the Kwakiutl and confers on Maggie high status within her tribes; practically, it also means that she has many relations in various villages on the North Island. Family relationships and interconnections are well known to the First Nations people of the North Island, and give each person a sense of their place within the many Kwa’kwa-‘wakw tribes and a sense of their relatedness to everyone else. Records of this family, the Jonathan Hunt and Abusa family can be found in the Franz Boas (1921) *Ethnography of the Kwakiutl* text.

Abusa and the Women of the Potlatch

Abusa, whose English name was Alice Dorothy Migamu, came from a powerful family. In 1851, sixteen chiefs of the four individual tribes who comprised those known as the Kwakiutl signed the Douglas Treaty, one of the only formal treaties in BC between the First Nations and the provincial government. Five of the chiefs who signed the treaty were Abusa’s ancestors. She was a very high ranking lady and all of the eight big names that she was

given came from chiefs who had no children. It gave her the right to a lot of dances, poles and coppers, the symbol of wealth. Properties went with names too—berry patches, fishing spots, trap lines. Jonathan Hunt's house came to him as part of his wife's dowry. Whether wealthy or not, it was the women who controlled the Potlatch, the main cultural, economic and political strategy of the Kwa'kwa-'wakw people. Although they did not speak in the Big House, women decided who would; they also determined what dances and songs would be performed and to whom the gifts would be given. A glance from a woman could stop a Potlatch if something wasn't right. They would just look at the chiefs, and the chiefs would stop and correct it. Potlatches didn't happen without the women; they had silent authority. It is not the same today, but in the old days, men and women knew their place.

Maggie's Mum, the eldest daughter of the family, was given a couple of Abusa's names after Abusa's death. Upon her Edna's death, her sister, Maggie's aunt, gave away one of the names to her grand daughter. That hurt Maggie and her sister to whom that name belonged, and who was present at the naming ceremony. "Today, there are a whole lot of people using stuff they don't own. In those days, you couldn't get away with it."

Why the Old Ways Changed

Maggie spoke Kwa'kwala until she was seven years old. She attended Alert Bay Indian Day school, then, in grade nine, was sent to the Port Alberni Residential School. She can't speak the language fluently today, but she can speak some of it and she can understand it. She may be of the last generation to retain a

competency in the Kwa'kwala language. Many young adults speak only English and efforts to teach the language in the region's tribal and public schools is just beginning. The loss of the language has had a profound effect on the old ways—the collective knowledge of an ancient culture.

People who leave their communities for education, travel and other reasons sometimes have a hard time going back to their villages. The villages are led by people who are elected chiefs but not necessarily brought up to take care of people or to serve people as hereditary chiefs used to do. Around 1900, the Department of Indian Affairs (DIA) lumped all the Kwakiutl sub-tribes together and made them have elected chiefs who are now just like mayors and mayors' wives. "They are just figureheads."

Maggie remembers her grandmother, aunts and Mum telling her that, when a woman was skinny, people thought that her family didn't provide for her very well. A nice chubby woman showed that she was well provided for. Now there is a complete shift. Everyone has to be shapely and thin with flawless skin and hair, and women who are chubby are probably eating unhealthy food. One of the reasons for obesity and diabetes in First Nations' communities, Maggie claims, is that the DIA have made some of the people dependent on them, preventing people from eating their traditional, healthy foods.

These traditional foods have become scarce and expensive; clam and cockle beaches have become polluted by the fish farms and run-offs from sewage tanks. The beaches and the waters were our supermarket for the seafood, the fish, shellfish and the abalone.

Generations of poor diet, substandard housing, drug use and limited medical care have all resulted in unhealthy people and unhealthy communities. The poor health extends far beyond the physical symptoms, however. Cultural and spiritual health has been eroded by government policies and practices that remain in place. And some Native people who have internalized the European way of thinking are making the regaining of personal and community health difficult for their relatives.

Maggie's Dreams and Beliefs

As a community health nurse, Maggie's dream was to "take my stethoscope, go check on the Elders, wash their feet and do whatever I could do for them." When Maggie's dream was interrupted by decision makers who did not want her asking too many questions and who put her down, she found the strength to redirect her talents and energies to the youth of the region, where she has made a difference in the lives of many teenagers. She asserts, "I have found where I want to be. I love the kids." A personal and professional journey turned in an unexpected direction and Maggie found unanticipated happiness.

Maggie credits her husband and her strong traditions and beliefs for giving her the strength to overcome the tragedies and disappointments that she has endured, obstacles that she chose not to disclose. She believes that "it's OK to ask, if a door closes, to find a way to go around the obstacle." Her Mum taught her that "you don't have to go to church to pray, that you can pray in a closet if you want to, as long as you believe in God, *Iki Gilamay*, the higher God, the big Chief up there." Maggie has always remembered that and knows that she has

supporters from the spiritual world. She also participates wholeheartedly in tribal ceremonies and memorials, feasts and Potlatches. She knows too, that because of her experiences outside of her community, and because of her education, that she “sees things differently” than those who have remained in the villages. Still, she tries to take what she has learned out in the world, and attempt to “construct it in a way that we used to have before”, to integrate modern theories with old ways, to care for others, to serve and to share knowledge. Maggie, who admits to having a curiosity that has driven her in many directions, and who always looks for the positives, also accepts that, with some paths that life takes, “that’s just the way it is.” Maggie has also learned to take the positives of the two worlds that she encounters every day. “It is easy to find a negative, a positive you might have to dig for, but it is worth the effort.”

Commentary

Restoring the Spirit

Maggie, a highly educated nurse and counsellor, has been directly engaged with youth in an area secondary school. As teacher, role model, Elder and Auntie for the past seven years, she provides comprehensive leadership to youth thirteen years of age to twenty years. She has also been instrumental in the changing attitudes of some staff to the particular needs of First Nations students and their parents and guardians. There has been an increase in the number of First Nations graduates that I attribute to Maggie’s powerful presence in the school.

The fact that Maggie completed all of her formal education in the years after becoming a grandmother provides further proof that, with the necessary

supports and a healthy life style, anything is possible. Maggie's students may not know these details but they know that she is a caring Elder with a very good job.

Her own initial schooling experiences were very different. While she does not speak of her experiences in residential school, Maggie is a survivor. The fact that the authorities sent her away to a distant school even though her family lived in walking distance of St Michael's Residential School speaks of the thoroughness of government efforts to fracture families and transform cultures.

Like Gail, however, culture and tradition continue to play an essential role in Maggie's life in conjunction with her professional careers and despite many years away from her family and home village. In her work with secondary school students, Maggie incorporates "the old ways" into her counselling strategies, including the sharing of food and drink, and the ceremonial drum. She is the Elder sharing her knowledge and wisdom with the youth, constructing counselling as it used to be. Accordingly, she focuses on spiritual health as well as the physical health of her students and the Elders. Maggie also creates the artwork of her Nation with her students, including button vests, headdresses, scarves and blankets. Re-awakening traditions and sharing knowledge are values she holds dear.

Maggie's knowledge of traditional ways has supported her through her own personal tragedies and difficult circumstances. She speaks of the hurtfulness of being shunned by those in her own village on her return and of the general attitudes towards women that stem from the "Department of Indian Affairs-trained" men. The lack of respect for women is illustrative of the colonization of

the men (Fernandez, 2003). Maggie points out other examples of loss of tradition - chiefs were raised to care for and to serve the people and this can be counted on no longer; community members take names and dances that they do not own, something that would never have happened in the past.

As a nurse, Maggie is very concerned about the diet of modern First Nations people which has led to diabetes and other physical health issues. She believes that the Department of Indian Affairs (DIA) is to blame given that they “prevented people from eating their healthy traditional foods”. Because returning to “the old ways” is still being hindered by government policies and because some First Nations people have lost their traditions, Maggie is worried about cultural and spiritual health as well.

Like Sarah, Maggie is gravely concerned about that the loss of language. She thinks that this is another reason that the traditional ways are disappearing. To her mind, “the collective knowledge of an ancient culture” is being lost. Years at the residential school undermined her first tongue so that now, she can understand it but not speak it fluently. This is troubling to her.

With her university degrees and her traditional knowledge, Maggie is uniquely situated as a contemporary First Nations woman and Elder deeply involved and thoroughly knowledgeable in both worlds. We have much to learn from her.

To her colleagues and friends, Maggie is known as a font of warmth and calm in a busy day. Her constancy and demeanour belie her history but most certainly, she has been bolstered by a supportive and knowledgeable husband, her

family, a faith in her cultural heritage and in her “supporters from the spiritual world.”

CHAPTER SIX

NOREEN, JACKI and COLLEEN TELL THEIR STORIES

Noreen's Story

Introduction to Noreen

Noreen is the middle child of a large Kwagiulth family whose international fame stems from the artistic renown of many of the family's members. Several of her brothers have their poles and masks displayed in galleries and museums throughout the world; in the 1950s, her father's pole was presented to Queen Elizabeth II by the government of British Columbia. Noreen is herself an artist and one of her sisters makes elaborate button blankets and Kwakiutl dolls. An ancestor, George Hunt, was an acknowledged contributor and translator for anthropologist Franz Boas' (1921) well-known ethnographic study of the Kwakiutl people in the early twentieth century. Boas gave an unusual attribution to his collaborator in the title of his work: *Ethnology of the Kwakiutl: Based on Data Collected by George Hunt*.

Because of the opportunities afforded to her extended family, Noreen was, at a very early age, exposed to public schooling and other challenges away from her North Island reserve. Most of her peers were required to attend residential schools and thus absent from their families for long periods of time. In fact, Noreen enjoyed a family-filled childhood that included Potlatches, idyllic summers in coastal resorts, the Pacific National Exhibition and introductions to premiers and prime ministers.

In her professional life, after returning to her reserve in 1985, Noreen worked for many years as a Home-School Coordinator and a Cultural Worker in the public school system on the North Island. During these years, she volunteered with both children and Elders on her reserve, planning conferences, workshops, feasts and activities. She now works for her Band in a similar capacity. Despite some past regrets about not being able to afford to attend Law school, she is most happy when meeting the needs of the youth and the Elders, and being with her own children and their families.

The Early Years

When Noreen was four years old, her father moved the whole family off their North Island reserve and settled in James Bay, Victoria. Henry had been hired by the British Columbia Museum and the University of British Columbia (UBC) to work with family member and carver Mungo Martin, repairing old poles and creating new displays for the Museum. It was to be his work for the next thirty-six years.

Her father's primary reason for moving his family away from their village had been the experience of having his eldest daughter taken away to a residential school. The reserve's children were being apprehended by Indian agents and Noreen's parents did not want their children to go to residential schools. As Noreen says, "I had one sister [at residential school] for two weeks and my Dad somehow got a boat and went over to Alert Bay, walked in the big school [St Michael's] and found her and brought her out, took her down to the boat and took her home. And we moved shortly after." She reflects now on his strength: "I never

heard of any other father doing that. Everyone just accepted that it was going to happen and that their children were living in the residential school, even though they might be only two doors down from them. They could have gone and got their kids at any time but I think there was so much fear . . . but my Dad never thought of that.” Later, Noreen was surprised to hear that her relatives had been sent to Kamloops and all over BC to residential school. They weren’t just sent to the local residential school in Alert Bay. “It didn’t matter if you were religious or not—most weren’t—but they sent you to where ever and they broke up brothers and sisters all the time.”

Mungo Martin and Noreen’s father were originally hired by the Museum to refinish the old totem poles that were decaying in abandoned villages. The government was going to the villages, taking the poles and bringing them back to Victoria where the two men would reproduce a copy and send it back to its village. The old refinished poles were kept in the Museum. It wasn’t going to be a long project but it became a tourist attraction in Victoria as people could watch the work being done. And it still is. During the many years they worked on the project, poles were sent all over the world on behalf of the British Columbia government. A long house exhibit was created on the third floor of the Museum which was named after Noreen’s grandfather, Jonathon Hunt. When Noreen goes to the museum, she does not have to pay to get in, a benefit she appreciates because she loves to go there and just sit and see her Dad’s and her grandfather’s work.

As a child, Noreen would do the same--sit in the long house and listen to the tapes of her grandfather singing, an especially meaningful activity as the family was unable to go back to the Big House on her reserve at that time due to her father's work. At eleven years of age, she was sent north with two of her older brothers to spend the summer with their grandmother on the reserve; when Noreen realized that "the lights didn't work" and there was only an outhouse for a bathroom, she decided that she would not stay for the summer. Her Mum had to send money to return the children back home to Victoria and never did plan another trip for them on their own.

When Noreen reached school age, she encountered many challenges:

I was the very first Indian child in James Bay Elementary. When I went to school, I couldn't speak English. I could only speak my language, Kwa'kwala. I remember the teacher looking at me but she was saying my name, Noreen. Well, I'd never used my English name. No one had ever used my English name. So I didn't know what she wanted or if she was talking to me. I couldn't understand her.

English came to her slowly but she was passed through all the grades "without understanding a thing that was going on. And there was a lot of prejudice . . . but my very strong older brother kind of protected us." By grade eight, Noreen was still "the only Indian in the classroom and people weren't used to seeing a Kwakiutl Indian sitting in their classroom."

Because of the racism and prejudice Noreen felt all through her elementary schooling, she left school after grade eight and started "hanging out"

with friends which ended with her marriage at sixteen to a non-Native man. Not used to the idea of a mixed marriage, both sets of parents tried to discourage it by asking the couple to wait a year. At the end of that time, Noreen had a big wedding with five hundred people in attendance.

What Noreen did not know at the time was that she was giving away her status under the Indian Act. After her marriage, she received a letter from Ottawa that said, “Sign this and send it back and we will send you twenty-two dollars.” Her mother did not know what it was for but presumed that Noreen had to sign it. As Noreen says now, “I didn’t know what I was giving up. I thought it was just another thing you had to sign when you got married—you sign this and it goes back to Ottawa. But actually, what it was, was giving up all my rights as a First Nations person.”

Losing her status because of marriage to a non-Native man had many ramifications:

Twenty-two dollars they gave me and it took away everything. I wasn’t allowed to go back to my village. I couldn’t own a house there. I couldn’t be registered as a First Nations person. I couldn’t get anything at all that made me who I was. I was called “Non-Status.” It made it really difficult because when I was wanting to go to school, the federal government said no, we can’t help because you’re Non-Status. Then, when I went to my village, they said no, we can’t help you because you’re Non-Status. So I had no status in any areas. It didn’t matter where I went, the doors were always closed. So eventually, I went back to school and received thirty

university credits by putting myself through, working summers. So that was really difficult because it was hard to get a job anyway, but when you were First Nations, it was harder because there was so much prejudice. I did manage to get a job.

When, after three children, Noreen's marriage ended, she found herself without support or Aboriginal rights. Her dream of going to law school faded because of the expense. "It's very frustrating in regards to my education and to where I am today." Her mother and father had both passed on by then. With their passing, she felt almost like she was being assimilated into Victoria, where people did not want to admit they were First Nations; many were claiming to be Hawaiian. Noreen is still angered by government policies that stripped status from women who married non-Native men, and men and women who left their reserves to serve their country in the armed forces or to attend university or college. It was only in 1985 that the government reversed the decision to remove status with Bill C31. "By then, I was in my late thirties. So it affected me in a lot of ways but I think it affected me more by not belonging to any place . . . not to have my status and belong somewhere."

Becoming a Bill C31

The federal government's Bill C31 had not come into full force for Noreen until 1985 when her status was re-instated. She found out when she was called by the Housing Coordinator in her home village, who told her that the government had sent money to the Band for houses for the Bill C31s. A month later, she was on her way home. "It took forever to process because there were so many people

trying to get their status back.” Noreen knows people who still haven’t been able to get their status back because their parents and grandparents weren’t registered and they don’t have a birth certificate, a necessary document. Noreen feels very frustrated for them because:

in our culture, we acknowledge people, not by paper, but by who they are. You can tell if you’re Native just by looking at someone. Here, the Elders know who you are all related to. So it’s really frustrating when you see one of our people right in our village who can’t get status. It’s a real problem.

An issue that illustrates the assimilation of First Nations people is the ongoing impact of another part of the legislation by which people originally lost their status. This is the granting of status to non-Native women marrying Native men, “so that they can get their education free [and] their medical and dental, and everything that the status usually gives to First Nations people.” Their children have status as well. And while the Bill C31s like Noreen have had status reinstated for their children, their grandchildren are denied status under the Bill and therefore cannot live in their parents’ home in the village as adults. This has the effect of denying Noreen’s daughters the possibility of moving their families back home. “[My daughter] has a house on reserve but . . . when she dies, her son would have to move.” The law has also had the effect of diluting tribal heritage, rights and title:

I think that, right from the very first contact, it was the plan. I really think that it was assimilation and they were absolutely wanting to get rid of that

word Indian status. [This would] give the government free reign over what they've done with the land and the resources and it also would have absolutely no responsibility towards First Nations people. . . . If it weren't for status, there wouldn't be any negotiating going on because they wouldn't be responsible to us for anything.

Treaty negotiations over the past decade have moved from hopefulness to distrust according to Noreen, because "nothing is happening, or if anything is happening, it's manipulation. . . . The government has mega-lawyers behind them and we've got to pay for all our lawyers . . . we're at a disadvantage." The government is also preventing First Nations from dealing with their "overlapping" land issues with their tribal neighbours, a strategy that has also helped to stall negotiations.

Noreen believes that government policy has separated Band members within their communities:

On top of the reinstatement of the Bill C31s, they decided that transfers would be allowed into each Band. . . We started accepting all these different people and our Band membership went up but our land and property didn't. So now we have an incredible housing list of people that need houses and we don't have the space to house them. [So there are] the Originals, the Bill C31s and the Transfers. . . . When I first became status [again], I was hired by the Band to go and record all our status Band members that the Department of Indian Affairs had on file. . . . So many people weren't even on [the list] because when the Indian Affairs agent

came to Fort Rupert, if a person wasn't there, they were just not on the list . . . and these are from families that have been there for centuries.

After twenty years, Noreen still finds herself labelled as “a Bill C31” in her home village, a label that tends to isolate her and others who have returned home. Despite having been born there, some Band members believe that she and others, who have returned under similar circumstances, are using resources that they are not entitled to. The Bill C31s are thinking of forming their own organization.

Famous Father, Powerful Mother

As noted earlier, Noreen's father Henry was a Kwakiutl carver of great renown, whose poles and masks are now deemed priceless. Her mother, Helen, was adopted by the highly respected chief, Mungo Martin, whose Indian name means Ten Times Chief. Mungo Martin was powerful enough to have coppers, copper being a symbol of wealth. “Each time [a copper] was cut, it made the copper more valuable. [The cut-out piece] is thrown into the fire at a Potlatch because he is so great that he can afford to throw it away.” Mungo had many cut-out coppers.

Noreen believes that UBC originally contacted Mungo and brought him down to UBC to do a carving demonstration. Then an anthropologist at the BC Museum and the museum curator thought that Mungo should get involved in a museum project to restore totem poles from abandoned reserves. “When Mungo was asked who he wanted to work with him, he named Henry, “so that's how my

Dad got there.” Henry was with the project for thirty-six years; Mungo was still employed by the government when he died in his late seventies.

Because the carvings led to national and international gift-giving and exchanges—with China, Germany, Japan, England, France, New York City, Quebec—Noreen’s Mum became involved in the many presentations. Henry didn’t like to fly so his wife would go on his behalf. Noreen and her siblings were often involved too, dancing, presenting bouquets; they got to meet a lot of great people. Noreen’s Mother and Mungo met with the Queen after the presentation of the pole at Buckingham Palace; Helen did all the speaking and translating for Mungo. “She was only supposed to be with the Queen for three minutes but she ended up being there for a half and hour. Henry and Helen meet the Queen on a number of other occasions.”

Noreen remembers her Mother as a powerful and outspoken woman. She gave a very involved speech at the opening of Thunderbird Park in the presence of Premier Bill Bennett.

I think of her education level. I don’t think she had anything past grade five but she put the whole thing together in front of hundreds and hundreds of people. We were invited to dance on a number of occasions at Premier Bennett’s house, for functions that were held there. We had a lot of exposure in public when we were children because we used to have to bring flowers and present them in front of hundreds of people . . . it gives you a little more confidence.

Noreen tells the story of the day she gave bouquets to Premier Bennett:

I think I was seven and there were thousands of people and they just expected me to get up and go do the presentation without being afraid or anything. I don't think I would have minded so much but my Dad said that I was going to wear these black shoes that were shiny and had a buckle on them . . . that were two sizes too big. So it was like I had flippers on. And I remember walking and thinking, my feet are only down to here in these ones. . . I was also worried about tripping on something.

Noreen thinks her Mother chose to involve her children in the celebrations “because she wanted people to understand who we were and who we are. It certainly gave me an understanding of who I am . . . and also, it's given me a push to always be there to try to help in any way I can to help people understand who we are.” Noreen's pride in her Mother's public and private involvement is obvious:

My Mother . . . was way ahead of her time. She used to do a lot of public speaking. . . . She was always trying to help people and she wanted to help people understand about the Kwakiutl people. . . [We had] a really, really strong family. When my Mum died, the whole family pattern . . . just fell apart. . . . I think when she died, a lot of other things died.. She seemed to have left us with that ability—to be able to see something and then go through it and look at it from every inch and then it gets bigger. It seems like she left us with that because a lot of us have that. And it happens in our art work.

A Sense of Belonging, a Sense of History

While Noreen's family was intact in Victoria, she was surrounded by her culture and did not miss her village. In fact, when, as a child, she was given the opportunity to spend time in her birthplace, she decided she did not want to do without amenities of indoor plumbing and electricity. Losing her status upon marriage had a powerful effect on her, one that resonates still. It took away her sense of being connected culturally. Given the opportunity, as a single mother, to return, Noreen came quickly back to her village. Still, she reflects on the impact on her life, of growing up away from the reserve:

It's definitely changed me. I think if I had grown up in Fort Rupert . . . I'd be in line with everyone else, say, fixing my roof. There's no way I would even think of fixing it myself, or planning for it myself. I have a totally different set of values. I think that's what they mean when they say, "Oh, you're a Bill C31". I'm kind of proud that I'm a Bill C31 because I've done a lot more than they've ever done in their lifetime . . . and I've spent thirty-six years paying for my own stuff, one hundred per cent. So it definitely has changed me in many ways.

Noreen contrasts the realities of European contact on her people with the self-reliance and wisdom of Kwakiutl people historically:

We figured out when was the best time to do all we had to do. We had our play time, we had our fun time, we had education areas that had to be dealt with. The mothers did it during the time that they were supposed to.

Children were raised with their mothers but it was more like a communal child raising because a family of ten lived in a Big House and the child was taught [for example] how to fish, if the child was a boy. Each family had a little section of the Big House. I don't think it was just the parents who looked after the child. The grandparents looked after the child too, everyone did. There was politicking in the Big House and the politics went on. We had our own system that was similar to what it is today except that it was done with more heart, not like today when we're bought as human beings today by the government. Things have changed. Money has changed the values and now everything seems to be about money, whereas in those days, it wasn't. We went fishing in the summer and canned everything for the winter. If we still had it like this, people wouldn't be stressed out, committing suicide, robbing people. Totally different system and values. We have really strong ancestors. We did the Potlatch when it was banned. I remember being in the Big House, I don't know where it was, but I think I was only about three years old and I remember us travelling in the winter and it was cold and wet and windy and I remember sitting in this really small Big House. That's pretty crazy when you think about it—having to run away from the government and the RCMP and the ministers so that we could have our dances, or cultural Potlatches. Change with the times but everyone always says, "I wish we could go back to the old times". Well I'm sure the old times were good but

they were hard too. [laughs] I want to take the happy medium and live with this.

