

nikāwiy to ôtānisa Narratives- nehiyaw (Cree) mother to daughter stories
for inherent role of nehiyaw-iskwewak
in Governance and Numbered Indian Treaty Enforcement.
Treaty Four and Treaty Six.

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ABSTRACT

*Niya askitako piasew iskwew.
I am Blue Thunderbird Woman.*

Nikawiy narratives including Mother to daughter, nation to nation, spirit and intent, and Treaty Enforcement are based on nikawiy (my mother's) teachings that I interpret as my inherent role as Nehiyaw iskwew (Cree woman) specifically for governance and numbered Treaty Enforcement. My methodology ¹is also based on nikawiy's *Circle of Life, Pimatisiwin, Calendar* (Poitras, 1996) curriculum that is related and included in the "universe is listening to me" paskwaw moostoos Treaty Law School (Poitras, 2016). We are from the Peepeekisis Cree Nation in what is now known as Saskatchewan. My mother *osawastimahkoop iskwew* is originally from Onion Lake on what is now the border between Alberta and Saskatchewan. Peepeekisis is in Treaty Four territory and Onion Lake is in Treaty Six territory.

Is there a 'gap' for the role of Indian women and Nehiyawak Iskwew in the numbered Indian Treaty negotiations and generally in leadership? ²Though such a 'gap' may be said to be relatively common knowledge perhaps from the time of the treaty negotiations, a comprehensive and chronological review has yet to be produced that may address this. Treaty Four was entered into in 1874 and Treaty Six was entered into in 1876. Before this and in historical accounts, this gap may also be apparent and indicative of European/settler ethnocentrism based on white male research and documentation of this history.³ The colonial disruption of the Indian Residential

¹ Protocol has been offered to nikawiy to request her interpretation of "methodology" meaning.

² I could not find any written historical accounts for the role of Cree women during numbered Treaty negotiations. I know that, in general, there are few sources for Indian women in leadership, and particularly for any historical accounts of Indian women leadership. In Treaty Four and Treaty Six, there are no written accounts of Nehiyaw iskwew (Cree women) involvement in these treaty negotiations. The signatories to these treaties are documented as Nehiyaw napew (Cree men) only. Historical accounts document what Cree men leaders/Chiefs may have stated at this time.

³ A reason for the lack of any Cree women documentation in historical accounts of numbered Treaty negotiations is that there could be a lack of understanding for the role of Cree women by the European men who wrote these accounts. Generally, Europeans were coming from white patriarchal societies where women did not commonly have leadership roles.

School, in particular, would have also impacted oral transmission of any history including the role of women in the treaty negotiations that might also denote a role in governance and leadership. In a contemporary context now, the question for this role is the search for inherent foundations that may be identified as the base to contemporary governance and leadership frameworks for Nehiyaw Iskwewak (Cree women) in Treaty Four and Treaty Six.

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I will state that I am focused on the nehiyaw iskwew (Cree woman) and these teachings from nikawiy to nitanis, mother to daughter, including kokum to nosisim iskwew (grandmother to granddaughter) and how I translate this to 'nation to nation'. Therefore, I will also distinguish that my research is not directly on the topic of Indigenous feminism although this may be a somewhat significant part of my research as well. Finally, I am seeking particular interpretation of the nehiyaw iskwew in Treaty Four and Treaty Six governance.

In my dreams, I see my mother with her brother and sister who also came to Peepeekisis. They are somewhat of a triad that secures our family structure as in the building of a tipi and beginning with the three main poles. Together they were our informal 'language nest' of Cree spoken as often as they could in their visits together. As many other former Indian Residential School students, my mother would not teach her children Cree, especially on a reserve such as Peepeekisis where Cree was seldom spoken. With the earlier development of the File Hills Indian Farm Colony on Peepeekisis and with the strict supervision of its engineer, the Indian

Agent William Morris Graham, Cree had been forbidden on the Colony (Carter, 1987, 1990, 1991, Poitras 2000). It would be a great regret in nikawiy's later life but as a young mother she had believed that she was making it easier for us as she and her siblings had been persecuted for once speaking their first language of Cree that was compounded by the general hardship to learn English as a second language.

There had also been an acknowledgement by Indian leadership for their need to learn English. Yet, nikawiy recalls a meeting called by their parents with the school where they made it clear that their children were to be allowed to speak their Cree language even so- the meeting was called as the parents learned that their children were being forbidden to speak Cree, an action that created much concern for the parents. They cared so much about this issue that they spoke out. This was not the case in most of the Indian Residential Schools and there is much testimony for this reality of forced language loss in notable sources such as the Truth and Reconciliation, for one.

In later years, nikawiy would be a teacher and a Cree teacher until her retirement. Finally, in the triad, my uncle is also my beloved 'fairy godmother'. He is well known to his many women friends and relatives on Onion Lake as *cakos*, sister-in-law. My late aunt had also married my late father's brother so two sisters married two brothers. I must acknowledge that my teachings as *nitanis* may also come from my two very dear nikawiys (little mothers) as they interpret *Aunt* in Cree.

Finally, I give my heartfelt gratitude to my Supervisor, Dr. Paula Sherman, for her guidance, patience, support, confidence, and her critical understanding of the politics and the Indigenous woman leadership perspective where I found a rare comfort level- that was also necessary- to work with. Dr's. John Borrows and Jerry Fontaine also sat on my Master's

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To all my ancestors who also made this trail to uphold and protect Treaty and our Laws, Kinanaskomitanan metoni, kisahikitin- especially to all who continue to do so today. To nikawiy, you are my land, my belly button, kisahikitin metoni. Nokum, who was the most beautiful woman in the world to me and who made me feel I was beautiful to be any part of her, kinanaskomitanan, kisahikitin. To my aunties, to my sisters, to my nieces, to my noosisimak, to my capanak, kisahikitin- you are my laws, my matriarchs. To our allies, our ancestors see you.

I make it clear also that one of my ways of receiving teachings is to dream. In my dream, I am swimming across a swift river with others and I am holding my mother, nikawiy, wrapped in red cloth. I hold her with one arm out of the water as I fight the frenzied current to swim as I am holding her, my precious bundle. It is my dream but I know it is also life and death. My mother spoke a lifetime of English to her husband and to her family. But I know when I was a baby that she spoke to me in Cree also. The ones that stripped my language from me can feign dismay or concern that I do not have this today but they are irrelevant. It is time for me to discern nikawiy, my mother's inherent teachings for me, her ôtanis, her daughter.

My mother is always that sign of new life that comes from great challenge. She is resilience, tenacious spirit and strength- including how she loves. At times, the scales of colonization have had to be taken from my own eyes to see her clearly as she truly is, as Creator's gift to us. When I am able to see her clearly, then I might also see myself clearly, too, but in her shadow where I am protected always.

It has taken true bravery, sheer strength for nikawiy to build and balance the universe- the circle of her own stars, 'acak', the spirits, of her own family system around her. This is the responsibility of the home-fire that she must protect. This is the light and the warmth that she carries with her. The breath she gives to us blows back on her home-fire now so that these flames reach into the sky and to the stars. Hiyhiy.

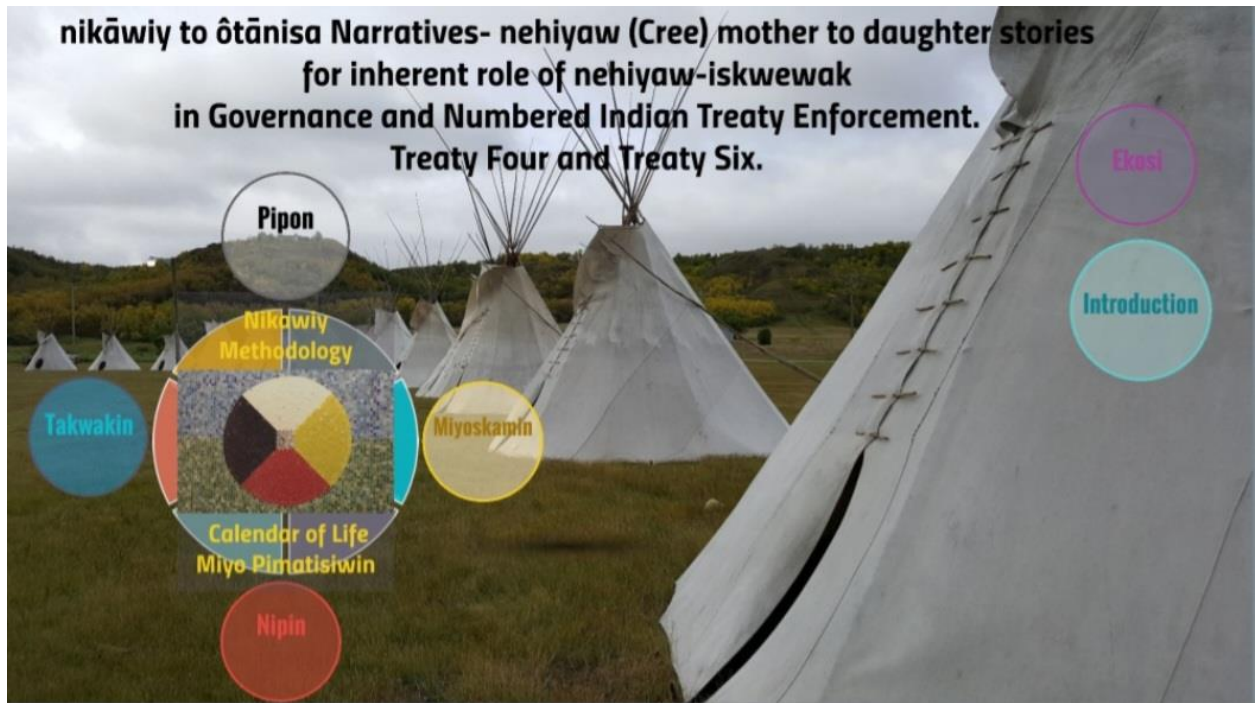
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Chapter One

Introduction

1.1 Methodology



My methodology is based upon my mother's circle pedagogy and the curriculum she developed for Cree teaching in the classroom that she utilized for her years as a teacher of nehiyawewin (Cree language). She called this Calendar of Life, Miyo Pimatisiwin. She was teaching the seasons in a circle from the east/Spring, Miyoskamin to the south/Summer, Nipin, to the west/Fall, Takawakin, to the north/Winter, Pipon. In each season, she also identified the months by the Moons as she was taught this directly from her own mother, my grandmother, Marie Cecile Quinney (nee Watchmaker). My nokum (grandmother) knew very little English so her teachings were always in nehiyawewin (the Cree language). The thirteen moons are also known as the

Grandmother Moon teachings but the direct teaching that my mother experienced was as a way to tell time that was part of their nehiyaw (Cree) knowledge.

I draw on this methodology to interpret a basic telling of nikawiy, my mother's life story. I understand that this is not a conventional dissertation as it is grounded in nehiyaw (Cree) methodology through nikawiy's teachings and stories. I privilege nehiyaw's and nehiyaw (Cree) knowledge- particularly nehiyaw iskwew (Cree woman) knowledge as interpreted through the experience and telling of nikawiy's experience. Every chapter concludes with a particular teaching that is derived from that moon and that experience of nikawiy's life.

Like treaty, the understanding of nikawiy's life experience and teachings have a foundation of spirituality and orality that is part of the interpretation of its meaning and knowledge. This is sitting in ceremony and observing long-held traditions and protocols that are laws- foundations and frameworks that are not written and are not ever meant to be written. Nikawiy to otanis, my mother to her daughter, these are the teachings that I privilege in the work I have done to interpret my mother's teachings for me as a nehiyaw iskwew (Cree woman). Treaty enforcement is treaty as law. The telling of nikawiy's story as based upon her nehiyaw foundations and teachings is also an interpretation of *law*. In nehiyaw law and the teaching of the Eagle moon, kihew pisim, love is our highest law. The story of nikawiy and her teachings is a story of our highest law; it is how she holds our highest law for nehiyaw (Cree/Indigenous) knowledge and her nehiyaw (Cree) world.

1.2 Kiskinaw-kīsikwan- teachings from the moon guide.



The term *kiskino kīsikwan* is the term that nikawiy learned from her mother; the translation is 'teachings from the moon guide'. Nikawiy, my mother, calls this 'from a language that is from the old people'- language from my grandmother's grandparent's time- late 1800's. She mentions that the language was 'pretty pure then'. She has noticed that terms for these teachings may differ in regions. According to nikawiy, this understanding is directly from her mother, *ōkāwiya pīwapskok-kahwīkit*,⁴ Marie Cecile Quinney, who was born in 1908. "She was raised by old people all the time", nikawiy mentions of her mother. Nikawiy credits *ōkāwiya* for this knowledge that was taught to nikawiy based on her mother's, *ōkawīya*, life's teachings. This was a way of life that was being practiced by both of her parents including her father's, *ōhtāwiya*, way of life based on hunting and trapping.

⁴ My grandmother's Cree name is deliberately not translated out of respect.

1.3 Circle, Ceremony

When I first used the circle as my research methodology, I started with ceremony and my personal prayer (Master's thesis, 2015). My parents, who both attended the Indian Residential School, did not teach us ceremony as they raised their children. By now, we were experiencing the remnants of their Roman Catholic teachings from the nuns and priests so some of us were baptized and we would mainly observe Midnight Mass for Christmas. As adults, some with our own children, we rarely observe these church events. As it is in life, when the greatest challenges came so did the search for spiritual solace and guidance. My parents found this in different ways from 12-step programs to their personal 'return' and journey on the *red road*. As their children, we could observe this and, later in our own lives, experience as well as understand the profound ways that we each would find our 'spiritual awakenings'. It has been a process that brings us together now. From this initiation, we have each grown on our own paths and through this also provide mutual support.

Therefore, the circle methodology starts from personal ceremony. As I followed my parents down this path, I was able to experience my own personal journey and meaning. My parents 'came back' to ceremony when they were older with their own adult children.

At a time when my late father took a stand for treaty, it was necessary for him to go to ceremony as he would learn and come to know how these are our Laws and Law Lodge. As he made this stand, we would see how our Laws could be drawn in the Canadian law system, that our Laws might be declared 'unlawful' by these standards. We witnessed what our late father, along with his younger brother, my late uncle Jimmy, were subjected to in a conflict over

taxation on reserve land.⁵ They would be put on trial in the Queen's court in Melville, Saskatchewan. Here, they refused to swear on the bible and requested to make their oath on the pipe instead (which they were granted and did). At the end of the trial, the Judge ruled that they were *guilty*. He went on to read his ruling and also declared that they would be fined but that there was no default if they did not actually pay the fine (interestingly, the Provincial government had *won* this case but yet immediately launched an appeal that they would later drop). Judge Barclay would say "that the accused may have lost the battle, but they may win the war⁶." I remember being in that courtroom and looking at Dad at times- I would see how his eyes were almost closed- only later did I realize that he was praying. They had already sought their judgment in our lodges- they had nothing left to fear. My Dad's faith was always dear to him, deeply meaningful. I saw this clearly in him that day. *Paskwaw moostos kahpimoteht*, Walking Buffalo, *nohtawiy* (Dad)...this is the way he faced into the storm that day. The buffalo will face into the winter storm to break a trail for others to follow. *Tapwe* (truly), we follow him in our storms today. *Hiyhiy*.

It is Easter, another holiday I have missed being at home during this pandemic. I remind myself to call *nikawiy* (my mother) to have my chat with her this day. She is good, quickly

⁵ In this court case, *R. v. Poitras*, the resulting case law explains; "The accused argued that as a result of ancient treaties entered into by their ancestors with the British Crown, they were not subject to the jurisdiction of the court, nor to Canadian tax laws." Notably, the term 'ancient' is not used by George Poitras in his own words from this case: "I guess I am of the same view as Jim, that as Indian people, we came up (inaudible word) honour and respect your courts. Now having done that, we now ask the Court to honour and respect the basis and the (inaudible word) that we have set up here as an Indian nation, therefore, we also have to exercise those things that come under nationhood status, one of exercising our sovereignty, exercising our jurisdiction within our own territory, and we must go back and start learning more about what has happened in the past and why were those Treaties made and what were the spirit and intent of those Treaties. Were they to be interpreted by the courts of Canada? That was not who we made Treaties with..." *R. v. Poitras* (J.L.), (1994) 121 Sask.R. 95 (QB), <https://ca.vlex.com/vid/r-v-poitras-j-681257817>

⁶ Sentencing Proceedings. Barclay J. *Her Majesty The Queen -and- James Louis Poitras and George Lawrence Poitras*. Page 6. (Melville, Saskatchewan. May 6, 1994.) *R. v. Poitras* (J.L.), (1994) 121 Sask.R. 95 (QB), <https://ca.vlex.com/vid/r-v-poitras-j-681257817>

recapping the events of her weekend. A niece was on the way out of her house just when I called so we yell 'happy easter' over the phone to each other. Then nikawiy tells me she is getting ready for a zoom meeting- on this holiday? I ask her- "yes", she answers. That is her life, constant demand.

Years ago, *nikawiy* (my mother) was walking down an old road that was now more of a trail south of our home on the reserve. It was at least a mile walk to a grid road that was the edge of the reserve so it was a nice walk for her- there and back. My little sisters came with her this day, I think one was on a bike. Suddenly, she felt something in her ear. She immediately held her finger against her ear and made her way home as quickly as she could. As soon as she got home, she got in the car to go to the nearest town and hospital, a 10-minute drive (I cannot remember if Dad drove her or not). When she got to see the doctor, he could not find anything in her ear but clearly, there was damage done to her eardrum. My mother had kept her finger over her ear all the way to the hospital. The doctor made an appointment with an ear specialist right away. Nikawiy now felt like the side of her head was hit. Now she told Dad that she had to go to Onion Lake.

Nikawiy knew something was not right and she was going to see a ceremonial doctor though she had not ever tried to see one before. She knew enough from her time being raised at home that there were nehiyaw (Cree) medicinal ways and keepers of this knowledge. This was a very serious incident and she immediately knew that it was out of the ordinary so she had to seek the right help in these circumstances. This was a powerful step on her healing path and a profound time in her spiritual reawakening. She did not hesitate to ensure that she would seek this help. When she returned to see the doctor in town, he checked her ear and was amazed to see nothing wrong now. She had not seen the specialist he tried to refer her to. Somehow the doctor knew not to question the circumstances; it would not be the first time that a western

doctor respectfully- though not outright- acknowledged the effect of ceremonial healing that nikawiy would seek for serious ailments. I suspect that other doctors might also have encountered what this doctor did.

At another Easter, I had travelled with my parents to Alberta to take part in ceremony. This is the Indian New Year. This is a time of fasting then a feast to acknowledge the new year. The memories are so good. So many have gone on their spiritual journeys home now. We watched the sun dance on Easter morning with them.

I recall travelling another time before this, now with my mother and sister. My baby niece was sick so she was also travelling with her mother that winter as we went to seek healing for her. It turned out that at this time, we were all also given our names (nikawiy already had hers). This was the beginning of the *red road* for me. I am so grateful as I recall this time. Today, I hear the birds out the window, see the sun in the afternoon, and feel the sacredness of this 'new year' and *miyo pimatisiwin* (good life). A few years later, I would travel back with my parents to do my own fasting now.

The ways that ceremony 'came back' to us was each in our own way and time. We each decide whether we will take the 'red road' or not. I know in my family that it has made all the difference in our lives though we will always struggle and encounter the challenges in life that we all do. I recall in the step programs that we would say 'higher power' to acknowledge whatever people wanted to- some were atheist and we could not have prejudice for this. In many First Nation communities today, there are strong denominations of different religions and Christianity. Some seem to be competing- declaring they are 'only way...others are cults'- or else lines are drawn between Christians (most often fundamentalist, evangelist) and

‘traditionals’. When it comes to Indigenous Knowledge, much of this is actually based in *ceremony*.⁷

1.4 Triad

This afternoon, nikawiy talks of her younger brother. We believe he is grieving yet the loss of his sister a year ago now. In my dream, they were a triad of tipi poles (my aunt, uncle, nikawiy). I acknowledge them as my nest of ‘little mothers’ and nikawiy (my mother). It is sad to hear of his loneliness and hurt. It was weeks ago when we had a family zoom meeting where nikawiy needed to shed some tears for her brother. She needed to share with us and this was her support. Just days ago, there was the loss of another elder from another community. The niece asked for people to keep her father in their prayers as he was now the only sibling left. She acknowledged an older relative who became the only sibling and how lonely this was. Now she knew her father would be alone this same way. I had not thought about this kind of sadness though it is real enough for us today when I think about losing our youngest brother. We are our first community. We are nikawiy’s circle. In my dream, nikawiy and her sister and brother are our triad to build a tipi. And this structure is also a circle at its base.

1.5 Kiskino tahiwew ona (Discussion Notes)

Teachings (reminders, guidance): Sovereignty

The circle is the foundational model for nikawiy’s methodology. It is based in ceremony. It is how prayers are said acknowledging the ‘circle of life’. Four directions are acknowledged

⁷ Protocol is offered to nikawiy to explain Indigenous Knowledge.

in prayers beginning with the east, going to the south, west, north. Ceremony is also spiritual law and Creator's law. When nikawiy uses the circle, she is grounding herself in this framework. She also makes a rejection of the 'box' that she says Western knowledge is. This rejection is also a foundation of sovereignty in the circle. This is where she deliberately places herself in ceremony.

The thirteen moons are the knowledge passed on to her from her nikawiy, kikawiy- her mother. This is from her life experience and personal teachings. These are the memories and knowledge that she draws on for her development of a curriculum to teach nehiyawewin, the Cree language. Language is from the land, she will also say. It is from this land, no other land in the world. This is how we are grounded when we speak Cree. Again, this is sovereignty.

1.6 Calendar of Life, miyo pimatisiwin

After my late father had passed away in 2005, I lived in the small town of Ituna north of Peepeekisis. I recall a visit from nikawiy one day as she came by to request my assistance to develop a diagram for her. She had already drawn out this diagram- a circle with quadrants in each direction. There was hand drawn pictures of animals and trees, people. Nikawiy was an artist and loved to draw. This is the template I used to develop another circle using the computer and some basic program. I used clip art for the pictures. This was my first introduction to nikawiy's calendar. Later and years later, we would develop this and other related 'circles' in a Prezi presentation to illustrate nikawiy's curriculum.

As I adopted nikawiy's calendar for my methodology, I learned more about the meaning for each part. I learned about the moons and now I pay attention to each of them. I have seen nikawiy always observant about the changes in nature and seasons. Now I find myself beginning

this seasonal observation now, too. It is easy to look up some of this knowledge on the internet now, too. We can see the online pictures of turtles with the 13 sections on their back- 13 moons. But before the internet, there was nikawiy's memories of her mother saying what the moons were as this 'living calendar'. This was their way to tell time, this was their 'knowing'.

I find this interesting now, too, when there is a question of how prevalent the turtle is in the land of where my mother was raised. Does the concept of 13 moons necessarily come from the turtle? My mother recalls her mother telling time this way- the months by the moons. Nokum only knew Cree and might have attended the Indian Residential School for a short time in her younger life but she never lost her Cree language and this was really her primary communication all of her life. I know this from all of my experience with her- she could barely say anything in English and my knowledge of Cree was the same. Nikawiy credits her mother for what Cree we did come to understand. It is true that we also had familiarity with the language as we heard this being spoken whenever nikawiy was with her sister and brother, our auntie and uncle, who have been constants in our lives.

1.7 Thirteen Moons, Four Seasons

In Chapter Two to Fifteen, I am telling the life story of nikawiy, my mother. Each chapter represents one season including three to four of the thirteen moons that nikawiy uses in her *Calendar of Life- Miyo Pimatisiwin* circle model. The circle and moons are organized by four seasons of Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter, in the four directions. Spring is her childhood including a story of her ancestors from Frog Lake. This includes her memories from St. Anthony's Indian Residential School on Onion Lake. Summer is her young womanhood moving to Peepeekisis where she is married to her partner, late George Poitras, and they raise their six

children. Fall is the memories of her late partner and of her late siblings. Winter is a time of nikawiy's story telling and her earliest memories from the winter round dance and ceremony. It is a time when her siblings begin to pass on before her. Finally, the Eagle Moon tells of the nehiyaw highest law of love.

Nikawiy's *Calendar of Life- miyo pimatisiwin* is a circle illustration and model that she has developed to teach Cree. After so many years of teaching Cree without any curriculum, nikawiy has always had to develop her own teaching materials. Nikawiy's 'calendar of life, miyo pimatisiwin' becomes the curriculum and teachings that are her legacy now. She is mindful about this.

When I apply nikawiy's *Calendar of Life- miyo Pimatisiwin* to my methodology now, it becomes a very personal framework. She says this about her teaching- 'I put myself in the circle, we are all at the center of the circle in our lives- I am not in a box'. She more or less rejects the 'box' as western knowledge. The 'boxes' were the classrooms in the Residential Schools. The *circle* is an act of sovereignty this way.

An image comes to me of a 'skin' being stretched on a frame- the way I would see beaver and other skins at my mosom's (grandfather's) when we would visit at nikawiy's childhood home on Onion Lake. I have pieced the 'skin' of nikawiy's life this way on a framework that is her 'calendar of life'. I have hunted for this 'skin' that will eventually provide a sustenance, a story and narrative, that will feed our 'knowing' ways. The stories will feed my family. My family sits in a circle. Nikawiy, our mother dictates that her law is to sit in this circle- 'our place is in this circle- we do not belong in a box'. I follow nikawiy in her legacy work. Her 'skin' is our shelter, it is our warmth, she keeps our home fire. She is our fire- she feeds our own fires in turn and through the generations. Her legacy is 'miyo pimatisiwin', good life. Hiy hiy.

The full moon shines in a great circle of moonlight. They say it is very feminine and they also say she is our grandmother. I remember when one of my nieces, who has another grandmother named Mona, would say as a young girl, ‘there is kokum Moona’ when she saw the full moon and make us laugh. The moon controls the ocean tides. It pulls at the water of women. Now I think they are such sacred grandmothers. Each face tells their own time. Their narrative now is incredible to me.

Nikawiy’s (my mother’s) methodology for a Calendar of Life, *Pimatisiwin* is used as a framework to illustrate her life story in Chapters that follow the thirteen moons that are part of this calendar. In nikawiy’s Calendar of Life, the thirteen moons are in a circle with the four seasons in the four directions: spring, summer, fall, winter. Nikawiy’s life story, including her genealogy, is examined in this model through narrative, observation, collective memory, and interview to derive inherent teachings. In my discussion with Paula Sherman, my supervisor, she also calls this ‘story weaving’⁸ as I am going back and forth in time from present day to past times in nikawiy’s life and as I also draw my own personal narrative into nikawiy’s life story through my own experience and interpretation as her ôtanis, her daughter.

⁸ Dr. Paula Sherman said her reference to ‘story weaving’ is a term from Muriel Miguel and Spiderwoman Theatre. “Spiderwoman Theater is the longest continuous running Native female performance group. Comprised of three Kuna/ Rappahannock sisters from Brooklyn, New York, Lisa Mayo, Gloria Miguel, and Muriel Miguel, the group has travel all over the world giving performance, lectures, and workshops. Named after the weaver in the Hopi creation story the sisters "storyweave" their message in a variety of formats including poetry, dance, theater, and song.

Spiderwoman Theater was founded in 1976, when Muriel Miguel gathered together a diverse company of women which included both of her sisters. They were of varying ages, races, sexual orientation, and worldview. The collective sprang out of the feminist movement of the 1970s and the disillusionment with the treatment of women in radical political movements of the time. They questioned gender roles, cultural stereotypes, and sexual and economic oppression. They took on issues of sexism, racism, classism, and the violence in women’s lives. Their weaving of humor with popular culture and personal histories along with their sometimes shocking style excited the hearts and spirits of the women (and sometimes the men) in their audiences, in the United States, Canada and all over the world.” <https://hemisphericinstitute.org/en/hidvl-collections/itemlist/category/476-spiderwoman-theater.html>

1.8 Discussion Notes

Kiskino tahiweu ona (teachings, reminders, guidance)

Each chapter is based on one season and the moons of that season. The moons include Discussion Notes that *nikawiy* calls *kiskino tahiweu ona* “teachings, reminders, guidance”.

These follow each moon to examine how *nehiyaw iskwewak* (Cree women) leadership may be interpreted for treaty and governance in this part of her life story.

1.9 Sakastenohek Miyoskamin (East, Spring)



Chapter Two includes an introduction to the season of Sakastenohek miyoskamin, spring. It is the Indian new year. The Moons of *Sakastenohek Miyoskamin* (Spring) and the youth of *nikawiy* (my mother) follow with the Goose, Frog, Leaf Budding.

Niski-Pisim (Goose Moon, March)

The Goose Moon, *niskak pisim*, tells of collectivity as well as leadership. The moons of Miyoskamin- 'spring' - start with the Goose Moon. This moon is about family, *peyakoskan*, 'one unit', collectivity. It is also about extended family in an introduction to *nikawiy's* genealogy and her *capanak*, ancestors. Even as a young girl, *nikawiy* would profoundly know a relationship with the land and these laws. She had an awareness that she was already an integral part of the family circle.

Ayikisak Pisim (Frog Moon, April)

The Frog Moon, *ayikisak pisim*, is set in Frog Lake and the history of *nikawiy's* *capanak* (ancestors). The Frog Moon of April tells the story of Treaty and the initial refusal of *Mistahiy Muskwa*, Big Bear, to enter into Treaty Six. On April 2, 1885, members of Big Bear's band, led by War Chief Wandering Spirit killed 9 settlers at Frog Lake following a conflict over food rations. Eight were hung in retaliation, Canada's largest mass hanging execution in North Battleford. This event has, no doubt, longstanding repercussion. The Frog Moon also tells of *nikawiy's* personal connection to *Mistahiy Maskwa* through adoption of her maternal great-grandfather Joe Taylor who was Chief of Onion Lake Cree Nation for many years. Teachings of inherent leadership are told in the narrative of *nikawiy's* genealogy and *capanak*, ancestors.

Sakipakawi-pisim (Leaf Budding Moon, May)

The final moon of Miyoskamin is Leaf-Budding. Nikawiy's youngest son is named *Itaypoh Yotin*, 'sits like a tornado'. He would pass away in January 2018 at the age of only 50. The strength of the wind in spring must come to blow the trees so their leaves may bud. His short life and passing would echo a story of *war*. The narrative of colonialism is all too personal and of struggle, loss. The Leaf Budding Moon tells a personal story of great loss for nikawiy in a contemporary sense- the loss of her youngest son. From earliest childhood to grandmother and capan (great-grandmother), nikawiy's story is one of ongoing colonial violence.

1.10 Sawanohk Nipin (South, Summer)



The Moons of *Sawanohk Nipin* (Summer) and the start of her own family as a young wife and mother follow with the Egg Laying moon, the Moulting moon, and the Flying Up moon. The Summer moons start with Egg Laying, the time of nikawiy as a young mother. The Moulting Moon is the loss of feathers so that new ones may grow again. Finally, the Flying Up Moon is leaving the nest.

Paskawehowi-pism (Egg Laying, June)

Nikawiy would have six children, three daughters- I am the oldest, and three sons. As a young mother, she would go back to her own studies starting with upgrading. She would go on to university studies later after having all of her children.

When they last moved back to Peepeekisis, nikawiy would also help her husband to do some farming on this reserve. A woman was never excluded from doing what may be considered ‘men’s work’; niwicewakan, *the one I walk with*, was a partner in all ways including any work that needed to be done.

Paskowi-pisim (Moulting Moon, July)

Old feathers make way for new feathers. This has been nikawiy’s personal growth and lifelong learning in miskasowin, *the search for herself*. I also related this to Abraham Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs and self-actualization. I would learn that this was actually an example of colonial appropriation as Maslow’s work- that he would never credit- was based on a Blackfoot concept and knowledge. In her lifelong learning, a finding is also how education is ongoing colonial violence.