Looking to the Future

Noreen's life work with children and youth, not only Native kids, has heightened her concerns about the future. "So many of them seem to be raising themselves and I worry about how they're going to move into adulthood when they've had, it seems, very little opportunity to learn from their parents." She has seen young children running around the community in large groups late at night, a recipe for trouble. And she has noted that when children become high school students, their parents are rarely involved at all.

Why do we have trouble with kids when they are in their teens? I was with a family in Victoria and I watched these little kids progress with their mother and father who were teachers. They had every opportunity of learning, every minute of the day and they were so smart . . . I think these kids had such an advantage over the ones that never had any kind of help with their development. Right from the day they were born [my children] were taken to the museum. . . .we went to Vancouver and I'd take them on the bus and into the shops and in Victoria where they could wander around the Empress where everything is lit up and so beautiful . . . any place where I could give them exposure. If nothing else, it shows you that you can have a happier healthier life without drinking with your peers. And now kids turn to violence, like they're just so angry.

In addition to her concern about children and youth, another motivator for Noreen's professional and volunteer work was her Mother, who was always trying to help people. "She did it because she wanted to help her people and she wanted to help people understand about the Kwakiutl people. I basically would like to help the Kwakiutl people too." Noreen's leadership role in the community for the past eighteen years has been with all the *Tsa'kis* cultural and language programs that involve youth, "to give children and youth a better understanding of who we are. It was also to expose the schools to who we are and what we do, teaching children how to dance and sing, some language, playing *Lahal*, [a bones game], and having mini-feasts. We try to include language in everything that we do." Noreen has organized and arranged for Aboriginal Youth conferences on her reserve to honour the voices of young people from all over Vancouver Island. She involves others in a variety of fund-raising activities to support these massive undertakings. She also tries to bring youth and Elders together where she can, to enrich the activities of both age groups. At one community family dance, everyone set aside their problems and really enjoyed the evening. "When they left, they were just so happy and that was one of the things that made me happy . . . just watching the parents." Many of the parents came from alcoholic families and had, at one point, lost their children to the Ministry. "And here they were at the dance with their children and going next door and being able to be in the Big House—very spiritual. As soon as you walk in [to the Big House] you just feel good and now, walking in with their children, they said it was a totally beautiful experience. So it was one of those times that made it worthwhile for me."

Noreen also initiated the “mini-feast”, involving all interested schools populations on Vancouver Island North, both public and private, in order to offer an opportunity for children, their teachers and parents to participate in First Nations cultural activities in the Big House on an annual basis. Noreen has taken the responsibility of organizing each one. Over one thousand people were directly involved in the last mini-feast, participating in dancing, singing, drumming and exchanging gifts that they had made in their schools. As well as helping the general population to begin to understand the purpose and spirit of the Potlatch, the experiences have opened communications and helped to bring disparate communities together.

Noreen has also taken delegates to Elders’ conferences around the province as well, instigating “a lot of trips to take them to different areas and places”. She speaks of the happiness that it brings her to create opportunities for people to feel safe, to enjoy themselves and each other. She speaks of being able to give them “a little shot of happiness,” in an atmosphere that is “absolutely exhilarating.” And in referring again to the youth with whom she has worked for years, Noreen speaks of the importance of providing them with safe places to come together:

And places to study too, to show them that [the reserve] isn’t just the world—that there’s a big, big world out there. If they can get to grade twelve and graduate, there’s even a bigger world out there. That’s what I want them to see and I think that’s from my growing up in Victoria as opposed to staying here. In the forties and fifties, when we left to go away,

we *had* to go away. The ones that are leaving now have the choice of going away. They have their culture still and because of the communication level we have today, they can still keep in touch with everything they need to. I don't know how things would be today if I hadn't moved. I'd probably be an entirely different person. I was separated by the government from my community, from my whole existence as a Kwakiutl person and I was quite excited about coming back and being in a community that was mine—that should have been mine for my whole life, but never was. But when I came back, it wasn't like that at all. It was, “You're a Bill C31 and we're Originals and you're taking our money.” So the government started dividing me when I got married when I was a kid, and now I'd come home and they're dividing us again.

Noreen is worried about the future of the culture too:

It's sad actually. I can count on three or four high school kids to be there if they want to do some singing. Our children excel at soccer and volleyball and those activities but [most] are not interested in singing and dancing [although] there are some really good dancers. There are very few artists as far as children go . . . The children haven't absorbed any of that, even though they've had the experiences.

Noreen has laboured through a time when she felt spiritually bankrupt, notably in feelings of loss of her creativity. Concern about her nation's possible loss of language together with frustration over the apparent disinterest of Kwagiulth children and youth in their culture resulted in a sense of desolation for

Noreen. During much of her career, she has worked with children and youth, both in the school system and, more recently, with her Band, in programs designed to encourage culture. Noreen relates that she now is feeling more grounded, and her artwork is becoming more spiritual.

Commentary

Formal education has played a key role in Noreen's life despite a difficult beginning as the "only Indian" in a Victoria elementary school. She has completed many university courses and has almost finished a counselling diploma by distance education while working full time as a coordinator of activities for youth and elders on her reserve.

The family's dislocation from the North Island to Victoria also brought with it privilege and opportunity, as Noreen recounts. Nevertheless, her childhood schooling experiences, coupled with loss of status at marriage has heightened Noreen's sensitivity to the indignities suffered by her people generally, and, it seems, has focussed most of her professional work life to the needs of her Band. When I first met Noreen, she was the Cultural Worker and Home-School Coordinator in the secondary school, a position she held for ten years. While her focus was on the youth from Fort Rupert, she worked with any young person who needed support or who was interested in the culture.

Noreen's family, like Karen's moved from the North Island to Victoria to avoid residential school. Noreen's father rescued his eldest daughter from St. Michael's and then moved the family away, the only parent with the courage to do so at that time, as far as Noreen knows. While the move was advantageous for

her parents, as a child, Noreen suffered from undue scrutiny and racist attitudes in her Victoria elementary school. While the family's move resulted in a difficult childhood for Noreen, she now credits her independence and strength with the fact that she did not spend all her childhood on the reserve.

Despite her uncomfortable start, Noreen became a successful professional and life-long learner, continually upgrading her own skills and knowledge so that she could teach others. In addition to her teaching, she organizes workshops and other activities to support and promote women and Elders on and off reserve. Noreen's one professional regret may be that she did not have the opportunity to become a lawyer but one of her daughters fulfilled that role and has given her mother reason to be very proud.

Cultural Renewal

During most of her public school career, Noreen focused her activities creating her own cultural curriculum as there were no teaching resources available when she began. Thousands of school children and staff on the North Island have benefited from the extramural *Lahal* tournaments (an Indian bones game), the Big House ceremonies and other district-wide cultural events that Noreen has created and implemented. Individual schools presented Aboriginal creation plays, role-played First Nations myths and legends, learned Kwagiulth songs and participated in mini-Potlatches as Noreen, with numerous teachers, wove these activities into a variety of subject disciplines. Given her talents as an artist and her knowledge of the history and techniques of Kwagiulth masks, cedar bark weavings, drawings and carvings, First Nation students and non-First Nations alike were exposed to

projects to help enhance understanding between cultures. Noreen is now working for her own Band as Youth and Elders Coordinator where she hopes that her focus on language and culture will now benefit her village directly.

Impacts of Colonialism

Federal government policies have wrought great damage to Noreen and her family. While a childhood spent off-reserve has given her a sense of independence and a “different set of values” from her community members, her on-reserve experiences as “a Bill C31” have left also their mark, and will continue to have an intergenerational effect on her family. Noreen characterized her disappointing homecoming as evidence of the government’s continuing efforts to divide her people. While she speaks openly about detrimental effects of colonialism, she does not stop trying to restore the traditional way of life.

Like Sarah, Noreen is worried about children on reserve who seem to be growing up without the supervision and traditional teachings, a circumstance that appears to contribute to their lack of interest in cultural and language activities offered in the village and in their schools. An educator and leader in her community and in society-at-large, Noreen lives a contemporary life strengthened by traditions learned from her parents and ancestors, and the models they provided for their children. She walks in two worlds.

Jacki’s Story

Introduction to Jacki

Jacki is a dynamic woman with a robust sense of humour and a willingness to let her voice be heard. A loving mother and wife, and a very busy

foster mother, Jacki has many creative and entrepreneurial talents that she pursues in her spare time. A former Vancouver Island North School District employee, she was, for many years, a Special Education Worker specializing in sign language, and a First Nations Support Worker at both elementary and secondary school levels. She resigned from her employ to foster special needs children full-time in 1999.

Although she works primarily with Kwakwakawakw children on the North Island, Jacki is a member of the Sto: lo First Nations whose father, grandfather and great-grandfather were required by the Indian Act (1876) to give up their status in order to work as steamboat captains. Accordingly, Jacki's family has chosen not to use their tribal membership to gain any advantages, out of respect of the decision made many years ago by great-great-grandfather Charles Alphonsus Gardner. Her family history gives Jacki what she believes to be a unique perspective on her First Nations heritage and on living in today's world.

Jacki's Family and their Place in BC's History

Great-grandfather Charles Gardner was taken in by the Oblates when he was a young boy. His relationship with them was such that, when they left the St Mary's Mission, established where the city of Mission is now located, the priests gave all of the land, cattle and sheep to the Gardner family. The land is still in the their hands. For generations now, the family has been well known in the Fraser River region and in the stories of white settlement in BC.

Grandfather Charles followed in the footsteps of his father and became a steamboat captain, as did his son, Jacki's Dad. Great-grandfather Charles' story is

one rich in the history of settlement in BC and was published in the Vancouver Sun newspaper between November 29 and December 27, 1941. Captain Charles Gardner was born in 1860 to the daughter and granddaughter of great Chiefs of the Fraser Valley in the Indian settlement of Matsqui. He was named after his father, George Clinton Gardner, a civil engineer and astronomer, and later, a financier of the railroad. Charles was given the Indian name, *Quotaseltill*. When he went to school in Mission for the first time in 1869, the priest mistakenly christened him Charles Alphonsus instead of George Clinton and the name Charlie stayed with him for the rest of his life. An article in the 1941 Vancouver Sun stated: "From both the vanishing Indian race and the incoming White race, he inherited traits which led to his success. . . . On the Fraser, the Stikine, the Skeena, the Yukon and the Mackenzie, he was one of the really great river boat captains of Canada."

Charlie and his wife, a diviner, lived on reserve until he became a captain and had to move into town; he was disenfranchised as a result of his occupation. His decision to continue with this work resulted in the loss of his Indian status. "You couldn't be an Indian and an educated man. . . . Status Indians were not allowed to be a captain or a doctor or anything like that" according to federal government policy at that time. Later, Aboriginal men who left the reserve to fight for Canada in the World Wars also lost their status.

Charles Gardner was the first Indian man to become a steamboat captain. Among many other boats, he was master of the boat *Catala* which supplied villages such as *Ba'as*, Blunden Harbour, up and down the coast on the Inside

Passage. The buttons from his uniform and his captain's papers are part of the family's treasures. Charles Alphonsus Gardner made a very proud and important contribution to BC history.

Raised by his grandparents off reserve in Mission, Jacki's Dad learned the importance both of maintaining the traditions of his heritage and of working hard and paying his own way. Honouring his grandfather and great-grandfather, he decided to give up his status to become a captain as well. "He was not allowed to be an Indian either" Jacki notes. He worked the steamboats on the Yukon, Skeena and Fraser Rivers and later, transmitted to his own family a strong belief in self reliance and respect for his great-grandfather's initial decision. "And that comes right back to tradition of the Elders, too. So it wasn't that they were ashamed, ever, of being First Nations. It was that they were very, very proud."

Jacki's Mum and Dad met in the Queen Charlottes. At that time, he was logging and she was a school teacher. Jacki remembers that her Dad had a trunk that held a mask and other things, but the children were never allowed to open it. She recognized that her friends didn't have the same values about Elders that she did, but despite this difference, and the mysterious trunk, Jacki, who was very young, did not think about her heritage.

When the family moved to the British West Indies, they "lived as Canadians" and Jacki presumed she was "white" like everyone else in the Canadian contingent. Then, when she was in grade eight, the family moved back to Squamish, she was offered the opportunity to travel to meet Chief Dan George in the Queen Charlottes [Haida Gwai]. Other students didn't get to go. She found

out it was because she had been registered at her school as a First Nations person and only First Nations kids were invited. Jacki was shocked about why she was able to go:

I mean, I'm not stupid but I didn't think you had any special privileges because you were First Nations. . . . I didn't know a lot about the history and then we started learning more about it and the problems and different things that the First Nations suffered. I can see a lot more from my work now. I was really sheltered.

After the trip which was "awesome"—returning to the place of her birth and meeting a famous First Nations person—Jacki told everyone that she was a Haida Indian. "I had no idea that I was not Haida." But once her heritage was sorted out, Jacki came to understand that her family's story was very different from many other First Nations families' stories.

Despite her "Canadian" childhood, Jacki acknowledges now that her family was much more traditional than she thought. "We always had people coming in and out of our house, and you'd never, never turn a child away. And I believe in the whole community raising a child; I think that comes from the First Nations' point of view." Her Dad would always give a child whatever that child needed whether they were First Nations or not. It rips her Dad's heart out even now, whenever Jacki takes in a new foster child because he knows that there is a sad story behind each one. She noticed that her Mum, of German-Catholic stock, was a very caring woman but never quite as willing to share anything with anyone

as her Dad was between her two parents, she believes she “got the best of both worlds.”

On trips to the lower mainland, Jacki noticed that people she met would know who she was by her resemblance to her Dad. She knows now that First Nations people can tell a family from a mile away, and are “real family, family, family oriented—or it’s pride.” She remembers going to a Potlatch in her family’s village and “there were all these people who knew who we were, even your birthdates. They knew whose kid you were--just look at you and know. That’s a funny bond that First Nations people have.”

Jacki learned the importance of clan and crest when she made plans to have a button blanket made for her Dad. She phoned her home village and was asked who the Elder in her family was. Upon naming a certain Aunt, the person answering her call let her know that, in fact, they must be related since this Aunt was her Elder too.

So she knew the whole story and that our crest was Salmon. I really wanted it to be Killer Whale. I wanted her to put a Killer Whale on the blanket and I said, “Who cares.” And she said, “I care” and this is why. So it had to be Salmon. I still feel a little bitter about it. [laughter] It turned out that we were both Salmon and Mountain Goat and I thought, “That’s even worse than Salmon”. And when I said that to someone in our family, they got really angry with me . . . and they tried to tell me all these wonderful things about the mountain goat, so then I had to be proud of the Mountain Goat. [laughter]

Jacki's Dad had a profound impact on her as she grew up and on the person she is now. While doing all he could to keep their traditions alive, he never allowed her or others in the family to take anything for free. He used to say, "If you buy it yourself, you'll look after it. If I buy it for you, you won't look after it. The government buys it for you, you won't look after it. If you buy it for yourself, you'll look after it." Jacki jokes that this used to make her mad because she wished she could take the tax cut. But "he will not take anything he didn't earn and that's just the type of person he is" and she wants to be more like him.

When Jacki applied to take her first university courses, she was told that she qualified to have her whole education paid for. Her Dad was "absolutely irate because [he said], 'You don't live on reserve and we pay taxes like any normal person and you are Canadian'." As Jacki observes, it was different for her than for many First Nations people. Later, after letting her know how disappointed he was, he refused to sign her application for status so she got her Aunt to sign for her. However she has never used it to her monetary advantage, nor have her own children. "It's not that we weren't allowed to be Indian because we were. We did all the traditional things and we still go for the ooligan run and we still go and help out on the reserve and with our families but we were not allowed to take anything that we didn't work for."

Looking back, Jacki recognizes the richness of her family life and the traditions that she took for granted. "I've never known if my traditions came from the First Nations or from Germany. I've just known that that's what we were told to do and that's what we did." Jacki has extended her youthful experiences and

traditions into her personal and professional life over the past several decades. Her own children have benefited as have the many children she has fostered and the special needs students and the First Nations students she has worked with for years in the school system.

Jacki the Support Worker and Foster Mum

While she hates to think that being First Nations has helped her in her work, Jacki admits that she wouldn't have become the First Nations Support Worker at a secondary school if it hadn't been for her heritage, nor would the students have placed as much trust in her as they did. She quotes her Dad's favourite saying: "Everybody wants to be an Indian now. Last year, nobody wanted to know us."

She was concerned because she knew the students assumed that she came from the same background as they did. "I felt guilty sometimes because I did not come from those places." She is very aware of examples of what she calls "reverse prejudice" because she has experienced it. "I remember one lady who reported me to the Ministry [of Children and Family Development] and who told them to get her child out of my house because I was white." When later this woman came to the house and met Jacki's Dad, she immediately went down to the Ministry offices to apologize; it really made a big difference to her. Jacki also admits that, at times, she has been called half-breed because her mother is white.

Another kind of reverse prejudice affects non-Native students, too, something that disturbs Jacki. She was working with the high school counselling staff one day, helping grade 12 students fill in application forms for their post-

secondary education. Students were asked to explain how they would pay for their university/college education and how they would pay for their rent.

One thing that really bothered me was that every First Nations child said, “Oh, I don’t have to worry about that. My Band will get it. I don’t have to worry about where I will live, the Band will pay.” Every other child there had to say: “I’m going to have to work this summer. I’ll have to get a part-time job.” I thought that was so unfair and it really made me angry that there’s a lot of underprivileged non-First Nations kids that need help a lot. Do you know how many kids finish school when they have to work their buns off for it? And how many kids don’t finish school when they don’t have to work for it? I have a real conflict in my mind because, in some ways, you think, they deserve this. But, you know, the other kids deserve it too. It should be their God given right for every Canadian to have an education.

Jacki admits to having an attitude that “gets you slapped.” She knows that her views are different from most First Nations people. She believes that people shouldn’t be on reserves, that they should be paying taxes and going to the same schools as everyone else—“that we should all just live as Canadians.” Otherwise, “it isn’t fair; it isn’t right.” She thinks many First Nations people haven’t admitted that education is a really good thing, and that while the residential school “was not positive by any means, there were positive aspects to it. These kids were given an education”. She believes that the residential schools were put into place because “[the government] couldn’t bring teachers into outlying areas.”

Jacki told another brief story, one that clarified her attitude: She had been at a ceremony on the North Island where a Sto: lo Chief was giving a talk. He had asked a local Elder to say the blessing before he began and she turned the blessing into a recitation about being taken to the residential school.

This Chief of the Sto: lo Nation said to her, “I think it’s time we stopped whining about it and get on with it, push past it and figure out how we can solve it.”

And I wanted to stand up and cheer him because if you keep whining about things, you’ll never get past it. You get stagnant. Nobody wants to hear it anymore. A whole lot of horrible things happened to the First Nations . . . but everybody has had a tragedy in their history but they all moved on and gotten past it. So that’s my attitude and it’s a very bad attitude isn’t it.” [laughter]

Jacki believes that one of the answers to the problems of First Nations people is work. When she hears Ministry workers telling some of her older foster children that they don’t need to work, that they need to go and get counselling, Jacki says to the child, “You know what would really help you? Go and get yourself a little job – a couple of days a week—something that gets you out of the house and thinking about other things, and maybe you could afford to buy yourself a pretty little dress or a nice pair of shoes.” She is convinced that these young women have, more than anything else, “self-esteem rage.” And so Jacki really tries hard to get them working.

There are a number of women whom Jacki admires, women who, unlike her, have grown up with dysfunctional families and still have made good lives for

themselves and their families as adults. “I can name a lot of women who have become very strong.” These women are all working hard and presenting themselves well publicly. She claims not to know why but the majority of people on the North Island who have become stronger are women but they are “becoming healthier and maybe that’s it. Maybe it’s the health, the healthier life style. . . .Some of them are taking advantage of the free education and are using it to their advantage.”

She knows so many who cannot keep themselves clean, who can’t clean their homes; they just go out and sit with their friends. She describes them as people who have given up. She believes that this has happened because they have had their power taken away.

It makes me angry when I see people having their power taken away.

That’s why, in every job I’ve had, I’ve worked hard to empower the person.” Even the little children who are placed in her home are offered structured choices--which cereal they want to eat, what clothes they want to wear. “But if you make a mess, you clean it up. I’ll hand you a mop but I will not clean it up for you. I tell them they are a good person but they’ve always had someone who has cleaned up their messes for them, I think.

Jacki describes the young women whose children have been taken away from them by the Ministry of Children and Family Development and placed in her home:

When I have a young woman come to this house to see her child that has been just taken away, you can never make eye contact with them. I have to

get down on my knees and look up at their faces. Why do they do that? Because you have stripped them of their power. You are telling them when they can come to visit, what they can do on their visit, who they can see on their visit. These are *their* children. [vehemently]. . . Then you think of the First Nations man. He stops looking you in the eye and he stops providing for his family and cleaning up the yard and other things that men usually do. If the government would give them back their power, I really think you would see a big difference—in all of us.

Strong Women

Jacki talks about several women whose childhood and family background would not appear to account for the power they have taken back now as wives, mothers, career women, community members. She tells of a young woman, now in her late twenties, with a husband, five children, a nice new pickup truck and a good job at the local supermarket. She describes the woman as always sporting a “big dimply grin on her face every time you see her and she’s working herself to the bone. Someone like her has come from the ground up. She has fetal alcohol brothers and sisters for heaven’s sake and look where she’s at. She’s just an incredible person. I’d be damned proud if that was my daughter.”

Jacki believes that women who never have lived on reserve and women who have married white men and left their reserves cannot be fairly compared to women who have always lived in their villages. “Those people know exactly what goes on behind the doors. We don’t know. Most of us have had incidents but these people have them every single day.”

Women who have moved away from their reserves “didn’t really live it. Just like I didn’t live it.” She admires women who “get to a place of power” even though they may have had parents who were drinking, and therefore unconcerned about school attendance or checking homework. She wonders where these women get their values, and what has made them what they have become—perfect role models, people to be admired, people who are trusted in their work. “Was it the love of her children, the love of husband? I don’t know. I would love to know why that young woman is that way—how proud she is.” What Jacki does know is that these women have that whole attitude—they love themselves, they love life and they are proud of themselves. Jacki knows many other First Nations women who are doing very well in their professional and personal lives but “they come from different families”, families more like hers.

Jacki admires those local organizations which have hired these women and promoted them according to their skills and abilities. She praises the fact that companies such as Overwaitea Foods and Alpha Processing have helped to remove the stigma by trusting and hiring First Nations people. She believes that the North Island is a good place to work because of this lack of prejudice—“in some areas anyway.”

Commentary

Several Generations Removed

Both Jacki and Noreen have a university education and an abiding connection with their respective heritage even though neither was raised on reserve. While maintaining the language does not appear to be the priority for

Jacki that it is for Noreen, participating in her family's cultural traditions is. What is most apparent about these two women is the strong sense of personal agency and cultural identity that each exudes, and the rich family life both enjoyed as children. The other striking similarity is the effort each has exerted throughout her life to gain an education, to establish a satisfying career and to pay her own way, albeit with some resentment. Each continues to contribute to her community through the generous sharing of talents and skills.

Jacki's family is several generations removed from living in their home village, and geographically removed as well. This may be one reason why language does not appear to be a concern. Her immediate family members have not been directly affected by the current government policies and practices about which Jacki speaks so disparagingly although she works with many First Nations people who are. She thought of herself as "Canadian" while residing in the West Indies as a young girl and did not know that she was "Indian" through most of her childhood, only learning of her heritage as a pre-adolescent on the family's return to Canada.

Jacki attributes her "bad attitude"—she thinks the First Nations people should stop whining, move away from the reserve, refuse handouts and get a job—directly to the teachings of her parents and extended family, and to the fact that she didn't grow up on reserve; she has particular admiration for those women who have become strong and independent despite their upbringing on reserve. She feels guilty about the fact that her students and foster children assume she understands what life is like for them because they think she comes from the same

background. This assumption helps her to establish trust and openness quickly but, as she says, it is false. While her First Nations heritage has offered her some advantages professionally and personally, she knows that her life experiences have been very different from many of the children with whom she works.

Jacki offers an insightful analysis of the effects of government handouts on First Nations children and youth, and of current provincial social services on First Nations parents. She describes behaviours that give evidence of either the entitlement or the powerlessness they feel; she understands their reactions. She despises the actions of government workers who perpetuate unnecessary indignities on First Nations people in their care; she believes assistance to find a job would help to empower them. She rails against entrenched colonial attitudes.

Maggie, Noreen and Jacki identify a variety of federal and provincial policies and practices that have been detrimental to cultural identity, health and agency. All the women in the study have, themselves, been personally affected and yet, able to surmount the personal devastation which for some has also meant overcoming addictions and personal tragedies.

The origin of the strength that these women now demonstrate appears to derive from their strong, supportive families and foster families—those that they grew up in, or that they created for themselves. Sarah had a strong, traditional and happy upbringing until she was twelve years old, a benefit that may have helped to minimize the detrimental effects of colonization. By twelve, Sarah was so interested in becoming educated in the ways of white people that the opportunity

to learn to read, write and play the piano countered the desolation of being away from her family.

The final story is Colleen's. Like Sarah, she also experienced a warm extended family environment in an isolated setting until she was twelve years old when her parents moved the family to Campbell River. She also remembers her childhood as "idyllic".

Colleen's Story

Introduction to Colleen

Colleen is the Chief Treaty Negotiator for the Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw First Nation for whom saving the Kwakwakawakw languages is a priority. A wife and mother, Colleen, has a broad university education, many years' experience working as a Home-School Coordinator, and Language and Cultural Worker in public school districts, and a 12 year period as a Self Government Advisor to the Kwakiutl District Council (KDC). In addition to her post secondary education and her formal employment, she has also taken extensive time to work collaboratively with Elders on the Kwakwakawakw languages. Colleen is a strikingly self-confident woman with a fine sense of humour.

Colleen talked about her birth in Alert Bay and her early life on a float house in the Minstrel Island area of the Broughton Archipelago until she was 12 years old. Her parents, who met at Coho Bay in Blunden Harbour, traditional territory of the Nakwaxda'xw people, moved their float house to different

moorages in the area from time to time, depending on the season's work they were doing.

Colleen remembers her early years as idyllic. She and her husband have often taken their three children boating and camping so that their children may relive some of Colleen's experiences and special memories. She is delighted that her eldest daughter, away at university, expresses a longing for her North Island home - an attachment to the land and seascape that Colleen herself feels strongly.

While living on the float house, Colleen's parents took her and her siblings to the small school on Minstrel Island for their elementary education. When her parents were busy, a friend would run them over in his boat. When Colleen was twelve, the family moved to Campbell River. The school on Minstrel Island was then closed because of low enrolment.

After high school, Colleen went to university and took courses that enabled her to return to Campbell River and become a First Nations Home-School Coordinator. Over the next four years, she and a colleague presented lessons to all students in the district's elementary and secondary schools on the Kwakwakawakw languages and cultures. This was in addition to the responsibilities usually performed by the Home-School Coordinator which included connecting with absent students and their families. The position was thought of as bridging the two key aspects of a student's life--home and school. Colleen's experiences at that time convinced her that the survival of the language was crucial to the survival of the culture and the Kwakwakawakw nations. She therefore returned to university to take linguistics and history courses.

On her return to the North Island, Colleen became self-government advisor for the Kwakiutl District Council (KDC), a provincially-created Native organization representing eleven North Island First Nations. It was her first job outside of the formal school system. She held this position for twelve years. Colleen is now chief Treaty negotiator for the Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw First Nation and has been in this senior position for ten years now.

An Idyllic Childhood

Colleen's unique childhood with its happy memories helped to develop a strong connection to sea and land that Colleen hopes to see recreated in her three children. She remembers being welcomed as a child at gatherings of her parents, grand parents and visitors. "I never sat on the fringes when my parents and grandparents and the old people were visiting and having afternoon tea. I always sat right here with them, having tea . . . though they didn't interact with me too much." Perhaps because of her presence in the Kwakwakawakw conversations, she understands the language well although she wishes she could speak it better.

The language evokes memories of its own for Colleen. Because she stayed with her grandparents a lot on their neighbouring float house, her memories are not just of the words and meaning of their conversations, but also of the sound and rhythm of the language being spoken.

I loved listening to them talk. It was so restful and peaceful and it was like a security blanket for me. They would be talking in our language and I could feel it in their chests when they were talking. I remember sleeping

on my Grandmother's knee and feeling the sounds of the language—soothing.

The happy childhood memories of her close family in a remote setting continue to resonate with Colleen. And perhaps because Colleen's grandmother and grandfather as well as her own parents were in business together, logging and fishing in their traditional territory, a belief in the importance of hard work is evident in Colleen's narrative, along with the conviction that the survival of the Kwakwakawakw languages is crucial to the survival of the culture and of the Gwa'sala and Nakwaxda'xw Nations.

A Life-long Learner

Colleen knew she would have to pay her own way at university. Because she was not living on reserve and she was a Bill C31, she did not have status under the Indian Act. She was able to attend because her Grandfather gave her a break that she believes other young women probably wouldn't have had at that time. He gave her a job as cook skiff person on his seine boat and she saved for her tuition for the first year. She remembers that, at the time, not many young men were pursuing post-secondary education but were going into the resource-based industries, forestry and fishing--fishing in particular. They were able to make "a ton of money." And while her Mother logged and ran boats, most young women did not have these types of opportunities in the resource fields.

With the courses that she was able to acquire, Colleen returned to Campbell River and became a First Nations Home-School Coordinator in the local public school district. Along with fluent speakers including her Mum, aunt

and grandfather, Colleen presented culture and language lessons, to Native and non-Native students alike, in the district's elementary and secondary schools for the next four years, thereby predating the current emphasis on First Nations languages by many years.

Treaty Negotiations

When working as self-government advisor for the KDC, Colleen strongly advocated for language and culture as the really important bases of self-government. Her office supported many language initiatives, including a twenty-eight day Kwakwakawakw languages immersion program on Gambier Island for interested people, including those working in the schools. At the Tribal Council level, she helped to form the Kwakwakawakw Steering Committee, mapped an agenda and accessed money from various places after noting that money was starting to become available for these things. She believes that Oka and Ipperwash and other controversial events of that time sparked both the federal and provincial governments into realizing that something had to be done about recognizing Aboriginal rights and title. There needed to be reconciliation of [governments'] interests and of the interests, goals and ownership of the First Nations with the rest of Canadians, so that's when they established the BC Treaty Commission (BCTC). BC has only a few treaties in place, those negotiated by Governor James Douglas in the 1850s. One of these treaties was with the Tsa'kis First Nations and that had to do with the coal mining that was taking place in the Suquash and Cluxewe areas. Scottish miners had started to dig to get access to the coal when their work party was surrounded by Tsa'kis First Nations people saying, "We

don't want you doing this here. There was a bit of an uprising and so Douglas felt that, to get this settled, he needed to make a deal with these people." But other than a few treaties initiated and signed by Douglas for specific purposes, no treaties were ever signed in BC, unlike other provinces in Canada.

At this point in her tenure with the Gwa'sala-Nakwaxda'xw First Nation, and with a history of focusing on the importance of language and culture, Colleen has a clear focus for her own Nation's treaty negotiations:

We have tabled a language, cultural and heritage chapter with the government, laying out ways we feel we would like to see our language, culture and heritage properly recognized, whether that requires the internal activities at our community level with various groups of people of different ages or whether that requires liaison and connectedness with the government to ensure its success. [Language is] one of the key subjects that we are negotiating. The old people in our communities have all been saying that the culture and the language in particular are the foundation to who we are as a distinct group of people, as a distinct society, as a distinct First Nations, as an Indigenous people. In an understanding and through the practice of our culture, language and heritage, we are able to promote all those things which are unique—such as art, communication, our unique institutions, all those things that relate to the land, the places where we access our resources and those places that are important for spiritual purposes. All of that is practised and displayed in our culture and through

the use of our language. So it is critical, and language is the most critical of the three I would say.

Through her office and her passionate interest, Colleen and staff of the Gwa'sala-'Nakwaxda'xw school have recently embarked on a project in her village designed to fulfill many of the goals and purposes she has so articulated: to bring Elders together in a comfortable, social environment to converse in their language, to offer children and youth an opportunity to interact positively and purposefully with their Elders, to capture the Kwakwakawakw languages on videotape for future generations, and also, from a technical perspective, to teach students how to film a documentary. She knows one needs

to have a lot of desire and passion about [the project] for it to work.

And I think the people who are involved are very passionate about it.

The Elders—when we had our meeting on Friday, when we were confirming that the things we had been working on last year were now going to be implemented—they were so excited. It was getting beyond just words that were spoken in a meeting or on paper. But now there was action. They were really excited about that.

Twenty-six Elders wanted to participate once they heard about the project. The Elders all said, “Me, me, me!” [*laughter*] Because only oral language would be involved, difficult issues surrounding the writing system challenge would not have to be dealt with.

A benefit of this initiative was the fact that all the Elders who wanted to be involved could be, given the resources of the Band school. And while

Colleen and her team have no say about the language exchange going on in people's homes, they could bring the home to the school, through the participation of the Elders.

So what we did was analyze who was sitting in different places, who was sitting with who, what were their connections and what was the likelihood of them being comfortable with each other in this setting. [laughter] . . . It was like developing a formula but we came up with it. We came up with four different groups but the groups are a bit on the big side . . . so we're starting off with the group we think are the boldest. They like talking the most--they're most verbal [laughter]

With the Elders arranged in comfortable, compatible groups, Colleen and the team plan to bring each group of Elders in, to talk and to get comfortable and then bring one or two children in to talk with them, and to serve them a cup of tea, "like they would have done in the olden days. Like I remember when I was a kid." Colleen knows that initially, she might have to encourage interaction between the Elders and the children by giving them simple questions to ask such as "What's your name?" and "Who are your Mum and Dad?" "And from there, what we hopefully could do is move into more activities that could happen, for example, in a mock kitchen—cooking, food preparation—those simple things. Language use in those ways." When this level of interaction is achieved, students who have been trained to use a video camera by an expert in the documentary field will film the Elders talking and interacting with each other and other children using language that is related to everyday activities. In addition to capturing the Elders

and their stories for posterity, the videotapes will be duplicated and used in the Band school to further language learning.

Colleen isn't sure exactly what will happen when the Elders and the children come together. "Maybe Elders will work with different groups of children. We'll sort of sense what is going to happen with the first group." It is an exciting experiment though and a beginning. Colleen has heard the comments in her community—that language development needs to start at home [not at school]. "Many of them have admitted that they are doing things with their little ones, and then their next home is in the elementary [Band] school." This may represent a new beginning for the Kwakwakawakw languages within the Gwa'sala-Nakwaxda'xw Nation.

Long ago, when Colleen was a small child, listening to her family members and friends speaking their Kwakwakawakw languages in private or at potlatches and gatherings, she was fascinated with the fact that the speakers always began by saying "I am speaking from my heart" or "My heart feels really good." She was touched by their reference to the importance of speaking from the heart when one speaks. For many reasons, she believes that the language is "almost like the heart beat of our people." It is obvious why the Elders are concerned that the language might be lost entirely. For Colleen, the language which embodies the culture; it is central to all her plans and activities as her Band's Treaty Negotiator.

Achievements and Barriers

Colleen has experienced a number of firsts in her lengthy professional career. She was one of the first young women to work on the fish boats, one of the first from her Nation to go to university, and she was the first Aboriginal person hired by the Campbell River School District to work with First Nations students in the 1970s. Her personal belief in hard work together with life-long learning has earned her these and many other educational and professional accomplishments in a career that continues to make a difference to herself, her family and her Nation.

Colleen has also experienced barriers along the way. Over the years, she has worked with some men who were part of an old boys' network and that "no matter what you did, you couldn't really . . . get recognized for your work with any kind of promotions." She thinks it may be because she was thought of as "a bit cheeky." She has also worked with men who were very fair, who have given her a chance to grow and to challenge herself in highly responsible roles—men such as former Chief of the Gwa'sala-Nakwaxda'xw First Nation. Colleen has always believed that as a woman, "you present yourself respectfully and don't make a big thing about being a woman. My Mum didn't do that. You learn what needs to be learned to the best of your ability and you work hard. That's what I've always tried to do." Colleen's work ethic and her belief in the need to be a constant learner have resulted in professional opportunities in both the Aboriginal communities and organizations, and in the broader society.

Colleen has found that having enough time to pursue the further education needed for her profession, and time to be the wife and mother that she is has been

difficult, especially living on the North Island, where training for her type of work is not available. She wants to continue to pursue “further formal education and a better understanding of things.” With one daughter in university, another graduating from high school and a son in elementary school, Colleen’s family is moving on to maturity. Therefore, Colleen thinks she may find the issues of time less taxing in the future.

Women as Community Leaders

Colleen notes that, when she went off to university, most young men were finding good jobs in the resource industries, fishing in particular, rather than pursuing higher education. “There’s not a lot [of men] who are my age that are leaders in the community at this time. They are either older folks who have a lot of experience who are leaders and now there are a few younger folks who are of my generation, but not very many males.” So, perhaps because high-paying resource jobs were readily available in the past, the young men were drawn away from education in their teen years.

Colleen also admits that her First Nations community tends to mollycoddle our boys.

And it was the same with my Mum and my aunts. When we were younger, there were always daily things that girls and boys could be doing, and maybe in the modern day society in which we live, there’s more to keep girls active and busy and playing the role and having responsibilities in the home. And perhaps less for the boys . . . The only real chore my son has is

to go and pack wood. There are not many other daily things my son can do (other than his daily piano practices).

If the boys have been “mollycoddled”, Kwakwakawakw girls are pushed and not always recognized for their achievements. Colleen remembers that, when she was young, she could never do enough, that her Mum always pushed her to do one notch more. “And I remember my brothers used to continuously get praised and were always doing things right but I could have been doing things a bit more right in my Mum’s eyes.”

Colleen admits that she allows her son to do things she would never allow her girls to do. “My Mum continues to say to me, ‘Well, that’s how you need to treat him because he’s very sensitive. You can’t hurt his feeling and you can’t break his spirit’. Nobody ever said that about the girls.” Having talked to extended family members about this apparently common treatment of boys and girls, Colleen has been told that First Nations mothers baby their sons and for some reason or another, put pressure on and demand more of the girls. “And I don’t know if that happened before now or if it’s even happening more now than it did before. I really don’t know. So I believe that is one factor [in the number of women making a difference to their families and their communities through education and hard work].”

Commentary

Language as a Key Component of Cultural Survival

A Gwa’sala-‘Nakwaxda’xw woman whose idyllic childhood experiences spared her the traumas and consequences experienced by most of the other

women in this study, Colleen is utterly committed to the collaborative efforts required to retain the languages of her Elders. She speaks from the heart, as she was taught to do by her extended family members, and has passed her passion and dedication on to her eldest daughter who will soon finish her Linguistics degree and return home to share in the efforts to save the language. Colleen's senior position with the Band, her childhood experiences with the language as well as her formal education and work experience make her an ideal person to spearhead this endeavour.

An expert in her field, Colleen educated me about the important distinctions that must be made regarding the dialects spoken by the people of the North Island and Central Coast. She asked that I use the word "*Kwakwakawakw*" to when referring to her people, an inclusive term which infers that many dialects are spoken by the people of the geographical area, including the dialects *gwasalla*, *nakwala* and *kwakwala*. Colleen's life-long work has been dedicated to the survival of the culture through reclaiming the languages; I acknowledge her patience with me and the importance of her efforts to the Kwakwakawakw people.

As the context for her focus on language, culture and heritage, Colleen explains that the BC Treaty Commission was established after the Oka and Ipperwash crises to deal with the concept of Aboriginal rights and title, a legal phrase relating to Indian sovereignty about which Thomas Berger (1999) writes so eloquently in his book, *A Long and Terrible Shadow*, as does legal scholar, Roth (2002). Regarding the Nisga'a claim, Berger notes that "[lawyers and

judges] could not accept that people without a written language can, nevertheless, have an elaborate legal system of their own” (p. 150). While the Nisga’a Treaty has now been settled with the federal government, Colleen’s Nation is negotiating with the provincial government. She notes that she has been involved for ten years now but confidently talks of having more personal time to pursue educational goals, implying the conclusion of the treaty process in the near future.

Gender Issues

Colleen comments on the number of First Nations women of her generation who have gained a good education and worked hard to advance themselves, their families and their communities. Because her young male peers were able to gain good employment in the resource industries in their youth, most did not move on to post-secondary education as did some young women. She believes that this is one of the reasons that few men of her generation have the kind of leadership positions that she has acquired. This fact may also account for the gender-biased circumstances that other women of the study have encountered in their villages. Men who have acquired leadership roles with relatively little formal education may be especially sensitive to the educational accomplishments of their female counterparts.

While Colleen has experienced some gender bias from the “old boys networks” she has encountered, men as well as women, she asserts that older folks with a lot of experience have offered her tremendous opportunities to learn and grow.

In an intriguing and thoughtful aside, Colleen also muses on the tendency of Kwakwakawakw women to “mollycoddle” their boy children while expecting a great deal of their girls. They do not want to “break the spirit” of their boys but do not seem to be concerned about the pressuring their girls. Colleen states that boys lack activities around the modern home to which they can meaningfully contribute. Traditionally, boys took their place beside fathers, grandfathers and uncles, learning the skills and knowledge that they would require in adulthood. Girls’ roles, on the other hand, have remained essentially the same in the modern context. From Colleen’s observation, I hypothesize that girls’ continued connections to their traditions—working hard to support families and communities without expecting extrinsic rewards—have transferred into areas such as formal education, paid work and community leadership.

Colleen believes, as her Mum does, that women should not “make a big thing” about being a woman. And that is what she has always tried to do—“learn what needs to be learned to the best of your ability and work hard.” The future of the North Island and Central coast communities and cultures seems more stable with knowledgeable people like Colleen and others “actively shaping a better world for future generations” (Lawrence and Anderson, 2003, p. 11).

Colleen’s childhood at the feet of loving and supportive parents and grandparents in a beautiful and isolated area of the BC Central Coast provided her with a stable foundation for her life’s work. Her story seems to provide further evidence of the importance of strong family relationships in the development of women who assume leadership roles in their communities and the larger society.

Epilogue to the Women's Stories

Aboriginal women are community leaders who protect the future by transmitting language and culture to their children. Despite the contributions women make, they are commonly excluded from decision-making roles with far-reaching consequences for them, their families and their communities. (Carl Fernandez, 2003)

The broad educational tapestry of the lives of these seven women reveals several patterns. All of them have been directly affected in one way or another by federal government policies and are, in a meaningful manner, connected with their traditional territories. They are all life-long learners who have chosen to upgrade their qualifications or further their knowledge. Their identities--even for those whose families no longer live on reserve and for those who suffered family dysfunction as children-- remain tied to their villages through cultural ceremonies, births, marriages, funerals and tradition, and for some, work. They move between their Western education, training and work lives, and their cultural and historical personal lives, some of them on a daily basis.

I wonder about the colonizing effects of formal education on the First Nations women such as those who have chosen it, like the women in this study. Are they doing the work of self-assimilation that the government has promulgated through its policies, or is Highwater (1981, p. 12) correct in assuming that his is the first generation to be able to become fully educated in two cultures? Formal education does not appear to have diluted these women's sense of heritage or their traditional ways of being.

This collection of stories is not offered as representative of all First Nations women of Vancouver Island North. As each of these narratives is unique,

so every woman has her own story, which she may share one day. The women whose stories appear in this study were asked to do so because, from my Western perspective as a secondary school principal, they were “successful” women (successful in my definition) who were contributing greatly to their children and their communities; this is a purposive sample. Each woman shared with me not only her story but shared the translation of the oral narrative to paper in a manner that she could approve.

The process has been both heartening and disconcerting for me in every respect. Each story is a precious gift that I treat with great care. While I believe that the narratives deserve to be shared with a wider audience, to counter disrespectful stereotypes and to offer opportunity for others to find inspiration, I am also aware of the pitfalls of writing for others, even with their permission. As Reid (2004) notes: “writing down another culture has its problems . . . [such as] editor-narrator relationships” (p. xxi). Life histories are edited first by the storyteller herself for her own private reasons and secondly, by the recorder/editor, for reasons of narrative convention, academic schemas and personal styles. Brumble (1988) declares that documents such as those I have helped to produce are “texts in which the assumptions of Indian autobiographers *and* Anglo editors are at work” (p. 11). They are “bi-autobiographies” (Theisz, 1981); they are narrated life stories.

Anthropologist Reid (2004), in *Paddling to Where I Stand*, states her position on the debate in her discipline of the verity of such “autobiographies” especially given the renewed and reconceptualized interest in them:

Why is autobiography a fiction? Many factors are at play. In the case of a literate person, her/his autobiography is a self-written fiction, a construction of the self. Of course, no autobiography can be a “true” representation of the self in any absolute sense, but self-written autobiography is at least the subject’s own fiction. With as-told-to autobiographies of non-literate First Nations persons, on the other hand, it is the recorder-editor who decides what is to be the final shape of the subject’s “autobiography.” Therefore the roles of the editor must be disclosed (pp. xx-xxi).

While the women whose stories reside in this document are highly literate, none withdrew to write her own autobiography; all were willing to put the task into my hands as recorder-editor. I felt then and continue to feel the great responsibility and the honour I have been given to collaborate in these very personal recollections. In my analysis of the themes that emanate from the narratives, I labour to maintain a heightened state of reflexivity and self-disclosure.

Remembering Context

Born into five different nations, all the women but for Colleen and Jacki come from backgrounds that include familial dislocation from their heritage and culture although these two women told of their own challenges of racial discrimination and gender bias. In addition to perseverance through difficult times, their stories demonstrate courage, agency, integrity, generosity, pride and love of family and community. It is heartening to bear witness to the personal and professional successes, and the manner in which these women pursue their goals

and dreams, for themselves and their families. The reader is reminded, however, that these stories must be centered in the historical and cultural context of women's lives and the lives of their sisters, a critical if sometimes silent aspect of the narratives; these are generations of First Nations women forcibly disenfranchised, discriminated against because of their gender and race, and condemned to dependency and poverty. While they themselves have risen above the indignities of the recent past, the women of the study continue to experience social disruptions caused by colonial policies and by community dysfunctionality which affect them both directly and indirectly. All of them understand the issues their people face and are striving to improve their communities, through intervention or as a role model for others.

Coming Home

Anderson and Lawrence (2003) believe that Aboriginal women need to “come home”, that is, to “re-embrace the traditions that return us to ourselves as Native people” (p. 12). One way to do this, in their view, is to help rebuild First Nations communities, beginning with the children. This belief is passionately shared and acted upon by all the women in the study. Sharing stories, rediscovering voices and articulating the struggles that continue to face them may be another pathway to “coming home.” But not everyone in their communities encourages the work they do.

CHAPTER SEVEN

UNIQUE STORIES, COMMON THEMES

Interpretation as an Act of Imagination

Peshkin (2000), in his research with Native American youth, stresses the importance of acknowledging the relationship of researcher subjectivity within the process of interpretation. As he states, “An important reason for reflecting on the development of an interpretation is to show the way a researcher’s self, or identity in a situation, intertwines with his or her understanding of the object of the investigation” (p. 5).