Ohpahowi-pisim (Flying Up Moon, August)

In August 2022, nikawiy would travel to Alberta for the event of the Pope Francis visit. Calls would be made to the Pope to rescind the Doctrine of Discovery. The Popes’ visit would also be in the wake of the 215 graves found at the Kamloops Indian Residential school.

1.11 Nikapehanohk Takwakin (West, Fall)



The Moons of *Nikapehanohk Takwakin* (West, Fall) and the maturity of *nikawiy* (my mother) as a grandmother follow with the Autumn, Rutting, Migrating, and Frost.

Takwaki-pisim (Autumn Moon, September)

The season of Fall starts with the Autumn Moon. It was the time when *Nikawiy* would marry dad in September 1962. This is also the time of the Pope Francis visit to Canada in 2022 that *nikawiy* would also travel to witness.

Nohcitowi-pisim (Rutting Moon, October/November)

The Rutting Moon is mating season for the Moose and other animals before the winter sleep and hibernation. It tells the story of nikawiy's oldest sister who left their family at the age of 16 to start her own family with a descendant of Seekaskootch 'how the moose's velvet from his antlers are caught in the trees'. My late aunt was also the oldest girl in her family, and she would have certain responsibility inherent in this birth order until she left to start her own family. As oldest, she would always maintain a certain position as the oldest daughter and sister. Nikawiy would be the oldest daughter in my grandmother's second family with my grandfather Charles Quinney after her first husband, Joe Naistus, would pass away. Nikawiy would also have inherent responsibility as the oldest daughter and sister.

Pimihawi-pisim (Migrating Moon, October)

The Migrating Moon tells of this course in many women's lives where they would leave their own mothers to start their own families. This moon also tells of how the women had critical responsibility (and ownership) to take care of the tipi and the home fire. This responsibility is maintained in a contemporary sense.

Iyikopiwi-pisim (Frost Moon, November)

As the seasons come full-circle, the Frost Moon is the time of nikawiy's season as grandmother and great-grandmother, *capan*. It was in the Frost Moon that nikawiy lost her partner in 2005. It is also the month of her birthday and the time she was born just as the World War ended in 1945. 'Where were you born, nikawiy...on the land, she answers.

1.12 Kiwetinohk Pison (North, Winter)



As a keteyaya, old one, memories of her childhood and family before the Indian Residential Schools are told in Chapters that include the Moons of *Pison* (Winter)- Frost Exploding, Great, Eagle.

Pawaca Kinasisi-pisim (Frost Exploding Moon, December)

The Winter moon of Frost Exploding is the times for the ceremony of the Round Dance and nikawiy's sacrosanct childhood memories where she was lifted up in the arms of her father into the shelter of the hall or into the- horse-drawn wagon to return home on starry winter nights with horse bells ringing on their ride. I smell the woodfire, I hear the drums, songs, I see the dance, I hear the ladies wrap-around moccasins sliding on the wooden floors in time to the drums, I see children quietly sitting under the wooden benches against the wall peering out to

watch and listen. I see the brilliant night skies, I hear the sound of the horse bells, the Cree language- nehiyawewin, the laughter. I see children sleeping...always by the side of their parents, at the heart of their families and the center of this circle.

Kise-pisim (The Great Moon, January)

The Great Moon of winter, Pison, tells me a personal story of a beginning that comes with ending and the loss of my much-loved *nikawiyis*- little mother- auntie. The Great Moon pulled the water of many tears from our eyes to grieve for this so great loss. For *nikawiy*, it was the loss of a sister who she walked with for so much of her life, a younger sister she was to look after.

Kihew Pisim (Eagle Moon, February)

The Eagle Moon is what I write about last. I think it is about leadership as it tells of what comes first. The eagle is the first creature that has a moon named for it. The eagle comes first. The story of 'eagle child' is also known as a Creation Story. The highest nehiyaw law of love is represented by the Eagle.

1.13 Findings and Conclusion.



This chapter highlights findings and culminates the teachings of the moon chapters as they have been interpreted in nikawiy's experience and life as a nehiyaw iskwew (Cree woman).

1.14 Literature Review

The literature review for this dissertation can be found in the appendix section.

Chapter Two

A Miyoskamin (Spring) Story

2.1 Nikawiy (my mother)

I feel the poke of a sharp stick in my side and I am awakened this abruptly. I was sleeping like a bear in hibernation. I growl and swipe at my attacker. But it was just a bad dream...and I had tossed and turned until I rolled on to the stick. Oh, I am tired. I have loved pipon, winter, and my glorious winter sleep. I have loved my cave, my bed, and all the dreams that have fed my spirit. My wakening must be done slowly now. It is a momentous transition. Instead, it is this abrupt and like cold water, melting snow and ice, being thrown at me so that I cringe and cry out. Let me hit the snooze button. The melting ice drips, drip, drip...it is time. I open one eye slowly and lurch to stand then let out a great roar.

I travel through cottage country from Kingston to Peterborough, Ontario on a grey, rainy, cold spring morning. I think the sky color is dove-grey exactly. When I first travelled here to Ontario, I found even the roads confining. I was waiting for them to stretch out in isolation as the roads in Saskatchewan and on the prairies but that never happened here. The farms and house yards came up to the edges of the roads. The narrow roads cut through omnipresent trees, land, rock and water. I learned that unless I would go on the 401 that I had to harness my speeds and almost never look away from the road. It commanded my attention. This morning I decide I will travel on the 401 part-way and as I take the exit I throw a cigarette out the window, my prayer offering.

I am in my office and this is where I come to think. I need to be moving in my car, I need to be out on the land even this way. I need to be under the sky and feel this movement. In

that space, my thoughts have room. This is where I feel free and where inspiration might find me. As a thunderbird, driving in the rain feels like home. Niya askitako-piasew-iskwew. I am Blue Thunderbird Woman.

I think of nikawiy, my mother, at home, osawastim-otakophpiw-iskwew, Brown Horse Blanket Woman. In all of my ruminations about her and trying to understand her as a woman in her own right and not just as nikawiy, my mother, a thought comes to me this morning. I need to qualify that this has been a long thoughtful process. The idea is not a baseless or spontaneous epiphany, it is the result of ongoing prayer, time, patience, struggle. What I think is that there is something about the English word “woman” that does not fit nikawiy. It does not fit her as a nehiyaw iskwew, a Cree woman. It is when I think of her as a warrior that it all seems to make sense to me then. I think of the war chief Obwandiac and the term *warrior* is more certainly what fits my mother and many Indigenous *women* I know.

In historical accounts for the plains Cree, it was unthinkable for women to be warriors (Skinner, 1914). The men had always been the warriors. My late father is Saulteaux and I am Anishinaabe this way. So, it is interesting for me to see in the same accounts that the Anishinaabe conversely accepted and upheld women as warriors in the instances that they chose to be in this role. I think there is an important caveat for the role of women as warriors and that is that there had to be men to fulfill this role, first of all, and it would always mainly be men to be warriors. What happens in this absence then? Can we say we are not at war today?

In the discourse controlled by the Canadian state, Indigenous *women* are missing or murdered. This is perhaps a step up from the moniker *squaw* and perhaps an improvement from outright erasure. In a counter to this, there are some Indigenous women who assert that they are Indigenous feminists today.

Would nikawiy (my mother) call herself a feminist? No, she does not. Similarly, I know of many Indigenous women who also do not adopt this identification, some more conscientiously and deliberately than others. For one thing, nikawiy likely has not considered the question of whether she is a feminist or not. It simply is not in her wheelhouse anywhere. She also does not identify with moniyaw (non-Indigenous and most often white) women generally and if anything, believes herself to be quite separate and unlike *moniyaw* women even though she knows many to be very close friends and even related by informal adoption as a sister/kokum to some. These sisters and noosisim (grandchildren) know nikawiy (my mother) to be a proud nehiyaw iskwew (Cree woman) and a keteyeyak (elder, old one). They might recognize what I have learned in my life, that beyond her quiet ways nikawiy is formidable in her strength. The politics, the ideology, the deliberation attached to the term *feminist* was never hers and never will be. When it comes to her representation in the world, nikawiy is nehiyaw iskwew. In her prayers to the Creator, she is osawastim-otahkopiw-iskwew (Brown Horse Blanket Woman).

2.2 Nitisikason (belly button name)

Nikawiy is a wonderful storyteller. I feel she is generous with her time and energy to share this way. At times, she has shared in healing circles and this is never easy to do. She has shared and she has listened with her heart. Every circle is sacred. Nikawiy is called on many times to give this support in the healing that is needed for all of our communities. There is healing and there is ongoing trauma. I think of this in relation to the concept of post-colonialism. And I would agree with others such as Alfred and Corntassel (2005) that we are not past colonialism, we continue to experience new and contemporary colonialism. Nikawiy's

narratives are dynamic and they invoke a space that is intimate and universal, irreverent and sacred.

Nikawiy is a teacher and some of her teachings in these spaces speak to the *belly buttons* and their origins in these circles, whole entities that include the spirit, mind, body, heart. *Awina kiya*, who are you...she asks. The answer is literally...*Niya nitisikason* (say name) and literally nikawiy translates this answer as “this is my entity...my belly button name is (say name)”. *This is my belly button where I come from, this is who I am, this is my whole entity.*

My mother, as a Cree teacher for most of her life and as a lifelong student including her Master of Education (Education Curriculum and Instruction) that she just completed at the age of 74, has studied language. Without dedicated resources for her Cree language instruction through the years that she would teach this in schools, nikawiy was left to create her own curriculum and sources (as many Cree/Indigenous teachers and educators can relate to). In her MEd program now, she is formalizing this resource based upon her years of experience. The course work she was obligated to take as part of this program drew her into critical reflection on the use of the English language as well. Such a tool was integral to the imperial Indian Residential School mandate to “kill the Indian in the child” (Pratt, 1973). Nikawiy would attend St. Anthony’s Residential School on Onion Lake until she was sixteen. In nikawiy’s experience as other Indian Residential School survivors, the imposition of English and this education was not only the great equalizer, it was also a tool for normativity.

Nikawiy tells a story of the difficulty for her to grasp the English language. The sounds are not familiar to her and her tongue struggles to find these new and strange shapes. She was turning seventeen when she marries my father and he brings her south to our band Peepeekisis. It is an eight-hour drive but at that time this was a journey to another world for nikawiy. As many First Nations in the south particularly, the languages had been largely erased through the

Indian Residential Schools. Peepeekisis, with its unique history, was further impacted by extra stringent measures taken by a zealous Indian Agent to ensure language was removed (Poitras, 2000). Nikawiy experiences the culture shock of meeting her new family and realizing that almost none speak Cree. She is comforted by the Saulteaux language that her new mother-in-law can speak with her; the languages are related enough for my mother and grandmother to speak to each other.

There is a type of ostracism that nikawiy encounters now and perhaps it helps to influence her own decision not to teach her children to speak Cree. The critical impetus for her choice absolutely lies in the Indian Residential School where she recalls the great difficulty of learning English. This was so much so that as many Indian Residential School survivors, they would not pass on their first language to their children thinking that they would not make their children suffer as they had.

The ostracism nikawiy experienced would later come to include other Indian people who only spoke English and had lost or never had other language knowledge. Nikawiy had a 'Cree accent' and an inability to reproduce foreign sounds from the English language. In time she would master English but the deep impact this struggle would have on her was to the point that her later university studies were jeopardized. The story that she shared of this is heart breaking for me and I will not share it at this time. I will say that the lesson of it was imparted once to a non-Indigenous teacher who learned a personal lesson on white privilege that I know that she will never forget. Nikawiy in all of her humility did not set out to do this but it is what came of her quiet sharing of her own experience.

Ridicule or humiliation is a type of lateral violence inflicted in the dysfunction of colonialism. It is an example of the intergenerational impacts of the Indian Residential schools. The loss of language compounded by such ostracism is perhaps the greatest damage of the

schools as colonial projects and as language is key to identity. For nikawiy, it has become her life work to address and to- in her way- reverse this damage. *Backward* can be sacred. In an interview I did with her for my documentary on the history of our band Peepeekisis, she would state in her Cree language how it broke her heart not to have taught Cree to her children (Poitras, 2000). This is the burden, the responsibility that she carries. What I know is that this is also her gift. Today she is a retired teacher but her demand as a Cree teacher is ongoing. Any stigma for the teaching and the sounds of the Cree language have been dispelled as internalized colonialism. Today it is indisputable that the critical need is for Cree language teachers.

I want to further relate this stigma to a perception of *backwardness* for traditional Indian-ness. It is what I begin to sense in certain perceptions that some types of Indians are more palatable than others and that this seemingly indicates some quality of sophistication that is more desirable. It is still an ability to 'fit in' within spheres that may have no great relevance anyway significantly to the Indians that are somehow typecast as *less* sophisticated and *less* desirable. It is a snobbishness that smacks of superiority and therefore an embrace of hierarchy in some form. This may include critique of ceremony as brilliant irreverence. Is this using our own ancestor's skulls for our ashtrays? The balance of ethics in our enquiries is delicate and critical. In Indigenous studies, our Indigenous privilege is also balanced with the research relevance to our subjects who are also our relatives.

As I consider nikawiy's teachings on our belly buttons, I am admittedly navel gazing but in this instance I am hopeful that this is also meaningful.

When we were born, our cord was cut and then after we were given a name. Your belly button name is nitisikason... First peoples of this land, our worldview is different, it's like a circle. But in English way it's like linear... We believe as Indian people, as nehiyawak, we believe there is four things all the time. When we are speaking the language teaches you and that's what has been happening to me. My parents are gone now, the old people are gone but the years I have been teaching, this is how it spoke to me (Poitras, 2019).

Nikawiy draws her teachings in a circle and goes back to her childhood. *Wawastew*, she sings, the circle of light (the sun) and life is never ending. *Kitsi-wi-nawa*, our belly buttons, represents the center of the circle of life, where the 13th moon sits. This circle is always present within this framework. That is where all the energy and power come from through where we were connected to our mothers at birth. This is source of emotions and concepts of elements. It also represents the Creator- both the female and male life.

2.3 Miyo pimatisiwin (good life)

In her curriculum, nikawiy tells a story of her childhood. She tells this to me as I help her with the document development and later an audio-visual presentation. This is how she begins her teaching for what she calls a *natural curriculum*. In the story she tells, nikawiy is bundled in a horse drawn sleigh with her parents and the rest of her siblings. The horse sleigh bells jingle on their ride through the snow. They arrive at the community round hall for a round dance. Children sit quietly and observe the great sights and sounds of this event, the dancing, drums and singing of Cree songs, the socialization of kinship that includes the community as a whole, the smell of wood burning in the stove. As the dance goes into the evening, the children eventually fall asleep contented and surrounded by family and community. Nikawiy recalls being bundled up and carried out to the sleigh under a starry night sky. She hears the sleigh bells and the horses crunching through the snow, the drums still in her ears, until she is home again. In the center of this sacred circle, life for this very short time is idyllic for nikawiy. Pimatisiwin, she calls this circle, the circle of life. *Miyo pimatisiwin, good life.*

For me to think of nikawiy as a child are at times moments of great intimacy, sacrosanct. It is because I can still see that little girl in her very clearly at times. I can glance and see all the

vibrancy of her youth shining and laughing from her eyes behind her glasses. I can sense the reverent emotions of confusion, hurt, anger of a child wounded deeply and the scars that are left to tell these stories because she does not have the words.

Nikawiy is a child who loves to dance. We are at the Onion Lake powwow and the summer day has turned cold and rainy so we are bundled with blankets in our chairs. I know she will want to dance and so I am prepared to go with her though I usually am not. I wait and she eventually indicates that she wants to go into the circle. But then I notice that she hesitates. In the cold I realize that she is worried about the stability in her legs. She has never had to worry about this before but in the past winter had experienced problems to walk that even required her to use a walker for a period of time. Her health improved but now she did not trust the stability of her legs. She could not join this circle at what was once her childhood home. The residential school ensured that she did not have memories of dancing in these circles. And I knew how much she loved to be part of this now, the pride that she felt, and the honour that it was for her to be in this circle especially at her childhood home. In time, it becomes too cold for us to sit anymore and so we go back to our hotel room. We are quiet and on this cold, rainy night I sense a great loneliness as we leave. There is a rare frailty that I witness in nikawiy that evening. It catches at my heart as we ride through the night. In time and at once, she is nikawiy again and I am nitanis. I sit in her shadow where I am protected always.

Nikawiy draws the circle and calls it the calendar of life, pimatisiwin. She explains every direction and season, every moon that is tied to this calendar. She presents this at a conference at the University of Regina to other teachers. The circle has different applications in her overall presentation. It is a framework for the seasons and moons, it is the round dance, it is a framework for teaching the Cree language, and it is part of the Creation story. Over the years as a Cree teacher, nikawiy has developed her own curriculum that she calls a natural curriculum. In

my own dissertation methodology, I look to my own application of nikawiy's *Pimatisiwin, calendar of life*.

I attend another presentation that nikawiy is invited to do at a First Nation that is an hour away from our band Peepeekisis. She was asked to teach a lesson to the elders of this community as their regular instructor was away. I recognize that many, if not all, of the elders in this class are Indian residential school survivors so this is also the reason for the language lessons. In that short time, I learned more from that lesson than I ever had on the Cree language. Nikawiy does not teach from a book. Her lessons are in her knowledge that she easily and effectively imparts even within this short time. And yet for various inexplicable reasons, the challenge remains for nikawiy to teach us as her children, grandchildren, and now great-grandchildren.

2.4 Okicitaw iskwew (*warrior woman/sacred woman*)

Ethnologist Alanson Skinner would write about Cree and Bungi/Ojibway⁹ 'warrior women'. He acknowledged that women could become warriors although it seemed in rare instances- and the Bungi/Ojibway more so than the Cree. Nikawiy would interpret 'okicitaw' as a term that also meant 'sacred' and a religious example was 'okicitaw Marie' for Mary, mother of Jesus.

If I may give a simplistic rendering of an account from Dr. Jerry Fontaine's dissertation on *anishinaabe* inherent governance (now a book "Our Hearts Are As One Fire" 2020),

⁹ "Bungi (Bungee) was a dialect of English spoken in the Red River valley north of Winnipeg, Manitoba. Its origins are linked to families of mixed Cree, Orkney, Scottish and Saulteaux/French descent who moved there early in the 19th Century from Hudson's Bay Co trading posts. Dec.14, 2019 [https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/bungee#:~:text=Bungi%20\(Bungee\)%20was%20a%20dialect,Hudson's%20Bay%20Co%20trading%20posts.](https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/bungee#:~:text=Bungi%20(Bungee)%20was%20a%20dialect,Hudson's%20Bay%20Co%20trading%20posts.)

Obwandiac was a war chief who took direction from the spiritual leader Neolin for the War of 1812. *Obwandiac* would go on to defeat and capture the British Forts to spare only Fort Detroit (Fontaine, 2014, 2020). The significance of a war chief taking direction from a spiritual leader is the point I want to make. In the fight for Indigenous survival today, I think *Obwandiac*'s leadership is an example for the foundation of our spirituality that is based in ceremony and therefore language and therefore land. Each element is intrinsic to the next and this bond is an example of the law of *wahkotowin (relationships)*.

I think of the ways we fight today, what we fight against, how we are warriors today. Perhaps the greatest enemy is ourselves I think; neocolonialism, wittingly or not. I think of the need to rest, to recover, how that time is never granted to us... how we die before our time, unnaturally, prematurely, the lowest life expectancy rates... how none of this may matter to anyone who is not affected and cannot be bothered to give a care. We burn out, we give up. We become wards, numbers, industry fodder for other livelihoods with benefits and their security, pensions, vacations. Even when they are paid to care then they might not beyond their paycheques. If we fight to be protective of who we are, we may find ourselves fighting our own. This distinction may not be easy to discern. What will my nieces and nephews, my *noosisimak (grandchildren)* all under the age of ten today see in the future? Will they follow blindly or will they listen to their ancestors? Will they know and believe in themselves as *nehiwayak isiniyawak (Cree people)*?

If we are at war today, then who or what are we fighting? For one, we can consider that colonialism is a yet ever-present onslaught that we continue to experience in our communities and homes and lives. Our *okicitaw iskwew (leader women)* today may still be fighting to survive and critically, to survive as *Nehiyawak (people of the four directions)* and *Anishinaabe*.

2.5 Red Dress

In my story of *Miyoskamin*, I acknowledge this time of our Indian new year and the season of spring. I also acknowledge my late niece and the memorial that I am travelling home for this month. In the spring of 2019, it is four years now and as my other nieces and nephews acknowledged on social media, their cousin would have been twenty this spring. She was named for the *spring*, *miyoskamin*. Instead, in the weeks before she turned fifteen, she would take her own life.

The night before, my niece posed for pictures in the red jingle dress that she had just received as a gift from her father, my brother. She asked *nikawiy*, her grandmother, to take these pictures. I remember looking at these pictures later and especially one where my niece had this great smile. I thought how could she smile like that if she knew what she was planning to do. It would be years when I finally let *nikawiy* know what I wondered. *Nikawiy* explained that she was taking the picture but something happened and so my niece was walking toward her laughing when *nikawiy* happened to take her picture. I could relate to that as I know what it is like when *nikawiy* takes pictures. *Miyoskamin*'s brilliant smile in that picture is what comforts us still. The jingle dress dance is a healing dance. For our fourth and final year, we will have had a memorial jingle dress dance for *Miyoskamin*, '*blooming spring*', and it has been a healing dance for our family.

My niece took her own life because her older brother had done the same in the previous year. She followed her brother and it was the worst fear and nightmare realized for my brother, my mother, our family. We went from shock to shock, trauma compounded. What I have also come to realize is that we are not special or unique in these circumstances and that such premature and unnatural loss is only a growing reality.

It is in this fight for our survival that women become warriors. They are surviving and they are fighting for this survival. I look to the example of Obwandiac and his spiritual direction from Neolin because it is a critical look to an example of leadership that is based in our inherent frameworks. I see nikawiy as a warrior, an okicitaw iskwew.

Where are our men? Where is their inherent leadership and protection? I believe they are doing what they can. But for our people who are leading outside of our frameworks, they have to answer the question for how they are able to do this successfully and meaningfully for the people's survival as Nehiyawak and Anishinaabe without conflict with these inherent knowledge frameworks. Such conflict would be contrary to our Laws and is told to have its own consequences in terms of the breaking of natural laws and Creator's Laws. To *overstep the Creator's Laws* is pastahowin.

In my mother's prayers, she acknowledges both the male and female parts of herself. She is iskwew (*woman/female*), a word derived from iskotew (*fire*) meaning that she brings or gives life, this heat and warmth. In my experience and reflection, nikawiy (*my mother*) is nehiyawak iskwew (*Cree woman*) and she is okicitaw iskwew (*warrior woman*) to me.

2.6 Wawastew (*the circle of life is never-ending*)

In my experience as an Indigenous pre-doctoral fellow in this inaugural program at Queen's University and teaching a class on *Indigenous Women and Leadership* in the 2019 Winter term, I had invited a series of guest speakers to this class. One of them was Cheryl Suzack, a professor at the University of Toronto in the Department of English. Cheryl was one of the editors for the book *indigenous women and feminism. Politics, Activism, Culture* (2010). On the topic of feminism, I asked Cheryl what she thought the future might be for Indigenous

feminism. Her answer was related to the importance of empowerment for Indigenous women generally (2019). She stated that she did not see an academic feminism development to be a greater need than this general empowerment of whatever the Indigenous woman chose to suit her.¹⁰ I appreciate her response that points to the individual agency of women themselves.

One of the readings for our class was also on an *Indigenous Feminisms Roundtable* (2015) that looked at transnational and Indigenous feminism. Scott Morgensen from the Queen's Gender Studies Department was one of the authors and I read with interest his thoughts related to the significance of Idle No More. Surely, Idle No More is a contemporary example of Indigenous woman leadership. Morgensen's comments were interesting observations of how this movement was effectively driven by women and the grassroots. I found myself wondering if any of the founders considered themselves feminists? My guess is that the one non-Indigenous founder would be feminist but I would not say for certain that the other three Indigenous founders would say the same. Did Chief Theresa Spence consider herself a feminist?

The English language can be problematic for nehiyaw iskwewak (*Cree women*) and for nikawiy (*my mother*). Today nikawiy has a critical understanding for how the language has been used to perpetuate colonialism. She is tireless in her work to retain the Cree language. As an *elder*, keteyayak, she is constantly in demand in our home area and regularly travels to surrounding communities to assist with ceremony, teachings, and any support she is able to provide. In our family, she is also the center of this circle. I am the oldest of her six children and I am otansa, her daughter. As I work to complete my PhD, she was also working to complete her MEd and finished in spring 2020.

¹⁰ What I understood Cheryl to be saying is that what a woman had to say for herself had as much authority as other identification. The need for an academic identification for Indigenous feminism is not more important than how an Indigenous woman understands her own empowerment and how she may choose to identify this for herself.

For nikawiy, the Cree language is living and it is her teacher. This relationship is dynamic. To repair the damage done to this teaching and knowledge is the life work of nikawiy. This is what she fights for every day. I see the child in her but I also see her as keteyeyak, ‘*old one*’. She amazes me with a fortitude that I will never have. I am most grateful for nikawiy.

I have come to recognize the importance of rejecting terminology and words that are part of a larger project to continue the colonial onslaught. I have experienced a daze of horror at times when I could only wonder then think ‘we are at war’. I would watch nikawiy, my little mother, lay powerless and drained, overcome with grief. The words *woman* and *feminist* just do not help to dispel this daze. Of course, few words might. I can only think of nikawiy as okicitaw iskwew because she never failed to stand back up. As Obwandiac, nikawiy follows her spiritual direction in her struggle and in her fight. Her commitment to this and to what she recognizes as miyo pimatisiwin, *the good life*, is where she stands and what she believes. For nikawiy, the words that matter to her are her prayers and all of the remembered and ongoing conversations with loved ones including the last words of her noosisim (*grandchildren*) who would say how much they loved her. As her children and grandchildren and now capanak (*great-grandchildren*), we have all learned to say this to nikawiy- kisahikitin. *You are so loved by us*. You are the center of our circle. We all sit safe in your shadow. Kisahikitin nikawiy metoni.

Nikawiy is a storyteller and she sits in a circle to share and listen with her heart. Tapwe (*truly*), she has a strong heart. Ekosi (*it is finished*).

2.7 Kiskino tahiwew ona (*Discussion Notes*)

Teachings, reminders, guidance

My chapter on Spring was originally composed for a presentation that I did at Queen's as part of my pre-doctoral fellowship there in 2018-19. It is a comprehensive overview of the research that I was doing at that stage in the development of my dissertation. It was an event hosted by Gender Studies.

I will include *Discussion Notes* at the end of every chapter to add closing or interpretive comments that tie the chapter to the research question based on Nehiyaw Iskwew leadership for treaty and governance. I introduce the season of Spring to start nikawiy's calendar of life, pimatisiwin, and the thirteen moons to follow. Spring is the Indian new year.

Chapter Three

Sakastenohk Miyoskamin (East, Spring)

3.1 Niski-pisim, Goose Moon (March)

3.1.1 Duck Eggs

The goose moon is the spring of nikawiy's life as a young girl. There is a story I recall nikawiy and nikawiys telling me of how she and her younger sister Delma would hunt for duck eggs. One time, they went out and found a slough where they went to hunt for their eggs. Even as girls, they had this responsibility and knowledge to go by themselves to hunt for these eggs. They knew where to go and what to do. On this trip though nikawiy was making her way through the slough carrying her eggs when she walked into an unseen dip. Nikawiy did not know how to swim so this was treacherous. She hung onto her precious eggs and managed to come out of the slough. The reality of life on the land was this real for them. Laws of the land were meant to be respected or the consequences could be very real. As girls, they were already depended on to help feed their family.

I see nikawiy as a young girl delicately carrying the eggs she found even as she stepped into a dip under the water in the slough. As this young girl, she was empowered with responsibility to help her family... to survive. I see her as a young mother carrying each of us protectively as her children even as she faced unseen dips in life that threatened to overwhelm her- she never lost her footing... would return always to her balance. I see her as notikwew (*old woman*) and nokum (*grandmother*), capan (*great-grandmother*), holding each generation in turn as protectively. Nikawiy is my land, she is my nitisiy (*my belly button*).

3.1.2 Enikanik *One who takes the lead*

Okimakan- this is the term used for *Chiefs* but nikawiy explains that the real meaning is ‘pretend chief’, a decoy. Indian Act chiefs are called this. I like that she calls this *decoy* as though this was strategic- Nikawiy agrees, this is also protective. The decoys may be a shield or distraction for the real ones. There is also the term ‘okimaw’ that some also use and now nikawiy tells me that this means someone who is putting himself ahead or above the people like a boss. Whereas, the real leaders are the ones that go ahead, she tells me the term enikanik, ‘*he makes the trail, the one who takes the lead*’ and gives me the example of the lead goose in their flying V formations. What I am also reminded of is nohtawiy Paskwaw Mostos Kapimohtet, *Walking Buffalo; Dad*. I love the story of the buffalo in winter that faces into the storm to break the trail for others to follow; tapwe, *truly*, this was who he always was to us and still is. Nikawiy still walks with her only partner- niwiciwakan, *the one who walks with me*.

I would not have anticipated the meaning of the *niskak*, *geese*, in terms of leadership, as well as its deep importance for *peyakoskan*, *family*, this singular unit that is as one and is the base for our inherent collectivity. The kinship meaning in *nehiyaw* knowledge, as in *wahkotowin*, ‘relationships’ is connected to this concept of collectivity that is based in *peyakoskan*, our families. Our children are the *acak*, stars in the night skies that guide us. I recall hearing *niskak*, *geese*, in a summer night; I was surprised to hear them now, so late. And then I realized that they were following their law, their natural law. Nikawiy would say ‘they are so faithful.

3.1.3 Peyakoskan (family)

Genealogy

A finding that I have had in my research is how I may be learning with *nikawiy* at times. This was in genealogy and in *nehiyaw* knowledge such as the *creation story* and *clans*. These were things that were taken away from her in the absence of her family. She recalls that she did have many teachings from her parents and this has been a foundation for her all of her life; it has been critical guidance at times that made all the difference for *nikawiy*.

Her own understanding of her genealogy was generally cut off at her grandparents and even so her knowledge was not certain. She had heard the stories but somehow felt uncertain of them, perhaps she could not recall exactly, perhaps she was too young. But then she also says that she knew of others who shared lineage and so she did not want to impose somehow. My late *nikawiy* (little mother, aunt) was different and would keep the stories that she had heard from her mother and she would mention these to us at times.

In my research now, *nikawiy* has connected to her lineages and she will introduce herself this way on occasion as ‘she is descended from this *capan*, this signatory to Treaty Six’. When it comes to leadership, *nikawiy* is descended from Chief Joe Taylor of Onion Lake, who was a longstanding chief. He is her *capan* and the father of her *nokum*, grandmother, Veronique Taylor, who married Louis Watchmaker of Kehewin. Joe Taylor was adopted by Peter Thunder of Little Pine. Peter Thunder was adopted by *mistahi maskwa*, Big Bear. This is our *peyakoskan*, our kinship, our *wahkotowin*- this was all but lost in the Residential School experience and in the greater colonial imposition.

We had not heard the *nehiyaw* (Cree) Creation Story before. And the Creation Story carries the 44 *nehiyaw* laws as well as the clan teachings. This is the meaning of the Creation Story and has been an incredible gap in our knowledge. We are indebted to our young teacher, Ben Steinhauer, of Saddle Lake Cree Nation who was always so generous to share with us. He,

in turn, received these teachings from his mosom, Jimmy O'Chiese, the son of Peter O'Chiese. These are well known and respected nehiyawak and anishinaabe leaders and elders.

Again, nikawiy might have vague memories or knowledge of such teachings. She learned with us as I also shared these teachings with our family. I think it may have been that our knowledge was hidden to be protected at times. It returns to us now. I feel the profound significance of this event and I am so grateful. It means so much. I understand that the younger ones in our family may not have this same impression but that does not matter- what matters is that they have their inherent right and gift to know who they are, as they were meant to be, as nehiyawak.