I began my research with the observation that many First Nations women that I know bridge two different worlds; I wondered what it is like for them to live in two worlds and what does the very notion means. I also wondered whether the lives they were leading were typical examples of contemporary role models for First Nations youth and other community members. Because of my involvement and interest with secondary schooling and education, I also wanted to learn as much as I could about the context of the First Nations communities in order to address concerns about student success. Both formally and informally, First Nations women of my acquaintance appeared to be making a difference to the education of our children. And so it was here that I began my journey with a subjectivity that unquestionably affected the lengthy interpretive process. As Peshkin (2000) notes, “We are not indifferent to the subject matter of our inquiries” (p. 6).

What follows are the responses to the main question of the study and predominant themes that I believed emerged from lengthy transcripts, field notes, scripted stories and ongoing conversations and interactions. I did not try to fit them into prevailing critical feminist theories. I came to realize that the theoretical constructs with which I thought I could interpret the women's words, were a reflection of my own thinking and world view, and not the participants. Instead, the resulting themes are my interpretations of what the women deemed to be important in their lives, their families and their worlds, based on what I imagined to be the enduring constants in their often difficult and always strenuous lives. I also chose to focus on the impact that their lives are having on their communities, and particularly, on youth. During the research journey, I discovered that, by immersing myself in the narrators' points of view and holding in abeyance those theories, muted voices were raised and personal experiences emerged from the life histories.

Supports and Barriers

Family and Cultural Supports

In each narrative of the study women speak of the importance of family, either attributing to their own parents and grandparents the love and pride that has sustained them, or claiming the love and pride of their own children as their reason for being. Even those for whom childhood was difficult, ties to tribe, clan, extended family and ancestors have provided a sturdy cultural foundation upon which to centre personal and tribal identity. Attention to genealogy and the unassailable sense of interrelatedness of First Nations people, as documented by

Highwater (1981) and Cole (2002), may have played a key role in forestalling cultural genocide and personal disintegration over generations.

Jacki, three generations removed from her home village, comments that “First Nations people can tell a family from a mile away and are real family, family-oriented—or it’s pride. . . . That’s a funny bond that First Nations people have.” Even so, she is surprised that people recognize her by her resemblance to the family when she returns to the reserve. Noreen, Colleen, Maggie, Jacki and Sarah relate at length the pride they feel in their strong parents and extended families, and the importance that their history continues to play in their lives. While Karen and Gail did not receive the same family support as children, they found the support they needed from others and the stability that they provided for their children, from within. Their families’ dislocations did not result in segregation from their respective cultures. Gunn Allen (2001) calls this transcending one’s circumstances while being firmly connected within them (p. xii). Sylvia Maracle says that, in order to walk a traditional path, one must ask, “Who am I? Where have I come from?” (in Schwager, 2003, p. 40). Feeling embedded in one’s heritage and culture provides continuity, a sense of belonging and, it appears, inner strength.

The healthy sense of identity and the concomitant social conscience that these seven women seem to embody is contrary to the well-documented struggles in demoralized First Nations rural and urban communities of people for their rightful place. Tuhiwai Smith (2002) asserts, “We know what it is like to have our identities regulated by laws and our languages and customs removed from our

lives” (p. 97). Looking forward, Berger (1999) believes that “Native people are determined to find a distinct and contemporary identity in a world that has replaced their own. . . . They may be torn, but they believe they cannot repudiate their past” (p. 37). Berger believes that health can only be restored when Indian people come to “rebuild their own social matrix, to reconstruct their own reasons for living” (p. 38). I believe that the research participants are role models, examples of praxis, living distinct and contemporary lives while continuing to respect their heritage; their lives have been supported by loving, healthy family members who help to shield them from ongoing pain and suffering of life, whether on or off the reserve.

Internal Barriers

When settlers came to the North West coast of BC, they brought with them a Eurocentric governance structure that presumed male dominance in the public sphere. While this was consistent with patriarchal Kwakwakawakw traditions, the specific form of local governance eventually imposed by colonial masters on each reserve was not. Hereditary chiefdomship was subverted via a system of elected chiefs and council members, whose new authority, as Maggie points out, was similar to that of an elected mayor and council in a municipality. This created considerable confusion within “Bands” about the legitimacy of elected chiefs and hereditary chiefs; on some reserves, the problems continue today. All of these actions were predicated on the BC land reserve system that was, despite the efforts of Native people to influence it, drawn up and forcibly imposed without their input. Harris (2002) maintains that the Indian reserve

system in British Columbia grew out of the mindset of a settler society and mid-nineteenth century colonial policy, attitudes that are now seen as a “culture of domination . . . which stereotyped non-Europeans as the obverse, the negative counterpart of civilized European and created justification for appropriating non-European lands and reshaping non-European cultures” (pp. xxiv-xxv). Native assimilation into “civilized society” was assumed to be the appropriate outcome. Stewart-Warahira (2005) describes the Nisga’a Nation as having acquiesced to this assimilation in their 2003 treaty with the federal government.

The amount of land eventually allocated to various tribes was based on hunting and fishing opportunities and the needs of settlers. In modern times, rules and regulations regarding both of these subsistence livelihoods have made it impossible for people to be self-sufficient; indeed, Harris (2002) states that this was true from the beginning. For example, coastal communities were given very small land reserves based on the presumption that the Native people could feed themselves from the sea. Current Aboriginal food fisheries are an attempt to address the inequities; those who demonstrate against the food fisheries forget or ignore history.

While I have given a grossly oversimplified review of the “land question” and the institutionalized electoral systems imposed on reserves in BC, my intent is to establish a political context for the position in which First Nations people find themselves in the twenty-first century, related to other nations. While attempting to reclaim traditions and sustain culture in a postmodern world, the infrastructures and systems within which they live and work—social matrices as Berger (1999)

would call them— are completely foreign. Among other ramifications, this has resulted in uneasy relations between First Nations women and men.

The Gender Imbalance.

Carl Fernandez (2003), in *Coming Full Circle: A Young Man's Perspective on Building Gender Equity in Aboriginal Communities*, states that “colonization undermined the position of women by instilling values and practices that displaced their important positions within the community. Women became less influential as European influence grew” (p. 244). Thus, women, who formerly enjoyed gender equity and a place of power within their traditional cultures have been particularly affected (Cardinal, 1977; Jamieson, 1986; Freed-Rowland, 1993; Sutherland, 1995; Wyrostek, 1997; Tuhiwai Smith, 2002).

The current gender imbalance resulted from the accumulation of many factors, according to Fernandez (2003): the initial loss of land and resources; the exodus of men from their communities to find work and to go to war; the low value given to women's work outside their villages; residential schools which separated boys and girls, preventing normal social interaction; and the ‘sixties scoop’ when many Aboriginal children were taken from their homes by social agencies across Canada and never returned to their communities (pp. 245-246). Fernandez hypothesizes that the “theft of children” decimated tribal knowledge as the elders did not have anyone to whom to pass teachings and values. This also devalued the role that elders had always played.

Fernandez' (2003) research demonstrates that intermarriage was another factor in traditional gender role breakdown. Marrying outside of the tribe occurred

because people thought it would make life easier for their children. A First Nations male, interviewed by Fernandez, told him that “if children were mixed or if they could pass as white then they got along fine. So a lot of the women were encouraging their daughters to marry a white man, because their children would have a less stressful life” (p. 246). This comment resonates with an experience that had, at the time, shocked me. A secondary school student reported that fair-skinned Indians do better in school.

Fernandez (2003) believes that these strategies “resulted in non-Native men directly introducing male-dominant norms into Native communities, something that is seldom acknowledged even today” (p. 246). As Maggie notes, some men have assumed elected power within their reserves without the traditional “ethics of caring” (Noddings, 1986) that hereditary chiefs always traditionally assumed and embodied.

Compounding the Native woman’s loss of position within her tribe was the Department of Indian Affairs (DIA) policy requiring women who married white men to renounce their “Indianness” while First Nations men who married white women did not lose their status. In fact, the policy conferred Indian status on non-Native wives.

In his challenging treatise, *Wasåse: Indigenous Pathways of Action and Freedom*, Indigenous scholar Taiaiake Alfred (2005) describes what he sees as a basic flaw in the contemporary Indigenous colonial male character:

Rather than taking the fight to the white man, the true source of the injustice in our lives, indigenous men are aggressive against their own

people. This is a form of self-hatred that is not open, but hidden and coded, especially in the behaviour of our supposed community leaders towards young women and the open disrespect shown by many of our people for their own languages, traditions and elders (p. 279).

Colleen, Maggie, Jacki, Sarah and Karen all speak of men who have overlooked or been disdainful of their contributions in the community or work place. Maggie was particularly hurt by the gender bias she has experienced from people close to her, directed against her leadership and her educational achievements.

Men such as those described by Fernandez (2003) and Alfred (2005) have been “de-cultured by colonization” (Alfred, 2005), and this has relegated women to the private sphere, or worse. Efforts to help rebuild their communities have met resistance, discrimination and sometimes violence for some women. At the very least, “women are taking a political backseat” (Fernandez, 2003, p. 247) and when this occurs, of course, the loss affects the whole community as well as the individual. Gunn Allen (1990) claims that it is possible to know how traditional an Indian is. If they haven’t respect for women they’ve lost the tradition.

As is evident in this study, there are many respectful men in leadership roles in their communities, men who have acted as mentors and role models for these women leaders and other community members. Alfred (2005) describes these men as “warriors”: “The distinction between the warriors and the still-colonized reminds us that decolonization happens at a different pace and in different ways for everyone and in every community. Withdrawal from our dependency on the state is like breaking an addiction” (p. 278).

While some of the women in the study have courageously overcome substance addictions, common in many First Nations communities, all of the women can be described as having broken the “dependency” addiction that Alfred (2005) describes. Noreen, Gail, Karen, Sarah, Maggie and Jacki were directed into independency by their childhood circumstances, which as adults, they came to appreciate fully. All of the women—six of whom live in their villages—acquired an economic and social independence through their endeavours via education, leadership positions and community activities.

They are not yet the norm, however. Their achievements present an substantial contrast against the experiences of some First Nations women, as described by Jacki, whose children are placed by government intervention in foster care. These are women whose lives she characterizes as being “stripped of their power” and who, in Jacki’s opinion, are encouraged to remain dependent by the actions of Ministry officials. The women such as those that Jacki describes are bereft of voice and pride.

Cultural Identity as a Requisite for Self Identity

I noted the strong identity with the tribal group in each of the women long before I invited them to this endeavour. Friesen and Friesen (2005) maintain that, typically, the degree of attachment to a cultural community varies widely (p. 156). Applying a model created by Schultz and Kroeger (1996), Friesen and Friesen identify five degrees of attachment: 1) the traditionalists, proud of their attachment, who are usually raised within their community and appreciate and pass on its historical, cultural and spiritual knowledge; (2) the assimilated who

have abandoned their cultural roots and beliefs and have adopted new norms and middle class social attachments; (3) the lost identity Aboriginals who are in limbo culturally and psychologically and who vacillate between grief and dependency, addictions and cultural knowledge; (4) the new traditionalists who are ‘born again’ Aboriginals—everything old is good—knowing little of their beliefs and practices but openly displaying symbols of their heritage, often in academic and social circles; (5) the international human beings who appreciate the gifts of both the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal worlds they inhabit, with healthy spirits, social consciousness and in tune with peers and environment (pp. 156-158). It is perhaps the males in the first or the latter group that Aldred (2005) calls “warriors.”

While the benefits of forming categories and labels into which Aboriginal people might locate themselves is dubious in my opinion, the model is offered as an effort to enhance understanding of cultural group identity and behaviour patterns (p. 156) by researchers who believe that cultural identity plays a critical role in women’s health. By the definitions given, Jacki’s example describes women who have lost their cultural identity, even though many of them live on or near the reserve.

Institutional Barriers

Aboriginal scholar Martin-Hill (2003) presents some of the institutional barriers that continue to haunt all Native women:

In the light of five hundred Native women missing in Canada today and the fifty plus women missing and murdered in Vancouver, British Columbia, it is not an exaggeration to suggest that Native women continue

to be oppressed and to be seen as disposable We are not seen as victims of the oppressive colonial regime that institutionalizes racism and sexism against us. As Indigenous women in this country, we even lost the basic human right to raise our very own babies! Where are our Indigenous leaders on this issue? Nowhere. But we cannot continue to be silent on such devastating issues. While Aboriginal women continue to live out the residual effects of the North American holocaust, we are also seeking solutions. The impact on our Nations' psyches is exacerbated by the mainstream's denial. The first step towards reconciliation is nested in the acceptance of our own stories, our own realities and history—a history of genocide (p. 117).

The impact of hearing some “good news” stories in this study is heightened by the contrast with Martin-Hill's (2003) shocking description of the institutional norm, from research prepared for Heritage Canada. It is also a reminder of the strength and courage of women who are healing themselves while surrounded by the effects of the “North American holocaust” (Martin-Hill, p. 117”).

Themes Emerging from the Narratives

Education, Ongoing Learning and Epistemologies

All seven women in the study have pursued formal education throughout their adult lives. Each graduated with a high school diploma, although for several, it came years after dropping out of school in their teen years. Four have attended university. One holds a BScN and a MA in Counselling, degrees she acquired after becoming a grandmother; another has almost completed a degree in

Linguistics. Two women have college diplomas, one in Counselling and the other in Office Management. Four women regret their lack of opportunity to further their formal education but continue to use their innate abilities and motivation to learn “on the job” or speak of continuing their formal education later.

Each woman speaks of the importance of formal education for youth, including her own children. Three have children in university or with degrees, including Law and Masters degrees. Five of the women have paid their own way through school, because they were not living on reserve, had lost their Indian status or because they chose not to accept government support. Four of the five asserted that they had paid for their own education or that of their children.

Noreen remarked, that, because her status had been taken away upon her marriage to a non-Native man in the 1970s, she had been denied her goal of going to law school. She was unable to support herself and her family, and go on to law school. It is apparent that the ramifications of that federal policy still rankle.

Three of the older women were students at residential school although only one talked at length about the continuing dilatory effects of that experience on her. Another lived with her family within walking distance of a residential school but she was sent to another school hundreds of miles away, disrupting familial relationships. Of the three, Sarah, the oldest woman, had a positive experience and did not want to leave the residential school when she turned sixteen in the early 1930s. She is still upset that she was not permitted to stay and graduate with a grade eight diploma. Residential school attendance does not

appear to have lessened the wish for further formal education in any of these women.

Later, when the rules requiring all First Nations children to attend residential school were relaxed, two of the middle-aged women were affected when their parents chose to move the family away from their traditional homes to towns with public schools, rather than allow their daughters and sons to be apprehended by Indian agents. Both experienced racial bias within the public school system. Colleen did not elaborate on her public school experiences although her first job took her back into the same school system when she became the first Aboriginal woman to be hired.

Jacki's family had moved away from their reserve three generations earlier because her great-grandfather had to "chose between being a steamboat captain or an Indian." All her schooling was in the public system. Her belief is that, while residential schools were often negative, they provided an education to children living in remote areas who otherwise would have had none. Jacki feels that the intent of the government was a sound one, given the importance of education in the modern world. She is aware, however, that the practice created many problems.

First Nations women have had to endure the double binds of racism, sexism, and the many constraints of colonialism, including residential schooling and the public school system. Noreen's elementary school experience in the public system provides a hint of the challenges she faced as the only "Indian." Karen and Gail voice similar stories from their own high school experiences.

From her position as Education Coordinator for her Band, Gail also speaks of her concern regarding parents in her village who are still uncomfortable entering their children's public schools. Despite these and other educational legacies, each woman demonstrates her love of learning and acknowledges the importance of formal education by the model she presents, the initiatives she has supported and the work she has engaged in.

The broad educational tapestry of their lives reveals several patterns. Each woman is a life-long learner aspiring to pursue formal education or take on new learning challenges. While their identities—even for those whose families no longer live on reserve—remain tied to their villages through cultural ceremonies, the women have, at the same time, achieved an independence through their careers and volunteer work. A Western education has not appeared to dilute their heritage or their ways of being, but has provided opportunity and financial stability.

Each woman speaks of the importance of education for youth and community. This emphasis is confirmed by the research. After extensive consultation with Aboriginal people across Canada, the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996) states that education is “the single most important issue facing Aboriginal people” (p. 19). Schissel and Wotherspoon (2003) explain that the potential for social and economic advancement are obvious but that education is also important for enhancing self-esteem, for raising awareness of one's own and other cultures, and for contributing to society (p. 3), an apt description of the characteristics of women in this study.

Indigenous Knowledge

A discussion about the importance of formal education and learning for First Nations people would be incomplete without acknowledgement of the traditional Indigenous worldview that comprehends learning and knowledge very differently from the ubiquitous Western perspective. For example, the separation of subject disciplines and the categorization of objects, properties and functions are antithetical to Indigenous thought as illustrated by Cole (2002) in his poetry. Battiste and Youngblood Henderson (2000) define Indigenous knowledge:

Perhaps the closest one can get to describing unity in Indigenous knowledge is that knowledge is the expression of the vibrant relationships between people, their ecosystems, and the other living beings and spirits that share their lands. . . . All aspects of this knowledge are interrelated and cannot be separated from the traditional territories of the people concerned (p. 42).

An holistic, relational epistemology such as that described by Battiste and Youngblood bears little resemblance to modern Western epistemology based on Pythagorean rationalism and Cartesian logic (Mahoney, 1991, p. 40).

Indigenous epistemology and ontology appear to originate from the period in human mentation prior to the sixth century B.C. when, as Mahoney (1991) says, “human accounts of nature and life were dominated by mystical, mythical, and supernatural metaphors” (p. 29). As Mahoney notes, “many of these same metaphors remain powerfully active today” (p. 29). The structures of Western

thought —rationalism, dualism, idealism and realism— emerged over the fourth and fifth centuries B.C., drawn from the contributions of Greek philosophers. As Wallace (1999) declares, “there *is* a depth of difference between Native and non-Native persons regarding the ways we see the world” (p. 305) (added emphasis).

Turner et al. (submitted) attest to the importance of Indigenous Knowledge, also termed Traditional Ecological Knowledge:

In terms of understanding environmental dynamics and interrelationships, Traditional Ecological Knowledge [TEK] is particularly important because it is *cumulative* knowledge over a multi-generational time frame, in some cases, thousands of years. Many academic disciplines, including western science, are relatively recent in comparison and scientific studies focusing on integrated understandings of particular localities across the earth are sporadic at best. In contrast, although the TEK for any group of people may be spatially limited, it extends its continuity and understandings of one location or territory back into the past on a more-or-less continuous basis through intergenerational transmission. These facts emphasize the importance of TEK globally as we struggle to deal with environmental issues.

The people of the North West Coast also practised the transfer of knowledge very differently from their Western counterparts. Children were taught through stories, songs and dance, and by including them as silent observers in an activity until they demonstrated readiness to learn the required skill; then they were given the opportunity to experiment. I have witnessed very young children dancing at

Potlatches with their parents. The child is neither corrected nor praised; s/he watches closely in order to imitate the parent when able.

Traditional Indigenous learning and teaching models have no place in Western pedagogy and methodology; even those public school systems which attempt to incorporate First Nations knowledge into current curricula are often unwittingly disrespectful of Indigenous epistemologies and ontologies because the strategies for doing so are invariably dissonant. Schissel and Wotherspoon (2003) contend that:

What the residential school experience [and all Western school systems] did was to reroute Aboriginal children from a true apprenticeship for living to a false apprenticeship for democratic and labour force participation. . . . In the final analysis, the combination of failure and abuse led to a massive devaluation of children from their accustomed place in cultural life. (p. 63).

Schissel and Wotherspoon's assertion brings to the fore Marx's (1906) labour theory. Given that children must be prepared to participate fully in the life of the tribe in order to maintain their heritage, the dangers to cultural survival are obvious.

Formal education, beginning with residential schools modelled on the British system, has proven alien to North West Coast First Nations thinking and difficult if not incomprehensible for many students. Those who have successfully adapted their thinking and learning processes to the Western model have created for themselves "the distinct and contemporary identity" that Berger (1999)

identifies as necessary for meaning-making in the world that has replaced their own (p. 39). Perhaps for the women in this study, their secret is that, while they have made the necessary adaptations to life in the postmodern world, all of them have refused to repudiate “the old ways” while becoming contemporary First Nations women.

Exploring the Primal Mind

To demystify Aboriginal epistemology and ontology for the Western thinker, it is important and appropriate to consult Aboriginal scholars and writers, of whom Jamake Highwater is a member. Highwater (1981) is a Native American philosopher and aesthete who, with the benefit of his dual cultural orientation, explores and contrasts the ideas and values of Western culture with the attitudes and world-views of North American tribal peoples. “I began the arduous tasks of exploring the infinite distance between peoples and building bridges that might provide me with a grasp of the mentality of Native Americans as it relates to the worldview of other civilizations. I had to undertake this task in order to save my life” (p. 3). As a young, “nearly assimilated” child with a disenfranchised [Indian] mother, Highwater believes that, if he had not taken on this challenge, he would have lost “the interior visions that make me an Indian, an artist and an individual” (p. 3). Of his mother, he says that she was “always capable of sustaining utter faith in the most contradictory realities—which is doubtless how she managed to keep alive her innermost identity as an Indian despite all the events that took her farther and farther from her origins” (p. xiv). Her faith in contradictory realities may be a clue to her sustained identity.

As one of the first generation for whom the use of the Western type of intelligence became a pervasive tool rather than a vehicle for assimilation and ethnic genocide, he became conscious of the “intelligence at work in my own culture” and no longer felt ashamed (p. 11). His generation also was the first to be able, because of social change, to become fully educated in two cultures:

We grew up in two Americas—the ancient one that had existed for our ancestors for tens of thousands of years and the new one that is written about in history books. The tales of these two Americas are rarely compatible—and we quickly came to grasp our perilous situation. We had to make convincing use of our newly acquired intellectual skills in order to sustain our primal culture . . . and emerge as a new cultural mutant—the *Intellectual Savage*—who was capable of surviving equally in two worlds by tenaciously retaining the ritual apparatus of primal people at the same time we were attaining the intellectual and communications paraphernalia of the dominant societies. (p. 12)

Highwater’s (1981) analysis of his challenges and opportunities provides a theoretical construct with which to understand the common thread for all seven women in the study. As first and second generation intellectuals, Highwater would acknowledge their pursuit of formal education, not as an abdication of their heritage but as a way to sustain it, and not as a dilution of their rich cultural lives but an enhancement of them.

Whether these women have consciously resolved to live in two worlds with the intent of saving themselves and their primal worldviews as Highwater

(1981) relates, is not relevant. They cross the bridge daily. Highwater recognizes that “the primal mind has too recently become aware of itself and cannot yet, and perhaps by its nature never will be able to, vivify itself in terms that are both its own and intelligible to non-Indians (p. 14).

In speaking of the primal mind, Highwater (1981) refers to “that spiritual consciousness . . . that is ageless and raceless . . . not better than linear, Western mentality . . . [but] an alternative to the Western way of thinking that has been chided, neglected, belittled, cast out and abused for centuries. . . The designation of primal mentality should not be used to deprecate those who do not possess it but to elevate those who do possess it” (pp.204-205). He uses the descriptor “primal”, rather than primitive, as the latter carries negative connotations in Western terms.

Highwater (1981) likens the primal mentality to the feminist mentality in that both are alternatives to the long-standing domination of male/Western thinking, not better than but equally important and not exclusive to females or aboriginal people but also discovered in the psyche of the male and in the attitudes of urbane Western people (p. 205). He asserts that “Indians do not believe that there is a ‘*universe*’, but in a *multi-verse*’. Indians don’t believe that there is *one* fixed and eternal truth; they think there are many different and equally valid truths” (p. 5). In an Aboriginal world of multiple truths and multiple realities, it *is* possible to be a feminist and a traditionalist, a scholar and a mystic, a devout Christian and a staunch adherent to cultural ceremony. It follows that all cultures deserve legitimacy and the right to remain dissimilar from the dominant

culture for “all the education and refinement in the world cannot supplant a capacity for otherness” (Highwater, 1981, p. 12).

As a test for that capacity, I am reminded of a First Nations woman, a senior administrator with a graduate degree who responded to my musings about the resident Orca of the Pacific North West, and the fact that, after 20 years of study, scientists still do not know where the Orca go for the winter months. My friend assured me that her people do know; Killer Whales transform into wolves upon beaching themselves and spend the winter in the coastal forests.

French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss called this society one of the greatest efflorescences of mankind, with its poles and masks and other animist symbols. Multiple truths.

Knowledge and Power

Dei, Hall and Rosenberg (2000) define an anti-colonial discourse as one that emphasizes the power held by local/social practice to survive the colonial and colonized encounters. Power and discourse are not possessed solely by the colonizer (p. 7). Two of the women in the study are exemplars of anti-colonial discourse as they speak openly about power relations. In their case, this relates to the empowering of others within their sphere of influence, in the context of the potential of education to strengthen their communities and to lift individuals from their passivity. As Jacki said, “It makes me really angry when I see people having their power taken away. That’s why, in every job I’ve had, I’ve worked hard to empower the person [I’m working with]. If the government would give them back their power, I really think you would see a big difference—in all of us”.

In Foucauldian terms, this woman is speaking to the cause and effect of subjugated knowledges and the emphatic call to lift oppression. For Michel Foucault (1977b), politics is the starting point and “theory is practice, not a translation or interpretation of it” (p. 208). Because Foucault sees power as productive, not repressive, as in the conventional view, and because power always generates resistance, he does not think of political change in terms of emancipation from oppression but as the transformation of political relations “through the production of new discourses and so, new forms of power and new forms of self” (Ramazanoglu, 1993, p. 24). Grimshaw (1993) notes that “Foucault constantly points out in his writings how traditional emancipatory theories have been blind to their own dominating and oppressive tendencies” (p. 56). Grimshaw argues that feminists’ recognition of these tendencies is crucial for those who would avoid being implicated in many forms of domination and repression-- another note of caution for the researcher.

The words of Michel Foucault are relevant for scholars researching with Aboriginal peoples. While positing that the academician needs to be a “remover of road blocks” for peoples with vulnerable, localized and popular knowledges, he argues that the “re-emergences of suppressed knowledges are keys to a multi-faceted, postmodern politics of refusal at the site of power . . . He advocates for a critical discourse” (in Cain, 1993, p. 87). In his final writings on ethics and care of self, Foucault argues that “a study of ethical praxis and thinking that is different in many ways from dominant western traditions is an important exercise in defamiliarization” (Grimshaw, 1993, p. 64), and ultimately, a morality and power

that is directed upon oneself. As Grimshaw asserts, “given the ways in which women have often experienced severe difficulties in achieving any form of personal autonomy, these notions of self-mastery, self-transformation, the active creation of self, the concentration on practices of the self and the care of the self, might seem to be the ones which could be congenial to feminist thinking” (p. 65). These notions do seem congenial to Aboriginal thinking. The movement towards transformative empowerment has been well underway for some time for the seven First Nations women leaders, as symbolized by the “courageous discourse” that they have engaged in for this study.

Feminist Perspectives

Tuhiwai Smith (2002) notes that in the broad international community of Indigenous scholars, debate is centred on protocols and methodologies, and the positioning of themselves as “researchers informed academically by critical and often feminist approaches to research” (p. 4). This has permitted space to be opened up within the Academy to talk more creatively about research with particular communities, challenging “racist practices and attitudes, ethnocentric assumptions and exploitative research” (p. 9). Even so, Western feminism has been challenged by non-Western scholars as “conforming to some very fundamental Western European world views, value systems and attitudes towards the Other” (p. 43). Also, feminist theory that ignores or denies the impact of colonialism and other contextual realities does not do justice to the life histories of First Nations women. Western assumptions about the primacy of the individual may not resonate with Aboriginal cultures that honour the collective. Rewriting

history and writing theory for research with and by Aboriginal women are, as Tuhawai Smith (2002) asserts, difficult and intimidating (p. 29). These are necessary cautions and advisements to feminist academics in all disciplines.

Feminism and Leadership

Despite the specific concerns of four of the women about their treatment at the hands of some men with whom they have worked, none of the women spoke of themselves as feminists, or indeed, as leaders. As a highly educated woman said about her important job, “I never really thought of it as a leadership role . . . I didn’t feel I set out to be a leader or a role model, but I guess I am”. This selfless attitude is one that I have noted in research with non-Native women administrators. In my personal and professional experience, many working women seem generally uncomfortable with notions of power of position, unlike their male counterparts. Also, it may be that the First Nations women in the study have not had exposure to the tenets of feminist thought or leadership literature.

Sylvia Maracle (2003) has another explanation that might explain why strong women did not name themselves as such: “Some of our [Aboriginal] notions of leadership were formed during the time [after European contact] that women were totally excluded from politics. Our development as peoples has been characterized by this tension between formal male leadership and informal female leadership” (p. 74). On the North Island, colonial policies and laws have served to exacerbate the effects of the local tribal customs which offer women a strong private role but silence them in the public domain unless they are acknowledged chiefs in their own right. Given this tradition, it is unsurprising that women do not

speak of themselves directly in feminist terms; their life choices, however, reveal an assertiveness associated with certain feminist attributes.

While the findings of this study are not generalizable, the methodologies and protocols are. It is essential that researchers work in concert with Aboriginal participants when applying current feminist theory or when attempting to craft new theory.

Summing Up

The question that anchored the study that I have undertaken is: What supports and barriers are encountered by First Nations women leaders as they work to enhance the health of their communities and of the larger region? As expected many other, more specific questions arose and were responded to or exemplified by the participants themselves: What do our children and our communities need to be healthy? How can we save our languages and our culture, and live in the contemporary world? What accounts for women's loss of status in their own villages? Why is education necessary for a good life in today's society? How can the First Nations become self-determining? What must governments do to facilitate a return to health in First Nations communities? And many other questions

I discovered that my initial question revealed my prevailing Western perspectives of such concepts as "leadership", "success" and even "community". Implied, as well, was my feminist point of view. Throughout the study, I have tried to articulate openly the lens through which I have worked; because of the research and the generosity of the participants, I have become aware of and open

to multiple realities and other ontologies and epistemologies if not fully understanding of them. As Friesen and Friesen (2005) conclude, that could take a lifetime. In fact, my own life has been transformed by the research that I have been fortunate enough to engage in with the seven First Nations women.

My initial purposes--stimulated by curiosity and admiration for their talents and their culture, and by a desire to learn about their lives and culture in order to understand better our First Nations students--have, for me, led to so much more than an academic exercise. I now enjoy deep and abiding relationships. My curiosity was not idle, but sprang from the stereotyping of Aboriginal women as *Citizens Minus* (Sutherland, 1995; Wyrostock, 1997; Cairns, 2001). My admiration for their strengths and community good works drew me to want to share their accomplishments far and wide. Now, having witnessed their collective generosity and trust in the face of historical and current injustices, I have begun to understand *why* women such as these are leading the recovery of their people and their culture. *How* they have managed to break deadly cycles afflicting so many of their sisters, over-represented as victims of family violence, unemployment, addiction and poverty, is the subject of further research, but it is apparent from this small study that education and a re-valuing of Indigenous knowledge—Traditional Ecological Knowledge- is important to that transformation.

Haig-Brown and Archibald (1996) note that “every living culture is in the process of transformation . . . in fact, the very presence of researchers transforms culture whether they come from within the culture, taking on new roles as academic researchers, or as outsiders, working to approach a ‘Native’s point of

view' . . . As they read and accumulate information and knowledge, the readers' cultural understandings may also be transformed" (p. 247).

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL LEGACY

Reconciliation

Sadly, our history with respect to the treatment of Aboriginal people is not something in which we can take pride. Attitudes of racial and cultural superiority led to a suppression of Aboriginal culture and values. As a country, we are burdened by past actions that resulted in weakening the identity of Aboriginal peoples, suppressing their languages and cultures, and outlawing spiritual practices . . . One aspect of our relationship with Aboriginal people over this period that requires particular attention is the Residential School system. This system separated many children from their families and communities and prevented them from speaking their own languages and from learning about their heritage and cultures. In the worst cases, it left legacies of personal pain and distress that continue to reverberate in Aboriginal communities to this day. Tragically, some children were the victims of physical and sexual abuse . . . The Government of Canada acknowledges the role it played in the development and administration of these schools . . . To those of you who suffered this tragedy at residential schools, we are deeply sorry (Excerpt from the Statement of Reconciliation, Indian and Northern Affairs, Canada, 1998).

This apology from the federal government of Canada was part of a 1998 initiative called “Gathering Strength – Canada’s Aboriginal Action Plan,” an

initiative designed to acknowledge injustices, encourage healing and invite collaboration on future community-based renewal strategies. Government acknowledgement of, and apology for, the complex legacy of residential school abuses was apparently viewed as an essential first step in the new relationship. Recognition and admission of the government's role, an historically rare occurrence, possibly received impetus from the final report of the 1996 Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples which dedicated a full chapter to the impact of residential schools on Aboriginal individuals, families and communities. The 4000 page Royal Commission document called for changes in the relationships between Aboriginals, non-Aboriginals and governments in Canada. Also, 1996 happened to be the year that the final, federally-run residential school in Canada closed although by 1979 only 15 such schools were still operating, many of them in the West. The last residential school to close was in Saskatchewan.

The history of residential schools in Canada mirrors colonialist activities in many countries from the fifteenth century onward. Tseshaht First Nations member Randy Fred (1988) tells of hearing about the residential school experiences of the Coorg peoples in India at the 1987 World Conference of Indigenous Peoples' Education:

I hadn't realized it was a world-wide story. The similarities between modern life among the Coorgs and among North American Native people were eerie: alcoholism, suicide, lack of economic self-sufficiency, racism, dependency . . . and residential schools to which the Coorgs are still forced to send their children (Fred, 1988, p. 11).

Victims of colonization the world over have suffered from practices deliberately designed to lead to what former Assembly of First Nations (AFN) Chief Matthew Coon Come (2003) and many other residential school survivors term “cultural genocide” (Churchill, 1994) . Separating children from their families and communities, and inculcating them in the colonial culture and language was a primary strategy in eliminating the “Indigenous problem” in many parts of the world.

The Canadian Historical Record

In what became eastern Canada, the Récollets and later the Jesuits and Ursulines established boarding schools for Aboriginal children in the seventeenth century. From the nineteenth century on, many schools were run by religious authorities, including the Anglicans and the Catholics, even before Confederation. It was Egerton Ryerson, an influential educator in Upper Canada whose ideas, published by the Province of Canada in 1847, “formed the basis for future directions in policy for Indian education and which, with Confederation, strongly influenced the development of schooling for Native people in British Columbia” (Haig-Brown, 1988, p. 25). Ryerson advocated domestic education, agricultural training and religious instruction for Native students. The report also expressed the need to raise Indians to the level of whites while at the same time, protecting them from the negative influences of white society. Haig-Brown suggests that political pressure to take control of Indian lands was implicit in the 1847 report (p. 25).

Steady immigration from the British Isles and Europe in the nineteenth century coincided with a need to settle the West. Prentice & Houston (1975) note that:

The general recommendations of the [1847] report were that Indians remain under the control of the Crown rather than provincial authority, that efforts to Christianize the Indians and settle them in communities be continued, and finally that schools, preferably manual labour ones, be established under the guidance of missionaries (Prentice & Houston, 1975, p. 220).

By 1860, the government had shifted its policy from fostering the autonomy of native populations through industry to their assimilation through education, a policy that transferred to the new Confederation the resulting Indian Act, a statute that is still the law in this the twenty-first century. As Haig-Brown (1988) concludes, “cultural oppression was becoming written policy” (p. 25).

Ing (2000) contends that the assimilation policy and the Indian Act emanated from the Conservative government of the day that had already demonstrated a distinctly racist perspective. She cites the Immigration Act of 1869 as an example of a government determined to attract only the “right and desirable” immigrants to Canada – a restrictive policy that established a hierarchy determining who would be preferable and who should be excluded from the country. Discrimination was based on assimilability and determined by national origin and apparently, skin colour (p. 17). The categories of preference under the Immigrant Act also included ‘acceptable but not preferred’, ‘non-preferred’ and

‘non-assimilable’ (p 18). While obviously not directly bound by the Immigrant Act, First Nations were determined to be “assimilable” and it was through the Indian Act of 1876 that this was to be achieved.

Boyko (1995) labels the Indian Act as the “most inherently racist piece of legislation passed at any time by any government . . . because the Act stripped Native people of their humanity by defining who was . . . an Indian” (p. 180). Provisions for small parcels of land, to be called reserves, where Indians had to reside to receive government support were also established under the Indian Act. Thus, “protection, assimilation and Christianity became the main tools used for the absorption of Indians into the body politic” (Ing, 2000, p. 20). Ing suggests that the systematic slaughter of bison and subsequent starvation of the Plains peoples hastened the intended consequences allowing for white immigrant settlement of the West (p. 19).

The Assembly of First Nations (AFN, 2006) identifies the years 1870 to 1910 as a time when the clear objective of both missionaries and government was the assimilation of Aboriginal children into the “lower fringes of mainstream society” (Haig-Brown, 1988, p. 1) with residential schools as the locus of this policy. Ing (2000) attributes this objective to the “mentality of subjugating people to get control over them (or their land) [by] targeting the children of those the government considered inferior” (p. 21). By 1920, the government had made attendance at the residential schools mandatory through to the age of 16 years, although Haig-Brown reports that children who were often sick or truant were barred from the residential school that she investigated (p. 87). Some parents hid

their children from the priests, Indian agents and police officers but most acquiesced for reasons ranging from a sense of powerlessness to a conviction that their children needed a white education.

In 1951, when the Indian Act underwent revision, Aboriginal parents were given the option of sending their children to public schools. By that time, however, students were coming from families whose parents and grandparents had themselves spent time in residential schools with the attendant and now well-documented problems. In rural and remote areas, the option to send their children to provincial public schools resulted in families having to relocate away from traditional villages to spare their children the same traumas. Communities and families thus continued to suffer; while children could now stay with their families and go to day school, they often experienced other indignities such as discrimination and racism in public schools. In the present study, Noreen's elementary school experiences are an example of this outcome, as are Gail's dysfunctional childhood and Karen's unhappy high school years. Meanwhile, their families experienced dislocation and separation from extended family members, elders and communities. For various reasons, not all First Nations families were able to choose the option to relocate in the 1950s and '60s, and thus another generation of children was ripped away from their culture and required to attend the residential schools.

Many children who did stay home were removed from their families during this time period as well, in the so called "'60s Scoop", their parents having been deemed by Social Services workers to be unfit to raise their children. The

intergeneration effects of that policy are still being felt as adults, raised in white families, attempt to reconnect with their birth families and their culture.

In the intervening years and to the present, federal and provincial governments have continued to make decisions regarding Aboriginal education without consultation with parents or community leaders, even after all residential schools were closed. In BC in the 1980s, the Master Tuition Agreement that determined the funding for the attendance of Aboriginal children in the public school system, was negotiated between school districts and the federal government with no involvement of the First Nations people themselves. Then Minister for Indian Affairs, Robert Nault, attempted to revise the Indian Act at the beginning of the twenty-first century without the adequate collaboration of highly organized national Aboriginal leadership groups. In 2003, Alberta Learning implemented the First Nations, Métis, and Inuit (FNMI) Policy Framework in the province's public school system without asking Aboriginal parents how they defined parental involvement and what they believed their children needed from their schools. And the significant BC tripartite Transformative Change Accord, called the Kelowna Accord in the popular press, achieved at the November 2005 First Ministers meeting in Kelowna, BC, between federal and provincial governments and First Nations organizations after years of engagement was ignored by Harper's new Conservative government in early 2006. Education had been "on the table" as well as other social and economic concerns. For some First Nations, this truly collaborative effort was the first to offer real promise; ordinarily cynical Aboriginal leaders had spoken openly about the opportunity for

genuine healing and transition through this Accord. (Personal conversation, former Chief Councillor, August, 2006). The record of relationships of Canada with her First Peoples continues to be viewed as a dismal one.

Ing (2000) notes that, while it took time for societal changes to occur for immigrant descendants, often ameliorated by legislation, “the First Nations peoples still have to deal with the lingering effects of institutionalized racism because of government policy and the legacy inherited from the residential school system” (pp. 42-43) – this despite the 1998 statement of apology from the Canadian government.

The History of Residential Schools from an Aboriginal Perspective

This brief history of residential schools has been gathered from both Eurocentric and Aboriginal sources. I feel it is important to offer an Aboriginal viewpoint, verbatim, on the same matter. The document *What Native Leaders Want* raises several issues that I have not often seen articulated in the literature, including the point that while Chiefs wanted white education for their children, they strenuously deny wanting the residential school model. The distinction is made below, cited from an Aboriginal website, apparently located in Canada given the Canadian flag which waves on its residential school home page (Thunderbird, 2006):

WHAT NATIVE LEADERS WANTED:

The setting up of residential schools was to say the least a clash of two cultures. Whereas a number of Chiefs wanted white education for their children, their reasons differed dramatically from the government’s

reasons. They wanted European education so that their children would be able to survive in a rapidly changing new world.

Native leaders were firm in not wanting to assimilate their children into white culture in order to receive that education; nor was the intent to surrender their lands and to deliver their children into forcible confinement far away from their families and traditional cultures their goal.

In other words, they made it very clear they desired only education for their offspring, not a fundamental change in their way of life. Native people were victims; they did not willingly agree to Canada's deeply oppressive apartheid policies against its First Citizens. They did not willingly agree to Indian Agents luring their children away with promises of rides in planes. Who in their right mind would??

For decades, the appalling lie that Native Leaders demanded the residential schools for their children was perpetuated. In other words, Church and State tried their best to "spin-doctor" their involvement by trying to place the responsibility for the debacle squarely on the shoulders of Indigenous leaders.

All Native leaders wanted education for their offspring, not a fundamental change in their way of life.

WHAT NATIVE PEOPLE GOT:

The wishes of Native leaders were ignored and the exact opposite occurred. A misguided Church and State led by Canada's extremely racist government leaders, endeavouring to civilize the 'savages' in the ways of

the Europeans, combined to create a diabolical set of circumstances that from the outset were doomed to failure. Poorly paid and morally bankrupt student teachers and missionaries, who were at best barely functional illiterates, were put in charge of educating Native children.

In fact, thousands of children between 1880-1990 were exposed to kidnapping, unimaginable physical and sexual abuse, starvation and virtual slavery that until recently had been Canada's dirty little secret. The Residential School debacle reached its zenith in 1931. The savagery, however, continued for decades leaving physical, emotional, mental and spiritual scars that reverberate to this day.

As a direct result of this horror, at the present time, alcohol and drug abuse among Native people is five times the national average; sexual and family abuse eight times the national average; suicide rate among Native teens five times the national average (Thunderbird, 2006).

This verbatim account uses language that, while harshly descriptive, offers evidence of the residual pain and anger that emerges whenever residential schools are addressed by Aboriginal peoples. Other web pages in this site are humorous, informative and colourful. Thunderbird (2006) also comments on two published apologies, one from the Canadian government, as cited in full at the beginning of this chapter, and the other, American, to emphasize the current state of relationships between nations:

INDIAN AND NORTHERN AFFAIRS APOLOGIZES – Jan. 8, 1998

The Canadian Government through the Department of Indian and

Northern Affairs apologizes to the country's 1.5 million Indigenous people for decades of mistreatment that include attempts to stamp out Native culture and assimilate Indians and mixed race people. Minister of Indian Affairs Jane Stewart reads a "Statement of Reconciliation" that acknowledges the damage done to the Native population - including the hanging of Louis Riel after he led a rebellion of Indian and mixed-race people in western Canada in 1885. The government apology stops short of pardoning Riel, something Indigenous leaders have demanded for decades. Stewart does, however, apologize for the government's assimilation policies. "Attitudes of racial and cultural superiority led to a suppression of aboriginal culture and values," she says. "As a country, we are burdened by past actions that resulted in weakening the identity of aboriginal peoples, suppressing their languages and cultures, and outlawing spiritual practices. We must recognize the impact of these actions on the once self-sustaining nations that were dis-aggregated, disrupted, limited or even destroyed by the dispossession of traditional territory, by the relocation of aboriginal people, and by some provisions of the Indian Act. The time has come to state formally that the days of paternalism and disrespect are behind us and we are committed to changing the nature of the relationship between aboriginal and non-aboriginal people in Canada."

A \$350 million dollar Healing Fund is created. Most First Nations do not believe that this sum is anywhere close to compensating them for the damage to Native societies; the money does not include off-reserve

Natives, Inuit or Métis. To date little of the money has found its way into the hands of the survivors.

The Prime Minister did not apologize and in terms of cold hard cash, this is significant.

WASHINGTON APOLOGIZES – *Sept. 9, 2000*

The head of the Federal Bureau of Indian Affairs formally apologized yesterday for the agency's "legacy of racism and inhumanity" that included massacres, relocations and the destruction of Indian languages and cultures.

‘By accepting this legacy, we accept also the moral responsibility of putting things right," Kevin Over, a Pawnee Indian, said in an emotional speech marking the agency's 175th anniversary.

With tears in his eyes, Mr. Over apologized on behalf of the BIA, but not the federal government as a whole. He is the highest-ranking U.S. official ever to make such a statement regarding the treatment of American Indians. "This agency participated in the ethnic cleansing that befell the Western tribes," he said. "This agency set out to destroy all things Indian. The legacy of these misdeeds haunts us."

The President did not apologize, and in terms of cold hard cash this is also significant. (Thunderbird, 2006).

Through their conversations and storytelling, the enormous influence of residential school experiences on the lives of the First Nations participants and their families touches the heart. The reader cannot deflect the facts and effects of

this government policy as an issue from another time, for the impacts are multi-generational and inter-familial, creating a matrix of effects that some have escape even as others cannot.

The Intergenerational Effects of Residential School

Ing's (2000) doctoral dissertation addresses the ongoing effects of residential school experiences on adults, a topic heretofore given little attention in the academy. In the title of her thesis, *Dealing with Shame and Unresolved Trauma: Residential School and its Impact on the 2nd and 3rd Generation Adults*, Ing names the effects that continue to plague Aboriginal peoples, not only those who attended residential school themselves, but on their children and grandchildren.

One of Ing's (2000) purposes is to "extract and compare what are the intergenerational impacts and to find out the reason why those 2nd generation persons were left to search for their identity" (p. 63). Given that she places herself in the 2nd generation, one can hypothesize that her purpose derives from personal experience as well as academic understanding.

Ing (2000) defines the first generation as those who attended residential school up to the 1930s. She names her parents as first generation adults. These are adults whose parents attended residential school. Ing's (2000) third generation includes those adults who did not attend residential school themselves, but who have suffered the effects intergenerationally through their parents and grandparents. Gail, the youngest of the First Nations women in this study, is, by Ing's definition, a 3rd generation adult, who also experienced relocation and the

resulting cultural dislocation. Like other 3rd generation participants in Ing's study, Gail is determined that her children have the benefits of a rich cultural immersion and a good "white" education – all the experiences that she didn't have.