I have listened to the geese return this year; I pay attention to this now. I feel their strong teachings of family and collectivity, their paths are living law in the skies, their song is of new life returning to the land just as they return so faithfully to their nature. In this time of pandemic, there is also something so especially soothing about this new and returning life that they promise now.

3.1.4 Return of Geese

I have struggled to write about this moon. I recall it is one of the first that I started and I see nikawiy sitting outside her house last spring. She was compelled to have a cigarette although she does not smoke anymore- she will do this only rarely as part of her personal ceremony as she feels called to. She was watching the geese return then and she told me about the three geese that she saw flying low, how fat and healthy they were- she said these were her late sister that she just lost, her late son that she lost the year before, and also her late brother-in-law, my auntie's husband and dad's younger brother who also left us the year before my brother. When I

think of this, I realize they followed each other a year apart. So now nikawiy remembered them as she watched the geese return. She said they were showing themselves to her now as free, healthy, a celebration of returning life. She smoked to this in her personal ceremony. Her heart was lifted this way, I see her sitting outside her house in her yard that she loved, the home she called 'a little piece of paradise she carved out'. And for me, I pay attention to the goose moon now, niski-pisim, and I love this moon now.

Lessons of our laws are coming to me now. I believe this is what comes of diligent searching. My intention is put out to the universe and I must be consistent and committed to this- so the teachings come because this is what I am searching for. I have observed protocols- I hear nikawiy saying 'tobacco comes first'. I put my intention into the universe and the teaching of the treaty law school was the specific answer in ceremony that 'the universe is listening to me'. I was so honored and humbled to hear this then. I was instructed to seek this name and this was what was given to me then. I certainly did not have a clear understanding of what this meant at all but in time and in pieces, I would come to understand. I believe that is an ongoing process, just as the geese return again and again.

Only now may I finish writing about this moon. It is just past and it is followed by the Frog Moon and the Leaf Budding Moon will come now. I think kiwetinohk (north wind) has gone home now. There was just snowfall at home, nikawiy sent me the pictures of the snow that she found so beautiful. It feels like spring, but the snow and the north wind return one more time. Ki-we, this is the part of the word that begins how 'the north wind' is said in Cree and it means 'to go home' nikawiy tells me. This is also the teaching that I finish with now.

My sister has contacted me late this night. I was actually already sleeping when she texted so I awoke in the night to see this. She is worried about mom; she lets me know. There is nothing that I can do other than sit up to write this chapter that I had started a year ago. Why did

I struggle to write about this, I wonder. The teaching is of collectivity, family. Our highest law is also of love. It makes sense to me then that this is one of the final chapters of nikawiy's story- one of family and love. It is also a teaching of collectivity as our laws are based on this and treaty as our law is also based on this. Even today, this is a threat simply because this is who we are.

3.1.5 Collectivity

We practice collectivity in *peyakoskan*, our families. This was also attacked in the schools my parents and grandparents went to- even we went to these schools for a time, my sister and I acknowledge during an online meeting earlier today. We listened to a young man, who is like a young elder, speak on laws and who let us know that half of our Cree laws had to do with children. This was the importance of parenting and child rearing- *peyakoskan*, our families. This was, and is, also our highest law of love, *sahkotowin*. It is the collectivity of the young man's own family that accommodated his strong teachings in his own life so that he was also now able to share with us. This is the case sometimes- our elders become younger- and during this pandemic, it is how we are also still able to access these teachings via such online conversations. I think of how unexpected this milieu is, how strange, yet it is also an assurance that we will always find ways to survive- together, in our larger and extended *peyakoskan*.

The teachings of the children bring me back also to where nikawiy's story begins- in the round dances she remembers in the round halls where she, as a young girl, was at the heart of her family. Women were sacred in this world, life-givers. Men sang with drums to emulate this heart beat but it was only the women who could carry this within themselves so they never had need to use a drum- this was a teaching from the young man today. He went on to say that

children learned to be well-behaved at this time when our laws were practiced naturally in life. I recalled nikawiy saying this, too, that when they were at the round dances and in these gatherings that children never had to be admonished, they knew to be quiet and were secure near their parents and family. No wonder it is the heart of her memories and teachings- how powerful to know this balance where children and where nikawiy was so protected at the center and heart of their families. Peyakoskan, nikawiy tells me this means ‘as one, one unit’, family.

I am in a place today where I learn of our laws. How grateful I am for this. The teachings that have been revealed to me during my time of seeking are amazing and invaluable. They change me and move me, imbue my life with a different color of understanding. Niya aski tako piasew iskwew, I am Blue Thunderbird woman, tapwe, truly.

I think of one the last times I saw nikawiy, in my rear-view mirror as I was driving away from her house. I saw her standing on her deck, shaking her fist in the air. Now my sister is telling me that she is worried about nikawiy. I am helpless where I am so I sit in the night to write, to finish nikawiy’s story as much as I can. I plan to travel home as soon as I can. Something has changed since I last saw her. She tells me a little bit but has also been quiet. We are always both busy but now I think there was more to her silence. She would never want me to worry.

All of her teachings come back to me like a great, warm blanket at this time of the north wind blowing one season close as another season surges forward in the ‘new year’, spring. I think of nikawiy’s calendar of life, pimatisiwin. She knew this was her legacy. As she did all of her work, she did this diligently. I recall her first hand-drawn pictures, how she loved to draw when she could. She remembered a painting she did in school and that this won an award. She never knew what happened to the painting though, somehow it was kept from her. I see the little animals and trees that she drew. Now I think that is the most special interpretation of her

teaching. But what she asked me back then was to help her do a digital rendition so I did this on the computer selecting clip art for the pictures and she was happy.

As I sit in this night with my memories of nikawiy, I also recall the sound of the geese in the night as they continued their migration. I was surprised to hear this but loved the sound. They were tireless and so, so faithful. They called out to each other in the darkness to guide each other this way, peyakoskan, as one, as one unit. I sense nikawiy this way in this night. I know I will always be guided this way, she is my peyakoskan, this is what we are, as one, one unit. Though she teaches me to fly on my own, I will always hear her guiding me. *Ekosi*.

3.1.6. *kiskino tahiwew ona*

Teachings (reminders, guidance): *Collectivity and Leadership*

The collectivity of peyakoskan (family) is a threat to the notion of individualism that was at the heart of the 1969 White Paper and the policy of assimilation that would bring us under a foreign law to say then that we were only a minority under domestic legislation. This is an affront to our international treaty with the Crown as *nation to nation*. Nikawiy as a nehiyaw iskwew is a further threat to colonialism that is based on white patriarchy. These ideas of colonialism and events of Indian policy are called ‘historical’ today but this is a testament to their longevity and their entrenchment.

Peyakoskan, family, is also revealed in genealogy. Extended kinship and relationship to ancestors becomes very meaningful when there is an opportunity to make this discovery. Nikawiy’s knowledge was only of her grandparents until later in life. The connection she is able to make to her capanak is personal and strong. It gives support and direction. This was the

knowledge that she was cut off from in the residential schools when she was taken from her family.

The goose moon, niski-pisim, is also a definition of leadership. It is not who is 'boss' but rather the 'one who leads'. Indian chiefs under the Indian Act, colonial systems, are called okimakanak, *pretend chiefs*. Imposed elected systems and elected leadership are defined as 'not real'.

This is what I see in the sky now. I see our law of collectivity. For me, this breathes new and ongoing, continuing life into our laws and into our treaty.

3.2 Ayiki-pisim, Frog Moon (April)

3.2.1 Treaty Six

Nikawiy is inspired to learn of connections to leaders in her genealogy including signatories to Treaty 6. Her paternal grandfather was a well-known interpreter who was said to be like a self-taught lawyer. Joseph Quinney, mawacihat (he who gathers the people together) was the son of Charles Thomas Quinney, manito nikik nahkeykisis (King Otter). Charles had six children: Benjamin, Angus, Joseph, Ethel, Charles, and David. Charles's father was William McKay, Oseywaskwan, who was a signatory to Treaty Six. The sources for this genealogy include Lydia Quinney, a relative from Saddle Lake, based upon her own research; and Hector Quinney from Onion Lake who had also gathered research including oral history on the Quinney family tree.

On nikawiy's maternal side, she would learn of her grandfather Joseph Taylor who would be Chief of Onion Lake for many years. The source for this includes nikawiys, my late aunt Delma Poitras (nee Quinney) who maintained the oral history of this lineage from her mother. Another published source by Joseph E. Dion and Hugh Dempsey is "My Tribe, the Crees" (1979) based on Dion's memories and experiences. The book recounts the lineage of Joseph Taylor as adopted by Peter Thunder who was adopted by mistahiy maskwa (Big Bear) who was also signatory to Treaty Six although he would famously refuse to sign the treaty until four years after the original signing.

The journey I have made with nikawiy in the process of my dissertation has led me to personal revelations and connections that I could not have not anticipated. It is my own journey

home. I would often think of nikawiy as my land. The issue of land is still the heart of our Nation and nations. This is our mother, *our mother; kikawino aski, our mother earth.*

The teachings in our Creation story revealed our inception on this land, our clans, our Laws... given to us by Creator- as Creator loved us so greatly and as *sahkitowin* (love) is His greatest Law. In his sharing of the nehiyaw Creation Story, Ben Steinhauer also shared the status of women- “old women...grandmothers”- in treaty. Enough was said to affirm that the role of women at the time of treaty was integral to these covenants. Without protocol, I believe that I cannot say anymore here. As bawdwaywidun banaise (Eddie Benton-Banai) points out, it can be controversial, if not dangerous, to make the decisions of what to disclose of ‘sacred information’. For the cost of colonization and all that was taken/destroyed/appropriated, we can be very grateful for what is maintained- but there is always a question if this is also protection?

At one time during our travels together, nikawiy looked out the window to the land that rushed by as we drove past- then she mentioned that ‘the treaties were for the animals’. I did not understand this but in our teachings for the nehiyaw Creation Story, I would recall her comment and then it made perfect sense. She would also say that we needed the animals, they did not need us. The animals are our Creation Story. We come from the animals and these are our clan mothers. These are our laws. This is my profound teaching and finding.

3.2.2 Appropriation

I recall hearing of sacred bundles that were acquired through whatever means to be placed in museums. So today, there may be call for repatriation and return of sacred items to the families or communities from where they were sourced. I asked a medicine man one time about this- and was told that these items may not have the same sacredness anymore. These are

‘living’ to us- animate, spiritual. They need to be taken care of appropriately. If not, they just become objects. As the *moniyaw* (white man, European) would say, they are artifacts. This comes to mind when I think of contemporary issues for appropriation. Sanctity and meaning may not be maintained simply by possession or appropriation.

I think of Abraham Maslow and the Indigenous knowledge that he would not attribute in his appropriation for what he would call ‘Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs’. It is very interesting to me to understand this appropriation and Indigenous knowledge foundation. In my analytical ruminations, I found myself reminded and drawn to this model as nikawiy’s teachings for me seemed connected to this also. Nikawiy absolutely loved to learn and in time, led herself down her own self-directed learning paths in life. Such *self-actualization* was the pinnacle of what Maslow called his ‘hierarchy’. Now I would think this made more sense to me as I realized there was actually a foundation of Indigenous knowledge to this and the connection that I was making for nikawiy to this also.

I think today of other Maslow examples today and appropriation carried out to degrees I have never seen before (other than Grey Owl). There is such a boldness to Indigenous identity appropriation at the highest levels of academic institutions. *Calling out* is not enough to ensure that this is stopped. Nikawiy will always say she is in the center of a circle and she very consciously and deliberately places herself in this position. She says outright that she is rejecting ‘the box’ of western academia this way. The imposters find their places in such upper academic echelons and fight desperately to maintain their lucrative perches there. Nikawiy sits with prayer in her circles and is content to be nehiyaw iskwew here. I know she is slumbering peacefully in her sleep as I write this. The other day she dreamt of nohtawiy, dad.

3.2.3 Ancestors

Frog Lake

When we do our ceremony, I was told once that the direction of the pipe goes into a circle to also acknowledge who we cannot see who join us in these sacred spaces like portals. This is where we sit with them. When we sit in these circles and acknowledge these circles, time disappears. We are who we are then. We are who we have always been. We are reminded of all that is unseen and of all that is in the seeming emptiness. This is not linear time. This is without beginning or end. Our energy and movement follow age old patterns and frameworks that are 'exact, precise, consistent, repetitive' - I hear the rumbling voice of my relative Larry Quinney of Frog Lake saying these words, he is my keteyaya and I learn so much from my visits with him on the topic of treaty. This is the dynamism and meaning of what seems only 'empty space' to the ones who came here to 'discover' us.

April 2nd is the date of the Frog Lake 'massacre'. My late father was born on April 1, 1937. I have a memory of travelling with mom and dad to Frog Lake after my late grandmother's funeral on Onion Lake. It was the first time we took the time to do this kind of sightseeing there. We went to a church tent on a hill at Kehewin, my late granny's birthplace and home. We also went to the memorial park for what they called a 'massacre'. Maybe it was then that we stopped at a restaurant in the town of St. Paul just west of Kehewin and Frog Lake. I would sit in this restaurant on occasion and was always reminded of when I sat here with mom and dad that day. It is always a special memory for me. I knew dad loved this land as much as nikawiy. Perhaps they sensed the personal roots that they each had here.

Treaty Six was entered into on September 9, 1876. Nine years later, the Frog Lake 'massacre' would take place on April 2, 1885. Eight Cree (Wandering Spirit-war chief, Little Bear, Walking the Sky, Bad Arrow, Miserable Man, Iron Body, Crooked Leg, Man Without

Blood) would be hanged on November 27, 1885 for the killing of nine settlers at Frog Lake on April 2, 1885 (Thomas Quinn, Leon Fafard and Felix Marchand- two Catholic priests, John Williscroft, John Gowanluck, John Delaney, William Gilchrist, George Dill, Charles Gouin).

At the time of the hanging, Indian Residential School children were brought to witness the hangings. Why would they do this to children? How could they not know the scars they were inflicting on innocent children? Indeed, what other purpose could they have had? This was their *law*.

Family history was taken away and silenced in the aftermath of the so-called Frog Lake massacre and the eight hangings in Battleford- Canada's largest mass hanging. The hangings were a shocking event, they had never known of people to be punished this way. When my *mosom* was under the influence of alcohol, he might have tried to speak on issues that were now forbidden to voice and he would be reminded of this with my *nokum*'s admonishment to "be quiet". It indicated a very real and serious fear for the well-being of any Indian man at that time and place.

Today *nikawiy* remembered her own sense of tension with older men in her family, her *mosom*, her father, others. Today she recognized the roots of this embodied admonishment for these proud and strong men to "be quiet". She believes there was a profound impact particularly on Indian men. In ways, there were effectively silenced.

From our visit with Hector Quinney, he recalled how their ancestors *Manito-nikik* and *Sekwun* and their descendants were given English names of McKay and Quinney. This was another way that family history was obliterated. As far as *nikawiy* understood, it was priests who could not pronounce Cree names who simply gave their own surnames to the men. How gendered was this process? How did this include the women? Other ancestors in her family

would move and change their given names. She was told that the Dressyman family of Red Pheasant were also her relatives.

3.2.4 Buffalo

I had a dream of a buffalo once years ago. I consider what I am able to divulge- not everything may be shared. I think of things that have come to pass since then and what has given meaning to this dream over the years. My late father's name was *Walking Buffalo* but this dream was not about him specifically. I dreamt of a buffalo calf. The interpretation of this dream always seemed to indicate a particular meaning for me. It is a meaning that guides me.

Recently, I learned that Frog Lake would be bringing the buffalo back to their lands. I had been reading of how Mistahiy Maskwa would follow the buffalo with his band and how far they might travel. After the treaties, they would be forced onto reserves but Mistahiy Maskwa would resist this to follow the buffalo as long as he could. He would eventually sign at Fort McLeod in 1882. Now in 2021, the buffalo were returning to Frog Lake and the land of Mistahiy Maskwa. Though the buffalo might come back to the land, where was the Indian land now today?

The Chief of Frog Lake First Nation Vernon Watchmaker was recently appointed Grand Chief of the Treaty Six Confederacy. In response to the resignation of the Canadian Governor General from this role, the Grand Chief had written a letter to Queen Elizabeth¹¹. I had heard of other letters written from other Treaty leadership as the relationship between the Queen and Chiefs would be acknowledged from time to time. The response to this letter was written about

¹¹ <https://ilrtoday.ca/the-confederacy-of-treaty-six-letter-to-queen-on-the-governor-general/>

in a local Indigenous newspaper as a rejection of the Chief's proposal to intervene in the selection for the new Governor General as a matter solely for the Canadian government.

3.2.5 Tobacco Offering

Last fall, my brother made a tobacco offering at Fort Pitt. He had called nikawiy before this and she told him the print to also bring. He went as early as he could, leaving from St. Paul on his way home. He would stop in for breakfast at the restaurant on Onion Lake and then make his way again to the site of the Treaty Six commemoration meeting. This was the last day and he made it for the final ceremonial fire to make these offerings.

Days before, he had travelled from *Ahtahkakoop*, his wife Debbie's First Nation where he stopped for a visit with his in-laws before travelling west to Fort Pitt to take in the gathering here. He would then travel further west to visit me in St. Paul. The next day, he would return to Fort Pitt and this time I went with him.

I stayed in the vehicle due to the pandemic but also as I had been bitten by a spider near my mouth and under my nose. At this time, it seemed that not everyone was wearing a mask yet for the pandemic. I wore a mask but was more comfortable to stay in the vehicle- the bite was still very red on my face and I preferred it covered as it was also broken skin. I had been bitten the day before in my apartment, likely while I was sleeping. I noticed it in the late morning and it quickly went red and then blistered. By afternoon, I was at the hospital emergency to make sure that it was looked at. I spent my day there waiting and left at supper to eat something. I came back in the evening as I saw the blisters starting to break open. I was very alarmed though not feeling any pain. Finally, in the late evening, I was able to see a Doctor who assured me that

it was just a matter of time for this to heal now. I think he gave me an antibiotic as a precaution to any infection and an antihistamine.

I later shared this bite occurrence with my boss, Sherri, and she mentioned something about 'spider woman teachings', which sounded very interesting but we did not discuss further. For me, the spider almost cancelled my trip to Fort Pitt, but my brother made sure that I was able to make this visit with him.

He parked near the Big Bear monument then he went to sit in the tent where the talks were happening. I stayed in the car and was able to tune into the gathering on the radio. I took my tobacco to put near the monument. I was so grateful to follow this protocol. I had noticed this monument before when nikawiy and I had travelled here to visit this area. Now the monument was much more meaningful to me as I now understood the connection to my *capan* (ancestor). For my family, there was also a greater purpose in offering our tobacco and acknowledge our ancestors. *Mistahiy Maskwa* (Big Bear) became more meaningful as we now shared his search for land.

The frog moon will come soon now. I remember other spring times in other years- I feel that spring has arrived. Nikawiy would always wait until she heard the frogs sing to finally agree. The frogs would wait until the ground was warm enough to bring them out of their winter sleep. They would emerge then with their songs. Nikawiy was always an appreciative and grateful audience. She had waited for them patiently and faithfully and would say the animals are the most faithful to Creator's laws. *Ayiki pisim*, frog moon. Their songs will fill the spring evenings and tell of warm days to come, the new life of a new year, *miyo pimatisiwin*, good life. *Ekosi pitama*. It is finished.

3.2.6 *kiskino tahiweu ona* (Discussion Notes)

Teachings (reminders, guidance): Kikawiynaw Aski, Our mother earth. Land

Nikawiy is my land, she is my nitisiy (my belly button). In a connection to her ancestors, her capanak, nikawiy also offers critical guidance for the future. These teachings remain vital. Our past leaders remain leaders.

Nikawiy's comment that 'the treaties are for the animals' is given a particular meaning when it is connected to the Creation Story. I know when she made this comment that she meant that we have a responsibility to take care of the animals, to be protective as they are relatively defenseless. At the same time, we are protecting ourselves.

The animals are our clan mothers and this is our governance. *She would say the animals are the most faithful to Creator's laws also. Ayiki pisim, frog moon. Their songs will fill the spring evenings and tell of warm days to come, the new life of a new year, miyo pimatisiwin, good life.*

Appropriation and erasure are introduced in this chapter on an event in history that is often told from one perspective only. This represents deliberate colonial theft and violence that is ongoing in Western academic institutions.

3.3 Sakipakawi-pisim, Leaf Budding Moon (May)

3.3.1 Brown Horse Blanket Woman

Nikawiy and I are attending the first *National Gathering for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission* (TRC) that takes place in Winnipeg, Manitoba. I recall this was very important for her to do. We travel with two other elders from Peepeekisis. We do not make a room booking in advance so when we arrive in Winnipeg, we realize the difficulty to find any room due to this event. We finally find one at a hotel near the airport- it is a suite so we can all stay together. We travel to the Forks the next day.

The first thing nikawiy does is find out where and when she can do her testimony as an Indian Residential School survivor. Support is made available for those who want this for the recording of their testimony. I wait for nikawiy at the hotel where this is taking place. When she is ready, I meet her in the lobby and she is excited to tell me that her support was someone who knew me. It takes a while, but I find out that this is my old friend from Lebret- she attended the Qu'Appelle Indian Residential School with some of her sisters at the same time as I had attended for one year in high school.

Lebret closed as an Indian Residential School in 1996. The nuns and priests had left years before this. In 1983, the school had become White Calf Collegiate as the Starblanket First Nation took over its' administration when it also claimed the land as part of their Treaty Land Entitlement agreement. The Collegiate would function for a few years before closing finally in 1998. The actual school building would be torn down in 1999. It was an interesting reunion of sorts for me to say hello to my old friend at this event as we were also Residential School survivors. I knew my experience was nothing like my parents and grandparents. It put my

friend and I back in touch with each other and we have stayed, mainly social media, friends since.

Nikawiy is excited as she hands me the DVD copy of her testimony. I did not expect this but now it becomes very clear to me that this was the reason that she wanted to do this testimony. It is for her own posterity, it is to leave her story for the next generations, it is for her to speak to her *capanak* (generations to come- as well as those who came before; we are our ancestor's *capanak* and they are also our *capan/capanak*). I realize now that from the time that nikawiy had learned of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission National Gathering and testimony gathering, that this was important for her to attend. When she hands me the DVD, she is completing her purpose of this journey. This evening, she is elated.

At two other TRC gatherings, nikawiy speaks on panels to share again. I search the TRC website to find the testimony she has given in Fort Qu'Appelle. As soon as I see her on the screen, I cry. No words have to be spoken. It is already hard enough to acknowledge this gathering and why she is here. What always touches my heart is how generous and determined nikawiy always is to share her story. In her opening comments, she holds an eagle feather and sweetgrass, I see how they are shaking in her hands. She has smudged and speaks Cree in her opening comments- I suddenly hear a man's voice translating what she is saying. Then she begins to speak in English to also interpret what she has said- it is hard to be here at the gathering and to share these stories, memories.

Nikawiy was taken at the age of 6 to attend St. Anthony's Residential School on their reserve, Onion Lake. She attends with her siblings but she is not allowed to communicate with her brothers the rare times she might see them. They are separated in opposite areas in the school- the boys and girls- but also in age groups. Nikawiy attends with her younger sister, Delma. Even in here, she takes care of her sister, combing her hair into braids. Auntie would

recall the braids being very tight and pulling at her skin. Though they attend the school at the same time, they are kept isolated from their brothers. It was also in these circumstances that their younger brothers would be left to fend for themselves from brutality directed at them from their caretakers or older students. The sisters would remember this also, how they could only witness some of these incidents helplessly.

There are particular stories I remember nikawiy telling me of being in the school: always praying in the church, kneeling with arms outstretched, the accident she had in this position one time when she needed to go to the bathroom badly but was too afraid to ask- eventually she was pulled up by one of the nuns who discovered this and was taken out to be cleaned up; the time they went swimming and one of the girl's swimming top became undone- she was jumping up and down in the lake to the thrill of the boys in the lake on the opposite shore; the time nikawiy and her best friend made home brew in a hole they dug in the ground in their playground- they pretended to be drunk and found cigarettes to smoke; the time nikawiy punched a boy in the stomach for flirting with her; how she would scribble with her pencil on the bald head of the boy who sat in front of her who was always running away so always getting his head shaved; the time she went sledding down the hill with another friend, Mary Horse (now elder Marie Linklater), who accidentally kicked nikawiy in the face with her winter boot as they tumbled off their sled- at the same time, she kicked off a wart that was on nikawiy's forehead so blood fell across her face and scared them until they realized it was just the wart knocked off (and how this was actually lucky for nikawiy). There were memorable Christmas concerts (my uncle was very good as a singing angel- he said he just liked to twirl around in the long gowns); the time nikawiy graduated from Grade Eight and the special occasion this was that called for a new dress to be made for her- the dress and event were something that nikawiy never forget for its beauty in her mind as a young girl. They were allowed to wear the dresses once and then had to return them.

There was the rare occasion when the nuns would buy rabbits from their father- how wonderful the nuns roasted them and how the rabbits were a great treat.

Another memory stands out for nikawiy. She was out in the yard with other girls when she and her friend noticed some leaving the yard. Curious, she and her friend followed. They did not know they were running away. They made it to one of the girl's auntie's place, nikawiy remembers sitting inside and listening to the radio with the others not knowing that the auntie promptly notified the school. They were returned to the school and nikawiy was called into the office of one of the nuns. Nikawiy was blamed for being the ring leader and her head was shaved with just a little bit left in the front bang 'just to make us look funny'.

Another time, nikawiy is blamed for a theft. She is aggressively interrogated by one of the nuns who was convinced that nikawiy was guilty. Nikawiy never let up her refusal to admit to something she had not done. Finally, the nun released her from her office- when the door was opened, one of the girls stood there and looked at nikawiy and realized this was the girl who blamed her for something she did not do. The girl turned to run away and nikawiy ran right after her. I cannot remember now if nikawiy caught her. One thing she felt was that the nun came to realize who was actually guilty. Nikawiy never got over that sense of being wrongly accused and punished- it was a very great betrayal and abuse. At the time, it made her feel physically sick to be so interrogated.

I look at nikawiy in the video where she is telling her testimony. Her hair is like my late mosom's, almost pure white. Two of my siblings would start to have white hair prematurely. As the oldest, I am only now getting white hair years later. I loved how the white hair looked on my late mosom and now nikawiy. I think there is something stately about such pure white hair.

I hear nikawiy talk about when they would return home from school in the summers. They would be desperate to come home while at school but now when they returned, their short

time at home would be marred by the alcohol abuse in their homes. These were times of alcohol-induced violence. As a young mother living 8 hours away, she would continue to return to her childhood home in the summers. A cycle of alcohol abuse and sometimes violence would continue.

3.3.2 *Awasisak*, Children

A child is a bright light, *acak*, like a star. We have learned of the graves found at Kamloops and now Cowessess. This is just the beginning and there will be more. At first, it is shocking when we learn of this in the spring 2021. By August, the growing numbers do not seem to command the same attention. For one thing, the *Tokyo Olympics* are happening this summer, despite the pandemic although one year late, and everyone is a proud Canadian with every performance and each medal earned by a Canadian athlete.

One of the things I have learned in nikawiy's story is the impact of trauma. There is no doubt that *nehiyawak* as did other Indigenous peoples have experienced trauma in colonization. I think what is less known is the nature of that trauma and this impact. I also question the difference of trauma effects on children and adults. When Indigenous children were taken from their parents, they experienced trauma but so did their parents. For the children who survived the Indian Residential Schools, what was the experience and impact of this trauma? What must also be acknowledged is the violence of this trauma. The trauma of ongoing colonization is also violent and ongoing.

As I walked to and from the hospital to visit my brother in the last days of his life, I would constantly think to myself, 'we are at war, this is war'. Death and dying are overwhelming; the violence of such death and dying is unmistakable. When I spoke at the

funeral of my nephew, I also spoke of 'war'. Death and the violence of this dying was something we had seen before with the death of our father- and now we were witnessing this with our youngest brother. Nikawiy witnessed this with her son. Before this, there was also the violent suicidal deaths of my nephew and niece. During the pandemic, and it is not over yet, we have also seen the drug overdose deaths of 2 young nieces and now a cousin. Most shocking of all is the suicidal death of another nephew not even 20.

A child is bright light, *acak*, like a star. The violence of trauma is the same as war. It is war because of this violence that is inflicted directly or indirectly. This violence is to the degree that it is physical and spiritual. It is an attack regardless of whether it is self-inflicted or not. This is how I see it and feel it as we are still reeling from such loss. *The graves of children are being found as new graves are being made.* Nikawiy falters as she speaks to me. It is not just tears, it is not just her heart, it is also her mind. This is trauma.

She recalls a violent episode as a student in the Residential School. She is in grade four, she tells me. The male teacher is at the chalkboard and has just relayed an order to the students not to make any disruptions in class. He turns his back to write on the board. Just then another student pokes nikawiy with a pencil so she makes some sound. The teacher throws his chalk at her but misses and it goes past her head. He goes up to her, takes the time to take her glasses off and then slaps her across the face. Nikawiy does not make a sound. She says now she must have been in shock. There is the cruelty of the student and then there is the cruelty of this teacher- for what? He would not take the time to clarify the situation and the other student certainly did not try to clarify her responsibility either. Nikawiy's lifelong ailments would be on the left-side of her body and this was where the teacher had slapped her face.

When my dad is asked by a journalist doing a story on Residential School students about his experience in the school he attended, dad suddenly slurs his words. They stop the questions

and dad rests. He should have been taken into the hospital but he likely refused. Nikawiy thinks he may have been almost having a stroke. We had never in our lives seen dad like this. Because my parents had both approached legal counsel before the Residential School compensation was offered in response to the class action lawsuit that eventually evolved, they were not aware that there were other options to what they were offered. Nikawiy tells me that the lawyers they approached would have known that there were other compensation packages being negotiated or anticipated.

My parents likely received a small percent of what they would have been entitled to; nikawiy received only \$1,000.00 after the lawyer took half of what she was awarded. I think my late father received maybe \$15,000.00 for abuse that was unspeakable. Later compensation awards for this type of abuse were in the neighborhood of \$100,000.00. Nikawiy would say that she tried to see a lawyer to re-open her case but she was mainly discouraged from doing so and told several times that she could not do this. It was an injustice, a re-victimization. Nikawiy did what she could but also accepted that she had little options.

There are more accounts of the violence they witnessed for other students including their siblings. Nikawiy says that one of the teachers must have been an alcoholic (and likely others-dysfunctional and cruel adults) and he took out his issues on students. She witnessed a time when this teacher punched her brother on the back of his head because he was reading a comic book. She saw this but could do nothing to help her brother. These acts of violence were inflicted on children by adult men and women. There was the physical violence but also the public humiliation that was deliberately inflicted to shame the student. There was a sense of helplessness for not being able to protect their siblings as it was their nature and teachings to do. For me, as their daughter, to learn this is further violence and a wounding to my heart and spirit.

There is such a rage and hurt. What was unspeakable by my father- I never stop to wonder as it was dad's choice not to share with us. That silence says everything.

A child is bright light, *acak*, like a star. Nikawiy tells me this. I still see this light in her eyes.

3.3.3 *Sits Like A Tornado*

I would think of my brother in the winter because of his birthday in December. Or I would think of him on his old skidoo in winter or out driving around in his truck in the fall night to hunt. Same with summer, he loved to sit out under the night sky near a fire. And always he loved to tease, joke, laugh, visit. Of all seasons, I now think of him in the spring and in the leaf budding moon. He is *itahpo pistos* (sits like a tornado), a strong wind.

When he was still a teenager, we found out he was epileptic. I vaguely recall hearing about how there were older relatives who also had this disease and how it could be hereditary. There was a story that a young person let baby birds fall to their death. Later this person would be afflicted with epilepsy. I heard a similar story on my other parent's side again about torture of an animal that would be revisited later in that family with some affliction. This is the belief that it is *pastahowin*, stepping over of the Creator's Law, and a great wrong to hurt what is innocent and defenseless. We give thanks for the life that is given in hunting and trapping to also give life to the hunters and their families. Torture of an animal is very different, without any respect. The story of the baby birds is also about how affliction may not just be hereditary but also the retribution of doing wrong and breaking a law. The greatest cost for this is opening the door to potential harm against your own. There is still this belief today. It is also in the case of directing harm to another person. This is a great wrong and you open that door for potential retaliation not

just to yourself but to something greater than yourself- your young and even unborn. It is a great lesson to be responsible with one's destructive thoughts and actions directed to anyone or anything, whether intentional or not. You may not pay the price but your own children or unborn generations may.