Ing's research (2000) shows that 1st generation parents were reluctant to share the experiences with their children because residential school was such an ordeal (p. 70). The silence that was commonplace in the schools - to avoid punishment, to avoid speaking about the unspeakable, for survival, as well as basic language issues, became the norm in the family home, complicating the lack of parenting skills. For some 2nd generation "endurers" as Ing calls them, this resulted in a denial of their heritage from which their children suffered a "cultural disconnection" (p. 95). Inability to speak the language isolated many from elders and the community, compounding the feeling of isolation and negative self-identity, which was then passed on by some to their 3rd generation children. Ing concludes that the "intergenerational impacts have deep emotional effects such as shame about First Nations identity inherited from those of the 1st generation" (p. 97).

From her interviews with ten participants, eight women and two men, Ing (2000) compiled a list of 46 impacts of 1st generation residential school experiences on 2nd and 3rd generations. Of the 46, 13 are consistent across the generations, meaning that each generation has experienced the impact even though 2nd and 3rd generation children may not have attended the schools themselves. Information about the impacts was derived from what the children said about their parents and grandparents. The 13 findings are:

- *Denial of First Nations identity
- *Belief in lies/myths about First Nations people
- *Shame
- *Poor self-esteem
- *Family silent about the past
- *Communication difficulties
- *Expectation to be negatively judged
- *Controlling father
- *Experience of racism
- *Violence and physical abuse in family
- *Sexual abuse
- *Alcoholism
- *Parents who value education. (pp. 119-120)

The list offers few surprises except for the last finding. Despite the many traumas caused by the “education” offered at the residential schools, all three generations in Ing’s (2000) study continue to demonstrate the value that education holds for them, a finding that, while counterintuitive, is consistent with my own findings.

Impacts that are only articulated by the 3rd generation include the reclaiming of identity, independence, language loss, ability to control anger towards parents, good parenting and perfectionism – a list that reveals shifting sensibilities and awarenesses in many 3rd generation adults (p. 121).

The Impacts of Residential School on the First Nations Women Participants

Using Ing's (2000) *Impacts of Residential School* findings as a benchmark, I note that twelve of the thirteen common impacts she lists were voiced by at least one of the seven First Nations women participating in my own study. The one impact that was not mentioned directly was that of sexual abuse. This may have been because of the sensitivity of the subject; it may mean that these particular women escaped this fate. The voluntary involvement of several of the women in sexual relationships in their teen years did, however, have a profound impact on their adult lives, as Gail and Karen relate.

Sarah, the only woman who is first generation, in Ing's (2000) terms, reveals that she only became interested again in her culture in her old age. While not turning her back on her extended family, she was "Christianized" to the extent that there was little room left for her First Nations culture, a type of denial of heritage. The stories Sarah told her children were the stories from the Bible, rather than the legends and myths of her tribe. While Sarah has lived and travelled extensively, it is interesting to note that many of her children are living and working in their traditional village, a clue, perhaps, to the current-day strength of their self-identity or of the wish to reclaim their culture and heritage.

Maggie, the next oldest woman of the group, is the most demonstrably spiritual and immersed in "the Old Ways." She is also the only residential school survivor who did not speak at all about its impact on her except to say that she and her sister were separated and sent to different schools away from her home island by the authorities. The fact that Maggie did not focus on her residential

school experiences reveals a possible reluctance to dredge up painful memories. Because, like Sarah, she did not attend residential school until she was twelve years of age, the negative impact of the experience on her life may have been lessened. Whatever the specific reason, Maggie's silence about the past is consistent with Ing's (2000) research.

Maggie's early marriage and subsequent international travel took her away from family and traditional territory for many years. When she and her husband came back to her traditional home after an extensive university education, Maggie responded to a Band posting for community nurse because her wish was to come home to care for Elders and other needy persons. The fact that the council rejected her in favour of another, much less qualified person, shows possible evidence of resentment about her education and world experience, and possibly her status as a Bill C31. The lengthy absence from her community may also have been a factor in the decision. Unwillingness to recognize, acknowledge and honour educational success may emanate from the expectation noted by Ing (2000) that the returnee would be judged negatively.

Ing (2000) speaks of the many participants in her study who have post-secondary education, although most decry the lack of residential schools information in course content, including Native Studies. Some say that the only way they learned about what their parents experienced was through independent research at university (pp. 78-79). These common communication difficulties that Ing highlights contribute to unhappy intergenerational relationships or, like Karen and her son, relationships that offer things while withholding the self.

In my study, Karen is the most articulate about her struggles with the residential school experience, which began in the primary years. She is also the person who seems most consciously and negatively affected by the abuses she suffered. The legacies of her experiences have remained with her into adulthood – low self-esteem and social dysfunction. A second-generation survivor, she says she is still negatively affected by her time in residential school, although at the same time, she knows that she is a well-regarded professional in her work life. She says that she ensured her son has wanted for nothing. He now has a graduate degree like many of the third generation adult children in Ing's (2000) study. Also like them, Karen's son knows very little about his mother's early experiences or the reasons for her self-described anti-social behaviours.

Fortunate to have been born into a robust traditional family and raised in a rich urban environment where their heritage was honoured, Noreen's residential school legacy was indirect, escaping attendance, as she did, through her parents' intervention. The racism she experienced in public school and the discriminatory policies of the federal government that she and so many other First Nations women experienced have left their marks. Noreen has learned to move on and has actively worked to minimize the impact for others throughout her professional career. She is, however, very concerned that many of the children in her village seem to be raising themselves, because of parents who are involved with alcohol and drugs. These children demonstrate that, for some, the intergenerational impacts of residential schools are negatively influential to the fourth generation.

There is a belief in Indian Country, originating with the Haudenosaunee of the Iroquois Confederacy, that Chiefs must consider every decision for its impact on the seventh generation. The wisdom behind this belief has been acquired by the First Nations School Association of British Columbia in its sponsorship of the 7th Generation Club for young First Nations students. The residential school legacy, affecting the children that Noreen and Sarah speak of, bears unfortunate witness to the depth of intergenerational impact.

Gail's dysfunctional childhood stemmed from her family's forced relocation from their traditional territory on the Central Coast. She grew up surrounded by people like her Mother who suffered, and continue to suffer, extreme cultural dislocation. She and her sister were moved from their home by Social Services and fostered out, a situation which, fortunately, had positive consequences for Gail. So while the experiences she suffered were not directly attributable to residential school experiences, they came from the same quarter and had similar impacts – a federal government which made decisions and took action for First Nations people without consultation or collaboration - and in this case, without prior preparation of such basic necessities as shelter and food, and without any understanding of the First Nations' relationship to place.

Neither Colleen nor Jacki have suffered intergenerational effects based on the residential school policy, although Jacki offers her opinion on the rationale upon which they were established. She contends that residential schools were established because “the government couldn't bring teachers into outlying areas.” Jacki believes that while the residential school “was not positive by any means,

there were positive aspects to it. These kids were given an education.” She also makes some controversial statements about the disadvantages of reserve life while holding great admiration for women who overcome the difficulties of this life. Jacki admits that she is speaking as a woman without the life or intergenerational experiences of most of the young adults whose children she fosters. She knows that her own life might have been very different had her great-grandfather not relinquished his status.

I identify both Jacki and Colleen as powerful, family-oriented individuals with a long history of competent professional involvement in the contemporary world as well as strong ties to their traditional worlds, especially in Colleen’s case. It makes sense to attribute their strength and ease in bridging both worlds to their untrammelled family histories and the avoidance of shame and dysfunction caused by the intergenerational impacts of residential school. Clearly, however, this conclusion is not generalizable. The resilience and accomplishments of my study’s participants who have overcome these traumas provide evidence of this.

Resonant Themes

Several themes emerge from the focus on the impacts of residential school experiences. One that I have noted is the preference of the exceptional women in my study to be future-oriented rather than remain locked in the past as are so many. Ing (2000), applying the phrase to both education and societies, calls this the ability to “move on” (p. 99). In Ing’s study and mine, education has been the motivator and the vehicle for moving beyond past tragedies and sorrows. Family and community have provided the foundation for taking risks and re-establishing

self-confidence and self-identity. Potential for healing comes from family members, friends and professionals. Ing believes that “returning to the First Nations community is essential after identity has been restored with a sense of pride. This is the link to the participants’ identity” (p. 112). That all the First Nations women participants in my study have returned to their traditional villages at one time or another supports Ing’s contention.

Another theme is the willingness of the research participants to describe their experiences knowing that their stories will be read by unknown others - those beyond their immediate circle. I am reminded again of Aboriginal scholar Joseph Couture’s (1991a) offer to share what he knows with society in general – if only we would listen. Canadian society can charitably be described as indifferent to the history and the suffering of Aboriginal peoples. Perhaps it is because we were taught only the settlers’ perspectives in public schools. With many Aboriginal people marginalized and invisible on reserves, the stereotypes of the drunken, urban Indian on Vancouver’s East side still persist. The courage of the participating women to expose their residential school and relocation stories to the academy and to society in general is courageous and generous.

The lack of information about residential schools is, in itself, a disconcerting theme that must only perpetuate ignorance and untruths in Canadian society. In my own experience, I have heard otherwise well-educated people speak of their belief that Canadian residential school experiences occurred generations ago. Public schools in BC are only now beginning to integrate Aboriginal history and literature into Ministry curricula. As Ing (2000) notes,

even in universities, the topic of residential school is not a part of the university curriculum (p. 79), except as an optional course, although the University of Victoria is one university that has plans in place to rectify that omission. Knowing our history does not imply inability to “move on”; instead, it opens the possibility that we will not repeat the wrongs of the past.

A happy theme that speaks to the strength and resilience of Aboriginal peoples is that for all the years of formal colonial policies designed to absorb the individual into the body politic - many still in place today - and thereby rid Canada of the “Indian Problem,” assimilation failed.

Further Research

In reviewing the experiences of the participants from a residential school perspective, several questions emerge which warrant further investigation and research.

Age of Admission and Length of Stay in Residential School

It seems reasonable to infer that the age at which some children entered the schools, and the concomitant length of time that they remained in the confines could influence the impacts of the experience. Both Maggie and Sarah entered their schools just prior to their coming of age, having spent their highly impressionable early childhood years within the family. Language would have been established, which, for Sarah, has remained fluent. Neither woman appears to have suffered to the same depth as that articulated by Karen, whose entire childhood was spent in residential school. Because students were released from the schools at the age of sixteen, regardless of their levels of achievement, it can

be inferred that Maggie and Sarah spent only four years in residential school. Now in her mid eighties, Sarah continues to express dissatisfaction about being sent home when she hadn't completed all the learning she had hoped to acquire.

The Christianization of the Students

While Sarah is the only participant in this study who expresses her Christianity openly, I know many devout First Nations people. Given that 'Christianizing' the students was a stated purpose of the residential schools, it would be useful to assess the effect that being "born again" (as Sarah says) has had on the impacts of residential school. It would appear that Sarah's appreciation of "white ways" was influenced by her missionary mother, about whom she still speaks with great reverence.

Another subject for investigation is the religious conversion of a people who, as Highwater (1988) says, speak of multiple realities. Does a traditional culture blend easily incorporate Christian beliefs?

Urban/Rural – On Reserve/Off Reserve

All of the women in this study have lived off reserve except for Gail who travels widely and regularly with her family. While six of the seven women have lived and worked in an urban environment, all but one of them have come back to live on their rural reserves.

Jacki speaks of the difficulties experienced by young adults in her care who have never lived away from their reserves, and of the very different life style she has had, given that she has never lived on reserve.

Five of the women have travelled internationally, experiencing other cultures and other life styles. How much influence has a varied adult life style had on the intergenerational traumas suffered in youth by five of these women?

Defining Abuse

Karen forces us to question what constituted abuse at residential schools. She reveals that she did not suffer sexual abuse and was not badly beaten (although she was “whacked”), “so when they talk about court cases, I don’t really fit any of their categories.” Current government policies regarding compensation focus on reparations for physical violence. Abuse that wounds the soul, as in Karen’s case, is not as obvious as that which affects the body, and is being overlooked.

It is assumed that these questions are being raised in the privacy of meetings of residential school survivors. Researchers will need to develop understandings based on what and when the survivors choose to disclose so that these more subtle but equally damaging abuses are recognized and acknowledged.

Valuing Education

It is worthy of further research, that the thirteenth and last impact on Ing’s (2000) list to have been chosen by all three generations of participants, is also the only positive impact on the list. Specifically all three groups agree that their parents value education as they do themselves. What is not clear is whether they define education as traditional, referring to the “Old Ways”, or contemporary, or both.

Presumably, the first generation group would have had parents who understood education as that which was fully integrated into traditional daily life. When second and third generation adults speak of their parents valuing education, what do they mean? Do they define the experience of the residential school as education?

My study focused on contemporary education, as each woman was formally involved both personally and professionally in some aspect. That formal education is highly valued is a consistent finding as demonstrated by the relevant literature as well as the women with whom I spoke. The Chiefs wanted a contemporary education for their children to help them adapt to the modern world (Thunderbird, 2006). To understand what is valued about education in each generation will require further research. With Jurisdiction of Education a potential reality in BC, this is a topic to be addressed by both school boards, universities and participating First Nations. Haig-Brown (1988) asks if decision makers will take time to separate themselves from the “models of domination and control that have pervaded Native education since the first missionary stopped the first Native child from speaking a Native language” (p. 125). What will Indian control of Indian education (National Indian Brotherhood, 1972) look like?

Haig-Brown (1988) terms the residential school policies of the Canadian federal government a “cultural invasion”. Like other invasions of a colonizing nation upon another, the results have been dramatic. What is instructive is the resilience of Aboriginal people to suffer such indignities to their way of life, and to rebound:

With an understanding of the past, people can participate with one another to make a different future. The strength which resisted the onslaught of cultural invasion perpetrated by the residential school for almost a century is the strength of a people and a culture which continues to survive and grow (Haig-Brown, 1988, p. 151).

The past and the present will only be truly understood by Canadian society at large when it takes the time to hear and understand the legacy of the residential school.

CHAPTER NINE

CROSS-CULTURAL CONSIDERATIONS

Working with indigenous communities is always occurring within a context of contested divides, multiple intentions, and fragments of emotional needs mirrored by contradictory elements in our cultures so distorted by history. Selby, 2004

Introduction

In her article, *Working Divides between Indigenous and non-Indigenous: Disruptions of Identity*, Jane Selby (2004) argues against ignoring difficult or uncomfortable experiences during non-Indigenous collaboration with Indigenous people as has been the tradition. She maintains that we must pay attention to the “apparently extraneous emotional aspects [of research]” or our work will lack depth (p. 143). Selby is not only addressing aspects of the recent protocols and guidelines that universities and granting institutions have disseminated, but “the move to awareness by non-Indigenous of the importance of reflecting on practices and motivations in order to identify forms of oppressions masked by good behaviour” (p. 144).

Brayboy and Deyhle (2000) are Native American ethnographers who also address relational issues and other issues when researching in American Indian communities. Deyhle, whose most recent work is a longitudinal study with Navajo youth, wrestles with her role as a “non-Navajo insider”; Brayboy scrutinizes his “Indianness” and how his embeddedness influences his work (p. 164). Both question traditional methods of doing research. Brayboy describes his struggle: “I have worked hard to develop a balance between being a good

researcher and a ‘good Indian’ simultaneously. Many traditional methods of conducting research directly conflicted with my sense of being an Indian” (p. 164). Brayboy and Deyhle give an example of a qualitative method that they question: that data analysis is distorted because insiders are unable to distance themselves from their participants. They declare that: “from our own experiences, it is this *lack* of distance that enhances our research” (p. 165).

In a recent trend, insiders and outsiders of various descriptions are acknowledging and debating the issues of doing research with Indigenous peoples. The heightened scrutiny is ameliorating an important discourse amongst individuals, in communities and in the academy. Power, oppression, ways of knowing, relationality, ownership, historical and cultural context and latent emotionality are all inherent in the discourse.

The generation of narratives and knowledge in this study has not been distanced from my personal relationships with the participants, nor of my responses to the narratives that we compiled together, and I believe this to be consistent with First Nations protocol. While I followed closely my intended research methodologies, I laboured over the scribing of the narratives as well as the form in which they were told. Sharing in a person’s life story requires acute care and attention. When the collaborations occur between cultural groups representing the oppressor and oppressed, attention must necessarily be heightened.

Caring for the Stories

I wanted the stories to be at the heart of this study, in a form that met with the approval of the storyteller, without my editing of content. Convinced very early in the process that the unique narratives deserved to stand alone, I searched for data analysis methods that eschewed strategies requiring categorization, a method that is contrary to Aboriginal ways of knowing, and, which, if used, it would eliminate “the heart” from the endeavour for the stories are the heart of this research.

Brown and Gilligan (1992) created such a strategy while conducting research with adolescent girls; Mauthner and Doucet (1998) adapted the strategy for their feminist research. The precise and extensive steps required for data analysis in this voice-centered relational method felt appropriate and I followed it thoroughly, concerned, as are Mauthner and Doucet, that data analysis is the locus where we are confront ourselves and our own central role in shaping the outcome (p. 122).

I believe that qualitative researchers have paid scant attention to methods of data analysis. Those who have, such as Hammersley and Atkinson (1996), argue for particular sets of analytical categories and other strictures. They believe that “where the researcher is particularly interested in the categories in terms of which participants view the world, this sort of account is of limited value (p. 222); the participants’ world view is apparently less meaningful than the researcher’s. Brayboy and Deyhle (2000) believe this to be a flawed position since respect must be paid to local voices which cannot be ignored if context is to be understood,

context being essential in all research with Indigenous peoples (p. 168). I have chosen to take this one step further, eliminating categories all together and offering substantial context within which to nest individual narratives.

Using the voice-centered relational method was a lengthy process but I believe it enabled me to better hear each woman's distinct voice. When I returned the narratives to their respective owners, there were some changes requested—information that participants wanted eliminated (thereby taking control of their own stories) and errors that I had made. After receiving the corrected narratives, I originally put them in one very long chapter in chronological order from oldest to youngest woman. It was immediately apparent that a chapter of this length was unwieldy and daunting for the reader. I separated the stories into several chapters and placed them between a prologue and epilogue, in a literary fashion, to offer further context.

The stories were combined into chapters according to participants' childhood circumstances, including residential school attendance and public school attendance in accordance with the impact of each on most women's lives and with the importance of education to the study. While I felt the need to highlight the themes that were emerging and to weave the stories together in a coherent and literate whole, I felt reticent about bringing analysis of the narratives directly into the stories; I did not want to impose meaning-making on the reader or on the narrators at this juncture. Furthermore, for the First Nations storyteller, interposing my voice within the narrative would be contrary to protocol. I also remembered Brown and Gilligan's (1992) directive to "hear what she says about

herself before others speak of her” (p. 28). For this reason, I included a “Commentary” section directly after but separate from each story with a focus on specific details raised in each narrative and my interpretation of these details. My intent is to hold up a mirror to the stories rather than to impose my opinions.

Disch (1994) states that “under certain conditions, a story can be a more powerful force than a theoretical analysis” (p. 106). The conditions include experiences of great trauma—a holocaust, a genocide. “In the absence of the traditional categories and standards that ordinarily serve as guideposts to critical thought, [Arendt] (1994) argues that such a response must take its bearings from the ‘personal experience’ of the thinker. ‘Storytelling’ is the term she uses to describe critical understanding from experience” (p. 107). While the study’s participants are individuals who are successful in Western terms, they are also survivors whose current circumstances must be understood within their contextual frame. Their struggles and achievements must not be taken for granted; their accomplishments are not the norm within their own communities although they would be considered so in a non-Aboriginal middle-class society.

I chose to formulate a synthesis of themes emerging from the narratives in chapter seven including responses to the main question of the study, as well as an analysis of my own cross-cultural interests.

Defining Insider/Outsider

My ongoing relationships with the research participants place me in an unusual insider/outsider position. I am an outsider because I am not a First Nations person; I am an insider because I live in the same geographic place and

have enduring social relationships with the women. I am not an insider in the usual meaning of the word, in this case, a member of the Kwakwakawakw community. My varied relationships as researcher, friend, colleague and white educator makes my role in this study highly complex and fraught with “extraneous emotional aspects” (Selby, 204, p. 143) to which I have tried to attend. I find myself in what Selby calls “a transitional . . . emotional, and intellectual space of creative uncertainty” (p. 153).

International Indigenous and non-Indigenous Perspectives

Maori researcher Tuhiwai Smith (2002) believes that feminist research has made “insider methodology much more acceptable” (p. 137), (insider defined as Indigenous) but that insiders have to live with the long-lasting consequences. She also decries non-Indigenous experts who have silenced Indigenous voices by claiming acceptability amongst their academic colleagues (p. 139), although she does not wish to exclude those who are non-Maori from participating in Maori research (p. 187). Tuhiwai Smith quotes Indigenous scholar Graham Smith as offering models for non-Indigenous researchers including one that best matched my personal situation as researcher: “*Whangai* (adoption model) researchers are incorporated into the daily life of Maori people and sustain a life-long relationship which extends far beyond the realms of research (p. 177). By this definition, I will be required to account for the long-lasting circumstances, as mentioned. Tuhiwai Smith notes that Indigenous research is a high political activity (p. 140) and, in her culture, research is “one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous world’s

language” (p. 1) because of past damage done and advantage taken by non-Indigenous researchers.

Jane Selby (2004) a British psychologist who teaches and researches with Indigenous peoples in Australia, describes the contemporary Australian attitudes towards the Aboriginal populations as vacillating between guilt and apology. Even those who feel neither emotion are caught up in the processes of reconciliation “and our role in it, a question which inevitably returns to issues of responsibility and cultural advantage” (p. 154). Selby advises making use of these painful emotions to learn about Indigenous peoples. Her descriptions and analyses are applicable to the Canadian population.

Selby (2004) demands that non-Indigenous people reflect on their practices and motivations in order to identify “oppressions masked by good behaviour” (p. 144). She argues that meaning can only be generated in what Habermas calls an “ideal speech-situation”, that is, always more or less distorted by asymmetries in power, status or capacity for self-expression. Therefore, rarely does one achieve intersubjectivity, a transparent communication of views and meanings between individuals (p. 144). While Selby holds little hope for unambiguous meaning between people, she does recommend that we enter an arena of developing narratives, a tradition now well developed in conceptualizing the structuring of our identities to ourselves and others. These accounts may be judged ‘good enough’ as vehicles to understand and to engage with others rather than a literal and unambiguous and coherent truth about ourselves” (p. 145).

While Selby has affirmed for me the structure and methodology of this research effort, she has underlined the uncertainties of collaborating with the First Nations, an oppressed people.

The Oppressed

All of the feminist researchers cited in this study who speak on the effects of European contact identify Canadian First Nations women as colonized, dependent and discriminated against on the basis of race and gender (Freed-Rowland, 1993; Sutherland, 1995; Wyrostock, 1997; Lawrence and Anderson, 2003, Fernandez, 2003). The First Nations as a people have been systematically oppressed over generations in North America but recently, Aboriginal male leaders are being accused of wearing the mantles of their oppressors in their communities, leaving women, children and males followers even more vulnerable to domination. This is a situation about which Freire (1993) warns: “Revolution can lead to domination rather than liberation” (p. 108). Foucault’s (1988) belief, that the act of liberation does not necessarily lead to practices of liberty (p. 3), is substantiated in the circumstances apparent on some reserves.

Friesen and Friesen (2005), drawing on the research of Adams (1999) and Flanagan (2000), paint an up-to-date picture:

The process of colonization has adopted another strategy, this time undertaken by Aboriginal leaders against their own people. The yoke of colonization has not been thrown off; only the cultural affiliations of the bureaucrats have changed. Indigenous leaders now colonize their own

people in the same manner they claim to have been colonized, while at the same time complaining that governments, religious orders, and schools are still “doing it to them”. (p. 158)

Given that the number of First Nations women chiefs in Canada is small (Voyageur, 2002, p. 207), I must assume that the authors are referring to male leaders, the norm originally promulgated by the colonizers. Friesen and Friesen question the validity of the description but Adam’s (1999) and Flanagan’s (2000) scenario is comparable to that described earlier by Carl Fernandez (2003), a young Aboriginal scholar.