I write this in my mother's dining room at her table. My mom's little home has been unsettled so we are in transition, sleeping in my sister's trailer while rearranging, cleaning, painting rooms during the day. Mom is off to work on the weekdays and I am hiding out from the heat inside the house. This morning I am settled enough to take out my laptop and find a spot at her table. The ceiling fans and the floor fan are moving the air, the only sound I hear other than the clicking keys of my laptop. The lovely summer is full, Saskatoon berries are starting to fall off their branches, ceremonies are still happening but many have completed already for this year, wood ticks are on hiatus hopefully until next year. On our stay-cation, we have already spent 9 days in a hotel in Regina during this transition. We are slowly making our way back into nikawiy's house. The work space I envisioned weeks ago might be ready by the time my working holidays are done. This quiet morning with space I claim for my laptop next to mom's house plants on her table is something I am very grateful for.

We think there are too many barn swallows around nikawiy's house this year. It seems there are more and more every year. For some reason they like to build their nests over the windows and under the eaves. I learned that I could not open the bedroom window because it was directly below their group of mud nests- the air was not fresh or clear then. The barn swallows could easily gather their nest materials from the nearby dugout that was close to our home so they loved our location. I could see them busy in the spring gathering the mud and building up their nests. We managed to block them from the front of the house knowing how we would not be able to sit on the front deck peacefully if they were also there. So, they built on the

other sides of the house and especially at the back over the three windows. My sister would drive up to mom's and declare that there were so many birds now swarming around mom's house. The babies were growing and now flying also.

Mom's house was like a big bird house. There was something that was invasive now about the great number of birds, nikawiy knew she would have to act and be ready for the next year for sure. It was too late now so she would leave them in peace this year. It was also very wrong to destroy their nests while they were still there. I remember my dad telling my nephews to leave the bird nests alone when they were trying to knock them down this one time. Nikawiy recently remarked that dad enjoyed the birds coming back in the spring, he waited for them. Now I do not know what he would think. There needs to be balance.

Dad was home when Beno had his first and last epileptic seizures. He was a teenager, fast becoming a young man. So, he had this great strength that dad had to hold him down against as a way to try and stabilize him. No one knew he was epileptic but dad was able to recognize the seizure when he saw what was happening to my brother. Dad put his own hand in my brother's mouth to protect him from biting his tongue. He stayed with Beno in the ambulance. The Doctor later said that my brother was lucky to be alive. He had endured 15 grand mal seizures all at once, something the Doctor had never seen before¹². He said they were usually spread out and a person might have only so many in their lifetime. My brother had them all at

¹² "A grand mal seizure — also known as a generalized tonic-clonic seizure — is caused by abnormal electrical activity throughout the brain. Usually, a grand mal seizure is caused by epilepsy. But sometimes, this type of seizure can be triggered by other health problems, such as extremely low blood sugar, a high fever or a stroke. Many people who have a grand mal seizure never have another one and don't need treatment. But someone who has recurrent seizures may need treatment with daily anti-seizure medications to control and prevent future grand mal seizures." <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/grand-mal-seizure/symptoms-causes/syc-20363458>

once. And he never experienced them again, save for four days before his 2019 death at the young age of 50.

Like our late father in 2005, my brother would pass away from complications related to diabetes. The only difference being that dad became diabetic when he was 43 and his son would become diabetic in his early 20's. After their diagnoses, none of them would survive much longer than 20 years. Dad would be the first of his generation to have this disease; otherwise, it was generally unknown before this. My grandparents on both sides did not have this disease. In a relatively short time, this disease has become rampant and it seems especially so for Indigenous people.

The epileptic episode shaped my brother's life more than I ever realized. He disliked taking the medication because of its side effects. So, he self-medicated as he saw fit and this was effective for him. Having this disease so young, impacted him mentally as well and he experienced depression at times. I remember him telling us that he would just mind his own business and go to his little corner, he did not want to bother anyone. He shared this with us to let us know that he would isolate himself only to avoid bothering anyone. It was painful to hear this. He was doing this out of love and respect for us. He wanted life to be simple and I knew he struggled with this complexity at times, he just knew things from his heart. Despite this, he never failed to show us his droll sense of humor. How he loved to tease, especially mom.

As the youngest boy, my brother did seem to always have this sense of isolation around him. He was too young to be with his two older brothers. He was a few years younger than his brothers and the older brothers were only a year apart. And then he was the older brother to two younger sisters. I think he found himself in his own little world in our family at times. In his last year, any division was non-existent. He was very much the center for all of us then. It was a time of need that he could no longer hide from us or shield us from. And so, he accepted us all

with his open arms. In all of his healing, I am most grateful for this- the love that was most healing of all.

For once in his life, my brother became the leader in our family. Though he had shown leadership at other times in his life, this was the time when there was no question of how he was standing up to show us the way now. I was so humbled to follow him. He showed us how to die, how to sing our death song. When he finally let go, he did so without hesitation, with clarity, and with purpose. I sat in the room with him when I heard his little voice say... oh, yeah (he often began speaking with this oh yeah... as though he was just remembering something)... oh, yeah... I want to give up now. I went up to his bedside and asked him, are you ready to go be with dad now. Yes, he said. He threw his little finger up in the air and pointed as he said to 'call the family now'.

There is so much I could say about my brother but so much is sacred to us and his leaving is still healing in our hearts. What I want to say about nikawiy is how her strength was unwavering and always amazing to me. No matter what I feel for the loss of my brother, I know nikawiy's loss of her son is inconceivable to me. The last year of constantly going to the hospital or going to my brother's home was numbing and wearing but always driving forward to my brother coming home for good. The last time he had his seizures were the last four days of his life- we would come to realize so suddenly. I knew he was getting tired and might not ever fully recover but I thought he had more time. Four sacred days of his life, he fasted in his own ceremony. Before this, he was in the hospital another time and telling nikawiy of a special dream he had, such beautiful songs! He was trying to remember, drumming in the air, bobbing his head in time with this beat he could hear from his dream. Then he was quiet before looking at nikawiy and saying *maybe it's time now*.

They put his old boots in his coffin with him as was our ways that he should have shoes to wear. His sister-in-law Vicky made moccasins for him but someone thought to put his favorite boots in with him also. Nikawiy was tireless through the preparations. I wanted to go to sleep and never wake up, deep fatigue. I just watched nikawiy non-stop calling people on her phone remembering another detail to take care of. Nikawiy was still taking care of her son. Her elder colleagues all came out of respect for her and her loss. She called for singers in honor of her son's special dream. There were Cree but also Dakota. When the Dakota singers sang a ceremonial song, I stood with my late aunty Delma and nikawiy. I loved the song and it was familiar to me so I closed my eyes and wanted to dance to what I knew was a sundance song. Vaguely, I could hear footsteps. After the song, my aunty and nikawiy wondered who was dancing, they could hear the footsteps. The next song, as beautiful as the first one, I now paid attention to the footsteps. I looked behind me, in front of me, and could see no one moving at all. I closed my eyes to dance with the song... I thought it is my brother dancing with his favorite boots on now.

Love you beno... love you. Kishahikitin. That never stops and I say these words when I need to, when I think of my little brother, when I miss him. But always there is a smile, too. That was who he was and is to us.

We gathered to take a family picture in the valley at Lebret this summer. We took one also in the winter and these were the first ones we took since dad had passed away. Nikawiy's family grows, changes, faces are old and new, different, tiny, smiling. We stand in a grove of trees behind the church. Nikawiy married dad in the chapel in the residential school down the road that no longer stands. We like the trees as a backdrop so we took the first family picture there. We are back in the same place as the simplest place to get together and for the photographer to meet us.

The summer day is mainly cloudy, which is good for the pictures, but it is also windy playing havoc with everybody's hair. Only later do I think of my late brother's name, itapoh pistos (*sits like a tornado*). It makes sense that he would join us then and tease us to blow our hair around. I share this with nikawiy and this thought makes her laugh. She loves the picture of herself with her hair blowing back now.

In the spring, the strong winds came to blow the buds off the trees so the leaves might come out then. Mosom yotin (grandfather wind) is powerful and healing, life-giving. It is transition.

In the family picture, my brother's children Dominique (notikwew) and Josh have new babies that had never met their mosom Beno. The newborn Cass lays sleeping in his big sister's arms. Right now, he has little colored eyes like his mosom who was known for his beautiful blue-grey eyes that also seemed to be green at times. He was a handsome man. Cass will be a hunter like his mosom now as his father Matt is still an avid hunter who also taught his 9-year-old daughter Arianna how to hunt and fish even as a young girl. Josh and Simone pose with their children, Andre, Roxy and Tilly who were greatly loved by their mosom, and the baby Brian Sage, now one-year old and named for his mosom Brian and the sage smudge that he came to love. Brian is still bald-headed as his mosom was when he was a baby, too. Cass, handsome man, was born with a full head of dark hair like his mom notikwew, the oldest of the grandchildren. She is a dark-haired beauty who was shocking to the family when she was born as her parents were both very fair. The youngest boy that my brother and his partner Nicole had together, Gordon, did not make it to this summer family picture. He was there in the winter family picture with his partner Kayla and their children Harmony, and Alexis. Perhaps he knows his late father's old corner.

Mosom yotin has blown in nikawiy's life many moons and seasons now. *Sits like a tornado* blew in and out of our lives. The price of life and love is loss. No matter how great the pain of loss, nikawiy is only grateful for this.

She is dreaming of brown horses now. This is her namesake and she never dreamt of them before. She dreams of wind in the horse's mane.

3.3.4 *kiskino tahiweu ona* (Discussion Notes)

Teachings (reminders, guidance): Colonial Violence 'we are at war'

The colonial premise of 'kill the Indian in the child' is as violent as it sounds. From my mother's experience in the Indian Residential school to burying her youngest son as a mother many years later, the onslaught of colonial violence has been consistent. The wounds are intergenerational.

One of the most striking realizations to me in the course of my mother's life story telling is how much violence she has endured from her childhood to today. From the loss of parents (and grandparents she never really knew about) to the loss of siblings to the loss of her partner to the loss of her son to the loss of grandchildren- nikawiy has experienced such violence and trauma over the span of her life. Through it all, she clings to the law of love. This is the strength of her love. This is the light and grace of her leadership.

Chapter Four
Sawanohk Nipin
(South, Summer)

4.1 Paskawehowi-pism, Egg Laying Moon (June)

4.1.1 Indian Teacher

By the time she was 26 nikawiy had all of her six children. I was the first born when she was just 17. She would quickly have my 2 brothers. My father was a teacher and in those days he had to go where he was sent so he would spend a year in one community before he was moved to another. When he taught on the One Arrow First Nation, I was born at the local town of Wakaw. The following year he taught at Poundmaker First Nation so this was where my brother Wayne (Bunna) was born at the local town of Cutknife. The next year my brother Mike was born at Balcarres, our local town to Peepeekisis where we are from. My first memories are from the teacherage on Peepeekisis where we lived at the one room school dad taught at. After a miscarriage, my mother would have another son 3 years after her first set of stairs (me and my brothers).

My brother Brian (Beno) was born in Kamsack when dad was teaching at St. Phillip's. This was the site of a Residential School and I still remember the large, white building at the end of the road that was like the main street of the village. We lived in a teacherage again that had two other units with other teachers and their families. I was now in Kindergarten and attended the school where my father taught. My mother had another miscarriage in the next small town we moved to. I was now in Grade One and attended the Ebenezer school. This is the first year

that I do not recall my father teaching. The following year we moved back to Peepeekisis so I was now in Grade Two at Balcarres. My two youngest sisters Diane and Angelina were born in Balcarres. We were home on Peepeekisis for good now more or less. After 13 years, dad no longer taught.

4.1.2 Education

Nikawiy and I attended the Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies SIIT 2019 graduations of her *noosisim* (granddaughter) Jessica and her son Michael in Yorkton, Saskatchewan at the Parkland College and Yorkton Regional High School. They were receiving their upgrading Grade Twelve. After the loss of her cousin Sensheera Miyoskamin, Jessica could not return to the Balcarres School or to her studies. It would take time and years before she was able to go back to complete her Adult grade twelve. Sensheera's father, my brother Mike, would receive his Adult grade twelve beside his niece Jessica. Even for this event, my brother would need the support of his niece. It was a wonderful celebration that also marked a time of healing. My brother had graduated from Sheldon Williams High School many years before in Regina. As he returned to his studies after years of other work and careers, he had to upgrade to be able to go to post-secondary now as he planned to. A graduation any year was always special for our family.

I make sure to take a picture of nikawiy outside the Yorkton Regional High School before we leave. I know she also attended this school as a very young mother when my brother Mike might have been only four years old then. He was third oldest after our brother Wayne/Bunna and myself as the oldest. Brian was the baby born in Kamsack when dad taught at St. Phillip's School near Cote First Nation. I attended Kindergarten at this school also. A year

later, I did my grade one at Ebenezer, a small town/village that we moved to from St. Phillips and that was still in the Yorkton area. My maternal grandmother Martha had found a place to live here so I think this is why we also moved here then. My granny was a Brass from Key First Nation so this was also her original home area.

In this year, nikawiy tells me of how she started to go back to her studies and caught the school bus to Yorkton from Ebenezer. She was an adult and rode with the children on this school bus. Today she wonders if her picture is still in the school archives. This was also a time when she had a miscarriage. I have a sense of the darkness of this time. So many memories here are hard for nikawiy...extremely sad. My brothers and I remember hours and hours on the community skating rink, which I think is amazing today. I certainly cannot put on a pair of skates anymore but just to think of how young we were and how much we loved being outside on the ice. Our memories of Ebenezer are vivid. I do not think we had any idea of how troubled these times might have been for our parents. That is the resilience of nikawiy as a young mother and that is the sacred resilience of children. I am constantly reminded of that resilience today.

Nikawiy smiles for me to take a picture in front of the school that she attended so many years ago but I feel the heaviness of some of the memories that she carries today. Later we sit with Mike to celebrate with a meal and I know how sincerely Nikawiy is joyful in her heart today for this. So much to be grateful for always.

4.1.3 Treaty Right to Education, Life-long learning

I sit with Tiny, one of mom's dogs, at my feet. She needs to be close as she is recuperating from surgery to her leg. She cannot be left alone today, so suddenly my obligation becomes sitting with her on this cool, grey summer morning as much as I can. It is the *hatching*

moon now nikawiy tells me. The birds in the nests around the top of her house are full of baby bird faces.

Nikawiy fills the feeder with seeds in her morning routine that she is happy to do when she has the time. She waters her plants inside and outside. After she has made coffee for me, she asks, “do you want me to crack you an egg?” I answer yes. Nikawiy confirms how I like my eggs, over medium, not too runny and not too hard. She serves me breakfast with a piece of toast. She does not even ask about that, she gives me one slice. Carbs are the devil.

My duty as she cooks is to visit with Tiny who needs to be held first thing after being let out of her kennel. She is drugged for her pain and trembles at times, whimpers. Her pal Cinnamon is sent to visit with my nephew and will stay as long as Tiny needs to be left alone. I feel the warmth of her little body near my foot as she rests and drifts in and out of a restless sleep.

Nature abhors a vacuum. I think of this over the last few days. Whatever priorities I thought I had when I moved back to Saskatchewan from Kingston, Ontario in May went out the window. While I am home, I realize I am expected to help out and have been enlisted to do a range of things that different people in the family might need.

My family knows I am doing my own work but their needs have a practical and urgent nature that my own work seemingly does not. They are not so disrespectful as one of our own elected Headman at the last band meeting who spoke of ‘going for years and years and years’ in a reference to my studies and as some reason why they refused to fund the last two terms of my PhD as I had requested. They already had not funded my program for the last two years. And this from the portfolio holder for Education who also blatantly stated that *Education is not a Treaty Right*, not once but twice, at this same meeting.

I stand at the band meeting to let the people know that I was the one who found the lawyers for our current claim negotiations. We are as close to this resolution as we have ever been. The Headmen have taken credit for this over the past three years and only one acknowledged that I was the one who found these lawyers to maintain our long-standing claim. Finding such resources was supposed to be their work as elected representatives so although they might take credit for this, they are silent now and without any response to my statement.

I want to make it clear to the people that I have always tried to give back in the course of my studies and just in general as a member/citizen of Peepeekisis. I am in my fourth year of my PhD. I recently lost my brother after his lengthy illness but I have managed to stay on track for my program for the most part. I implore the people to consider the future of education in our band for their own grandchildren and to also consider how this is related to our Treaty rights. I sit down and listen as this Headman continues to support the rejection of my funding to complete my studies, as he tells the people that I have already taken 'years and years'. And that education is not a treaty right referring to some Indian affairs guidelines to prove this is true. I think he should be working for Indian affairs then and not for our band where he has had to swear an oath to uphold Treaty in the ceremony for our elected governance being named as Chief and Headmen. At the next election, he runs but is not re-elected.

As I sit at the band meeting, I also feel ludicrous in ways to be asking for my education funding. The meeting is in Regina and urban-based. What I have to say does not have much meaning to many of them who are here for the lunch meal and to hear where the claim is at mainly.

In my own experience as an elected Headman, I recalled the particular challenges of the urban members. What could we do for them? The band funding was mainly for on-reserve only. This was something that one of the Headman I worked with then made very clear. It was also

clear that the off-reserve vote mattered in our elections and often made the difference for who would get in. Yet when it came to any services or support, there was really very little done or that could be done for the off-reserve and especially so if there was no will to have this consideration. Urban members used to get a Christmas turkey and now got a gift card at this time of year but even this has always meant a lot to them. The lunch meal at the band meeting, the hand out of information materials, and the update on the claim was more than they had been given in the past.

It seems a welcome change but then I also learn at this same meeting that our band has, indeed, signed a 10-year contribution funding agreement that is actually part of Trudeau's Framework Agreement. The move on behalf of this new council was startling after the announcement at the last band meeting three months ago that they would not be signing a new agreement for a year. Why the sudden and unannounced about-face then?

I questioned them on this development and they answered affirmatively with their reasons for why they had gone ahead to enter into this funding agreement that we all knew other leadership was challenging and protesting on the basis of Treaty. For one thing, our council had been assured that they could easily back out of this Agreement whenever they wanted. I had already been told that there were some things that were being introduced now that if entered into could not be backed out of.

I tell the band members that we need to have an education to understand the legislation that is being imposed on us so that we will be able to protect who we are and to be able to say we are Treaty Indian people with these inherent rights. Do rights matter when we are just surviving? If I could ask my ancestors then I know the answer is that this is how we survived.

4.1.4 *Nikawiy* (my mother)

Nehiyaw Iskwew (Cree woman)

I am the first of six children that my parents would have together, and I was born in June. It was during this month that my mother began her family and gave birth to her first child. If there is one thing that defines my mother, it is this. She is a mother and yet she is also not a maternal personality. I think she maintained a ‘tomboy’ part of her in all of her life.

I recall a time when my youngest sister did ‘glamour photos’ with my mother and so our mother was dressed in fancy outfits with her hair and make-up done up. She had no problem to do this when there was an occasion albeit the occasion might be rare but this was something a little extra, more special than usual. It was unusual to see her as a diva. In one picture, she is in a black leather jacket with her greyish hair curled up as she sits beside dad also put in a leather jacket. It is a sweet photo.

I ponder this another time when I am visiting *nikawiy*, this idea of her being a tomboy and somehow rejecting her femininity perhaps. When I am 10, I know there were absences of both of my parents as I would be left to ‘babysit’ my siblings. Very quickly or even abruptly, I would take on responsibility for child care, house cleaning, and cooking. My youngest charge and sister is just newborn. I recall once asking for payment for my babysitting as I knew my friends might get this. I was told it was not babysitting, it was me taking care of my younger brothers and sisters as I was supposed to do as the oldest. There was no question about this. For me, in particular, there was a keen absence of what I thought a mother might be.

The other absence was my father who would be away working. And when he was home, he might also be away playing sports and then celebrating, drinking. At the time of my birth, my mother as a young woman would be alone with me in the hospital. My dad would be out celebrating. This was normalized behaviour and nothing unusual for that time. By the time I am

10, my mother has had her 6 children, the family doctor has insisted that my mother undergo tubal ligation due to complications during and after the births of her last two children, my youngest sisters. It was not a procedure that my mother wanted at all at the age of 26, she wanted to have more children but she reluctantly agreed.

Now when my father would leave home to go to work, my mother attempted to take his place in farming. At times they would get help from my uncles, her brothers. They would clear fields, take care of the cows, do other farm work. This was work that might not be unusual to them as mosom/my grandfather had done this kind of work for many years also. Summers at home from the residential schools would be spent helping out with this farming labour at different settler farms. Many Indian men would do the same work of finding labour at these settler farms. Now my mother would step in to help my dad the same way. I believe that she did this willingly- driving a tractor in the fields suited her more than staying at home with her children. As the oldest, I was given that responsibility to watch over the younger ones and she did not question this either.

I ask her about being sixteen when she got married to dad. Whether this would be legal by today's standards and would be questionable today. I also recall one of her laments was being a 'child' when she got married. Perhaps this was in an argument with dad? But today she answers emphatically that this was how things were then, 'life was so short then, we were ready to have families at this age, it was acceptable and the way things were then'. She would be seventeen when they were married and sixteen was a more common age for Indian women then to be married and to start families. Her oldest sister Alveena was married to her husband Norman Chief at sixteen. Her youngest sister Delma was married a little older at age twenty? to my uncle Jimmy (my dad's younger brother). Her other sister Agnes was an anomaly when she married at a much older age to Tony Kahpeaysewat from Moosomin First Nation.

Although my aunt Alveena was the oldest daughter, she was already several years older than mom so by the time she was sixteen, she would have already left my granny/nokum to start her own family by the time my mother was a young girl. My mother was the oldest daughter in my granny/nokum's second family with my mosom Charlie and would understand the greater responsibility for taking care of her younger siblings.

This was their economy- the children were necessary to support the family unit. *Peyakoskan*, my mother tells me this is how you say family in Cree- "one unit". This was the essence of a collectivity and how they would survive. These were the Cree natural laws that they lived. Children had a very practical and critical role in the well-being and embodiment of *peyakoskan*.

A thought comes to me as I consider my mother as an inherent tomboy. Perhaps she related to her sons in a way that she could never relate to her daughters. I recall catching a moment of intimacy between my mother and her youngest son Brian as she sat beside him where he laid in what would come to be the last months of his life. Even today, a memory of him takes her back to unfathomable grief and loss though he has been gone now for over a year. She will never get over this. And I know this is her heart as a mother that I will never know but may acknowledge for its greatness. I snapped the picture of them then as they lean their heads toward each other so that I wondered what great secret and confidence they could be sharing in that moment that still glows in my mind. I witnessed this singular moment not as mother and son but as best friends, the greatest pals, who would happily die for each other.

I consider tomboy and recall how the Peepeekisis ladies fastball team on our reserve were called the Tomboys for many years. So, these are women playing a man's game. My mother did men's work. I recall stories of my granny/nokum doing men's work in the farmer's fields. I know that many women would also do this labour-intensive work in the Alberta sugar beet fields

including my family on both sides of my parents. Many Indian families contributed to this work. Indian women as well as men would work long days and summers in these fields for the sugar beet farmers.

My granny/nokum was nabbed for stealing a bottle of vanilla from a grocery store once. The police picked her up right from a field where she was working in rubber boots. This was how she was taken to jail and forced to spend several days to account for her crime of stealing a bottle of vanilla. My mother said it was not her idea and she was more or less framed for this. My granny/nokum was not allowed any dignity for this offense that was so great that she had to be jailed for it still in her rubber work boots. Every time I drive by Fort Saskatchewan and the jail that my granny/nokum was brought to, I remember this and will never forget it. I knew my granny/nokum could not speak English but I am sure that was not an issue that mattered at all in her incarceration. This was the most beautiful woman in the world to me. Knowing what she endured in life makes her all the more beautiful to me- nipahi kitawasisew- so beautiful it hurts.

4.1.5 Granny's bare feet in rubber boots

Taken from a farmer's field where she labored
Taken to a jail cell for her theft of a bottle of vanilla
That she had robbed from a store with her friend
How many days did she serve for this crime?
She could not speak English, what did she think
How many times had she stolen before...I think probably never
A lark with her friend or whatever made them do this
I know she was naïve, not cunning
After her party with her friend...how much was the vanilla worth
The police came to the field where my granny was doing seasonal work
Her bare feet in rubber boots...long days in the field
My granny worked so hard, had 13 children plus 1 adopted
To come to this field now, to provide labour to whoever owned that land
Then one day, her and a friend got some crazy idea
That they were going to steal a bottle of vanilla
That they could not even afford, it was so unlike my quiet granny
Mom wondered how she got involved
But now she would pay the price for this lark, for her party
They took her from the field with her rubber boots still on

I remember the shape of my granny's feet; I almost never saw them bare
She always wore beige stockings as many of the old ladies would in her time
My granny was crippled, tb in her hip joint
the surgery to fix this made one leg shorter
so, she would always walk with a limp
Before this...and after, she was strong and always a hard worker...
Always very modest, made her own skirts and clothing, wore stockings, a scarf to cover her
head, would not talk directly to her nahaksim (son-in-law), my dad,
would not speak to strangers.
I pass this town now and always see my granny's bare feet
In the jail here where she once served time for stealing a bottle of vanilla.
-Evelyn Poitras 2020

In my own treatment at an addiction healing centre, I would have a cathartic realization for my own misogyny, my own hatred of women, the hatred I took within myself to also turn on myself at times. It was a rejection of my own womanhood. I rejected this as weakness and worse. I simply did not trust women. I was hurt by women. And to this day, it is relatively easy for me to feel this wariness and guardedness. At the same time, I have found love for myself and forgiveness that allows me to love and forgive others also. I was triggered by an event and in my circumstances, I was able to decipher what was happening no matter how painful this was. I think of the person who gave me this gift of this lesson and wonder where she is today. In my heart, I thank her and pray for goodness for her. This teaching was so powerful for me and of course, I have never forgotten it.

I know that I can look around at any time in this society and see this hatred of Indigenous women. I fear for the fallibility of young women who may take this in through their amoeba skins, just absorb without defense or protection or knowing. The commodification of their worth.

A friend posted a pic of fabulous pink shoes with the caption 'self-love'. I know it is entirely innocent and makes me laugh. For sure, they are a great pair of shoes.

The journalist asks Delores Huerta ‘don’t you want to go to the spa sometime?’ as a matter of how she might reward herself. Delores could not relate to the question in any sense and replied to say she thought that was a waste of time. Time is of the essence when you are just surviving. But it is true that when I reward myself, it usually is some time at the spa. My esthetician told me, now you are a woman again as she did a pedicure and some waxing for me. I was like coming out of a cave after the pandemic closures. She was one of my first stops so I could only agree with her with a laugh.

There are concepts of beauty, femininity, womanhood, motherhood that may not transgress divides of class and race. I acknowledge that when I think of true beauty, I think of my granny/nokum. I think of my mother. I think of nikawiys- my little mothers, my aunts.

My granny/nokum could make moccasins, mukluks, bags that were so beautiful but she never made them for herself. She made them to sell to feed her family. My mother tells a story of how my granny/nokum kept the canvas bags that flour used to come in to wash and sew an outfit for the baby who was my uncle Allan at the time to enter him into a contest. He was a healthy baby and both he and his baby clothing made from the flour sacks were immaculate as this was my granny/nokum’s standards. She was very hard-working and skilled. Of all the babies with their store-bought clothes, my uncle Allan won the contest.

The truth of motherhood, womanhood, Indigenous women, *nehiyaw iskwewak...* is wind, sun, water, rock. It is our breath, our blood, our fire/life, our bones. Not for sale.

Kikatawasisewino- so beautiful it hurts. I lean my head toward my mother’s, nikawiy. She tells me the greatest secrets; she is my greatest friend. I know that we would die for each other. Is this codependent, is the real challenge to live. Yet it is with this love that we can love others and ourselves. It is with this forgiveness that we can forgive others and ourselves.

I wondered what is meant by being carried by our grandmothers when I first came across this idea. When I first heard this, it was explained by a Mohawk woman that a woman does not reproduce her eggs; she is born with a finite number from the time she is developing in her mother's womb. These are released one at a time and monthly from the time of puberty until the time of menopause. These 'buds' that develop in a female fetus represent the life that will potentially come in the adulthood of this female. The egg is held in the fetus and the fetus is held in the woman.

In this way, a grandmother holds her grandchild's life. For me, as a granddaughter, this was very meaningful. I am a thunderbird who was hatched and nurtured in the nest of my granny/nokum. The bond has always been inextricable for me. It is a bond that gives me wings.

Nature abhors a vacuum¹³ and nikawiy herself truly needs an assistant so I braid her hair this morning as she quickly discusses her day yesterday and what she thinks she needs to do in her own research now. The trip to Onion Lake sparks ideas and realizations for her of how things were in her childhood life. I redo nikawiy's French braid as my first attempt is loose but also to listen a little longer in these stolen moments before she is out the door again.

I put a towel over Tiny to keep her warm in her sleep. The rain has begun and a coolness pervades the dining room. The rain is welcome after so much dry weather. A few weeks ago, Tiny ran wild with Cinnamon outside of nikawiy's house. Her little chest and front legs were growing muscles. The dogs flew around each other in their routine of chasing each other in a figure eight in front of nikawiy if she was outside with them. Tiny had grown in her confidence since coming to nikawiy's. She quickly became the top dog even though she was smaller than Cinnamon. As they walked together down the road exploring the ditches, it was Tiny who would

¹³ The phrase *nature abhors a vacuum* is attributed to Aristotle. It means every space in nature needs to be filled with something. <https://www.myenglishpages.com/english/random-idiom.php?c=941>

become bolder to lead them further and further down the road and then off to the main road with the vehicles rushing by in clouds of dust. Eventually they would make their way back but it was taking longer and longer. Through the night, they could be heard barking from their kennels if they sensed anything outside.

It was good to have a dog. But we almost never had indoor dogs. Suddenly nikawiy had inherited two. They adored nikawiy, they bounded out of their kennels in the morning and out the door to chase each other in figure eights around her if she was walking outside, life was good. One time a large, black stray dog came into nikawiy's yard. As soon as nikawiy saw it, she started yelling to chase it away afraid for the small dogs. She could not contain the smaller dogs as they took off after the large dog with Tiny in the lead absolutely fearless. Amazingly, the larger dog ran away with the two smaller ones at full-speed behind it down the road then down an older road that was just a trail. When they were satisfied the dog was gone, they took a shortcut back home down another trail. We had watched as they chased the dog through the grass on the trail road and could hardly see them streaking through. They came out into the open finally and made their turn back down into nikawiy's yard. They were bounding along as though they had thoroughly enjoyed protecting their little territory, glorious bitches! Now I had to wonder if Tiny would ever be so fearless. She is whimpering in her bed, she just ate from my hand, I know she is in pain.

I am getting ready to leave again while nikawiy is still sleeping. Yesterday, I sat with nikawiy at the table and I cannot recall how our conversation went to late Gord Downie of the Tragically Hip. I got up to show her the video for his song "The Secret Path". It may have been our discussion before this and then the song itself that brought nikawiy to tears. At first, I did not notice her quiet grieving and then I realized how deep this was. I sat beside her as her tears and memories came to her. This was not usual for nikawiy as she had done so much work on

herself through the years. Yes, she might cry naturally in her prayers or in her talks- but this was deeper when she could only cry and not speak. She grieved from her heart. She grieved for her late siblings and parents; she grieved for her late partner and son. All were taken from her and had their lives unnaturally shortened in painful and traumatic ways.