The potential for a new kind of oppression, this one internal to the culture, has particular dangers for First Nations women living in their villages. As treaties are signed in BC in the near future, there is the possibility of newly self-governing Nations extending control over their own people, especially at it relates to the dispersal of money and resources. Women and children could again be the most vulnerable. While treaties are now generally seen as a way to solve current political problems in BC, it is interesting to note that Roth (2002) defines them as another tool of colonialism.

Some Aboriginal women have “gone public” with their concerns regarding male leaders who fashion themselves as “elites”, as Canadian journalist Barbara Yaffe (2000) has written. Hints of dissatisfaction from some of the women in this study regarding local male leaders’ disregard of their female colleagues’ qualifications and initiatives appear to support the trend; the local men are said to be less educated than the women who want to share leadership,

and are described as generally unconcerned about the community public good. Having won a semblance of power after generations of white oppression, such men are unlikely to want to share that power. They have had powerful role models.

Decolonizing the Oppressed and Perceptions of Power

Friesen and Friesen (2005) believe that people must become empowered, a process whereby they can gain greater control over themselves and their environment. In their view, this involves “throwing off the yoke of colonization” (p. 160). The Aboriginal leaders described previously undoubtedly see themselves as having acquired a notion of power that Foucault (1980) critiques extensively—the commodity metaphor.

Winslade and Monk (2000) note that there are a number of assumptions about power: “One of these assumption is that some people possess more or less power than other people. In other words, power is viewed as a commodity or property that can be possessed in finite quantities that are distributed (unevenly) among people” (p. 49). This is a hierarchical view, placing the person with the most power “on top”. Given that the Kwakwakawakw tribes have a hierarchical social structure, it is unsurprising that this Western perspective of power has filtered into the leadership. Despite that social structure, however, traditionally, women held a place of respect and power; “there was natural equality between the sexes. Each had their own ceremonies, roles and purpose in the community and within the order of life. Neither one was more important than the other” (Deerchild, 2003, p. 101). The ‘old ways’ required that chiefs’ lives be dedicated

to the well being of the whole community, not to their own advancement as the designation was hereditary. For example, one of the purposes of the Potlatch was the redistribution of ‘wealth’—that which was valued, such as fish and furs—from the chiefly ones to the community. When the federal government forced the move from hereditary chief to elected chief, tribal affairs shifted irrevocably to a Western-style politics. As Tuhiwai Smith (2002) remarks: “They were all inheritors of imperialism who had learned well the discourses of race and gender, the rules of power, the politics of colonialism. They became the colonizers (p. 9).

Foucault’s (1980) view of power offers opportunities for the leadership of women given that it is possible to view power as a relational phenomenon rather than a commodity. Winslade and Monk (2000) illustrate how First Nations women can reframe their opportunities for leadership: “As people express resistance to a particular power relation, that relation starts to change, even in the tiniest of ways. This process of expressing resistance develops a sense of agency in people who have felt silenced or marginalized” (p. 51). Foucault’s call for the re-emergence of suppressed knowledges to stimulate the “politics of refusal at the site of power” appeals directly to those who want to “throw off the yoke of colonialism” as Friesen and Friesen (2005) suggest. However, the Friesens’ call for “empowerment” is itself problematic because this term implies the commodity metaphor and may be therefore culturally inappropriate.

Tribal Feminists

In order to achieve future self-government with the necessary re-balancing of gender relationships, educated and independent First Nations women in this

study are following a path of quiet resistance, personal autonomy and a return to the traditional ethics of care within their communities. Given that they “lead from the heart” (Young, 1993), a metaphor used by two of the participants, they are honouring the traditional way of tribal leadership. Some of them find the way difficult, their contributions unappreciated, their visions for the future frustrated, in communities that forget what it was like to have social and economic well being—to walk in balance with the Earth (Deerchild, 2003, p. 101).

While Third World feminists have long upheld a covenant based on the impacts of imperialism and racism unknown to their white sisters (Narayan, 1998), the First Nations women of my acquaintance attest to a relatedness that is based solely on heritage and culture. As Friesen and Friesen (2005) acknowledge, “The Indigenous people have always believed that all phenomena, including material and nonmaterial elements, are connected and interconnected. Every living entity is related” (p. 99).

Some First Nations women scholars are now claiming the term “feminist”. Deerfoot (2003), a poet and journalist, defines the term “tribal feminism” in her article, *Tribal Feminism is a Drum Song*:

You may wonder what a tribal feminist is and what makes her any different than a mainstream feminist. It would be too simple to say a tribal feminist is a feminist with Indigenous heritage. It would be too complex to do a comparative inventory, dissecting the ideologies, methodologies and theories, complete with footnotes and bibliographies of both perspectives. Instead, I’ll explain through storytelling, as is the custom among

Aboriginal peoples. Actually the story isn't really a story. It's more of a drum. Or, rather, a drumbeat. Not with a drumstick, but with a woman's heartbeat. It is the heartbeat that lies beneath her breast. The sound is really a question that has been asked for thousands of millennia: Who am I? (p. 98)

According to Deerfoot's definition with its ironic "jab" at the Academy, all women who listen reflexively to the beating of their hearts are tribal feminists.

Tuhiwai Smith (2002) speaks of a burgeoning international cohort of Indigenous scholars and researchers who are informed by critical and feminist approaches to their work. As a rising Indigenous political consciousness spreads world-wide, "cultural and linguistic revitalization movements have tapped into a set of cultural resources that have recentred the roles of indigenous women, of elders and of groups who had been marginalized through various colonial practices" (p. 111). If these international movements find their way to British Columbia, perhaps North Island First Nations women will engage in feminist discourse. I believe that, for now, their focus is understandably on themselves, their families and communities in order to heal and to restore the spirit.

Emancipatory and liberatory feminist theories as explored by Lather, (1986) carry with them overtones of First World blindness to the inherent exclusion of the Other (Narayan, 1998, Weedon, 1999), although Lather does acknowledge this deficit (p. 40). As Weedon claims, "The major emancipatory discourses which developed in the Western world in the wake of the Enlightenment—liberal humanism, Marxism and feminism—were, at the same

time, universalist in their aspirations and Eurocentric in their assumptions and practices (pp. 152-153). Foucault (1988) himself warns of the dangers as well as the benefits of speaking about and acting on the emancipation and liberation of others. Tuhiwai Smith (2002) notes that social research at the community level is often referred to as community action research, or emancipatory research—approaches that seek to make a positive difference in the lives of the people (p. 127). In this case, and in the example of First Nation women forming talking circles to create their priorities and form analyses for future action, indeed the collaborations could be determined feminist and emancipatory. However, postmodern feminism is not currently a discourse for North Island First Nations women intent on taking back their traditional gender roles within their small rural communities. Working for the benefit of children, the community and themselves, and sharing the burden of transforming a contemporary Nation into health and stability--praxis--is a life's work. The women of the study have demonstrated that the goal, while enormously challenging, is achievable.

The Oppressors

Much has been written about the oppressions that have been wrought on the Aboriginal peoples of North America. These oppressions must not be dismissed as relics of the past. While Western political correctness and Indigenous political activism have ameliorated some of the worst offences, many others remain, Bill C31 being a prime example. Also there is a more subtle bias that non-Aboriginal Canadians rarely acknowledge and for which they must accept responsibility—“unmarked whiteness” (Weedon, 1999, p. 154).

Weedon (1999) hypothesizes that the Otherness of people of colour is predicated on a centuries-old assumption that places white people on the top of the racial hierarchy. She theorizes that this assumption stems from the fact that “whiteness functions as an unmarked neutral category” in discourses about race; this renders race and racism as the responsibility of people of colour (p. 154). Weedon cites Audre Lorde (1984), a Black scholar, who offers an example from her experience:

Whenever the need for some pretense of communication arises, those who profit from our oppression call upon us to share our knowledge with them. In other words, it is the responsibility of the oppressed to teach the oppressors their mistakes. . . .Black and Third World people are expected to educate white people as to our humanity. (p. 154)

Weedon also accuses second-wave feminism of rendering invisible questions of race, while focusing on emancipation from the patriarchy (p. 155).

Weedon (1999) examines three common responses to questions of racism promulgated by white feminists: a refusal to acknowledge racialized difference based on the view that racism is an individual response, not a structural, systemic phenomenon (hooks, 1986); a sense of guilt that denies white racial privilege, “for as long as any difference between us means that one of us must be inferior, then any difference must be fraught with guilt” (Lorde, 1984); and, racism as a problem for women of colour only (pp. 155-156). Weedon stresses that “racism functions by privileging whiteness” (p. 156).

There is a fourth response that Weedon (1999) rarely witnesses: “The conscious recognition of racism as a structuring force in both the material practices shaping societies and the production of individual subjectivities, whether white or of colour” (p. 156). By Weedon’s analysis, until the problem of whiteness is understood as an aspect of Western hegemony then the unacknowledged assumptions by which colonizers stripped Aboriginal people of their lands, their cultures and their sovereignty will continue. Norms of whiteness are also gendered, according to Weedon (1999), as Western feminists will attest; this also presumes the obverse, that non-white women are “less rational and less sophisticated than their white Western counterparts” (p. 153).

I have raised Weedon’s characterizations of “the theoretical and political problems of whiteness” (p. 157) because it is a readjusted lens on the oppressions that people of colour, such as First Nations women, face. In fact, *we feminists* may be the oppressors, in subtle and unintentional ways— in the way we view ourselves and, concomitantly, in the way we relate to rural and urban Aboriginal women; in the assumptions we make and in the way we perceive the world presuming that there are no genuine alternatives. “And by masking our oppressiveness with good behaviour” (Selby, 2004, p. 144).

As Weedon (1999) asserts, the dominant meanings that white individuals attach to whiteness “remain implicit until confronted by difference” (p. 158). Complicating the problem of whiteness is the possibility that, as Friesen and Friesen (2005) state, “the non-Native value system may not even incorporate the necessary mental structures by which to understand Aboriginal tradition. An

enlightened grasp of the reality contained in oral tradition is usually thought to require the business of a lifetime” (p. 99). To restate Berger’s (1999) claim: “the moral and intellectual distance between those of us of European descent and Native people often seems as great as ever (p. x). And we mustn’t forget Couture’s (1991) offer to share the secrets if we would only listen (p. 54).

The Educational Leadership of First Nations Women

The women of this study are educators and leaders in both traditional and contemporary ways. They teach and support children and youth, and their community members in formal or informal environments, depending on their job position, volunteer work or family circumstance. Each believes strongly that education is the key to their people’s futures including the social and economic health of the tribe. They are contemporary women who model how to live well in Canadian society and remain grounded in their traditions and culture.

Over the last twenty years, theories have been constructed about women leaders as though they were a homogenous group. They have been characterized as collaborative, compassionate, flexible, nurturing and focused on the ethics of caring, a different set of qualities that are attributed to male leaders who are more likely to be identified as goal-oriented, entrepreneurial and multiskilled. Fitzgerald (2002) remarks that rarely, however, has “the possibility for substantive diversity among and between women [appeared] possible” (p. 13). Debates about gender, ethnicity and leadership are played out by women about women, but this leaves the substantive issues on the margins. Fitzgerald (2002)

asserts that gender and race need to be accounted for at the centre of the discourse on leadership.

Fitzgerald (2002) suggests that one way to discover the special complexities that Indigenous women face is for the reader to learn about their historical and professional contexts, and to focus on bicultural life stories that examine the interplay of ethnicity and their environment (p. 14). Like Weedon, (1999), Fitzgerald identifies whiteness as the “taken for granted norm that is deemed to be stable, unified and homogenous. Difference is therefore expressed as the corollary of whiteness (p. 13). She acknowledges a growing body of literature on cultural diversity and leadership that constructs non-western theories “that value and recognize indigenous ways of knowing, acting and leading” (p. 13). But Fitzgerald notes that “there has not been a conscious attempt to theorise how power is exercised and differentiated in gender *and* race based ways” (p. 15).

Some of the North Island First Nations women do face specific problems of race and gender in their leadership roles such as the dilemma that Fitzgerald (2002) names as “double consciousness as they struggle to interpret, negotiate and survive in two distinct cultural worlds” (p. 13). In other words, as they literally and figuratively cross the bridge daily between their villages and the town.

A second issue is the unfair presumption that the women are representing their tribes as well as presenting themselves as individuals in the public school or health care system or in local businesses. In the eyes of an often unsympathetic public, each is unwittingly representing all First Nations women—an unreasonable burden. Clare Boothe Luce, one of the first women to be named

ambassador in the United States, once remarked that when a woman fails in a job, it is not seen as an individual failure but the failure of all women. Boothe Luce did not have the disadvantage of being a woman of colour.

There is also the colonial assumption, both on and off reserve, that leadership is naturally a male prerogative and women who assume these roles need to be pulled back into place, as crabs in a bucket will pull down those who try to climb out. Other women can sometimes be as ready to undermine their colleagues as their male counterparts. And from anecdotal evidence only, I suspect that in some local First Nations communities, failure and tragedy has been such a constant companion that success of any kind is not tolerated by some individuals. I experienced this phenomenon with the many First Nations students in the secondary school who came within weeks of graduating. These behaviours are, of course, contradictory to traditional ways of being that position all tribal people as part of a collective identity whose survival rests on the collective responsibility of the group to value and respect each person for their skills, strengths and attributes (Fitzgerald, 2002, p. 16).

Fitzgerald (2002) posits two strata of leadership that may exist within Indigenous communities, derived from her work with Maori peoples in New Zealand that is relevant to aspiring First Nations women on the North Island:

Traditional community leadership that is derived from an indigenous worldview that recognizes skills and knowledge according to the *mana* (authority and respect) of an individual; and leadership as advocacy between indigenous and non-indigenous communities [which] often

requires people to be able to walk confidently and with influence in two worlds. (p. 17)

In the women of this study, both kinds of leadership as described by Fitzgerald are amply demonstrated. The authentic work of First Nations women can broaden the conceptualizations of what it means to be an educational and community leader in the twenty-first century. The first to benefit will be First Nations children and youth who are in position to break the cycles of dysfunction and dependency addiction.

CHAPTER NINE

RECONSTRUCTING AND RE-COGNIZING IDENTITY

Many Native women have told me that underneath all of the oppression and confusion, there has always been a part of them that knew the strength and vitality of being a Native woman. Uncovering this part is an act of recognition.
Kim Anderson (2003)

Colonization has had a particularly severe impact on Aboriginal women as recorded by Sutherland (1995), Wyrostock (1997), Graveline (1998), Yazzie (2000), Daes (2000), Battiste (2000), Nicholas (2001), Anderson (2003), Cole (2002) and many other poets, storytellers, authors and scholars. Even more telling is the evidence that continues to confront us in our city streets, on our highways and on reserves throughout the province and the nation – problems that Anderson (2003) describes as “a sickness that is the legacy of colonization” (p. 14).

Aboriginal womanhood has been negatively constructed by generations of colonial policies and practices, many still in place in the twenty-first century.

Anderson’s Theory of Identity

Cree-Métis scholar Kim Anderson (2003) is interested to learn how some Aboriginal women maintain and uncover their power, in spite of generations of oppression. Another question relates to what women are able to construct as an alternative to the pervasive negative identities extant.

Drawing on the work of feminists such as Patricia Hill Collins (1990) and her own interviews with 40 Aboriginal women across Canada, Anderson (2003) has determined that Aboriginal women are engaged in a four step process that she calls the medicine wheel of *resisting, reclaiming, constructing* and *acting* in order

to acquire and affirm the strong sense of self-identity necessary for healing. While these four steps are similar to those described by Hill Collins in her study of Black women, Anderson relates that “what is distinctly Aboriginal [about her own theory] is the way in which past, present and future are understood to be inextricably connected” (p. 15). Knowing one’s ancestors, one’s heritage and where one comes from, is the link to the past; this helps to define the present and the future. “Who am I and where do I come from?” is the necessary prelude to, “Where am I going and what is my responsibility” (p. 16)?

I note the connection with Clandinin and Connelly’s (2000) work on narrative inquiry given the importance that these authors place on what they term “the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space.” In addition to the personal, social dimension, Clandinin and Connelly believe that narrative inquiries “are always located somewhere along the dimensions of time [and] place” (p. 144). Temporality and geography are not just helpful in narrative research with Aboriginal peoples Anderson (2003) asserts, the concepts are integral to the research.

I understand Anderson’s (2003) identity framework to be like a matrix, the process couched within the added dimensions of time and place - the historical and cultural contexts. It is within this theoretical matrix that I reflect on the autobiographies of Kwakwakwakw women participants who are reconstructing and re-cognizing their lives, and thus, re-establishing self-identities needed to overcome the stereotypically negative identities that have been the norm for generations. I view the effort as one of innumerable acts of decolonization

necessary for healing as well as for developing the cross-cultural understandings essential for life in a contemporary world.

Constructing Negative Self Identity, Past and Present

Before focusing on the reconstruction of identity, it is important to relate how the negative image of Aboriginal women has evolved over time. The historical and cultural context interwoven throughout this study provides for the reader an awareness of the struggles faced by Aboriginal women since white settlement. Their traditional roles as respected members of their societies were overlooked by explorers, settlers and missionaries who arrived in North America with entrenched patriarchal views of the role of women and the authority of men. Initially, women were not deliberately displaced as much as rendered irrelevant during early contact. The cultural and social changes wrought by the newcomers resulted in unbalanced gender roles within Indigenous families and communities, a disorienting and disturbing result, but the worst was yet to come.

Cognizant of the critical importance of women to their communities and as reproducers of new generations, the nineteenth century governing class establishing policies of assimilation and integration which ensured that women lost all control – not only of families, communities and resources but tragically, of themselves. In residential schools established to civilize the youth, girls were taught that bodies were shameful and sex perverted. Boys and girls were completely, fanatically segregated, including brothers and sisters and other extended family members; sisters were also separated from each other (Personal conversations, 2004). Maggie tells of being shipped off to the Port Alberni

Residential School despite living close to St. Michael's School in Alert Bay. Her sister was sent to the BC Interior.

Anderson (2003) reports that, in the residential schools, “females had a greater obligation than males to be modest in dress, chaste in behaviour . . . Their heavier burden was part of the misfortune of being a woman” (p. 93). One of her study's participants reported: “As you are growing up, you begin to think that you are not worth anything, being Indian. Being an Indian is dirty. . . You are less than. You begin to feel low self-esteem” (p. 93). Another participant pointed to archetypes created at the same time, of the oversexualized Indian female who could be “used for the colonizer's pleasure and profit” (in Anderson, 2003, p. 101). Professor Emma LaRocque is quoted by Anderson as noting that Disney's *Pocahontas* embodies many contemporary stereotypes of Indian women – “part noble savage, part princess, part loose squaw” (p. 101). Pocohantas eventually wins the prize; she is elevated above other women in her culture by marrying a white man. Thus, her story also contains an unsubtle message about assimilation and integration. As Noreen relates, some young women were actually encouraged to marry white men in order to make their lives and the lives of their fairer-skinned children easier.

These and other examples of negative stereotyping - the licentious and slovenly squaw, the whore, the drunken Indian - combined with the shaming of female children in residential schools served to create in some Aboriginal women what they have shockingly come to identify as a “self-hatred rooted in internalized racism that comes from the negative self-concepts of racist

stereotypes” (Anderson, 2003, p. 106). Anderson reports that a number of contemporary Aboriginal authors and scholars – Paula Gunn Allen and Lee Maracle, for example – have themselves written about holding such attitudes resulting in self-destructive behaviours, including addictions and involvement in violent relationships (p. 106). Women with such devastatingly negative self identities, given the feelings of helplessness that are engendered, are easy prey for oppressors of all kinds, systemic as well as personal. The forced dependence of the reserve system only serves to exacerbate the sense of powerlessness. The downtown east side of Vancouver and many reserves harbour these damaged people.

Deconstructing a negative self-identity rooted in internalized racism begins with resistance – to stereotypes, to negative definitions of womanhood and Aboriginality, to the contemporary colonialist policies and practices of society.

Resisting Colonialism and Racism, Past, Present and Future

What inspires the seven women of my acquaintance to acquire or retain their power in the face of intergenerational oppression? From whence comes the strength to dare to see beyond the negative stereotypes and to construct a self identity that permits a woman to support her community by being comfortable with herself? While I did not ask this question directly, I noted some patterns emerging from our conversations together that suggest sources of this strength.

Stable Families.

Five of the women, Jackie, Colleen, Noreen, Maggie and Sarah, had the loving support of healthy family members as children and youth. The latter two

were the only ones to attend residential school although Sarah didn't leave home until her twelfth year, a circumstance that may have helped to buffet her against the trauma of being removed from her family. In addition, Sarah tells of the woman teacher with whom she could form a special maternal relationship while at school. Maggie spent years in a residential school far away from her family although she returned home in her early teens. Her references to her "much loved Mother" tell of a strong connection to family which appears to have sustained her through the ordeal. An early marriage to her life-long partner provided and continues to provide loving support.

Noreen's father and mother offered powerful models for her and the whole family. Their own acts of resistance included rescuing their eldest daughter from residential school and then moving the family away from the local Indian agent to prevent their incarceration and the seizing of other children. The flight from their traditional territory to Victoria resulted in other problems for Noreen but established an important template for her future decisions and actions. Jacki's father and grandfathers chose Canadian citizenship over government-prescribed Indian status in order to pursue professional goals as master mariners, setting the whole family on an actual and symbolic life journey away from reserve life except for cultural events. Colleen's extended family removed themselves from the confines of the reserve as they lived a traditional lifestyle as loggers and fishers. Women fortunate enough to have powerful role models within their own extended families have secure foundations upon which to construct their own positive self identities.

Dysfunctional Families.

Karen and Gail, because of residential school experiences and the dysfunctionality of their parents, did not enjoy stable childhoods. Both sets of parents had undergone dislocation from their traditional territories, one by federal government decree and the other, to avoid the Indian agent and residential school for their children.

The stories reveal each woman's personal initiative and determination to live healthy lives, despite difficult childhoods. Having the inner strength to resist the addictive lifestyles in which others chose to assuage their pain, they created their own sustaining families. This courage is particularly noteworthy, given that their acts emanate out of chaos and instability.

I return to Anderson's (2003) research for answers about the sources of their strength. Given that over half the Aboriginal women Anderson interviewed have been abused, and that family violence was, for them, the rule, Gail and Karen's childhood experiences must be recognized as the norm for Aboriginal women in Canada (p. 55), more commonplace than those who experienced a stable family life, and, despite the examples of women in leadership that I encountered in this study. Countering these prevailing social problems, Anderson states:

Many Native women have told me that underneath all of the oppression and confusion, there has always been a part of them that knew the strength and vitality of being a Native woman. Uncovering this part is an act of

recognition, a physical, spiritual and emotional remembering that can link us back to our ancestors and to a time when Native women were uniformly honoured and respected. (p. 9).

I know of no other explanation for the strength of spirit that prevails in such women as these.

Foundations of Resistance

Anderson (2003) believes that strong families and communities, and relationships to the land form what she terms “foundations of resistance” (p. 116). She offers examples of the benefits. Growing up in a home where children witness love, respect and equity between parents helps young women resist being controlled by men. Living in a traditional community with many young girls and women is empowering as is having grandmothers and other Elders close by (p.117). And, strong female role models who question, take risks and resist uncomfortable pressures of all kinds provide new norms of female behaviour. Connection to one’s traditional territory, as experienced most deeply by Colleen, Sarah and Maggie, and most tragically by Jacki, Noreen, Gail and Karen whose families left their ancestral homes for various reasons, provides a third powerful and sturdy foundation.

Attitudes and Acts of Resistance.