4.1.6 215

The news of the 215¹⁴ Indian children found in Kamloops, BC, buried near the Indian Residential School there has resounded across the country. ‘Numbers instead of names, ringing bells and rules...’ I try to recall the words to lyrics I wrote many years ago now. ‘...’but it wasn’t right, they had to see the light, be saved from their natural ways... Now in single beds lined up in rows, they learn, learn not to cry, these are their learning ways’. I was 19 when I wrote these words. By then, I myself had already attended one year of Residential School at the Qu’appelle Indian Residential School in Lebret, Saskatchewan, the same school dad attended for all of his school years until he graduated from high school in 1957. Of course, our experiences in that school were night and day, not comparable. I had choice, nohtawiy, my father, did not.

Nikawiy was soon asked to provide a statement on the 215 or else she was asked for prayers. Though she did her best, it was clear that she was also being triggered. Yesterday, she grieved. She released the tears of a mother who had lost her own children.

When nikawiy was in St. Anthony’s Residential School, the number she was given was 71, as all students were given numbers and they were called by their numbers then, not their names. The children at Kamloops are now collectively known as 215. Now it is a number that

¹⁴ “Preliminary findings from a survey of the grounds at the former Kamloops Indian Residential School have uncovered the remains of 215 children buried at the site, the Tk’emlúps te Secwépemc First Nation said Thursday.” Courtney Dickson, Bridgette Watson · CBC News · Posted: May 27, 2021 10:58 PM MDT <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/tk-eml%C3%B4ps-te-secw%C3%A9pemc-215-children-former-kamloops-indian-residential-school-1.6043778>

Canada will never forget. It twigs at me that they are nameless now. They would have English names and I wonder will they discover what their names are? But they would also have spirit names- perhaps that is not so important for anyone to know now. That was something that could never be taken from them. Nikawiy never asked for her spirit or Indian name, as many seek with our protocols for themselves or their children now. At a time when she needed to be in ceremony, she was simply called by her spirit name then. She was told, ‘this is you; they are addressing you’. Nikawiy was already a mother of six children when she learned her name.

We watched the small screen of my phone as late Gord Downie was given his Indian name ‘he who walks among the stars’. He would receive his Lakota name shortly before he would pass on to the next world and truly walk among the stars. He was honored this way for the work he did to bring light to Chanie Wenjack and the Indian Residential Schools. We acknowledged that he earned this.

Tiny was up earlier and excited for the day. As I sat down at the table with my coffee, she went back to her bed. I hear her snoring now. It is hard to think of leaving this comfort, the quiet sounds of a beautiful early morning and the routines of nikawiy and Tiny. We stood out on the deck last night straining to hear the frogs but heard nothing. Nikawiy’s young colleague had sent her a short recording of the frogs he was able to hear at his home further north. We sat to listen to this recording last evening when my brother and sister-in-law stopped by for a short visit. We could barely hear the trill of the frogs. When we stepped outside to listen in the evening to hear what we could, we heard nothing. It is already the egg-laying Moon again and we have not heard the frogs. Nikawiy is getting up now and Tiny is alive again, clicking her long nails on the floor, dancing around nikawiy.

4.1.7 *kiskino tahiwew ona* (Discussion Notes)

Teachings (reminders, guidance): Healing

Personal leadership is about healing. Because of colonization, which is still an ongoing onslaught and experience, *healing* becomes a personal responsibility. Leadership starts at a personal level and for Indigenous people who have been subjected to colonization, healing is a fundamental requisite. Otherwise, the disruption and pain of colonization is carried in generations, families and extended families, communities, and nations. Part of healing is calling out the spectre of colonization that casts itself over our Indigenous generations and is evident in its carnage in personal lives. Leadership is standing up to this to rebuke and reclaim. These have been the personal examples that I have witnessed in my parent's lives.

Sixteen years ago, *nohtawiy paskwaw mostos kahpimohteht*, my father Walking Buffalo, made his spiritual journey. I sit in the night in a Regina hotel room to recall this sad anniversary. I am close to *nikawiy* and know she is peaceful in her slumber at home during the first snow of this season. There was a storm, too, when dad passed. The snow and ice made travel difficult, if not treacherous. I recall falling snow as we laid dad to rest in our family burial ground. He was buried on November 10th to avoid Remembrance Day ceremonies on the 11th.

When I ruminate about *nohtawiy*'s teachings for leadership, I think of the team work he espoused naturally throughout his athletic life; he was a team player and he was strategic in ways to meet his goals and purpose. There is a critical difference in strategizing politically especially if this becomes the goal and purpose above ethics or sportsmanship. I think this difference is key in leadership. There are politicians and then there are leaders. The lines may be blurred in this discernment.

As Indigenous people, we adapt, and we adopt systems that may be in conflict with our application inherent responsibilities. This is colonialism at very deep levels- when we take this

into ourselves to use as a tool/weapon against our own. This is individuality above collectivity. This is the individuality held up in the 1969 White Paper and now held up in ensuing and ongoing Canadian government policy for Indigenous people- *gradual and civilizing enfranchisement* and assimilation. This is the power of the damage that can be done by such individuals and this is the threat to our collective rights.

My teachings as I grew up was the importance of the family, that no matter how old I was- or young- I had a real responsibility to serve the greater needs of my family. I would rebel against this as I grew older but then I would come back to this place of *balance* that was inherent in collectivity. I believed this was my responsibility but also now, my privilege, to do so and it is what I am grateful for, to protect the gift that family and *miyo pimatisiwin*, good life, is. These were and are my teachings, particularly as the oldest daughter, from both of my parents. *Hiyhiy*, thank you.

4.2 Paskowi-pisim, Moulting Moon (July)

4.2.1 Miskasowin, finding one's self

After having her children, nikawiy eventually went back to school. University level classes were brought to our reserve and she started from there. I still remember how much she loved this. She would never lose that love of learning. My father always encouraged her and I am sure he was proud of her.

When I was fifteen, we finally had our own house on the reserve. Dad was Chief then and he found five old 'war homes' for sale in Cutbank, Saskatchewan. He purchased these houses for \$1 each and then had to pay for their move to our reserve. Before this we had lived in my mosom's old house and then my uncle Archie's old house. Years before we had lived in Long Joe's old house on the east side of the reserve.

For us to finally have our own house on the reserve was a big deal for us. One of the television networks did a story on how these homes were purchased and moved to our reserve. The door swings open in the empty house and there is dad standing there with my sister Angie in his arms. Just his head is visible through the open door as the house is elevated for moving. We would watch this and laugh when we saw the door swinging open because we knew we would see just dad's head and the big smile on his face with my sister. That house was like a mansion to us though it was only a rather small 3-bedroom house with two floors and a basement. It was the first house that was ours.

In a few years, nikawiy would move to Regina to focus more on her studies and to take classes right at the University. She would earn her first BA degree and then a second degree in

Education. At the age of forty-six, she had had her six children and was starting to teach. Nikawiy would retire at the age of seventy-one but she has never given up teaching Cree.

This is what I know of nikawiy. This is my lifetime with her in a nutshell. From being her first born to today where we continue our journey together as nikawiy ekwa nitanis (mother and daughter). In 2015, I started my Master of Arts in Indigenous Governance program at the University of Winnipeg. During the drafting of my thesis, I remember at several points needing to refer to her for Cree translation but also her teachings. It was a different experience to work with her as a mentor and colleague. In new ways, I came to discover and appreciate her professionalism and her humility.

4.2.2 Life-long learning

Nikawiy would start her own Master of Education program in 2017 at the University of Regina. As always, she was a diligent student. The last thing I would do before leaving to Kingston in the late summer of 2018 was to videotape nikawiy at the McKenzie Art Gallery in Regina. It was late afternoon and very windy so it was not possible for us to find an outdoor location as we hoped. We had met my nephew Jonas and his girlfriend Jessi earlier as they were helping with moving items for us that day. Jessi suggested the McKenzie Art Gallery space so we went there and were glad to find out it was open until the evening. We were generously given permission to go in to the main floor foyer space while a wedding reception took place in the Art Gallery. The Commissionaire security at reception even commented that it was a good thing what I was doing- to document my mother. Little did he know that she was doing this for her Master's. But absolutely, this is nikawiy's legacy and it was important for me to support her this way.

This was how much we had to depend on good fortune for us to complete this work for nikawiy's project. We were exhausted and I was preparing to leave that evening to start my 3-day road trip to Ontario. This was literally the last thing we were able to do before I had to leave. It would have been heartbreaking if we ended up not having this opportunity or postponing it any longer. We had known about this for something like two months but this was also how hectic and busy our schedule was over the summer. By the time we got into the Gallery, it was a quickly darkening early fall evening, cool, and very windy. I was like a machine setting up the camera, our chairs, our audio equipment, getting my still camera and my phone ready for other pictures. This was it. It had to be now or never for that summer at least. It was a miracle we were in our location. Nikawiy started her presentation in Cree. I checked the levels, all was good. I sat back finally to have my decaf coffee as nikawiy talked. Approximately an hour later, we were finished and packing up.

On this cold late summer evening that felt like fall, I kissed and hugged nikawiy *good-bye* (there is no good-bye, literally no Cree word for good-bye, she always says). At 3 am later that night, I would text her to let her know I made it safely to my destination in Manitoba. Her project now would be submitted for her oral thesis and her program would be complete. At 74, nikawiy would complete her Master's in Education.

It was a time of constant movement... *keep moving, do not stop, keep going*. No matter how tired you are, how much you want to rest, keep going. The wind swirled around us in the parking lot of the Gallery. The neon green writing on the outside wall shone in the evening and was visible to Albert Street where traffic still rushed by, "as long as the sun shines, the grass grows, the river flows", the treaty epithet.

From March 3 to June 24, 2018, the Mackenzie Art Gallery held an exhibition *Mixing Sand and Stars, the Art & Legacy of Sarain Stump* co-curated by Gerald McMaster of the Red

Pheasant First Nation and Mackenzie Art Gallery Executive Director Anthony Kiendl. It amazed me to learn of this exhibition although sadly I never did see it. The writing on the wall, this exhibition and its co-curator Gerald McMaster reminded me of the rushing wind that swirled around us in the parking lot. *There are my people sleeping...*and dreaming in this fitful slumber. It is interesting for me to note that Sarain was born in 1945, the same year as nikawiy. What would he think of the neon green writing on the wall? I think of him as forever young as he would die tragically in a drowning accident at the age of twenty-nine.

In other ways, I also think of my mother as forever young.

4.2.3 Feathers

How many of the moons are related to birds? This summer moon is a time when the birds begin to shed their old feathers as they grow new ones. The old must make way for the new. How I see this in my mother is a constant transition, sometimes painful, most often challenging, but always seeking to understand and uphold her own life purpose, *miskasowin*. She never is just surviving though this is often the reality. With the strength that she has gained through the years, she is always striving and driving herself forward and periods of inertia are seldom. I marvel at this as I struggle with this state of inertia myself at times. How she constantly moves, yet carves out contemplation so this is also movement. She ruffles her feathers, flies. She meets this moon time through her cycles in life always shedding old feathers to make way for new ones rebuilding strength to survive but also to always seek her purpose and, in this cycle, builds inner vision to always see what is most important, her tried and tested knowing in life. Despite the challenges that always come to simply survive, there is the eagle-

eyed vision and fortitude certainly knowing what is beyond this. This is a time of transition that will bring a time to fly up in the next moon to come. The challenges now will bring the strength to achieve this.

4.2.4 Inherent Responsibility

Nikawiy is a young mother now and her younger siblings have joined her at her new home in the south. She travels with her sister Delma to visit their parents. Even today, remembering this, brings a deep sadness to nikawiy to recall the state that they found them in alone at home together but without care to sustain them so they were hungry and unkempt, weak. Mosom could not take care of his partner to even feed her or keep her clean so she was infested with lice. I remember my aunt commenting on this to say that ‘we weren’t there to help them’ in such a way that I understood that their role as their children was also critical to the well-being of their parents. I understood that this was tied to the residential schools in the first place, that this was when their forced absence made this indelible hole in their family, that my grandparents were so impacted by this absence to fall in on themselves without this center, this critical structure of their own children. This is also the resilience of children.

In this summer, my sister Diane is coming over to mom’s to help with yard work. The riding lawnmower is fixed and ready to go again so my sister is over to tackle the overgrown grass around nikawiy’s. She brings her two youngest daughters ages 9 and 6. The baby is certainly not expected to do anything but run wild and amuse herself. The older one is asked to help her mom at times. I notice this at different times- my sister relies on her daughter to lend a helping hand already and she is fully expected to do this. She has a role already that she is constantly learning. My niece also has a particular role to be a greater helper to the people- not

all of my nieces do or not that I am aware of at this time and perhaps not in the ceremonial way that my sister's daughter does already. Such responsibility brings out other commitment to protect, nurture and support this. I feel this as her *nikawiys*, her maternal aunt, her little mother. And I have learned this in turn from my own *nikawiys* who was always there in my life. She has flown up to the great moon now but is always my *nikawiys*. I hear her wings gently fluttering or else surging through the wind still.

What did they do then, I ask. *Nikawiy* says they cleaned their mother, took all of her clothes and burned them, cut her hair short. They spent a day to delouse their mother. And then they took her home with them. At different times, my granny/*nokum* would live with different daughters, not her sons that I ever knew of. I imagine this was the last time that my granny would have lived with my *mosom* then. From here I believe my *mosom* would live at times with his sons also. In this way, the roles of caregiving would reverse as they aged. I do not think that anyone had the capability to accommodate my grandparents as a couple together. It was also a suitability for my granny/*nokum* to go to her daughters and not her sons- the same with my *mosom*, he was suited to go to his sons. I heard he would still hunt with my uncle.

4.2.5 Poverty

Nikawiy and *nikawiys* confronted a situation of abject poverty when they came to their parents that time. My grandparents were merely trying to survive. I cannot think of how long they could have sustained this before *nikawiy* and *nikawiys* were able to intervene. Such poverty is debilitating, spirit killing. Only the parasites might thrive.

As Indigenous people, we are not unfamiliar with poverty. Poverty is a term that might be like 'success' and anomalous to define. What perspective are we making this definition from?

Our poverty may also be our success, my father would ask ‘what is wealth...when we can stand up and take care of ourselves...then that is real wealth...when they gave us welfare, free money, then that is when we became poor’ (Poitras 2000). Someone else’s success may be our poverty.

To be poor may also be shameful. When you are poor, you may be ridiculed, looked down on. At least, this was the case for my parent’s as they grew up. To be poor is to be lesser-than. With contemporary resurgence of identity, the societal connotations for being poor as Indigenous people may be different today. There is an understanding that something is not wrong with us because we may be poor. We learn that this is what a system decides for us and how a system keeps us. We throw back the blankets that keep secret shame and light is thrown on the parasites that might thrive in this darkness. When you are poor, you may be seen as weak. Now we learn that others live on taking our strength from us to sustain themselves. We are not poor, we are targeted.

Regardless, such circumstances are what we are impacted with. This is where I would struggle with inertia, the sense of immobility, perhaps entrapment at times. I might wait for my strength to gather but sense that it was never enough. I am afraid to fly. I am not ready to yet. I lose the purpose of my wings. It might be my mother who comes to ruffle my feathers if only to remind me that I must go. Old feathers must make way for the new ones. The moon calls.

4.2.6 Maslow Appropriation

No matter what dire circumstances my mother has faced in life, I understand that she was not just surviving although it may have taken all that she had to do this, too. She also never stopped self-actualizing- to borrow a term from Maslow’s hierarchy of needs. The highest need is to self-actualize. The basic needs are for food and air to live. In all the cycles of her life, my

mother never stopped learning or striving to be her best. At home today, she goes out for a walk as far as she can go even though she must face the wood ticks in the grass or even is she has aches and pains. She always comes back rejuvenated. She knows the walk gives her life so she is glad to go even if she might not really want to. This is her discipline and her joy, her medicine.

To survive and to thrive may seem contradictory but that is how old feathers shed as new ones grow out. This is nikawiy's lesson for me. As a young mother with six children, nikawiy went back to school and became a teacher later in life. What this meant in terms of all the challenges she had to face to do this is humbling to me.

On my holidays at home visiting with her, I witnessed how she endured one particularly overwhelming day. Exhausted and stressed at her home, my niece Reanna came to give her kokum mail she had picked up at the mailbox in town. My niece was very careful to ensure that she made this delivery to her kokum knowing that there was something special today. Nikawiy opened the package to see her Master of Education diploma. In the pandemic, her convocation from the University of Regina had been cancelled. This was how she was delivered her diploma. It was unceremonious and yet a great reminder for all of nikawiy's dedication and hard work. I saw how this lifted her up for just long enough to show her a bright light at the end of this dark day before she put it back in its package. Old feathers and new feathers but most of all, fortitude and vision to see beyond this now. I saw great wings span and surge through the air in swoops and swirls pushing up in to the sky. I heard the eagle screech. I felt the full moonlight. I saw feathers falling to the ground... new ones opening up.

When nikawiy went to the Indian Residential School, this marked an introduction to violence that would be part of her life. This violence was systemic and what she personally

experienced in her vulnerability as a child and as inflicted by adults in the residential school system. There was abuse of authority and trust.

As an adult, she would pursue her own post-secondary education to become a teacher. I would relate her lifelong learning to the concept of ‘self-actualization’, which we were both familiar with from nikawiy’s undergraduate degree program. I would recall Abraham Maslow’s theory when I thought of nikawiy and how she impresses me with her persistent drive to what her purpose is in life.

One thing I discovered in nikawiy’s story, is the violence of colonization in ‘school’. From the residential school to university, education has been an experience of violence. There is a type of violence in the example of Abraham Maslow and how he would claim Indigenous knowledge as his own without any credit to a source of his inspiration and research that came from the Blackfoot. As we continue to learn today, there are ongoing examples of such Indigenous knowledge ‘theft’, including identity, that takes place in western academia’s higher learning institutions. As we learn, it is a lucrative mining of Indigenous resource, a usurpation of rightful ownership for the benefit of modern-day colonizers. What is more, this may be protected in institutions that are supposed to uphold society’s highest standards of ethics and integrity. Such standards do not allow the turning of a blind eye to such colonial violence.

4.2.7 Esisipiyan (*To the best of my ability*)

I also think of my grandmother’s edict and teaching in a concept of *esisipiyan*- ‘to the best of my ability’. It was a way to live each day. She would do what she could to the best of her ability for that day. There is also a balance to this- *I am going to do what I can and that is all*

that I can do. There is an acceptance to what a limit might be. I think of this even as a natural law of self-respect, and self-love.

There is a violence in colonization that does not have these boundaries. Nikawiy became a number in the residential school- #71. Even I know her number today. There is an inhumanity to such practice. Where is nitsikason- our names? The connections to our belly buttons, the connection to our mothers, our ancestors? Where are our spirit names, how we are known in the universe?

4.2.8 Huerta

In our unexpected stay-cation, I am unsettled, flapping my wings as I seek a place to land finally. I have a moment of wondering what it will be like when things are back to 'normal', of when I am back in my nest with no urgent agendas to attend to. Is that rest? We watch tv in the hotel we have been staying at, me more than nikawiy of course. That is really not her style but she does indulge at times such as these when we can lay back in bed to watch some murder mystery usually.

One evening we watch a documentary on Dolores Huerta, the partner of Cesar Chavez in unionizing Mexican farmers. It is an amazing story and history that we watch one evening. Here was an Indigenous woman leader that we could relate to in many ways. When I learn that she also had 11 children, this was another point of relation. Her adult children spoke of the time that their mother's work took her away from them. Her commitment was also a compromise. Again, the resilience of children. I have seen this in my own family as well, that we can almost raise ourselves, we learn to survive, and we may operate as a unit. We become each other's stability and support. I still see this in smaller children sometimes in my own family but also in

others. No matter how things are, the siblings are happiest when they are together. They forge a bond that is incredibly strong. They are each other's comfort especially if they cannot always be with their parents or at least with their mother.

Dolores would become well known and she would come to be friends with Gloria Steinem. Though they clearly relate to each other on labor and class issues, they could not share the same positions on topics such as gender and feminism. Dolores was Catholic and did not support abortion. There was this point of contention but it did not seem that this was an apparent stumbling block and it did not take away from the mutual respect and partnership that they shared for each other. They were both leaders, they were both impacted by patriarchy, they were both put down by white men.

Dolores's Mexican cry to the farmers was 'yes, we can'. Years later Barack Obama would borrow this in his presidential campaign but he would attribute it to Cesar Chavez. Upon later bestowing a medal honor to Dolores, Obama would acknowledge and correct his mistake for the true source of the manifesto 'yes, we can'.

What is the moon now mom? Moulting moon, paskowiy pisim. July, the birds are losing their old feathers and growing new ones. Next month is the flying up moon.

I cannot remember the last time I tried to write. I tried to start with the Great Moon, the passing of my nikawiys, my little mother, auntie Delma. In my room here at mom's, I slept in my bed surrounded by my auntie's belongings that were brought here after her house in the city was cleaned. They are to be given away at a feast. My aunt passed away in late February so just before the pandemic. The time of her passing was like an early spring, almost no snow already, beautiful sunny days. The days after that I remember sleeping with nikawiy and shortly I would return to work loathe to leave her but also lifted up by the ceremony we did for my late aunt now. It was peaceful, joyous at the same time as deep grief. I was so grateful, it was as her own

nature, gentle and bright. I did not know when I might see a gathering like this again. I was also grateful that my aunt would not see or know of what was to come.

The moons have come and passed under the same dark clouds of pandemic uncertainty. I was immediately reminded of a story I heard of late mosom Charlie, my maternal grandfather, who was a young boy at the time of an infectious disease outbreak believed to be the Spanish flu. He would awake one morning to find his brother dead beside him. My mosom would be spared then and I would always remember this tragic story. My mosom would not tell me this himself but I heard of it and it comes back to me now in these current times of a pandemic. It is comforting for me to recall my mosom's resilience. We survive. If our history tells us anything, it is that we survive. Of course, not without huge ongoing loss.

4.2.9 *kiskino tahiwew ona* (Discussion Notes)

Teachings (reminders, guidance): *Miskasowin* (finding one's self).

Miskasowin is a Cree concept that is identified in the book by Harold Cardinal and Walter Hildebrandt, *Treaty Elders of Saskatchewan: Our Dream Is That Our Peoples Will One Day Be Clearly Recognized as Nations* (2000). It was identified by a group of elders that they consulted in the development of this book as a term that was a guiding principle for Cree people. I recall that this was one of several terms that we used from this text for a class on *Teaching Treaties in the Classroom* at the University of Regina. I acknowledge Angelina Weenie and Audrey Amond for their work to develop a course curriculum for this class.

In my own experience and observation, I have witnessed *nikawiy* on her *miskasowin* journey in her life. This has been in her education but also in all of her growth. This has been her lifelong learning and healing.

Esisipiyan, to the best of my ability, is also vital 'letting go' and maintaining balance. It is self-love and self-respect. This was a great teaching from nokum, my grandmother, for her nitanis, nikawiy, my mother.

4.3 Ohpahowi-pisim, Flying Up Moon (August)

4.3.1 Reconciliation

Nikawiy has decided that she will join the group of elders travelling by chartered bus from Peepeekisis to Edmonton for the Pope's visit in the summer of 2022. It is still covid but such travel is now being permitted. Many have had their vaccine shots and international travel such as the Pope's trip to Canada seem safe now. Pope Francis will visit Maskwacis (formerly Hobbema) and Lac Ste. Anne on the Alexis First Nation in August. Elders, some of whom are former Indian Residential School students from different areas are travelling to see the Pope. Nikawiy finally decides she will join the bus.

They travel to Maskwacis and visit the Ermineskin First Nation here- where the Pope arrives. Nikawiy walks with others to an arbor and finds a place to sit in the great crowd. It is somewhat of a pilgrimage and I know, in different ways, it is not easy for nikawiy. When she is back at her hotel in Leduc, I go to join her there. I am there to spend the night with her now and she will travel back with me. She was able to endure the long travel in the bus coming from Saskatchewan but now she opts to travel back with me.

We decide to stop in Lac Ste. Anne just after the Pope's visit there. I have never been to this location though I have heard of it. Nikawiy lets me know that she had been here once before with my youngest sister Angie and her husband Lester, nikawiy's son-in-law, years ago while dad was still alive. It is nice to know this and she likely told me before but I did not recall. We stop in Spruce Grove to buy water jugs with the intention to bottle some of the Lac Ste. Anne healing water. We make another stop to buy late season Saskatoons that we are happy to find for sale on the road. And then we find a place to park as close to the lake as we can.

I am glad we have avoided the crowds that were recently here. It is hot, dusty, with some canteen vendors still here. I have heard it was quite the temporary market place that is set up here to accommodate the many visitors that would come to camp here annually for the event of Lac Ste. Anne. People would come to walk in the lake as it was said to be miraculously healing. Nikawiy tells me of the local church with the discarded crutches displayed in testimony. She takes a short walk out into the water and other visitors help us to fill our water jugs. We collect our water and then we are on our way again.

We find our way to visit my cousin, nikawiy's niece, in the Spruce Grove area. We are grateful to finally rest at Ivan and Jen's beautiful home. I know nikawiy and Jen are happy to see each other- they mutually miss Jen's late mother, my nikawiys (little mother), nikawiy's sister. The quiet time they spend with each other visiting is also healing, comforting to both of them. They spend the afternoon cleaning the Saskatoon berries together. Ivan will make jam with the berries that evening so nikawiy will enjoy this treat for her breakfast the next morning. Ivan and Jen treat nikawiy like their own mothers, like an honored guest. They treat us all like that but with nikawiy, they are extra attentive.

4.3.2 Flying Up

It is another late August. I have just travelled home to nikawiy's from another visit to our sundance family south of the medicine line. It was a wonderful reunion after covid- sad in some ways as there were faces we did not see on this trip.

I am reminded of Big Bear and his relations south of the medicine line as well. I long for the time and opportunity to do my own research in this area. There is something that always draws me to this history. Some of our ceremony relatives are connected to Rocky Boy

reservation, which is also connected to Big Bear. I become more and more intrigued. I question the connection to land; how Big Bear never got the land he was supposed to as a signatory to Treaty Six. I think of landless and amalgamated bands.

On August 3, 2022, the Crown- Indigenous Relations Minister Marc Miller travelled west to visit our First Nation among others. He came to make an apology for what happened on Peepeekisis and the File Hills Indian Farm Colony. He had previously announced in December 2021 that 'land back' was a particular initiative that he believed was the 'heart of reconciliation'. They said he made some of his comments in Cree. He likely knew more Cree than most on our band.

My family and I did not attend. I had sent a letter to the Minister on May 14, 2022, to request our own band. The claim resolution did not resolve fundamental issues for our band regarding land. We knew that the Minister attended our First Nation while ignoring our request. Yes, the matter is land. Our adopted capan Big Bear- adopted Peter Thunder who then adopted Joe Taylor, nikawiy's mosom (grandfather)- knew the issue was land.

In ceremony, we danced upon the land. There was a particular focus now. We knew to acknowledge our protocols so that we could move on from there. These were and are our laws.

On the way home, I saw a bird hurt on the road. It was a less busy highway so I had time to stop and turn around. The bird was not able to fly- I could not tell what kind of bird it was. It disappeared off the side of the road into the grassy ditch. I felt terrible and cowardly, unable to stop its suffering. I put tobacco down and continued on. I recalled seeing geese on another highway earlier this year- they were also hurt probably in some collision on this very busy road. I could see the goose trying to stretch out its' maimed wing and I knew its' partner was next to it on the middle of this road. Traffic was slowed and rerouting itself around this site- so many cars delayed and backed up.

I would think of what the niskak, geese, meant to me now, how they stood for leadership. These maimed geese were like our leaders struck down by the relentless machinery of colonization. They drove around us witnessing the carnage and the damage but could not do much else. The geese maintained their own natural spaces and patterns because this was their life and laws. Did any of this matter to the vehicles they collided with? So, the niskak lost their lives.

In other ways then, we may 'fly up'. When our natures are denied, our lives may be lost. When we cannot be free, we may release ourselves. I think of so many young people. It is the same horror to witness their carnage in colonization.

Flying up was the culmination of a season of growth and strength building. From eggs, learning to fly, and then leaving their nest- these baby birds make their way into the world. In time, their old feathers would be replaced by new ones to prepare them for the journeys they make to other parts of the world. Flying up, they follow their paths into the future they were always destined to make.

4.3.3 *kiskino tahiwew ona* (Discussion Notes)

Teachings (reminders, guidance): Treaty protection

Former Chief of Alexis First Nation, Cameron Alexis, would let me know that the Spruce Grove area was also the location of what was once the Michel Band reserve. Some of their members would join other local bands. Michel Band is now the only one to ever become enfranchised in Canada's history.¹⁵ (Indian people may use this term as 'disenfranchisement')

¹⁵ "Until 1985, under the Indian Act, First Nation people could legally get rid of their status by enfranchising, which means they would surrender their status to receive the same rights as non-Indigenous Canadians.

because they see this as loss of Indian/Treaty rights- not the opposite perspective that Canadian rights are gained in this process.) Today some of their members fight to be recognized as a band and for a land base. I had learned about this history in my studies but was not sure of where it once was. Now I understood that it was actually in the Spruce Grove area. This was very interesting to me.

I had heard of Indian individuals disenfranchising/enfranchising historically by their own choice, giving up their Indian status and rights, for some monetary compensation and to become a regular Canadian who might be able to vote, for one thing. Others might be enfranchised not by choice. Indians were not allowed to become lawyers or go to university and could be automatically enfranchised if they pursued these careers. These exceptions and rules were all arbitrarily laid out or somehow initiated in the Indian Act and the administration of Indian Affairs. With name changes, INAC has had different incarnations through the years but is still commonly known as Indian Affairs (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, INAC).

Bill C-31 was about giving Indian Status back to women who had married non-Indian men, lost their status along with any children they had. Conversely, Indian men who married non-Indian women actually acquired Indian status for their new partners. Did Bill C-31 address all status lost through enfranchisement?

Assimilation is related to enfranchisement because there is also the loss of one's legal status and identity. The White Paper of 1969 was proposed as a way to get rid of the Indian Act (and Indian Affairs). But Indian leadership nationally refused this as they also saw this as a threat to their 'distinctness' as Indian people (equal does not mean 'same'). The Treaty that

Typically, enfranchisement was a personal choice, meaning a First Nation person would make that decision as an individual. But in 1958, the entire Michel Band in Alberta enfranchised — the only community in Canadian history to do so." <https://www.cbc.ca/radio/unreserved/how-the-indian-act-continues-to-impact-the-lives-of-first-nation-people-1.5614187/how-every-member-of-an-alberta-first-nation-lost-indian-status-1.5618085>

recognized their sovereignty would also protect their distinction and ways of life as Indian people. They were to be ‘unmolested’. The Indian Act was also binding on Canada. In legislation such as the *Ten-Year Agreement*, Trudeau is said to be, once again, selling assimilation that Indian people also see as termination of distinct rights¹⁶.

During the Pope’s visit, there were calls for him, as Head of the Catholic Church, to get rid of the Doctrine of Discovery. It was this papal bull that declared that the land, now known as Canada, was *terra nullius*- empty land. Therefore, it was ‘discovered’ by Europeans. Indians who had lived here from ‘time immemorial’ were not considered to be *human* under the edict of the papal bull that determined that they were not Christian and so their lands were ‘empty’. Why, in 2022, would people call for the Doctrine of Discovery to be rescinded? Because it was still in place and in the foundation of Canadian Law. It is the only ‘Bill of Sale’ that Canada has to say it owns this land- and this is to say that there is no Bill of Sale.

The Indian Treaties gave permission to the Crown to allow for European settlement of what would become Canada. The underlying jurisdiction is still the Indian Treaties. The Indian Treaties are still based on Indian sovereignty. Any legislative attempts to place Indian treaties and sovereignty under Canada is an attempt to terminate these rights; it is domestication of international rights.

¹⁶ “IN 2017, THE ASSEMBLY OF FIRST NATIONS (AFN) under the leadership of National Chief Perry Bellegarde, entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Canada regarding a new fiscal relationship with First Nations. Former National Chief Shawn Atleo also had a similar MOU with Canada on Fiscal Relations. Not much has changed since the former National Chief spearheaded that approach. Under Atleo’s leadership, the AFN held a special Assembly in Gatineau, Quebec from December 9-12, 2013, regarding fiscal relations with the Crown. At that time, “streamlined funding” was the terminology used by INAC, but the same objectives are included in the current MOU: to remove Indian Affairs from the fiscal relationship and to put an end to further funding once the new 10-year agreements are concluded. No more Indians, no more treaty obligations, no more relationship from a Crown – First Nation perspective. This should be critically alarming to Treaty Nations, both pre-confederation Treaties and Treaties 1-11, because the fiscal relationship is grounded in our rights in the land.” *A Critical Look at the New Fiscal Relationship and Contribution Funding Agreements with First Nations* March 4, 2019 | by Candice Maglione Desjarlais. <https://yellowheadinstitute.org/2019/03/04/new-fiscal-relationship-contribution-funding-agreements/>

Chapter Five
Nikapehanohk Takwakin
(West, Fall)

5.1 Takwaki-pisim, Autumn Moon (September)

5.1.1 Nokum (my grandmother)

Nikawiy recalls a time when she was in North Battleford in her last year of school at the Assumpta Academy. This was where she would be brought on that fateful trip with dad at the request of the nuns to bring nikawiy back to school. She was able to go up to Grade Eight at St. Anthony's on Onion Lake and now she had to travel to stay at North Battleford to continue with her Grade Nine. She would not get her high school education before leaving school to get married that Autumn.

It was some kind of coincidence that when nikawiy was in North Battleford that her mother was also there in the hospital. Nokum, my grandmother, had been taken here and what transpired in her hospital stay was also due to the fact that she could not speak any English. I am sure this created high anxiety for my grandmother and she experienced high levels of mental duress on top of the alarm she would feel being in the hospital away from her family. Somehow nikawiy found her mother in the hospital here. North Battleford was also known for its psychiatric hospital so I imagine this was where my grandmother may have been.

Nikawiy would talk of catching a trolley for 10 cents and travelling across the river to visit her mother. I do not know how many visits she was able to have before her mother was moved from the hospital. Nikawiy said she travelled to visit her one day and found her hospital

room empty. She was not advised that her mother would be moved and this was how she found out- an empty room. I think of the precious moments between them then- the critical respite they must have experienced to sit in each other's familiar company, to have their Cree mother and daughter conversations. Nokum would save an apple or some other little treat from her meal to give to my mother when she came to visit. And then just like that, nikawiy travelled one day only to find an empty room with no idea where her mother was taken. I remember her saying how shocked and bewildered she was to find this empty space where her mother once with no idea where she was taken.

Years later, nokum would visit nikawiy and now she was close to the end of her own life. In this space, nikawiy found her softly crying one day. 'Tanike nikawiy'...what is wrong, mother. My granny would answer in Cree, 'I never gave my children away...'. She carried this great heartbreak with her through the years from the time her children were taken from her to go to the Indian residential schools. How many times had she shed her tears for this; she would let them fall once again.

5.1.2 Our Father's Daughters

I have been in Kingston three weeks now. I take Sir John A. Macdonald Boulevard down to Union or King to Queen's University. Just yesterday I noticed a sign for the burial place of Macdonald that is here in Kingston at the Cataraqui Cemetery. This was the home of Canada's first Prime Minister and one of its Fathers of Confederation. On my way I also pass the Women's Penitentiary that is no longer used as a pen for women. A taxi driver told me that it was now used as a dorm for female university students. I pass the Men's Penitentiary that is also no longer used as a pen and now offers tours. Both closed penitentiaries are still foreboding,

massive structures of stone. I noticed a stone church on my weekend drive that had attached a mural that read “175 Years”. It was older than Canada when it celebrated its 150 years of confederation in 2017.

In Regina this year, the statue of Sir John A. Macdonald in central Victoria Park had been vandalized more than once. Across the country, there were other incidents and questions being asked about the appropriateness or correctness to recognize Macdonald in light of his transgressions now including those against Indigenous people in the development of Indian Residential Schools and Indian reserves. Scholars such as James Daschuk in his award-winning “Clearing the Plains” meticulously documented the negative impact of early federal policy for Indigenous people despite the goodwill of treaties that had just been entered into in these regions. Certainly, Macdonald was included in the design of such policy as the Prime Minister of Canada. Only last week on October 29, 2018, Conrad Black would speak at Queen’s in a controversial lecture to defend the legacy of Sir John A. Macdonald as a Father of Confederation. There is something ironic to me about this location that is historic for its relation to Macdonald at the same time as it is recognized for marking Canada’s earliest penal institutions. These would be monuments to Canada’s earliest jurisdiction. Perhaps there was an appropriateness for Black to speak on this then?

I was welcomed and introduced as one of Queen’s inaugural Indigenous pre-Doctoral Fellows yesterday in an evening reception at the Agnes Art Gallery at Queen’s. I made my way downtown and followed the Sir John A. Macdonald Boulevard to Union Street. Before I turn, I see Lake Ontario and it is always a sight that amazes me.

At the reception, we are welcomed to an informal audience of Dean’s and other academics. Each of the five fellows is introduced by a mentor assigned to them. Mine is Karen Lawford, a new professor at Queen’s. I had not met any of the fellows before and I had not met

my mentor either. When I am introduced, we make our way up to stand together in front of the glass doors at the entrance of the gallery. Karen begins with her own introduction and I realize that she is the daughter of Elijah Harper. I may have been told this before but in a sea of new information it is a detail that I may have already forgotten. When she refers to my research, she pays it a heartfelt and emotional tribute that truly humbles me. And then she hands me a tobacco tie. Those two things were an intimacy between two Indigenous women that our audience was allowed to share with us. It was unexpected to me but her hand reaching out to mine with the tobacco was a gesture with such meaning that brought me to my home and let me feel this familiarity so far away. I acknowledged this is ceremony.

On my way home, I am struck by how many Indian women I meet who are following their father's footsteps particularly in leadership. Our fathers lift us up to inspire us to take on responsibility not just for ourselves and our families but also our communities and our Nations. Certainly, our mothers must have also influenced us but it is our fathers who were recognized. So now I wonder why this is? It is not a mandatory trait for women leadership to be so influenced by their fathers. What I know is that my mother's influence was just as critical though perhaps in different ways.

Today I prepare for the class I will teach in the winter term on *Indigenous Women and Leadership*. I chose what I myself wanted to learn about. Now down to the task of searching and reviewing my readings, I wondered if it was such a good idea. There are gaps and older perhaps outdated literature. Now I know I will learn for sure. I acknowledge the territories where I will teach this class in Queen's- the Haudenosaunee and the Anishinaabe- and I review readings on Molly Brant and how Kingston is also the final resting place for this Mohawk woman leader. Brant's actual gravesite is not exactly known unlike Macdonald's that is now marked as a *National Historic Site of Canada*. But this example is also of a crucial anomaly

between matriarchy and patriarchy or other Indigenous systems against patriarchy. It is the colonial clash. In ways, their legacies would also denote that of jailed and jailer.

Karen would also mention something to me briefly about the significance of the reception at Queen's and within this institution to welcome the pre-Doctoral Indigenous Fellows. The event was an affront to a different cornerstone of hierarchy, patriarchy, and institutional exclusivity. As she handed me the tobacco, I also felt these stone walls fade away.

5.1.3 Every day is a ceremony

Nikawiy makes this comment to me, "every day is a ceremony". I take a mental note of this but struggle to remember the context. It was as she was explaining something to me, perhaps her own project ruminations as she was completing her Master of Arts in Education program at the University of Regina that fall. She would often share with me as she was gathering her own thoughts and organizing them. There were times when one of her statements would resonate with me particularly and I was given this insight to what she was explaining. We were constant companions when I was home in Saskatchewan this past year. Now back in Ontario, I was awakening on a fall morning and reminded of nikawiy's words, *every day is a ceremony. Tapwe, truly.*

The morning is quiet. I have not felt this sense of quiet for a long time. At home, I would often sense the need for constant movement, I would think to myself, 'just keep on moving...you cannot stop, keep on'. I would be reminded of my dream with nikawiy, of swimming frenetically/frantically in a fast-flowing river, swimming somehow with one arm and holding my mother wrapped in red cloth with my other arm, holding her up out of the water as much as I could while paddling with my other. Such is dreams, I could feel this power and

energy of the river also propelling me forward. I was in complete survival mode. My mother is smaller in my dream and not as small as the size of a baby and yet baby-like wrapped in this red cloth. Even in my dream I understood that she could not swim as she is not able to in reality. She has a fear of water for this reason.

I stood by the water yesterday. I unintentionally came to a street that brought me to the lakeshore so then I was drawn to make my way to the edge to make an offering. The Great *Lake Ontario* looked like an ocean to me with its expanse stretching over the horizon. The day was sunny and windy so the sparkling waves rushed up to my feet. I said my little prayer and put the tobacco into the wind where it disappeared into the waves or into the sand and rocks. This water is foreign to me yet I felt myself moved by its sheer power and energy. It spoke to my blood and then it was not strange to me at all. I felt a buoyancy in my spirit. I felt a breath in the wind. I took a picture to send home.

Niya Askitako Piasew Iskwew. I am Blue Thunderbird Woman. My other sense of constant movement is also that of flying. Keep moving, don't stop...as a bird in flight. This was my summer at home with nikawiy. I am perched on a tree now, building another nest, taking in the expansive view from this vantage now. I see nikawiy and my family at home. From my thunderbird nest, I see our seasons.

5.1.4 *kiskino tahiwew ona* (Discussion Notes)

Teachings (reminders, guidance): Iskwew leadership

Molly Brant was Haudenosaunee therefore she came from a matriarchal society. It is said that the roots of feminism were inspired and modelled after this society. Other Indigenous societies were also not patriarchal; they largely may have been matriarchal or egalitarian.

Indigenous men may have been more accepted as leaders in the process of colonization as this was patriarchal. In contemporary times, we see many Indigenous women also following their father's leadership. We also see that their fathers are supportive of their daughters in their leadership development.

I recall running in my first election campaign for my band. I did this with the support of my late father who had been an elected Chief of Peepeekisis in the early 1980s for three years (1.5 terms). Before this, my mother had also run for Councillor of our band. At one time, dad also seriously discussed the possibility of nikawiy running for Chief at one election. He believed in her. From all of his political experience, he must have saw her potential to be an elected leader. She has always been a dedicated advocate for treaty and governance development in different areas. Nikawiy brings many gifts in her support and voice; she remains active and responsible in these roles.

5.2 Nohcitowi-pisim, Rutting Moon (October, November)

5.2.1 Deciding to run

Ideally, there is a balance between the doing and the talking/teaching. Planning should be careful and mindful but eventually, the steps must be taken and it is time to walk to the talk. And sometimes, the planning is done for us also- the opportunities present themselves and we hope we are prepared to take them.

I would run for Chief of Peepeekisis in September and October 2022. It is an unexpected time but I feel I must move on this. It is not my first time. I ran after being elected Headperson in 2010 and then I lost by 10 votes, I was third. I ran in the next election, two years later, and now I ran against the two Headmen I had served with in 2010, including my uncle, whose terms were now up. The incumbent Chief, who they had supported in the last election, would beat us all. Indian politics.

Ideally, there is a balance between the doing and the talking/teaching. Planning should be careful and mindful but eventually, the steps must be taken and it is time to walk to the talk. And sometimes, the planning is done for us also- the opportunities present themselves and we hope we are prepared to take them.

I am awake this very early morning at nikawiy's. There had been a period of intense late summer heat that had now cooled off with even cooler evenings. There was a transition to fall nights that felt like frost. The leaves were starting to change their colors and this was often the sight in the Qu'Appelle valley where the week-long Treaty Four events would be held annually around the day of September 15th, the date this treaty was entered into.

The flies buzzing around are a distraction but otherwise, the dark morning is quiet and the sun will be rising soon. I take in what I have come to discover in the last few days. I have been

nominated to run for chief and now it is already one week into the five-week campaign period before elections on October 8th. The election timing is new and according to an election act that was voted on by 23 people (our population is approximately 3,000) at a band meeting last November. The vote was not on the agenda but was suddenly motioned for during this small meeting. All of this to say that so much is questionable.

Now we go through this process. My hope is that there is some opportunity to repeal/rescind the act somehow. I cannot be naïve that change can necessarily be made within the system. I believe in resurgence and our inherent systems that may not be placed under another jurisdiction. And yet I still have to try to address what I can this way. The options may be legal? But we do not know this and what we do know is that there is a great cost in time and money to try to get results this way.

In my first week, I am mainly assisting with social media platforms, something new to me in campaigning, and planning how the next few weeks might go. There are other practical matters to address and the week flies by. In my second week, I start my visits. Most are long and I am happy about this because they have so much to tell me, so much that I learn. I understand there is a confidence and hope that they put in me so this is also humbling. Can I do this? And then I feel I must- 'to the best of my ability', *asisipiyan*, nokum's (my grandmother's) teaching comes to me.

So why would I run again at this time? I was in conflict with the Indian Act, with imposed elected systems, with political agendas that were more about strategy than leadership now. Though I acknowledged this, there was also an understanding that there was still a need to somehow work with this system in order to also bypass it. I had an intuition that it was somehow necessary to feel out a process- that whether I was elected or not, there must be a way to come to a common ground where our Laws met. We, my family and I as they supported me, had to feel

this way through because it did not seem to have been achieved before. Or there were rare examples but we also had to find our own particular and autonomous path.

These system understandings are hard to articulate. Perhaps they are not meant to be explained. Certainly, there is a sense that there is no model- no one has got it right yet from a Treaty perspective. Canada will always offer its solutions- I think of the Indian Agent Graham's declaration that he had 'solved the Indian problem' with his development of the File Hills Indian Farm Colony on Peepeekisis.¹⁷

In the middle of all of the other demands in my life, I would choose to make this run. I would lose, come in second of three candidates for Chief of Peepeekisis in October 2022. It was an election where I knew that members of my own family did not support me- some actively campaigned against me. I cannot say that we have always been supported in my father's family for the Treaty work that he stood for. This, unfortunately, was not surprising. I was all the more grateful for those that did give us their support.

One of the most common things that I heard on my campaign was that a woman was needed in leadership. I was also able to bring forward was that I was the one who found the law firm who would finally resolve the claim after three decades. Really, the current governance could take credit for doing a lot of spending since the claim was resolved including giving themselves substantial raises that were also retroactive. After the claim was resolved, I realized that finding the law firm really did not matter so much as what the per capita distribution amount would be (\$15,000/adult). When news of the next claim for Cows and Plows was also announced and that the per capita distribution would be even bigger, the incumbent Chief used

¹⁷ ISC Minister Marc Millar would make another presentation at the 2022 Special Chief's Assembly, Assembly of First Nations, to, once again, make an apology for the File Hills Colony.

that in his campaign and was voted back in despite incessant calls for governance transparency and accountability just prior to the election.

The day after the election results, I would go into ceremony with my family. I was exhausted and welcomed this respite. I awoke early the next morning, as I was accustomed to during my campaign- these were the moments when I had time to reflect and make notes that I would sometimes share on social media to connect with membership on an ongoing basis during this last part of my campaign. Now this morning after the election, I had the thought that I needed to work with the newly elected Chief. I had to reach out regardless if my previous messages prior to the election were not responded to. I requested a meeting and three days after the election, we went to sit with the new Chief and Council. Our request was for a new band, separation.

5.2.2 Amalgamation

Nikawiy has quietly mentioned her need to see her Doctor more than once now. In her schedule, she marks down this appointment. In our travel plans, she ensures that we will be back in time for this. I forget her schedule when we return from our weekend trip to Alberta: to Calgary and the Glenbow Museum; to Spruce Grove just west of Edmonton and a quick overnight stay with our cousin Jen and her husband Ivan; to Kehewin and our Watchmaker relatives- chi Louie, Alfred and Walter; to Onion Lake and our Quinney cousin Hector as well as nikawiy's recently adopted brother Clarence Whitstone; and finally to a stop on our way home in North Battleford to the mass grave of the eight who were hung for treason in what was called the 'Frog Lake massacre'. In a few days, she reminds me of this Doctor appointment. In a rare, quiet moment she lets me know that she needs to share something with me from this visit to her

Doctor. Nikawiy has had two major back operations in her life that she believes stem from a car accident injury.

We travel by the James Smith reserve on another trip and now she is remembering her second teaching position after her first year at Red Earth First Nation. She recalls the differences she noticed now in James Smith that would be similar to our history in Peepeekisis¹⁸. There was a noticeable sensitivity for how this history might be related. Today we were all too familiar with this experience. Our histories were sensitive because they were controversial and because they were so personal and at the same time very political. This is what we lived.

Years later, James Smith would be recognized as three separate bands with distinct representations that had been wrongly amalgamated by the Canadian government as one band without these band's approval. In her first few months as teacher on James Smith, nikawiy would initiate a creative community project in her class with all the energy and enthusiasm of a new teacher. Later she would acknowledge her naivete. She worked on this production in conjunction with the community resources and support that she needed to access for this project that included the history of James Smith. The students were also excited to work on this.

Ultimately, nikawiy could not see this project through as her physical ailments grew and worsened. She noticed that she was starting to drag her left leg when she walked. She would find out from the Doctor that this was due to a spine injury and that she would have to have a back operation. She enjoyed the community of James Smith but was not able to continue her teaching there.

¹⁸ James Smith is an example of an amalgamated Band/First Nation where two or more Bands/First Nations were put together as one Band/First Nation on one reserve. Sol Sanderson is from James Smith and is former Chief of the Federation of Saskatchewan Indians (now Federation of Sovereign Indigenous Nations). He has become an advocate for other amalgamated Bands/First Nations including his own; today James Smith is separated to include two other Bands/First Nations: Peter Chapman and Chicastipaysin. The File Hills Indian Farm Colony is one-of-a-kind in Canada but Sol has said Peepeekisis is also example of amalgamation. In 2023, there are preliminary requests for two other Bands/First Nations to be created from Peepeekisis- Canahacapew (signatory to Treaty Four and the father of Peepeekisis) and New Band (Colony descendants).

Nikawiy was in her forties when she would start teaching. By the age of twenty-seven, she would have had her six children already. She also had two miscarriages. Doctor Steele of Balcarres delivered nikawiy's last two children, two daughters Diane and Angelina, who would later become nurses. After her baby Angelina was born overdue, Dr. Steele recommended that nikawiy not have any more children due to complications that she was starting to have in her births. So nikawiy had her tubes 'tied', tubal ligation. In the next two decades, she would raise her family and eventually go back to her own studies.

5.2.3 File Hills Colony

If the issue with our band is division, could the 'placements' just return to their own original bands? Would that solve anything? After a century of being on Peepeekisis, could we just 'go home'? And where was home?

I try to explain this to someone who has asked me this. This had been considered before but was not seen as feasible. The Colony has been on Peepeekisis for over a century now. The ones most displaced have been off-reserve mainly from the time of the membership review in 1950. Even if they were successful farmers, they sold everything to leave. This was not the only reason that the Colony was 'ended'- if it ever has been truly ended as we continue to experience internal strife and division. Colony farmers thought they were going to be kicked off. If they could have returned to their bands then they might have done it when they faced being kicked off the reserve. I know of only one case where someone returned to their original band. So even if they were displaced, those brought on with the Colony remain Peepeekisis band members.

Some do not have bands to return to. Their bands no longer exist. For my family, our roots are in North Dakota on the Turtle Mountain Chippewa Reservation. They would also say

we are Metis- because we do have Metis roots -but we are also from Turtle Mountain. We became status in Canada when we were brought on to the Colony for my great-grandfather to become a farming instructor. Twenty-five family's membership was reviewed in 1950, my family was not one of them.

If we were to go to our mother's bands, we would go to Key on my dad's side, my grandmother's band. Or else Onion Lake on my mother's side.

My great-grandfather was farming instructor Elizear Poitras who married Marie Desnomie of Peepeekisis and had developed his land here on the Colony and Peepeekisis. Eventually, he was asked to leave his land. He said he would leave if he was paid what it cost him to develop his land. They didn't pay him anything and he was forced to leave to another piece of land because someone else wanted his land for themselves.

For a century, we have been an amalgamated band. Commissioner David Laird said *the Colony should have had its own reserve* (2004 Indian Claims Commission Report on the File Hills Colony). The 2020 File Hills Colony Specific Claim Settlement Agreement did nothing to address this. These are matters that remain outstanding.

5.2.4 Claim Award 2020

I write this knowing that I may only be a witness to what is and has been unfolding. I can only say to our future generations 'this is what happened and how it happened, this is when and where the choices were made to give up your rightful inheritance... because we were too colonized to care about you'. We only cared about ourselves- we did not even care about each other.

Yet I am the one who put the final claim resolution in motion- I found the lawyers who were the ones to ensure that we got our claim after almost 35 years. And this process was started when my late father met with then Federation of Saskatchewan Indians Chief Sol Sanderson. Sol asked dad, when he was Chief of Peepeekisis from 1980-83, if they could do the research to see if Peepeekisis might have a claim- this was before there were any claims in Saskatchewan. Dad approved and by the time his brother, my uncle Enoch, was now Chief- and based on the research done, the decision was then made to submit the claim to Federal Court in 1986. And there it sat for the next 3.5 decades, almost 35 years. Until I came along and pursued what I was told was 'Plan B' when the case was ruled against in Court.

In a side meeting with then Peepeekisis lawyer, Tom Waller, in his Regina office and with then Chief, late Michael Koochicum, and Claim committee member Freda Koochicum (as I was also a Claim committee member and this was during a break at our Committee meeting taking place in Waller's boardroom), I asked about the 'placements'/new members in this process. This is when I was promised that 'Plan B' would be that the 'placements/new members could make their own claim. I am not sure if my uncle Enoch was also in this side meeting at this time, he was also on the Committee then.

The court ruling against the Claim had transpired when I went to a Chief and Council meeting in August 2016 with my referral for our own 'placement/new member' lawyers from the Gowling law firm. As far as I understood and as there were no announcements made from the Band to confirm where things were at with the claim- it was a topic that they were very quiet on at the time as there was nothing happening or being done. We were aware that the decision had been reversed, so I wondered whether and when an appeal had been filed. There was a clear and mutual understanding that "Plan B" was the reason I had contacted Gowling. Since the time of

that meeting till the present, I have never taken part in any additional claim development discussions.

The promises that were broken and the outright lies that were told to me were just business of the day. This was the beginning of how things would be done by our elected governance and these lawyers who would make 22 million from approximately 3 years of work with our Chief and Council. Half a million of our then potential future Claim funds were already being spent on travel to different arbitrary locations in Canada with the lawyers and our Chief and Council, with selected elders who were bound to confidentiality- locations that rarely included our own band. Information sessions would be held at reserve meetings but much of the information was 'confidential' and undisclosed to band membership. They told us only what they wanted us to know.

In November 2020, after the Claim Settlement Agreement had been distributed, and at an online information session that was done remotely in several locations due to the pandemic, I stood up very late in the evening to address concerns from my family. The Q&A part of the information session was left until the very end of the scheduled two-hour agenda after Gowling and Deloitte Touche made their very detailed presentations, in tandem. They left only a few minutes for questions and comments from band members. I stood up to say that I was the one who found these lawyers and about 'Plan B' that I had been pursuing as promised. The initial Gowling lawyer had even helped me to draft a letter that I asked to be presented at a Band meeting so that band members would be aware of what I was doing.

I had been a student in Ontario then and could not afford to travel to the band meeting so a Headman took my letter to the band meeting and read it to membership that was there. The letter was to be submitted in the minutes also. It was clear that I was seeking representation for the 'placements'/new members. The Gowling lawyer stood up after I spoke to refute what I was

saying- he said this was not a membership claim so the ‘placements’ - he almost snorted when he used this term- were not any consideration whatsoever. I suppose the idea that his firm might see their claim funds slip away shook him. They certainly did not present themselves this way when they were helping me draft my letter on legal representation for the ‘placements’. This was the door-way to making millions with our claim. Additionally, they have tried to close all other doors for the "placements" via their Settlement Agreement.

Even now, I will ask ‘what about the ‘placements/new members?’¹⁹ ²⁰There was nothing done to resolve this longstanding issue. It is our work as a band, but we have never had any political will to address this. Sol Sanderson will maintain that we are an amalgamated band, something he has done during his visits to Peepeekisis after being invited by my late father many years ago. We are not alone, I know this. The wrongdoing that happened so many years ago was not done by the Indian Agent alone; He had willing collaborators, including the Canadian government and Indian Affairs, who gave their blessing to everything he did. And today, it is our own elected governance and our own membership who, in turn, now sanction this against their own people. I forgive the ignorance of the people who, for the most part, have never seen \$15,000 all at once and especially when this offer comes just before Christmas. The 1911 Agreement with the Indian Agent Graham was disputed as *corruption* with a ‘bribe’ of

¹⁹ The File Hills Indian Farm Colony members- also called ‘placements’ - were originally recruited from Indian Residential Schools (Regina, Lebret, File Hills); they were Indian Residential School graduates who were selected to join the Indian Agent William Morris Graham’s development on Peepeekisis. This was Graham’s idea to ‘solve the Indian Problem’ by isolating and monitoring the Colony members in a *model Indian farm colony* that was one-of-a-kind in Canada where they would learn to farm but also assimilate. Members were not allowed to speak their language or practice their culture. (Poitras, 2000). The Colony members did not bring land with them and they were allotted 80 acres on Peepeekisis by Graham. This was not the square mile promised in Treaty. What about the ‘placements’ is a question to ask about land that Colony members never got. They were strictly controlled and many were not given choice about joining the Colony as they were taken from the Indian Residential Schools.

²⁰ Commissioner David Laird stated that ‘the Colony should have been given its own reserve but it did not due to financial reasons’ at that time. Indian Claims Commission Report on File Hills Indian Farm Colony, 2004.

\$20/member to vote on new membership ‘just before the Regina Exhibition’. In 2020, the \$20 is now \$15k and the same old bribery.

5.2.5 *kiskino tahiwew ona* (Discussion Notes)

Teachings (reminders, guidance): Wahkotowin, relations

Nikawiy would wait until summer holidays before taking us to visit with her family in Onion Lake. This was our summer trip and vacation. And this was where I learned how different we were on Peepeekisis. We were treated royally on our visits to mom’s home reserve and family. I understood unconditional love from my nokum, grandmother. We were greeted as long-lost family by all. It was always an adventure. This is the difference that wahkotowin, good relations, and kinship makes. I would listen to my cousins, near my age, speak Cree as their first language. For me, travelling 8 hours was like travelling to another country- one I knew I belonged to also. I would never have this sense of familial belonging to my own reserve.

As I grew older, I would be confronted by a much older Peepeekisis band member- he would not be the first- who clearly and angrily made it clear his feeling that we did not belong on the reserve. *We were placements*. We are one big family only when our numbers are needed.

In a recent summer, we have travelled to Onion Lake and stopped to pay our respects to the eight that were hung in North Battleford in retribution for the killing of nine settlers at Frog Lake. This is Canada’s largest mass hanging. Indian Residential School children were brought to witness this event. Nikawiy acknowledges that these are her capanak, ancestors. We learn again that our struggle is always about the land.

5.3 Pimihawi-pisim, Migrating Moon (October)

5.3.1 Home fire

Missing thanksgiving with nikawiy is like missing Christmas- colonial holidays that we celebrated mainly socially for the turkey dinner and the family gathering. I remember one Christmas as a young girl missing this holiday with my family- I was taken to visit a friend then. I really cannot remember how much was my idea to leave my family for the holiday, I remember loneliness missing my family, coming home after to open my gifts but a sense of missing something that was important to me.

I am remembering this as I go to pick up my take-out turkey meal- I cannot remember ever having to do this before. Now I have done this twice in two days from two different restaurants just to see how their meals were. My first meal from a local small-town café that I liked to stop in sometimes was not terrible. The second meal was a bad idea. It was later in the day so I knew not to expect a fresh meal and I was right.

I had a new appreciation for nikawiy's cooking especially for a turkey dinner. She told me once that this was something that she learned in the Residential School but as an older student. She also worked at the school for a short time after her and dad were married. She was expecting me then, her oldest child, and worked in the kitchen. She had terrible morning sickness so even the sight of one of the cooks who liked his garlic would cause her to run to the washroom to be sick. Through this work experience, she had no fear of cooking a turkey and her stuffing is like no other as she experimented with her recipe through the years perfecting this. We were always her happy guinea pigs. Now this evening, my meal was a mix of white and dark meat they said at the restaurant, but all I saw were dark meat pieces that were starting to dry

up...no cranberry sauce. I recall granny/nokum cooking cranberries in our kitchen. I thought of the jars of pickles, carrots, and beets that I picked up in a nearby small town that I passed through. I did no canning of my own but I could at least pick up something that was homemade to bring home I thought. The jars sat outside in my car. I threw my leftovers away.

The development of the second Covid-19 wave stopped me in my tracks when I took a moment to consider what was happening. My only plan had been to go home- my own travel just prior to this seemed innocent enough but not when I was reminded of how the situation was changing again. I was up early in my hotel room and texting nikawiy. In these particular circumstances, I knew I could not take a chance to endanger her or anyone in our family. She understood and supported my decision not to come home. I missed her and my family so much. I knew she missed me also. The saving grace was the idea of her birthday coming up in a few weeks that I would not miss then (I would actually miss her birthday for the same pandemic reasons).

Nikawiy was born November 1, 1945. She was born at the end of the Second World War. She will be 75 in a few weeks. I will do everything I can to be with her then...safely (again, I would have to cancel my trip due to the pandemic). My mother is always that sign of new life that comes from great challenge. She is resilience, tenacious spirit and strength- including how she loves. At times, the scales of colonization have had to be taken from my own eyes to see her clearly as she truly is, as Creator's gift to us. When I am able to see her clearly, then I might also see myself clearly, too, but in her shadow where I am protected always.

It has taken true bravery, sheer strength for nikawiy to build and balance the universe- the circle of her own stars, 'acak', the spirits, of her own family system around her. This is the responsibility of the home-fire that she must protect. This is the light and the warmth that she

carries with her. The breath she gives to us blows back on her home-fire now so that these flames reach into the sky and to the stars. Hiyhiy.

5.3.2 Nokumak, my grandmothers

I recall hearing of when the first Europeans came to our shores that these were men- were there any women? When they started to settle here or had to stay for extended periods, at least, they would start to take Indigenous wives. The French saw this as important to establish good relations through intermarriage. The English who took ‘country wives’ saw this differently perhaps. Over time, they would send for their English wives to join them in the ‘new world’ and generally abandon their Indigenous wives and children.

My late father George and his younger brother James, my late uncle, respectively married sisters Marie Alma and Marie Delma from Onion Lake. They moved from Onion Lake to Peepeekisis and became members there when they were married. Most often, since the imposition of the Indian Act, it is the women who will move to be with her husband. They say the greatest resource we have is our people. I think of the union of my parents and what has come of that- 6 children, 19 grandchildren, and now great-grandchildren.

The last time I was home, I looked at the pictures of my two grandmothers, the matriarchs of our families that hung on Nikawiy's wall. I think this may be the only picture of them together. I remember taking this picture of them together when my parents celebrated their 25th anniversary. We had a barbecue in our yard and invited family, friends. We did what we could with what resources we had to celebrate this day with them. It was a momentous occasion.

My grandmothers sat side by side. Between them they had 25 children- 14 and 11. I remember when my granny Quinney passed away, the number of her grandchildren and great-

grandchildren was in the 90s. This is my family. The two little old ladies in the picture are these precious and amazing roots. Nikawiy took the time to frame and hang that picture to honor our matriarchs. Without them none of us in our families would be here. They cherished every child in their care, no matter how big their families were. If possible, they loved their grandchildren even more. As their granddaughter, *chichims*,²¹ I know this.