Gail and Karen provide examples of women who found their own ways to deconstruct the toxic environments they found themselves growing up in. Anderson (2003) suggests that challenging stereotypes is one of the earliest acts of resistance for most Native women, especially those in the residential and public

school systems. The pervasive racism of the BC curriculum, as well as the active discrimination practiced by some students and teachers, affect many Native students at an early age (p. 137). Resistance may take the form of refusing to cooperate, a tactic of which Karen speaks, or of forming groups to challenge the harassers, a tactic that many young women of my acquaintance choose. Gail simply walked away from school to undertake a relationship that resulted in early pregnancy and the birth of her son. Noreen dropped out of school altogether after grade eight, unwilling to endure the cultural isolation and discrimination she encountered in her “white” school.

Rebelling against the regimentation of female sexuality that was imposed in residential schools and in religious teachings also becomes a source of resistance for some young women. Karen speaks of immersing herself in alcohol, drugs and sex upon her release from residential school as a youth, an act that emanates from being “starved for love” according to Anderson (2003, p. 199). Gail speaks of resistance to the wishes of her son’s father and his mother who represented a different kind of regimentation; in opposition, she returned to school to complete her grade 12. She eventually left her partner to live as a single mother and student in a foster family situation, unwilling to return to her own family’s chaotic household. The resistance and rebellion that these young women embody speak to an act of re-cognition and determination deep within – a strength of spirit unbowed by circumstance.

As Anderson (2003) notes, “coming from the history that we do, Aboriginal women have had to become practiced at resistance . . . in order to

defend their identities” (p. 115). This is no longer enough. Anderson, quoting LaRocque, claims that: the “aesthetics of opposition” must be transformed into “entirely new constructs . . . “that both build on wonderful values and traditions, and yet, at the same time, move us forward” (Anderson, 2003, pp. 152-153). This requires the reclaiming of tradition and the relationship to place but also the constructing of a life in the contemporary world.

Reclaiming the Past in order to Strengthen the Future

For Anderson (2003), reclaiming tradition “is the means by which we can determine a feminine identity that moves us away from the western patriarchal model” (p. 157), essential for restoring gender balance in relationships and in community. She asserts that while ceremony comes early to mind when reclaiming tradition, other, more philosophical facets of culture must also be attended to, such as the values and purposes behind the ceremonies.

Reclaiming the many metaphors for the feminine also will strengthen identity recovery – Mother Earth, water and the tides, the cycles of the seasons and of the moon. Woman as life giver and teacher must again be honoured in order to return to the universal Aboriginal epistemology that places children at the centre of the culture. Anderson (2003) relates that the early Jesuit missionaries were struck by how “the savages love their children extraordinarily”; they believed that this excessive love prompted poor discipline, not understanding that Aboriginal parents used creative strategies such as storytelling to teach appropriate behaviours, rather than the corporal punishment of the colonizer (p. 159). The relationship that a healthy Aboriginal community has with its children

and youth signals the reclamation of its heart, and, at the same time, further the decolonization process for its women and for its men too.

Sarah embodies the worldview that places children at its centre. She speaks constantly, both publicly and privately, about the importance of children to her nation's future and of her concerns that children today are not being taught their traditions. Having taught her own children and grandchildren, she was still involved in language teaching of children in her mid-eighties. The professional life's work that Noreen, Jacki, Colleen, Gail and Maggie have devoted to children and youth demonstrates their commitment to the heart of the culture.

Colleen remembers that, as a child, she was allowed to be with her parents and grandparents as they conducted their daily lives. While she didn't participate directly, she observed, listened and learned, and felt safe and secure in the heart of the family. She wishes the same for her own children. Gail's young daughter is enjoying a culturally rich childhood in the company of two grannies, a childhood that Gail herself wished she had had. Karen gave her son everything she did not have, then worried that she spoiled him; instead, her son is most appreciative of the childhood she provided for him. Each woman of my small sample claims the blessing of a stable, loving family.

Reclaiming Ceremony and Restoring the Old Ways

On the North Island, potlatches have been held since time immemorial. During the years when they were outlawed by the federal government, the coastal grapevine spread the news about secret locations, in order to avoid raids and

arrests by the police and Indian agents. While some potlatch participants were discovered and jailed – including Sarah’s father and other relatives – the tradition was never eradicated by the colonial decree that affected other localities. The remoteness of the territory may have played a part.

Given that the potlatch had political, legal, financial and social purposes, as well as ceremonial ones, the Kwakwakawakw resistance preserved many of the “old ways”, traditions that continue to be practiced today. This is in contrast to other nations in Canada whose traditional governments, laws, gender roles and social responsibilities have not been not maintained through ceremony, for various reasons. On the North Island, the traditional songs and dances have been remembered but they also remain contextually connected to other aspects of contemporary life through practice.

In this regard, the study’s participants may be more meaningfully linked to their ceremonies in the twenty-first century than their brothers and sisters in other parts of Canada. Rather than having to reclaim ceremony, the Kwakwakawakw have maintained their ceremonies and, as songs, dances and masks are created to commemorate new events, the people are actually participating in the necessary evolution of their culture. For example, the roles of men and women in the Big House are traditional although I have noted some relaxing of rules.

What is of concern to Maggie and Sarah, perhaps because they are older and more knowledgeable about the old ways than the other women, is the ignorance of protocol and purpose behind the ceremonies for many participants, especially the youth. The inability to speak the language of the Big House is an

obvious hindrance. Reclaiming the language and thereby, the meaning of the ceremonial traditions is urgently needed. The ceremonies endure, through the great efforts of the grandmothers and grandfathers but the loss of meaning behind the songs, dances and speeches is possible.

All of the women are culturally involved, however, Sarah is the only fully fluent speaker of her first language. Colleen is devoted to helping restore her language and understands it well, listening as she did throughout her childhood to her parents and grandparents conversing. She does not yet feel adept at speaking the language. Maggie is also working on improving her knowledge of the language but is unsure of herself in conversation. Maggie is, however, most articulate about the need to return to the old ways, and to incorporate them into daily, contemporary life, a belief that she models in her work. Noreen, who spoke nothing but Kwa'kwala until she entered public school has all but lost her facility with her first language since her schooling has been in English. She has taken immersion programs in the hopes of reawakening her facility with the language. The other women did not speak of their tribal language.

Given the lack of opportunity to learn or retain the language on the North Island at this time, even by women aware of its importance, I believe that the traditions of the Big House may eventually become devoid of their deep meaning and spirit although still practised. Reclamation of the language is urgently needed.

Re-establishing Gender Balance

Traditional economic systems operated on the premise that men brought resources such as fish and mammals into the community and women had the

authority to manage and distribute the wealth. The patriarchal Eurocentric system disrupted the social, economic and personal balance between Aboriginal men and women. Anderson (2003) believes that, after so many years absorbing the colonial practices, “it will take considerable reconstruction work to collectively shift into a place where we can be sure that women and men can achieve balance through division of responsibilities” (p. 217). While women are reclaiming leadership positions with their communities, many complain about the dynamic that leaves the final decision making with the men. Anderson notes, for example, that of the six hundred and thirty-three Chiefs in Canada, only eighty-seven are female (p. 218). Maggie’s story is an example of this asymmetry. Efforts to offer her expertise, both professional and political, to her community, has led to frustration and disappointment for her and for those who looked forward to her ministering to them. Fortunately, she did find another community that appreciates her qualifications, skills and energy. Noreen has found herself in similar circumstances, as has Karen.

Colonial politics have infected personal relationships between men and women as well, and not only in the Aboriginal community. The lack of gender balance has caused social problems in marriages and partnerships, and in families. Anderson (2003) quotes Lee Maracle who suggests that having two Chiefs, one female, one male, is a way to bring back balance into a community. Others look to the resumption of traditional ways to solve the problem. What is clear is that the disequilibrium interferes with the reconstruction of healthy communities and healthy relationships.

Men, too, need to regain their balance. As a woman in Anderson's (2003) study noted, "I don't think we are raising our young men in the same way we are raising our young women. I don't think we are equipping them to live, to be independent, to be self-reliant, and to leave [his mother's] house" (p. 243). Anderson believes that it is more difficult for men to find their place in the contemporary world since their roles as providers and protectors are not as easily reclaimed as communities move away from the land. Colleen alludes to this dilemma when speaking of her son and the paucity of traditional activities available to him. Welfare has also created a dependency mentality to which Aboriginal men were wholly unaccustomed. The independent roles that men appear to have available to them at this time are jobs, often away from home, and, in their communities, participation in governance structures created by the colonizers (p. 239). Author and professor Bonita Lawrence (2003) makes the distinction between gender differences in Native and non-Native communities:

. . . large numbers of [Native] men have been cut out of the power structure. So the gender inequalities, the disproportionate power that white men have that fuels feminism, often doesn't apply in Native communities. We face phenomenal levels of violence in our communities, but that is a function, in fact, of histories of male powerlessness in the face of colonial violence, as well as our own victimization of course. In any case, we need to talk about empowering our own men. We need empowered families.

(p. 276)

Despite the gender-based disparities noted in Anderson's study as well as that which the participants and I conducted, it is obvious from Lawrence's analysis that the feminist stance of blaming men for women's powerlessness is not historically appropriate in Native communities. This may account for the omission of any discussion of feminism amongst the women I interviewed. In Native communities, empowering both women and men, thus restoring gender balance, will help to reconstruct both the family and the community.

The contemporary woman who retains or reclaims her cultural and spiritual traditions will, by definition, have escaped the negative colonial identity stereotypes that have been imposed for generations. The act of taking back the old ways, interwoven into work as well as community life, is one means of answering the question, "What is my responsibility? – a question that assures a better future for a woman, her family and community.

Constructing Identity and Taking Action

Anderson (2003) believes that *re-cognizing* via a mental and emotional constructing (p. 25) the sacredness of being is the foundation and impetus for the recovery of the traditional self in a contemporary world. Searching for life direction when one has a connection to the "Great Mystery" leads to the acceptance of responsibility and the call to action (p. 194). For women, this presumes the central position of women as givers and nurturers of life and of their children as sacred gifts. Grandmothers assume traditional roles as household authority figures, dispensers of stories and wisdom, and as supports for younger women in the extended family and community. Some women become leaders in

community and nation, actions that emanate from traditional roles as teachers and caregivers. The results of Anderson's study, as for this study, suggest that in their individual, family and community lives, many Aboriginal women have assumed these responsibilities having first learned to take responsibility for themselves (p. 229).

Beginning with Self Care

Generations of neglect, abuse and sexist/racist treatment have resulted in Aboriginal women identifying themselves as "citizens minus" in Canada (Sutherland, 1995). The wonder is that resistance, the first step to action, has been undertaken at all. I have illustrated some of the courageous acts of resistance, as described by Gail, Karen and Noreen. Gail explains that she returned to school because she did not want her son to think of her as a failure; Karen wanted her son to have everything in childhood that she did not. Noreen has powerful models for resistance in her parents. These examples may offer some insights into motivators that drive some women to resist while others acquiesce to circumstance. Anderson (2003) suggests that "many Aboriginal women understand that they hold the power of the future in their hands" (p. 211), an awareness that has the possibility of inspiring those blessed with the sacred gift of a child or those determined to *re-cognize* and reconstruct their identities.

Whatever the motivators, all of this study's participants have maintained or reconstructed the sense of the sacredness of their bodies and minds, and thus care for themselves physically, psychologically and emotionally. As Anderson (2003) notes, "Reclaiming a sense of sacredness of the body can be helpful for

Aboriginal women who wish to construct healthy lives. The greater meaning of our lives can also be enhanced when we reclaim our sacredness because then we see ourselves as beings with a sense of purpose” (p. 201). Nurturing the self is essential for the reconstruction of a healthy identity. This includes surrounding oneself with positive people and events, keeping one’s home a sacred place, allowing oneself tranquility in a busy life. Without these and other acts of self love, it is difficult to nurture others as women traditionally have done and it is difficult to make the necessary transformations required to heal communities. The varied examples of caring for self and community leadership that the study’s participants have undertaken over the course of their lives thus far is evidence of a sense of purpose - both a validation of individuals and a valuing of community.

Being Traditional in a Contemporary World

Many young Aboriginal women of my acquaintance already believe that it is possible to maintain one’s culture and enjoy what is worthwhile from the dominant society. I know this is so by observing their actions. Jan is finishing a linguistics degrees and plans to go home to help revitalize her language; Gina is pursuing her mariner’s papers; Tina has her teaching degree; Annie is involved in youth work and is planning to further her education by distance learning; Alex has almost completed a Masters degree in leadership; Cherie has completed a college diploma program in carpentry. All of these young women are involved culturally. Gail is, of course, providing the counselling and financial link between her village and post-secondary education beyond the reserve. And with jurisdiction of education now a reality for all nations in BC that wish it, there will be many more

opportunities for young women to strengthen their cultural knowledge and connection to place while crossing the bridge with facility and confidence. They will have the benefit of knowing healthy role models for what they wish to accomplish.

Rethinking Traditions

There are women who dare to question whether all traditions are worth returning to. Some traditions may have been infected with colonial or religious intent over the generations, especially those requiring women to be invisible. Others may be misunderstood by contemporary Aboriginal peoples who do not know the purposes, values and beliefs inherent their traditions. Lawrence (2003) is concerned that today, in some communities, certain roles and responsibilities are being reconstructed as a means of control. “The reason they are not talking about the roles and responsibilities of men is that it is much easier to chastise and discipline women. And it is much easier to invest in that image of women being ‘theirs’ – part and parcel of the rebirth of their nation” (p. 272). Lawrence also questions whether “wounded” Elders who harm others or who are poor role models should receive the unquestioning respect that they traditionally received. She says, “This affects how we reclaim our traditions. It can be really hard, dealing with that” (p. 267). She also wonders whether the unquestioning obedience to the “wise Elder” was not partly derived from the authority of the missionary or priest (p. 268) – or Indian agent. She distrusts slavish obedience as well: “There is a difference between the deep obedience and the deep learning and the shallow – the ‘I have to listen to you because you are on a pedestal’ “ (p. 268).

I suggest that distinctions made about traditional behaviours will not be easily made.

There is no questioning of this kind by participants in this study, although Sarah refers of some of her contemporaries who, by their behaviours, do not deserve the respect they are accorded as elders. Those who do speak of the old ways, such as Maggie, Colleen, Noreen and Sarah, speak from personal memories and from stories they have been told. In each case, perhaps because of age or circumstance, I sense that their reflections and their obvious reverence for the old ways were derived from what Lawrence (2000) calls deep learning.

Crossing the Bridge between Two Worlds

It is because of reverence for self, for extended family, for community and for nation that some women are able to cross the bridge between their traditional lives and the dominant society regularly— a two-way transit that implies constant change, delicate balance and determined sense of purpose. Anderson (2003) suggests that it is the *resist-reclaim-construct-act* medicine wheel that provides women with the strength to fulfill their responsibilities in both worlds, in acts that provide models of courage and of possibility to others. Given the evidence provided by the women in the study, I would concur. They have constructed for themselves the positive self identity needed to heal themselves and their communities.

Even so, there has been little respect or recognition for the responsibilities undertaken by women to this time (p. 221). Their stories and histories are not yet part of the dominant society's discourse; their status in their villages is dependent

for the most part on male leaders. That bridge has not yet been crossed. The lack of public recognition does not appear to affect the women's determination to nurture and teach girls and young women, preparing this generation for the time when they are mothers and grandmothers. Of course, they do the same for the boys and young men that they encounter. These youth will know their heritage, the importance of relationships and that it is possible to maintain culture and educate themselves beyond their villages. They will resist the norm and hasten the transformation to healthy communities and nations.

The stories in this study tell of residential school life, dysfunctional families, forced relocation from traditional territories, internalized and societal racism, recovery from alcoholism, discrimination suffered within reserves and without - the recent and terrible history of the First Peoples. The stories, for those who will listen, also shine with the courage, strength and intelligence of women who are determined to learn, teach and model how to be proudly Aboriginal in a contemporary world. It is my fervent hope that I have shared the stories with the respect that I feel for these women, thereby contributing to the bridging of our nations.

CHAPTER TEN

WHO WILL TELL OUR STORIES?

Thomas King (2003), professor and Aboriginal storyteller, believes that stories are wondrous things—and dangerous too, but that stories are also the only hope for human understanding (p. 9). As he says in the Massey Lectures of 2003, “The truth about stories is that that’s what we all are” (p. 2). King tells his stories, “not to play on your sympathies but to suggest how our stories can control our lives” (p. 3). In contrasting a Native creation story with the Christian creation story, he notes that one is the story of a world created out of chaos through cooperation, and the latter, a perfect world thrust into chaos by the human quest for knowledge. Stories *can* control our lives.

I wish to share one of King’s stories, this one about Bill C-31 (1985), which the study’s participants refer to a number of times. This is the federal bill that permits Native people who had been denied status, for one reason or another, to reapply so that they can be considered ‘Indians’ again by the federal government. Whatever the intent of the Bill, there have been many negative ramifications of its passing for the current generation. The worst result for the current system is the irrevocable loss of Indian status for the grandchildren of Bill C-31 applicants. The Bill, while appearing to redress past wrongs, has, in effect, assured political assimilation within two generations, continuing proof of a nineteenth century mentality still in effect.

This may not be such a bad thing though. I wonder what right a government has to tell a person whether they are Indian or not. Perhaps, in two generations, self government may be the norm anyway.

King (2003) tells a story from his Massey Lectures about one of the incidents that happened after Bill C31 was passed, a story that encapsulates many truths. I'll let him tell the story in his own words:

As soon as Bill C-31 was passed, it was challenged by three Alberta bands . . . who insisted that the bands, not the bureaucrats in Ottawa, should be able to set their memberships. . . . The bands argued that the objection to Bill C-31 was neither racist nor sexist, that they had no objection to non-status people regaining status, only to the proposition that status and band membership were the same thing and that bands no longer had the legal right to control that membership.

The eight-month-long court case that followed was a montage of the horrors that legislative racism, judicial arrogance, and Native xenophobia can create. The government, which had originally stripped Indians of status, blithely gave it back with little regard to potential consequences. The judge in the case characterized Indians as primitive and adolescent, in need of governmental control, and argued that oral-history testimony was unreliable and at odds with the authentic written, historical record that had been created by non-Indians. And the bands, in an unsightly display of fear and loathing, suggested that accepting back into membership people who, for various reasons, legal and personal, had neither lived on the reserve nor been part of the community could have disastrous

consequences, including the possibility that the reinstated Indians could band together and vote to liquidate band assets and sell the land.

An ugly thing from all angles.

No doubt there is some clever cretin somewhere who will make the argument that terminal legislation is, in fact, the answer to the Indian problem, that once every last Indian has been terminated /enfranchised /vanished, and once every reserve /reservation has been surveyed and sold, Indians will no longer have to deal with the barriers that status has created.

But then who will sing for us? Who will dance for us? Who will remind us of our relationship to the earth?

Who will tell our stories? (pp. 150-151)

Postscript

The actual genesis of this study occurred in the 1990s when I was an administrator in a small rural high school. It was prompted by the realities that faced the staff and me relating to the First Nations students registered at the only junior/senior secondary school in town. The graduation rate of our First Nations students was not the prime issue when I first went to that school; finding ways to keep these students coming to school regularly was the issue.

The school district had, for some time, employed First Nations Home-School Coordinators in collaboration with the Tri-Band Council. The role of these Native workers was to act as a bridge between school and home—to facilitate communication, and to track attendance and make home visits if necessary. The three co-ordinators each worked two hours a day, paying special attention to the students from their respective Bands but also assisting students from the other Bands when they were on the job.

The arrangement that had been made between the school district and the Bands' Education Coordinators long before I arrived, spoke to me of positive working relationships at a time when these partnerships were not mandated by the BC Ministry of Education. It also alerted me to particular problems concerning the education of First Nations youth.

I soon learned that many youth were getting themselves up in the morning, or not, and often coming to school without breakfast when they did. Their parents did not come to the school and many had no telephone. I came to admire those children who arrived at school at all since many had no home support to do so. I learned that,

often, all night drinking parties had disturbed their sleep. As I came to know the students, I found they were quite open about their circumstances. I also learned of specific residential school and public school experiences that had poisoned many parents' attitudes towards "white" schools and formal education.

A number of the children had undiagnosed Fetal Alcohol Syndrome Disorders (FASD) which rendered them unable to learn or to control their behaviours. The addictions of their parents affected all aspects of their lives. Attempts to find special placements within the school for these children sometimes led to accusations that we didn't care about them. Having children in Special Education classes came to be seen by some First Nations parents as proof that we weren't teaching them properly. The only way we could get government funding for these children was if a parent signed a letter admitting to alcohol consumption during pregnancy. Asking parents to do this created others stresses for everyone and rarely was successful. Parents did not want to be involved, neither did they want to admit to behaviour that had harmed a child irrevocably, even if they were unaware of it at the time. It was especially hard on parents who had conquered their addictions. Parents who did meet with us usually denied that there was anything wrong with their child, sometimes suggesting that we were discriminating against their child.

Some Bands had policies that offered students monthly attendance money. When I first arrived, I noticed that cheques were being given out in the school, a scenario which created tensions with the non-Native students. In those first few months of my tenure, I discovered that some students only attended on the one day a month that the cheques were distributed. Although I could only wonder at the

messages the children were getting from this practice, I was unable to do anything about it except to ask that it be removed from the school premises.

The next few years were spent finding ways to make school a place that students and their families could come to trust, for learning and for other supports. One of the Bands collaborated with the school in setting up a satellite campus in their village for those students who would not “cross the bridge”. Thirty-four students attended our alternate school in the first year of its operation, and, because of its location, many parents and families dropped in too. In the main school, multicultural days organized by students, drew in hundreds of people. The Tri-Band Education Council and the school board collaborated so that we could hire a fully qualified First Nations counsellor. Regular post-secondary tours down island to both colleges and universities gave First Nations students a glimpse of what was possible when they graduated from high school. Attendance began to improve and students stayed in school through to grade twelve, including those with FASD who could not earn a regular Grade twelve Dogwood Diploma, but who would receive a School Leaving Certificate attesting to the fact that they had completed all their personal learning goals. A number of older students who had dropped out of school previously asked to come back; given that they could only gain re-entry through an interview, most of those returning graduated. A Young Parents program that we had started included a day care on school grounds which allowed young mothers and fathers to stay in school and care for their babies throughout the day. In one special year, sixteen young parents, including one young man, received their graduation diplomas.

Throughout these intense, frustrating, inspiring years of the principalship, which, of course, focused on everyone in the school, I looked to others for my support and my education. I had come to the school as a veteran teacher and public school administrator but I knew nothing about the Kwakwakawakw people and how to reach and teach their children. I did not know how we could help the youth break the cycle of dependency and addiction in a public school environment.

Twelve years later, I have learned that there is no one prescription for all youth but I am heartened by the number of First Nations students with Dogwood Diplomas who have found stable lifestyles or who have gone on to postsecondary education and training in colleges and universities, trades and technical schools, and fine arts institutions. It will be important to talk to those students who are breaking the cycles of dysfunction and dependency to discover what has supported them to achieve their endeavours, what barriers they have faced and what successes that have celebrated.

The women in this study have been my teachers in this most important work. Through them I began to understand the history and culture of the First People of the North Island. This has provided me with contextual information that I now know to be essential in working with youth. Through the relationships my teachers offered, I learned that their children and families are paramount. I observed their personal agency, strength, determination and sense of humour which they demonstrated in a wide variety of ways. I heard about their challenges, disappointments and tragedies. I began to learn about them as First Nations women and about their culture. I thank them deeply for that gift. Working together we may encourage First Nations youth to

cross the bridge with the confidence and dignity, transforming our respective worlds.

Gila'kasla

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