But neither of my grandmothers would tell me much of where they came from. It was especially difficult for my maternal grandmother and I to talk very much at all because of the language barrier. Though I loved being in her presence and though these moments were truly healing experiences and memories for me, I was not able to speak Cree and my granny did not speak English. I recall making special requests for her to sing a song at times, the richness of that has fed my spirit and heart for a lifetime. If I were sitting next to her, I could feel the power and vibration of her song going through her and touching me. I was in awe. Even as a young girl, I was humbled and grateful to know such beauty. I truly felt special to be any part of my granny, the most beautiful woman in the world to me.

I loved visiting with my paternal grandmother- now this granny had no problem to talk to me. She was a social butterfly who so loved visiting and chatting. She would tell me stories about anything and loved to laugh. She would slap her hand on her lap and tears would come to her eyes- she had such a sense of humor. I see her always smiling. She loved home making and cooking. My granny was always very independent and she talked about working at an Indian handicraft store in Regina as she would make moccasins and knit Siwash sweaters.²² She also

²¹ *Chichims* is what my grandmother called me. Noosisim is how 'my grandchild' is said in Cree. *Chichims* was a special way she called me 'grandchild'. I ask nikawiy about this term and she explains it is diminutive for noosisim- a way to say "my little grandchild". My grandmother would still call her grandchildren 'little' even though they may be adults, we stayed 'little' to her. It is also a term of endearment this way, too. Nikawiy told me of how granny would also talk about her own face as 'little', too- she was older then and reverting to her childhood at times, it seemed.

²² "a heavy sweater of grey, unbleached wool with distinctive designs that were originally black-and-white but are now sometimes coloured: knitted originally by the Cowichan people of British Columbia. Also called: Cowichan

told me of when she tried to learn to drive a car- she backed into something like a garbage can and scared herself then so never learned to drive. I recall how she told this with regret. I know my granny was hardworking all of her life, raising her family, growing her garden, cooking, sewing. I also remember hearing that she also took care of some elderly men relatives who were sick along with taking care of her family.

Both of my grandmothers were hardworking. They also took care of themselves- my maternal grandmother sewed her own clothes and always wore a scarf to cover her head. She had long braids all of her life and when she was older, I knew that she had shorter, white/grey braids tucked under her scarf. My paternal grandmother kept her wavy hair blunt cut a little above her shoulders. She, too, always wore a dress. I had never seen my grandmothers wear anything but dresses or long skirts, never slacks/pants. Despite their appearances, they also knew hard labour that was decidedly not the work of women. Nikawiy would talk of her mother being able to do the work of men- stooking hay for long days working for farmers or weeding long rows of sugar beets in the Taber, Alberta fields.

I think of my grandmother's labour and their families. I think of the first Indigenous women who supported the first European men who came to our shores. I hear the voice of an elder women in a documentary proclaiming that 'we were not waiting on the shores when you came over with our hands outstretched asking for welfare'. No, if our Indigenous ancestors did not assist the first Europeans then they would not be here now. The children of these unions would also be part of a new foundation for this country. I have heard this said, that our greatest resource is the people. This is the wealth of our families.

Indian sweater, siwash, siwash sweater." Collins English Dictionary. Copyright © HarperCollins Publishers. The Cowichan Indian siwash sweater was popular with other tribes and regions. I recall my paternal grandmother knitting these in beautiful animal/graphic designs.

5.3.3 *kiskino tahiwew ona* (Discussion Notes)

Teachings (reminders, guidance): Keepers of the Home Fire

On November 13, 2022, approximately a month after meeting with Chief and Council to request separation and a new band, a meeting was scheduled at the Treaty Four Governance tipi in Fort Qu'Appelle. It was a larger venue to accommodate more membership. I attended with nikawiy, my brother Bunna, my sister Angie. They had also accompanied me to the Chief and Council where we made our request for band separation and a new band. I would refer to 2004, when our late dad went to see a lawyer with three other band members to seek separation. I would learn of this years later when I also went to see the same lawyer. We were following our late dad's footsteps. He was *Walking Buffalo* and as a buffalo in a winter storm, he was facing into the storm to break a path for others to follow and so were following him now.

We sat in the governance tipi (this is an actual man-made tipi building in Fort Qu'Appelle on the Treaty Four reserve) and I was reminded that women own the tipis. They keep the home fires- their name *iskwew* is derived from *iskotew*, 'heat', 'fire'. They are responsible for this ownership; I think *responsibility* and *ownership* may be congruous in their meaning, particularly from a nehiyaw (Cree) perspective. Furthermore, when it comes to land, nehiyaw may not have considered land as private property but they did have territories and regions. The early Indigenous language maps would mark such territories and regions.

Nehiyaw *iskwew* are key wealth holders in our nehiyaw economies this way. I also think of the great labour that is involved with this responsibility due to the need for constant movement; even today, it is laborious and stressful to make even one household move. As Indigenous people, we are fluid in ongoing transition between our First Nations and urban centers. We are constantly balancing two worlds in different ways including where we live with

our families. Very often, it is the women who bear this responsibility as they still are responsible for the home fires and the shelter of these home fires.

After the election, my 'normal' life came crashing back on me with all of its pent-up demands. There was also another demand now to address development for a new band, for separation, as a type of an amalgamated band. *Ahkimemohk*, "don't give up", would come to me. There was more. There was no time for the words, for the teachings. There was only the 'doing', survival. *Ahkimemohk, keep going forward. Ekiya-pakicik, don't give up, don't let go.*

We sat with *nikawiynan, our mother*. She also took her place with us and did so to also show her position in this realm of governance. She was our clan mother and in matters of governance, she would always sit with us- visibly and actively, responsibly. Her quiet strength and power were deliberate and felt in this circle.

5.4 *Iyikopiwi-pisim*, Frost Moon (November)

Nokum (my grandmother) had thirteen children and one adopted son who was actually her nephew, John Watchmaker of Kehewin. She would give birth to all of her children at home with the exception of her last-born son Jimmy who would be born in a hospital. I asked nikawiy once, exactly where were you born? She answered “on the land”. Nikawiy was born on November 1, 1945. It is possible she was born on the land at that time of year as they lived in tents as much as they could but also possible that she was born just at home. I remember my grandparents lived in a small grey two-room house on Onion Lake. Two years ago, nikawiy and I went to visit my uncle Jimmy at his home on Onion Lake that is near the location of their childhood home that is no longer standing. My mother was born the year the Second World War was ended. In nokum’s second family, nikawiy is the fourth oldest in this family of seven and the oldest of the two daughters in nokum’s second family. What I witnessed in my life was the close ties between all of the sisters. Nikawiy’s younger sister Delma would also move to marry on to Peepeekisis. As sisters, they married brothers George and Jimmy so our families have always been especially close.

5.4.1 Sisters

I am texting my mother on a cold fall rainy morning. I am preparing to go back to the provincial archives in Edmonton, Alberta so I am asking her information about her mother and father, their birthdates, their parents, the days they passed away. I vaguely remember the connections and recall through stories I was told. I had requested this information from nikawiy before and she did not respond. It is unlike her so I know enough to come back to her another

time. Sometime later, perhaps weeks later, I ask again. This time she tells me that she needs time to think about this, she has had an emotional week, and that she lets me know this is also unlike her. But I understand what she is saying. *Eyipsisiyan*, she has done the best to her ability that day and she needs to rest now. Why should it be so hard for her to answer relatively simple questions about her parents? My mother actually does not really know her grandparents. She barely remembers meeting either her maternal or paternal grandparents. It is this struggle for her to know this information about her own grandparents that is also emotional.

As we would drive past the school on Onion Lake named for Chief Joe Taylor, I would know that this was an ancestor but was not clear on exactly how. My youngest sister Angelina would graduate from high school from here as she had decided to move to Onion Lake for her grade twelve. In her own way, she decided to ‘make relations’ beyond the times that we would visit usually for a funeral these days. It was not always easy for her there on her own and despite her relatives, she could feel isolated but she persevered. Nisimis (my younger sibling) made her own new friends as well as got to know others better. It was a great and proud moment for my parents and the family that was able to travel to attend her graduation. Years later, they would change this high school to an elementary school. Another larger high school, Eagle View, was built at another part of the reserve that was actually near the site of where St. Anthony’s residential school used to stand. Today Chief Taylor school looks small and it is hard to believe it was once the high school for all of Onion Lake. The population of Onion Lake today is around 6,000 on reserve. It is one of the largest First Nations in Saskatchewan.

This morning my mother texts me to answer my question. “Our grandmother’s name is Veronique Taylor, our mom’s mom. Our dad was born 1913 according to the records and yeah, our mom was born on that year 1908. Our dad’s mom was Marie Lavivier. Don’t know how to spell her last name.” She clarifies that it was another relative who told her that her maternal

grandmother's name was Marie. I am confused because of the story that I was told, I thought Veronique was her grandmother. My mother reiterates, *Veronique Taylor was my mom's mom and that is what Delma is saying*. My mother refers to my aunty Delma, her sister. I think they must be visiting at the time my mother is texting me. If they are both on the reserve, my aunt will come over in the mornings to visit with mom. Although my mother is older, it is my aunt that has taken care of some of the family stories for my grandmother's lineage. She has told them to me before but now it is the first time for me to attempt to document this information. When my mom wants clarification now, she refers to her sister.

Growing up, I was fortunate to know all of my grandparents. I did not see them all of the time especially on nikawiy's side but still we would visit them or they would visit us and these were always special occasions. I especially was attached to my maternal grandmother and this was a profound impact I would feel all of my life. Just this summer, I spoke in a circle at a language gathering that was facilitated by my mother. I remembered how my grandmother did not speak English and I did not speak Cree. Yet, she was my hero. What does it feel like not to know my language, my tears fall to say how it hurts. I could not speak to my hero and yet I learned so much from her. The greatest lesson will always be the unconditional love that she had for me, her *chichims*. And she was and will always be the most beautiful woman to me. I have always felt special to be any part of her beauty. The stories of my grandmother in her younger life that would come to be related to me by my mother, my aunt, or my uncle let me see her as a young woman and then as a mother. I loved her all the more.

Nikawiy, my mother, texts me now to clarify,

My mom's mother (Veronique Taylor) was very kind and died at an early age and so were her two siblings, a young man and a girl. She was left alone and her grandmother had to bring her up, who was mean to her and tried to marry her off to an old man when she was a young woman, I believe at 16 years old. Her grandfather pitied her and turned the man away with his horse.

My grandmother, Marie Cecile, was the daughter of Louie Watchmaker and Veronique Taylor of Kehiwin First Nation in Alberta. Interestingly, this was near Elk Point (km east of St. Paul), the home of Poitras relatives that we would come to meet at Poitras family reunions. When Louie lost his wife, Veronique, my grandmother's mother, would go to live with her grandparents Joe Taylor and his wife on Onion Lake. Louie Watchmaker would remarry and have a daughter Yvonne that was not much older than his granddaughter, my mother, and my mother would call her aunt. Yvonne was the half-sister to my grandmother. Yvonne would marry Ernest Jenkins and they would live near Elk Point. I remember going to visit Yvonne and her family at their home there. As a younger girl, nikawiy would recall going to visit Yvonne who had her own horse and buggy. That was something that seemed to impress nikawiy a lot. She knew that Yvonne was a beloved daughter of nikawiy's grandfather Louie.

I am grateful to know the kindness that my granny's grandfather Joe Taylor had for her to save her from a forced marriage to a much older man. Perhaps this was one of the attributes that led to him being named Chief. It is sad for me know how my granny lost her mother and siblings and to be on her own at a young age. I am grateful to know that my granny also had a kind mother. So many years later as a very young girl, I remember coming to visit my granny on Onion Lake. We arrived very late; I still remember the car headlights against the trees in the night darkness as we drove along a dirt road leading to my grandparent's home on Onion Lake. And then being carried in to their small house to sleep beside my granny on her bed. I see her in the dim light shadows making room for me beside her and lifting the blankets for me to lay beside her. I hear her calling me *chichims* before I am off to sleep again. The lessons of kindness that my grandmother learned from her mother, father and her grandfather were powerful lessons that would also be passed on to me. There were also many experiences and

lessons of sadness and cruelty but my grandmother would choose only to accept kindness in her own nature.

Marie Cecile Watchmaker would live with her grandparents Joe and Veronique Taylor on Onion Lake Cree Nation. In those days, Onion Lake was known as an Indian reserve and reserves then were not called First Nations yet. Onion Lake today is now known as a Cree Nation as it acknowledges that it has always been and continues to be a Nation. Nokum, my grandmother, would eventually choose to marry Joe Naistus. A story my uncle Clarence tells me is how nokum lost her first child as a baby. He tells me that this experience devastated her and of how she was inconsolable. When I tell this to my mother, she is surprised and did not seem to know this. Nokum would have six children: Alveena, Allan, Alphonse, Bruce, Agnes, Dan with her husband Joe and one adopted son, John Watchmaker. One of the stories I had heard was that her husband enjoyed dancing and after going out to a dance one winter night, he got pneumonia and would die from this leaving my grandmother alone with seven children. Another story is that he was working in a cold well on a very hot day and this was how he got pneumonia. It is interesting to me how these are very different stories except for the fact that he died of pneumonia.

Nokum would marry her second husband, my grandfather, Charles Quinney of Onion Lake. Her children had been taken to go to the Indian residential school in Onion Lake and this was how my grandmother came to be in Onion Lake to be close to visit her children. This was also how she came to meet my grandfather Charles Quinney who lived on Onion Lake. In her second family, she would have another seven children: Duncan, Donald, Gordon, Marie Almannikawiy, Marie Delma, Clarence, and Jimmy. When my grandmother passed away, she had almost 100 great-grandchildren. This was truly her wealth. I think of her losing her first child not knowing the great family she was to eventually have. How she loved this first lost child was

how she loved each of her children. And if she could love her grandchildren more than I know she did. She would lose one of her grandchildren as a baby once again to pneumonia and this would mark an indelible change in my grandmother for the rest of her life.

Nikawiy and I are visiting at my uncle Jimmy's on Onion Lake. The old grey house of my grandparent's is gone now. It is one of my earliest memories of visiting here. It was a small two-room house that was a childhood home for my mother and her five siblings. Her oldest brother Duncan was already on his own with his own family. My grandmother's first family with Joe Naistus were older and also on their own with their own families and lives. When Joe passed away, my grandmother would marry my grandfather Charles Quinney. My grandmother had seven children in her second family with my grandfather and they would raise six of them including my mother in this little two room grey house. My uncle's house today is only a short distance from where my grandparent's house used to stand so this area is very familiar to me.

I recall my late uncle Gordon's house being near the place where my uncle Jimmy's is today. The house my uncle lives in now also used to be my late uncle Donald's. With the exception of my uncle Duncan who went to live with his wife, my late auntie Flora Lewis, my other uncles stayed close to this area and start their young families. So, I recall visiting them all here and all my cousins.

When my mother married my father and came to my dad's band Peepeekisis to start their family, my auntie Delma and uncle Clarence would come to visit. They were close to us as we grew up. My aunt would also marry my dad's brother Jimmy so we were especially close to my auntie's family. My uncle Clarence also lived with our families when we were younger.

As children, my mother would sometimes pick us up right from the school on our last day before summer break and bundle us into the car for a trip to Onion Lake. It was always an exciting time for us. Eight hours in the car with our tribe was a long journey then. It still is. We

were not a family that took conventional summer or anytime vacations so this trip was our adventure. For me, it was always that journey to another world that was the same, yet different, from my home.

Today we are happy to find my uncle Jimmy at home with his son and grandson. His son Brandon is called pakan, peanut, in Cree. His son, my uncle's young grandson, is just called peanut. He is maybe six years old, inquisitive, friendly. He is his mosom's (grandfather's) constant companion. Our visits here are rare now. Different families lived in this house for years now. My uncle had also lived in the old folk's home for some time. Today he is all that is left of the memories of my mother's childhood home. So, the day that we stop in is a special day. My uncle is happy to see us. He visits with my mother in Cree and Brandon serves us a meal and coffee. We go outside on the beautiful summer afternoon to take pictures.

Later on, my mother tells me to drive to a location nearby. I take a turn off the main road to a side dirt road that leads to a house in the distance. We stop and pull over on top of a bluff that overlooks a large slough. I turn on the recorder and hand it to nikawiy before I go outside to take more pictures. She records herself in Cree talking about this location and memories from her childhood that she wanted to share.

Another time, I am sitting with my mom and auntie Delma as they are visiting at home on Peepeekisis. My aunt often comes over to visit my mother when they are both at home. I am asking nikawiy about her childhood again and she is happy to have my auntie there to help her with these memories. The thing I notice is how they have almost no memories of their grandparents.

They have some memory of their late mosom Louis Watchmaker, my grandmother's father, from Kehewin, Alberta. My auntie remembers him as being quite stern. My auntie being a very timid child would notice this. My mother has other memories of visiting him with her

auntie Yvonne who was actually close in age to her. My capan (great-grandfather) Louis lost his first wife and re-married so his daughter Yvonne would be my grandmother's half-sister and my mother's aunt. Yvonne was an only child and my mother recalled that even though Yvonne was a young girl she had her own horse and buggy so my mother would go riding with her.

Both of my maternal grandparents actually came from small families. My mosom (grandfather) Charlie had only one living sister Ina. I recall a story of my mosom as a young boy waking up beside his brother who had passed away in the night. It seemed like it was a terrible illness that many were dying from and I often thought it was smallpox but now today I think it was the Spanish flu. My nokum (grandmother) had one sister who also passed away but had one son John that my grandmother would adopt as her own. By the time my grandmother married my grandfather, John was also on his own with his own family on Kehewin so I do not really remember him other than going to visit later in years. Of course, the other times we might see him and his family was at funerals including the funeral of my grandmother.

One of the stories that nikawiy (my mother) and nikawiys (my little mother) tell is of walking through a slough as they were going to collect eggs and also do their own hunting. So, this required them to walk through the slough. At one point, there was a dip in the ground so that my mother went under the water and almost drowned. They were on their own as young girls but this independence did not mean that they were separate from their family. There was an ever-present delicate balance to the reality of living on the land where life could not be taken for granted.

Nikawiy and her younger kisimis (younger sibling) had to contribute to their family's survival and wellbeing. They were already contributing in this way to their family and even as children they were a part of this economy. In later years, I would learn of the term "good life" in an economic class and would think of how we use the term miyo pimitasiwin for "good life"

also. During the summers they would also live in tents. They had to haul water from the sloughs to drink and then it was safe to drink also. They had responsibilities to be able to make fire, cook, watch after the younger siblings.

Nikawiy, as an older sister, perhaps claimed more authority at times than her younger sister especially so as children. Today we might be sitting having breakfast and one of nikawiy's favorite memory of is that of using orange marmalade for her toast. And every time this would trigger the memory of when she was small and they were living in a tent for the summer. They had a stove for warmth and cooking as well as a 'grub box' to store their food. For whatever reason, the two sisters had a squabble and nikawiy turned her back on her sister who was crying. My aunt went to the grub box and took a piece of bannock and was spreading orange marmalade on top of it for a snack. Suddenly her hands flew up to her face and in a circular motion, the bannock with the marmalade was now being spread on her face. My aunt had had enough and amazing to everyone, she retaliated by sneaking up behind her sister to reach in front to pull the bannock to nikawiy's face. I am sure the thrill of revenge for my aunt was short-lived as my grandmother appeared and scolded them. For one thing, it was dangerous to be squabbling near the stove; and secondly they were wasting food. I am not sure if it mattered so much that they were fighting. The story has lived on in infamy in our family now. We never fail to have a good laugh- even nikawiy who enjoys her marmalade all the more with a good story.

5.4.2 Keteyeya (Elder)

Nikawiy has just smudged, had breakfast, let the two little dogs out. Last night she sat with me at her dining room table to let me know her schedule. She shows me how busy she was last month and laments a little that she is not so busy this month. She could actually accept more

new work commitments and is contemplating this. Another time, she mentions to me that she cannot maintain this level of her energy and time for more than a year or two she thinks as she feels it in her body. She lets me know her free time and I put this in my own schedule so I know when I can have some final research time with her. We plan a trip to Calgary to the Glenbow museum with my brother. Nikawiy and I are both anxious to get our own copies of Joe Dion's and Edward Ahenakew's books there on the Cree people. We know they mention Onion Lake and people from there. In general, they speak of this history in Treaty Six.

Nikawiy's work is not that of an elder, but she also still teaches Cree. I notice that elders such as herself are in demand because of their language and ceremonial knowledges. Nikawiy can speak the language, she can do the ceremonies, and she also has a Western education background including education, social work, counselling. Her varied background and skills allow her to go different directions as required. She retired as a full-time elementary teacher a few years ago now. But what this did was also free her to do this other work where she is constantly in demand in our local Indigenous communities. Nikawiy accomplishes this while finishing a different phase of her post-secondary education and working on a Cree curriculum for her Master's in Education (she convocated in Spring 2021). This is her legacy work. Her work as an elder is critical to supporting families and community who are healing yet from the colonial experience of the Residential schools. Nikawiy can speak from first-hand experience and her own healing journey. Not least of all, she is elder, keteyaya in our own family.

At my age, nikawiy had already been in this role of elder. She was only in her forties when she was offered tobacco and asked to say prayers from another community that had few Cree speakers left. It was the language but also nikawiy's traditional knowledge that gave her this ability to answer this request. Our elders are no longer 'old ones' necessarily. In spite of the

demand for elders, there is always a question of their support.²³ Their work can be full-time, but they are not compensated this way. Where are the elders following to take their place? I simply may have a hard time to see myself as an ‘elder’ but I also acknowledge the gift of their teachings that not everyone inherits. The invaluable work of nikawiy’s generation of keteyayak and elders, knowledge keepers, is irreplaceable.

I sit at nikawiy’s dining room table. There is a peace and comfort here like no other. This is the small home that she shared with my late father until he died. For the following year, nikawiy could not bear to be here without him so she had moved to rent a house in a nearby village. In that year she also forgot to register her driver’s license and only realized this the following year when she went to renew them. These were two examples of how nikawiy experienced the grief of losing her partner. They had been married 43 years when dad passed away on November 7, 2005. We had celebrated nikawiy’s birthday only the previous week. Dad ate Chinese food with us and had a piece of nikawiy’s cake. Nikawiy and I spent the last night of his life with dad in the Fort Qu’Appelle All Nations Healing hospital. Family were called early the next morning and nohtawiy, our father, left on his spirit journey in the first light of the morning. It was always his favorite time of day. As I sit at nikawiy’s table, I am surrounded by the presence and memories of dad.

Recently we remembered a story of the *old house* as we simply call it. It was only a few yards away from the present house of nikawiy. The first family home that was truly ours was still not a new house. When dad was Chief, he had arranged to move six war era homes from Cutbank, Saskatchewan 320 km to our reserve Peepeekisis. He purchased them for \$1 each and

²³ There is ongoing discussion for how to compensate elders for their work in ceremony, institutions, communities, etc. How do you put a price on what they offer? I have heard that they are not paid for their work but they are paid for their expenses that facilitates their attendance at events. My mother will say that ‘tobacco comes first’ so there are these required protocols also.

incurred the moving costs so that six families from our reserve could have a home. Our family of eight had our first home. Through the years we had lived on the reserve, we had different houses including a teacherage attached to the old one classroom school that was burned down several years ago now. Now the two-story army era house with 3 small bedrooms and a finished basement was like a mansion to us. After several years and when, mercifully, no one was home, lightning struck this house. During our visit around mom's dining room table, my second youngest brother Mike is telling us of how he had just left the house to go visit during a thunderstorm. I no longer lived at home then and was out of province. By the time I came home to visit at Christmas, we had a new home near our old house. The lightning had come through the roof and through the second floor to go through our parent's bedroom on the first floor. All of the wiring was damaged. It made more sense just to build a new home rather than repair all of the damage that was done by the lightning strike. The old house stood for several more years to serve as storage until it was taken down and taken apart.

Nohtawiy, dad, late George Poitras, has been gone fourteen years now since 2005. I recall the ice storm that we had then. His funeral had to take place in Lebret on November 10th to avoid the ceremonies that would take place for the Veterans on Remembrance Day, November 11. I recall the comfort of the speakers who had travelled to attend his wake the night before. There were wonderful old friends and colleagues from Saskatoon and relatives from Key and Onion Lake. Some of these great orators and storytellers were mesmerizing. They each in their own beautiful ways honored the memory of dad.

I remember the song my cousin Dwayne Lewis sang that was so appropriate and touching. *I am going to lay my weight down at your feet and rest here for a while, I'm feeling low, Lord, I feel defeat, I feel like I just walked my last mile so I will rest here for a while...* My

father suffered so in the last years of his life. I never saw him lose his inner bright light and “good morning” at his favorite time of day. Tapwe, he would rest now.

I been to church, Lord, I have been to school but I couldn't find you there so I defied them, I broke all the rules. There was a time early in my father's life and as a young student at the Residential School when he thought he would become a priest. At that time, it was a noble profession and calling. My father was deeply spiritual and loved his faith. Instead, after he graduated from Grade Twelve at the Qu'Appelle Indian Residential School, he went on to Teacher's College in Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan for two years and would be a teacher for thirteen years. My mother tells a story of dad coming home to Peepeekisis with her as a young bride and soon starting their family. One of the elders Edwin Nokusis remarked that dad left to be a Father but came home a *father* instead. Dad was 25 when he married mom.

I just didn't seem to care when I didn't find you there. Oh, lord, I've been a fool. Dad would be reconciled now with his beloved Maker, the trauma and the struggle on all the colonial battlefields would be laid to rest now.

I wanna fly like the free bird flies.
There's a blue sky calling me.
Then I know that I will always be in the shelter of your smile,
You were with me all the while
waiting patiently. (Errol Ranville)

My dear cousin Dwayne with his gift of voice and song is still a healing memory for me. I will always be grateful!

I recall from this evening as well the visit of dad's old school mate Walter Linklater and his wife who was also a schoolmate of nikawiy's from the Onion Lake Residential School, Maria Linklater (nee Horse). I remember how they made the trip from Saskatoon despite the short notice and bad weather conditions. When they stood to speak, I remember Walter telling stories of dad from the school and teacher's college with his great sense of humor and respect. Years

later, I would interview Walter for a documentary that I did on dad that I called *Buffalo: A Memorial* and the memorials we did for him for four years after he passed away. They played basketball together and went to Teacher's College together. In many ways, their life experiences would be similar to my parents. Maria also spoke at dad's wake and she made a point to sing a woman's Honor Song for nikawiy who had just lost her life partner. The smudge, the stories, and the song were so incredibly healing and loving for all of us but yes, especially for nikawiy.

Just days before, nikawiy stood at the foot of dad's hospital bed to ask him if she should go to a work event that weekend as it meant her flying to BC. Dad agreed that she should go and so I took her to Regina to catch this flight. We were there minutes after they let someone else catch this flight but now they refused to let nikawiy do the same. We had encountered some other delays as well. Nikawiy decided that she would catch a flight the next day and we returned back to dad's hospital room. That would be dad's last night. Nikawiy and I would spend that night with him and call the family early in the morning. My sister Diane would make it there to witness dad's final moments. The rest of our big family of his children, grandchildren, brothers, sisters and their families would come in later during this day as we now prepared for dad's final arrangements.

I recall nikawiy sitting with one of her sisters, I think it is auntie Agnes. When my auntie lost her husband Tony Kahpeaysewat from Moosomin First Nation, my mother and auntie Delma would travel to be with her then. Nikawiy travelled to be at her other brother-in-law's Norman Chief's funeral as well. She recalls they stopped to sleep on the road and were late but made it to the burial. It was important for her to be with her sister Alveena then, too. Now it was my aunts who gathered to be with nikawiy.

The snow is on the ground where my father's grave was dug by hand by some of the men of the McNab family who lived down the road from us. They were good friends of my brother

Brian and helped out of respect for our family and for dad. It would have been easier and was more common now just to use the backhoe to dig and cover the graves. I know dad would have been truly honored by all of these last respects and homage. I try to remember if the snow was falling then? I see people moving by the grave while letting the dirt from their hands fall on dad's coffin in the frozen ground. I sense movement in this memory. It is a time of transition and transformation for my mother from wife to widow. Nohtawiy, my father, paskwaw mostos kahpimohtet, Walking Buffalo, goes on ahead to make the trail for us in winter. We follow his footsteps in the storms to come.

5.4.3 he chose you

mom, dad would call you... even in a crowd
and you'd say people would look
when he called out
and then look at you
when he found you
could you really be his mom

you were sweet 16
listening to Johnny Horton
everybody was crazy about him then
a tomboy sailing down a snowy hill
with your girlfriend who would tumble with you
and fortuitously knock the wart off your forehead
with her winter boot
you were always grateful to her for that
maybe it was then dad noticed you

he was twenty-five
a teacher in his suit
teaching your younger sister and her teammates
how to play basketball in an old barn
they went on to become champions
he was good
and engaged to a monias woman
what did he see in you tomboy
smoking and making home brew
out in the residential school play yard
that wart was gone... but still

they all said someone else watched you, too
that when dad married you
another heart was broken
this other man called your younger brother 'nistaw'
and carried him like a little sack of potatoes on his back
until you were married and then he never carried him again
all for dad
the monias man and woman loved you and dad
sometimes you are angry when you remember this
dad chose you tomboy

you are old enough to decide that you will not go back now
you pretend to be ill and smear salve on your eyes
when dad comes to get you
he had obliged the nun's request
and so, with greasy eyes
you went back with him
maybe it was then he noticed you

soon after you were 'dating'
dad sitting in a bar and you sitting outside waiting for him
you would order orange crush pop, cheezies, player's plain no filter
you wore a watch but couldn't tell the time when dad asked you
and this is my favorite part
dad taught you how to tell time

you never told me until just a few years ago
how much you missed my father that summer
all my life I had only heard of how he married
this innocent child who didn't know how to tell time
or what she was doing
you never ever said how much you missed my father that summer

you said he would write letters to you
and you would write back but didn't have much to say
you were so excited to meet him at the local fair
that you left the bread you were making
so, it spilled out of the pans through the night
and then he didn't come after all

dad is weak now, sitting with us in the van
as we travel through the cool, rainy night going home
you tell me this story like you know it is time to
fess up that you had always loved my father after all
and I know why this is a hard thing for you to do
dad is sleeping now and doesn't hear
you're always leaving him

like leaving your shadow
dad loves this ride like we all do
and his sleep is as contented as it can be

I see your love story like some old book
with all blank pages
the journey of the book itself is its story
at once comic, tragic, adventure, horror
child's rhyme, country song, dysfunctional how-to
funding application, photo album, history
sociology, psychology, art
cook book, trashy novel, hymn book
bible, scrapbook...
the book was lost a few times
and there were times when you both tried your best to destroy it
until tonight, I had only glimpsed at it the odd time
sort of knew it was there but didn't really know about it
now I see how gently you hold it in your arms
all its ripped and tattered pages stained with life
just before you tuck it away again

mom, dad calls you in a crowd
and you turn around to find him

my dad could see the future in you
he knew you were what we all needed
even if no one else could see what he saw then
how many men can see this in a woman
even I knew his vision was clear and sure

there was a young girl learning about stairs
for the first time in her life
when she is allowed to go home
she discovers a small bird in her house
she runs and chases after it
until she catches it in her hands
and then with all her strength
twists its neck
there is that boy who innocently flirts with her
at the top of the stairs
with all her strength, she punches him in the stomach
there is that boy who sits in front of her in class
whose head is always shaved because he is always running away
with a pencil, she scribbles on the back of his head
and then she runs away, too

in years to come, you would fight my dad also because you had to
each of you falling down stairs and twisting little bird necks

dad doesn't call you mom anymore
maybe just in his dreams
I think he knows your name now

-Evelyn Poitras, 2005

5.4.4 *kiskino tahiwew ona* (Discussion Notes)

Teachings (reminders, guidance): *niwiciwakan*, the one who walks with me

I am listening to nikawiy talk about her late partner, nohtawiy (my father). She explains that he is *niwiciwakan*, 'the one who walks with me'. What is implied is that this is an equal partnership though their roles might be different- they were complementary. Together, they were the heads of the *peyakoskan* (family, one unit). When nikawiy lost her partner in 2005, she would not walk with any other again.

Nikawiy shared with me that when her and my late father might have had disagreements, that the children would never be used in their arguments. She would not interfere or withhold us ever from our father. She had this much respect despite anything that was happening in their own private relationship. Today, I really appreciate this. I see young couples who are immature and do not hesitate to be damaging or irresponsible in their disagreements with whatever 'power' they might have. Very sadly, there may be very serious consequences to such young *peyakoskan*, families.

Nikawiy also comments to me one time that she is one of many widows, *nehiyaw iskwewak* (Cree/Indigenous women) who have partners who would die before them. In general, their Indigenous life spans are shortened for various reasons but the men were leaving in greater numbers much sooner. *Nehiyaw iskwewak*, Cree women, have that greater responsibility to carry on alone and very often, as widows.

Chapter Six
Kiwetinohk Pison
(North, Winter)

6.1 Pawaca kinasisi-pisim, Frost Exploding Moon (December)

6.1.1 Round Dance

The fall day my mother was brought to the St. Anthony's Indian Residential School on Onion Lake, the day she struggled to find and elevate her way up these stairs as she had never seen stairs before, the first step and entry into these doors was the beginning of a particular season of winter for her. This was her formal experience with colonization. Today in her personal practice of deconstruction and decolonization, she talks about the winter round dance before she went to the Residential School as intrinsic to her teachings on the natural curriculum that she is articulating in her academic work.

The round dance she speaks of is similar to the chicken dance held in a round hall. It is social but that is only one aspect of this event. It is also very spiritual, *sacred* to use a word that has almost lost its meaning through overuse and appropriation (conversely, *nikawiy* would tell me that there were words that they would speak in Cree that were so seldom used due to their sanctity). This is central to her work. It is among her earliest and most powerful memories as a child being with her family at this event. It was how she was socialized as part of her family and community and as a young girl. These were among her greatest teachings for Indigenous knowledge as *Nehiyaw, iskwew, isiniywak*. She is watching the dance, listening to the songs, then she is sleeping, being woken up as she is being carried outside into the cold winter night air,

she is being bundled under blankets on top of straw, she hears the bells of the horses as they pull their sleigh home under the night stars. From this vibrant winter night in the arms of her family she would be taken to experience a different winter of colonialism on stepping through the doors of the Indian Residential School on Onion Lake, Saskatchewan.

6.1.2 Colonial Winter

Winter denotes an ending but it is not death. We know life sleeps then. Early in my post-secondary education at the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College (SIFC), I learned of Sarain Stump and his book “There are my people sleeping”. Many times, I would recall these words in seeing some sadness regarding Indian people. *There are my people sleeping*. For a time, people would come to question the authenticity of Sarain Stump as an Indian (although his appearance seemed clearly Indigenous). He died tragically in a drowning accident in Mexico as a young man. Yet he had already made an indelible contribution to the development of Indian artists and their work in Saskatchewan. A particular school of artists and their works emerged under his influence and tutelage. In ways, Stump is attributed as the spark to ignite this development.

At times, it boggles my mind that I can actually be witness to such early developments as this Indian Art movement, the development of the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College (precursor to the First Nations University of Canada), Saskatchewan Indian Education (my father in 1957 was among the first Indian teachers in Saskatchewan), etcetera. I myself would be the first Indian to have convoked from the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College in federation with the University of Regina with a Bachelor of Arts in Film and Video Studies in 1989. I received my paper degree from the University of Regina and my leather degree from the

Saskatchewan Indian Federated College. The paper degree was mailed to me and I received the leather degree at an event the College hosted for its graduates. For me, it was a swanky affair with a nice meal and my parents with me. Three years later, I would once again don the SIFC baby blue gown this time for a BA in Indian Studies. At that time, it did not occur to me to consider an MA after my BA.

By all accounts, 1989 is relatively recent for such “firsts”. Perhaps this indicates a place in history that is really quite close and not so removed at all from the experience of the first onslaught of colonization here on the northern plains in the Treaty Four and Treaty Six territories. It is an ongoing sticking point that we are generally told to ‘get over it’ and that the actual experience of colonial dispossession was ‘passed/past’ now, over? I recall my own understanding that I was not to cry over this history and then my later realization that my own mosom’s (grandfather’s) memories and stories were not even one generation removed from the buffalo.

Treaty Four was entered into in 1874 in the Qu’Appelle valley that is today a 20-minute drive from Peepeekisis. Our reserve had been surveyed in the late 1800s and our band was encouraged and expected to move on to the reserve to begin farming. Chief Peepeekisis refused and went back to the buffalo hunt one more year. My mosom Enoch was born in 1913 so only about 30 years after Chief Peepeekisis’ last buffalo hunt and my mosom was the baby of five children. This personal realization stunned me and the buffalo became very real to me then. I felt this sustenance in my blood in a very real way ever since. The convenience of ‘getting over’ colonization was a sham prerogative that denied a fundamental truth to our history; its’ convenience was and is erasure. I touch colonization with my fingertips every day. That is how real it is to me.

6.1.3 Intervention

I sit with my coffee this Saturday morning that feels like spring once again. We are still waiting for the Northwind to let us know when he has gone home. I am now home and the quiet of this morning seems rare these days.

I am thinking of nikawiy and my recent visit with her. I feel a peace in her home when I am there. At other times, her home was always full of the energy of her visitors and family. In the pandemic and at this time in her life, there is a sense of her contentment that I feel throughout her space now- a sense of settling as she has been fixing her little home to suit her now. She arranges Tiny's space also as there is just two of them here now. We started the most recent transformation last summer with her deck building and indoor painting. At Christmas, her grandson's pine tree that was nurtured from a little seedling in a Styrofoam cup now stood several feet after so many years. Another grandson had come over to his kokum's (grandmother's) to put lights on this tree that stretched from her house with an extension cord. It really was brilliant and a wonderful sight to see this tree off almost into a field with its blinking lights as I drove up on a winter night to visit for the holidays. Mom would keep these lights on and her Christmas tree up for some time after the holidays. She especially loved them this year.

It is hard to recall times of crisis that nikawiy would experience but there were certainly these times. I would think of her as fearless in situations that I do not think I could do the same. I recall a time when we were in a crowded restaurant and someone a few tables from us had some emergency- I think he might have been choking. As soon as we could tell that there was something happening, a commotion, mom did not hesitate to jump up from our table and go to where the crowd was gathering. She pushed her way through to see what the problem was. Dad and I sat at our table and wondered what was going on. Of course, people were told to return to

return to their tables and soon enough, emergency personnel arrived to take care of the situation. I think the person might have been taken to the hospital but it seemed he survived okay.

In another very serious situation, a young woman approached mom to request her personal assistance to intervene in domestic violence circumstances. Again, nikawiy did not hesitate to do everything she could immediately to address this by calling on assistance and ensuring the safety of the woman and child. I believe that someone else might not have taken the same actions. This was also at a time when there was much fewer social services available. The reality was that this was potentially very dangerous.

In our own family situations, nikawiy has also been called on for her assistance in our own times of crisis. This includes our immediate family as well as within our larger family. At one time, she was also a Social Worker who worked on the File Hills four reserves including our own. As they say, the hardest place to work can be your own reserve. To this day, nikawiy draws on her training and on her character to always stand up to protect or ensure safety when this is needed. She is petite but a tower house of strength. She is also most kind and loving.

Today I let her know that a family friend has passed away. She had told me about seeing him last fall and that he was very sick then. She sat with him then and offered her prayers. This is the work that she does now most often in palliative care in the Regina hospitals. I know I would express my concern as this could mean her travelling during the pandemic and then going to the hospitals where there could be a risk to health care staff that she was considered to be part of- as well as being an elder, among the most vulnerable. Just now she expressed her gratitude that she was able to be with our family friend to offer what support she could.

Nikawiy is not reckless in her intervention though it could potentially be unsafe or even dangerous for herself. She puts her faith first and then is assured that the outcome is not in her hands or in her control but she must act as she feels called to do. This is her comfort and her

fortitude. I have seen many times when she will act or speak to be protective or to be diligent in what she believes needs to be done. She will do this when others are silent or unmoving, even when she may be persecuted or targeted by these same people who will not say or do anything. I see her in my rear-view mirror shaking her fist in the air as she stands on her deck and as I drive away from her house- she is telling me that we will never give up what we need to do.

6.1.4 *kiskino tahiweu ona* (Discussion Notes)

Teachings (reminders, guidance): Dancing into the Circle

The time of winter solstice marks a time of storytelling. It is also a time for the round dance. When nikawiy does her presentation on her ‘calendar of life, miyo pimatisiwin’, she starts with the ‘before’ of colonization and the Indian Residential school. This is the round dance. It is social but also ceremonial. It is at the heart of her childhood and family memories.

When nikawiy did her Master’s defense, she also requested that she do this in a round hall on her original band in Onion Lake. I attended this to support nikawiy and recall how we started with ceremony that morning. Her supervisor Associate Professor, Dr. Anna-Leah King, and the Acting Dean of the Faculty of Education, Andrea Sterzuk, both travelled from the University of Regina to attend nikawiy’s defense. Cree speakers from the Onion Lake community were also invited. Several members of nikawiy’s family also attend.

As a family, we have also hosted the round dance for the memorial of our late nephew, my brother Michael’s late son also named Michael but who we called Mikey. Our cousin David Chief travelled to attend this dance near Peepeekisis where we hosted this in the Starblanket Lebret hall (formerly the gymnasium for the Qu’Appelle Indian Residential School). He would notice how the dance seemed somewhat different than what they might have on Onion Lake.

Nikawiy discussed this with him in Cree and later told me what he said about how they knew this as 'dancing into the circle'. What he saw here were smaller groups of people who would dance in these fragments of a circle because they were not part of the larger circle- they were not holding hands with others outside of their small group. I noticed this also- that when I went to hold hands with a younger person, they might accept this for a while but then they would let my hand go. I was surprised when this happened.

Nikawiy talked about the round dance of her earliest memories as the 'before' of colonization. She would say this was still the foundation of her nehiyaw knowledge. She would deliberately and very consciously position herself in the circle and reject the Western box that was what she knew in the Indian Residential school. The round dance was also this circle.

6.2 Kise-pisim, Great Moon (January)

6.2.1 Nikawiyis (little mother)

I sit in the kitchen of my new apartment in St. Paul, Alberta. I have moved here for work so it is a big step, another big move but now not so far as across the country. Nikawiy states this when I am last at home, that at least I could make it home in a day. I think it is a comforting realization for her. Not only am I closer, I will also be home as much as I can be. Though she would not interfere in where I needed to go, she had uttered the comment when I had previously mentioned the possibility that I would move east again- “I am not well nitanis”. The three-day drive was too far away now. I understood this and yet I still had made the commitment to go east for one more year- it would not be a full year in that location as I was expected to do my Doctoral student research at the same time and the place of my research would be with nikawiy whether at home or at her childhood home in Onion Lake. The eastern opportunity also afforded a better position to travel home when I needed to. The year would fly by.

When I started to look for work after that, I knew that I could not just go where the opportunities were now. When I considered coming to St. Paul, I had to discuss this with nikawiy first. I suspected she would be pleased and she was.

My new workplace at Blue Quills is a five-minute drive west of St. Paul and was once an Indian Residential School. It is 110 km west of Onion Lake Cree Nation and even closer to Kehewin, the home of my late grandmother and nikawiy’s mother, Marie Cecile Watchmaker. I am on my grandmother’s land here. I am on the land of my mother’s childhood home and memories. I think it is as though I have exchanged places with nikawiy. There are pines next to my kitchen window here and I am on the second floor of a two-story building, so it is perfect

place for my nest, my thunderbird nest. There is snow in the boughs in the pines, a gentle wind that makes them wave. I remember sitting here another sunny morning when I could see the shadow of the smoke from our building playing against the trees like a movie playing. The land illustrated the movie and the story of nikawiy's life on her mother's land here.

The last time I travelled home two weeks ago, I left in the late afternoon to make the 8-hour drive so by the time I was halfway it was already evening. As I get older, I try to avoid night driving but this evening was bright with a full moon. I had already planned my trip when I learned that nikawiys, my little mother/aunt Delma, was in the hospital but that was all I knew so my heart fell in fear of the worst.

Before the Christmas holidays, auntie had gotten a flu so I really had not seen her very much at all while I had been home visiting. We understood that her health was precarious and her immunity greatly compromised in her cancer treatment. On my last day at home for the holidays, she came for a visit at mom's. Although frail, she always maintained a tenacious strength. Her ways were quiet, she spoke softly, yet she was always the backbone of her family. She was ever-present when there was a need in our families- whether the need was to mourn or to celebrate. She was nikawiy's sister, our auntie, nikawiys, "little mother". I cannot remember a time when she was not in our lives.

Many times, I recall sitting with my auntie in ceremony. I was always so comforted by her presence there, the sound of her Cree conversation with nikawiy, her Cree prayers, her voice joining ours in ceremony song, the little informal visiting. At a sundance in the summer, I remember her preparing to leave after participating for two days, which was as long as she could do then. She joined nikawiy and I as we prepared our pipes to begin the long day of dance and sacrifice. I felt carried like a baby between them as we sat together in our little circle. I could not explain the inextricable sadness I felt as I knew she was leaving us that morning. This is how

removed and insular my sense was of that sacred space. I wanted to cry as though my aunt were leaving to another country and yet she was only leaving our circle. This was how important her quiet presence was for me there, I mourned her leaving. In that space, I could fully acknowledge the gift she was to me.

Nikawiys, little mother. The full moon will guide you home now, no more darkness. I thought of a picture that I had found in the archives of my aunt and her friend receiving an academic award when my aunt was 18. I thought “your skin will be smooth once more; you were always beautiful. Now you will be cancer free, pain free...free.” I prepared myself for the worst. By the time I returned to St. Paul two days later, I was greatly relieved to know she was not ready to leave yet. At her hospital bedside, she asked me to feed her, something I had never done for her before. Of course, there was no need before this. She must have known how much I wanted to do something for her, anything. I mashed her hospital food together and put it on a spoon that I handed to her. She slowly ate and thoroughly enjoyed her food. Her appetite was good, how good to be hungry.

I sat with my cousin who almost never left her mother’s side and we had our visit together this way. My aunt would ask about my work and I would mention treaty. She would nod her head affirmatively and supportively. Then she would say she wanted something to read and asked me for something about treaty. This was potentially one of her last requests to me so she was letting me know what was important.

Several months before this, my aunt had given me the birth certificate for her mother, my grandmother, Marie Cecile. My aunt had kept this tattered and folded paper for many years. When she gave this to me, I knew she was giving me something that was precious, which was also a responsibility that I was inheriting from my aunt. I carefully unfold the delicate paper and read the Certificate of Baptism from the Holy Rosary Church, Onion Lake, Saskatchewan- that

nokum was the child of Louis Watchmaker and Veronique Taylor born on an unknown day and month in 1909 at an unknown place but was baptized on the 25th day of March, 1923 at Onion Lake, Saskatchewan. The date of nokum's baptism, March 25th, reminds me that my aunt's birthday is March 22. If my aunt is able to celebrate her birthday this year, we know it will be her last (our much-loved nikawiys passed away in February).

6.2.2 *kiskino tahiweu ona* (Discussion Notes)

Teachings (reminders, guidance): nikawiys, little mother

It is evening and I am trying not to cry as I read about nikawiys. We are told not to cry at night.²⁴ When nikawiys left, it was just before the pandemic. And now it is three years later and we can say that the pandemic is over though covid seems here to stay in some degree.

I recall the planning that nikawiys, my aunt, did for her own funeral. She did this several months before her passing as she knew this was imminent. She purchased the cloth that she wanted her dress that she would be buried in to be made out of. The colors were emerald green and deep purple, they reminded me of the colors that nokum, my grandmother, her mother would often make for herself. Again, nikawiy took responsibility for ensuring that her sister's wishes would be honored.

Nikawiys noted the elder she wanted to officiate. She listed the three women who she wanted to speak at her service: Chief Marie Anne Daywalker of Okanese, elder Margaret Keewatin of Okanese, colleague Susan Beaudin of Cowessess- my aunt had also been a teacher.

²⁴ I recall being told not to cry at night from the time I was a child. There is a belief in the spirit world that is active at night. They were to be respected and also acknowledged that they could be fearful- there are both good and bad. These are my particular teachings. Children, in particular, were also to be quiet at night. This was protective for them. If we cry for someone who is passed away then this could also disturb them in the spirit world particularly at night. Grieving is healthy and normal but still not good to cry at night or we may disturb our loved ones who are gone on.

I listened to their words and thought how honored my aunt would have been. I thought of the great friendships she had with all of these wonderful women. I recalled my aunt's great sense of humor.

The coming autumn, my aunt's granddaughter Tia would pass away in Winnipeg. She was a young woman, not even twenty, when this happened. Now it was in covid and we wondered how we might travel to the Pas in Manitoba where she would be buried. My other aunt, Vera, dad's youngest sister, took care of the arrangements and found us a place to stay. Nikawiy and I travelled to support my auntie's son Steven who had lost his daughter. My niece would be with her beloved grandmother now- my aunt carried all of her grandchildren in her heart.

Nikawiys reminds me of the circles of women, the aunties, the little mothers who carry us all. Her last request was for women to speak for her. She had dear friends who honored her this way. They also honored us as nikawiys' peyakoskan, my aunt's family. They were also our peyakoskan.

6.3 Mikisiwi-pisim, Eagle Moon (February)

6.3.1 Eagle Child

The late summer evening was perfect with a brilliant full moon. There was probably never a runway beside the lake and next to the arbor but tonight there was. The club music blared and the trannies strutted down their catwalk dancing to this music. My uncle sat demurely on the sideline with his cane taking notes. Nikawiy and I sat next to my young nephews who we brought with us to attend this event.

It was an evening like no other in Treaty Four- the *Miss Indian World Two Spirit*- that was hosted that year in our home territory. My uncle was part of this, more in the volunteer administration although this was a time when he could have let his hair down, too. In this scenario, he had a different position more as an elder and I could see that he was very respected as such. He was experiencing health issues so he was carefully bundled up in a jacket and moccasins, he carried a cane to steady his walk. He took his role in administration seriously.

My young nephews were his grandsons who adored him as their *mosom* (grandfather). This evening they would share a special time with their *mosom* and it seemed important that we brought them out with us then. They were excited by being brought out late in the summer evening and then the music... and then the trannies who were gorgeous and who danced provocatively. The contestants for *Miss Indian World Two Spirit* were very aware of my nephew's presence and seemed honored- I noticed they were careful to be mindful of boundaries with their dance- they pulled back on their twerking for example- and innocently flirted with my nephews as a way to acknowledge them, which always made them giggle from the sidelines. I think my nephews were also conscious of being honored in this way, too. Their presence was

welcomed and special to the trannies also. I could only imagine what the contestants' own childhoods were like when they were young boys.

My uncle would tell me 'write a book about me, my girl, you will make a million dollars'. With his irreverence and animated storytelling, he has made so many people laugh. Nikawiy would be annoyed with this at times and question why he had to be so funny all the time- with our family and friends. Of course, the laughter was, and is, healing for my uncle. His nature and gender made his life as a child in the Indian Residential School hell; of course, this is not true- it was not his nature and gender that were responsible. It was the Indian Residential School and those people, inside and out of this institution, who created this *hell* very deliberately. My uncle, without any protection from this as a defenseless child, was one of the most vulnerable and tortured. This is my uncle's sacred story so his only to tell, my beloved fairy godmother, Eagle child, *kihew awasis*.

Eagle child is in my nest of mothers, he is *nikawiys*, one of my 'little mothers'. I also call him my fairy Godmother. I was baptised Roman Catholic so he is also my actual Godfather, Sister Rachel is my Godmother (I cannot remember ever meeting her). In my mother's prayers, she will at times, cross her arms against her chest to indicate both sides in reference to male and female parts of herself that she acknowledges in her prayers. She will say that we have both of these 'genes' in our natures. There is no 'he' and 'she' in Cree- there is male and female. In the Indian Residential School, and as nikawiy started to learn English, she as most Cree speakers had a real difficulty with differentiating the use of 'he' and 'she' or 'her' and 'him'. It is said that the Cree language is based on differentiating between animate and inanimate, what is living or not alive. It is not based on gender (such as the French *feminine* and *masculine*). Even today, I might hear nikawiy say 'he' for a woman or 'she' for a man. She quickly corrects herself but Cree is still her first language and where she speaks from.

As she was corrected for this in the schools, she came home as a young girl and tried to correct her own father at one time for struggling to make this gender differentiation in her attempts to speak English. Nikawiy tells me this recently and I can sense the gravity of this memory. It was a very rare time when my *mosom* would speak to his daughter in a way to discipline her. He asked her, 'who are you to speak that way'. Nikawiy was deeply shamed. It is a memory that recalls deep hurt also. This was all my *mosom* had to say to nikawiy to teach her this great lesson.

I think of my nephews today and the young men they have grown into. I see some of them carrying their baby daughters in their arms. They have grown up to love our family gatherings and to carry each other's babies in these visits. I love that about them as young men- how they honor their children, their daughters- but also their *mosom* Eagle Child. He is protected now.

6.3.2 Eagle Feather

One of the seven Cree values is illustrated by the eagle and its gift is said to be that of love, *sahkotowin*. It is also the first value. Nikawiy and I drove home last night through the winter cold and under the eagle - moon, *mikisew pisism*, that was almost full. She loved the night sky of bright stars. We remembered other moons and the nostalgia was something we could share now of painful loss. The love was healing. Love now gave strength.

Mikisew pisim is almost the last moon I write about. I think of an eagle feather I was given many years ago now. I had managed to keep it through the years. It was special but there were years when I did not fully realize its importance. I was given this for writing lyrics to three songs that would be part of an Indian musical play "in deo" that had been produced for the *World*

Assembly of First Nations that took place in Regina in 1982. On the last night of the play, I was called up to receive the feather and another gift of a leather vest. I was 19 and still terribly shy so this event was monumental to me. Years later, I keep the feather in a protective case and I am honored to use it in ceremony.

The singer who put music to my lyrics was Curtis Jonnie, *Shingoose*. My family was saddened to learn of his passing in January 2021. He had been living in long-term home care where he got Covid and succumbed to this virus. He was recognized for his lifetime of music achievement but one of the barriers of the pandemic was not being able to gather at such times. It was truly a loss not to be able to comfort the grieving, to express our love, to give this strength.

If I sit back on nikawiy's couch, I can see the almost full moon through the window. There were times when I lived at home when I might sit up in the night quiet and write as I was inspired to. I have not done this for a long time now. As I get older I treasure and need my rest more now. Tiny, nikawiy's dog, comes to me in the dark for a few moments before going back to her bed. She is getting older, too. I hear nikawiy stir in her bed before she is quiet again. For me, I have carried my thoughts of the eagle almost constantly for some time and try to capture this when I waken and start to think again of *mikisew pisim*. It is almost like a dream. I watch the moon move now through the window. It is setting in the very early morning.

I have come to spend a short time with nikawiy following surgery on her eye for cataracts. In her recovery she must not lift anything or drive. Just before I travel back to Saskatchewan from Alberta, nikawiy shares with me on a telephone call. It is an emotional realization on her part. It is why she will always be protective of the men in her family.

She had told me this story before but the meaning is changed now. As a young girl in the residential school, she had been blamed once for stealing money. One of the nuns interrogated her regularly to ask again and again about this theft. Nikawiy never gave up defending her

innocence despite this pressure. Finally, she cried out to the nun that she would tell her dad about what was being done to her. The nun more or less laughed at nikawiy. And then she retorted that nikawiy's dad was *just an alcoholic*. I cannot imagine the deep hurt and scar that was inflicted upon nikawiy then. I thought 'what did these nuns know about *sahkotowin*, love'.

Perhaps it was after this particular interrogation that nikawiy saw another girl standing in the hallway through the open door. There was a look of knowing then that nikawiy saw when she realized who had actually stolen this money and lied to the nun about it. Nikawiy said 'you're the one...' and took off chasing the other girl who knew to run away. The nun witnessed this and said nothing. She would end her interrogation then but never acknowledge or apologize for what she had inflicted upon nikawiy.

It was then, nikawiy said, that she would always be defensive of the men in her family. By then, she was already protective of her younger brother Clarence also. He was always bullied and nikawiy would jump to his defense to chase the bullies away. In time, she would also defend my father if there was ever a time when she felt she had to. Eventually, she would also be protective of my brothers.

I think of the skewed models for womanhood that the nuns presented to the young girls in the residential school. Nikawiy would tell of her shock when she realized that the nuns were even human, that they would use the toilet like anyone else. I have heard this same story told by another former student at another residential school. The nuns wore their habits and gowns so that even their feet could not be seen. They were ethereal and floating above other humanity. Their teachings were about the dirtiness and danger of women and sex. Their teachings were actually misogynistic, of disdain, and definitely not of love.

The moon is on the horizon now. I see it over my brother's house in the back of nikawiy's beyond a field. I have been reading one of nikawiy's books that I came across on this

visit. It is about two women survivors of the 'Frog Lake massacre' and the forward is by the academic Dr. Sarah Carter. One of the things Sarah would note in this interpretation of Frog Lake is how the loss of the Cree men and woman would never be acknowledged in any accounts of the 1885 rebellion. Whereas, there was almost a romanticism to the accounts of the two captured non-Indigenous women that might have even been played up as their accounts were also monetarily compensated. As a *nehiyaw iskwew*, Cree woman, today I wonder *where are our stories in history?*

I recall a very young girl doing a recent CBC interview on the state of clean water in her remote community. I was always struck by the young girl's eloquence when she was asked about how it felt like not to have clean water- '*I feel like we're invisible... like we don't exist, like we're put away in a drawer...*'. She spoke like an old woman with a weariness and wisdom far beyond her years. She was already my elder.

Of the many definitions and interpretations of love, the gift of *kihew*, the eagle, as *sahkotowin*- love, is perhaps all of these but also something else. There is a love *nikawiy* speaks of in her protection of the men in her life starting with her father. This love broke her heart but this is what she would bear for her father.

I recall how *nikawiy* would sit by his side in his last days when he lay dying from cancer. *Nikawiy* would go to sit with him and sing the hymns she knew for him as he requested. She spoke of how she would be alone with him as my auntie could not bear to see their father this way. They had brought him to Peepeekisis to try and take care of him here. There was no other family here to also sit with him. *Nikawiy* would often sit alone by his side. My *mosom*'s heart was so strong up to his last breath. The hearse would come from St. Walburg near Onion Lake 8 hours away to take my *mosom* home finally. He would take that last journey that we all knew and loved to Onion Lake.

I have watched nikawiy as she has been tireless in her devotion to her family and those she loves. She has been fearless in her protection. She has been fearless. I see her love in ceremony this same way, with the greatest of devotion. I see her beginning with her lodge and how she is dedicated to this no matter the challenges. She lovingly creates these spaces with hard work and selflessness. I also see her love for herself and I see also how she has had to fight for this.

I discuss Maslow's hierarchy of needs with her. She is familiar with this from her own psychology classes in university. I have realized that this has been her journey overall, that she never hesitated to take every opportunity to learn and grow to the best of her ability in life- *asisipiyán*- 'to the utmost of her humanly possible limits'- and this was a teaching of her nikawiy and my *nokum*, grandmother. My mother would tell me this and I have never forgotten. This was life, *miyo pimatisiwin*, good life. To this day, nikawiy does not hesitate to take these opportunities to support *miyo pimatisiwin*, good life. She will support, uphold, intervene, love with her whole heart, to the best and limits of her human ability. I see this in her in all of her life. The gift of *kihew*, the eagle, is love. The gift of nikawiy is love.

My own particular teaching in this is unexpected and it is how Maslow's hierarchy has Indigenous knowledge origins. I start to read about this and find out more about how this is controversial as Maslow never did give any acknowledgement to how the work and knowledge that made him famous was actually appropriated. Somehow this seems appropriate in nikawiy's story. What is false should fall away without power in her life anymore. With the courage of love, she has fought always for her truth, *tapwewin*. She has honored the gift of her life from the Creator who she loves with all of her heart.

I cannot see the moon anymore. The sky in the east is brightening. I listen to the silence in nikawiy's home where she and Tiny are dreaming now.

6.3.3 Mother Earth

If I shut my eyes and close them very tight,
I can feel the shadow of my people
Like a shadow of the night
Growing over me, blowing over me
Bringing me to a different light
And it's a long-ago day that's just begun
I can see the rising of another sun
I see my people radiant in its rays
I can hear their voices lifted in a song of praise
Mother Earth you give me all that I need
Sweet, fertile, life abounding
The spirit in you is the spirit in me
The Great Spirit is all surrounding
My heart draws nearer, their words grow clearer
I feel their truth and I join them
To sing a song of celebration
I move to their vibration
And I dance to the sun and to the rain
We're all one in this mystery
I'm a part of you, you're a part of me
I see the glory in your skies
The wonder in your land
Yes, I'll give thanks that I'm a child of this mother land
Mother Earth, you give me all that I need
Sweet, fertile, life abounding
The spirit in you is the spirit in me
The Great Spirit is all surrounding
The Great Spirit is all surrounding
Now I stand in moccasined feet
My roots are strong as all the trees
My prayers rise on the sweetgrass smoke
To sing through the leaves
Mother Earth you give me all that I need
Sweet, fertile, life abounding
The spirit in you is the spirit in me
The Great Spirit is all surrounding.

-Evelyn Poitras 1984

(Lyrics written for "in Deo" musical, World Assembly of First Nations, Regina, Saskatchewan 1982, music written and song performed by Curtis Jonnie, *Shingoose*)

6.3.4 Eagle Moon

My nephew was *fast talking eagle-child*. I had not really known this but I was aware of the time he had an eagle tattooed very conspicuously on his neck. I was kind of surprised by this but understood that was his choice.

I think of my story on the Eagle Moon and how I struggled with this. At the time that I wrote this chapter, I watched this moon set over my brother's home as the sun rose in the east that early morning. I think now that maybe my nephew was home at his parent's then slumbering in his bedroom there. He may also have been in Regina with his girlfriend and their one-year-old baby girl that they doted on as such young parents. But somewhere then, my nephew was sleeping in the eagle moon.

I want to remember when I last saw my nephew and received one of his great long hugs. But I cannot. I feel now the personal heaviness of this pandemic and the separation from those I love; our family times held back on now as we lived in fear of potentially exposing anyone to this virus that any of us could carry. As a traveller, I tried to be especially aware and careful. And now I cannot remember the last time I saw my nephew and was held in one of his hugs.

I am alone at nikawiy's tonight. She has left with my sisters to travel to Onion Lake for yet another funeral- my cousin, only 51, also passed away earlier this week. I would be with them also but became sick with a cold/flu. Today I went to be tested 'just to be safe' the Doctor tells me as he believes it is not covid related but there is still the rise of the variant cases. I feel that I am already improving so am not so worried about this now. I still need to isolate and certainly could not travel to a crowd. I am not used to being alone at nikawiy's overnight and am grateful for Tiny who is already sleeping in her bed.

There was a time when I would be left alone as a young girl. I started to babysit when I was 10 and 11. It was a natural course of responsibility as I was the oldest. By the time I was 10, I had 5 younger siblings and my baby sister Angelina was newborn. I try to recall this as I sit alone at nikawiy's in the late evening. I smudge, it is not easy for me to be alone here despite my age now. A poem I wrote one time was about 'keeping ghosts at the door' when I would be alone with my younger brothers and sisters. If our parents came home drinking, at least they were home. I live alone today and have no trouble to be alone in any of my homes, and I have had several over the past few years as a graduate student. To be alone at nikawiy's is different. She knows this, too.

I sip my strawberry tea with 'wikay' (a root) and honey for my throat. The honey comes from my nephew's partner's bee farm. Jess thinks so much of nikawiy and gifts her with a generous container of fresh honey. Such good medicine.

I want to sit up to confront my ghosts. I am tired of their power over me, I am tired of being afraid. Another part of me believes I should not be afraid, that I should only be respectful. At some point in the blur of this time, I resolve that we will keep moving on, I will keep moving on. I tell nikawiy, I want to go now... when it is my time, I will want to go. I miss them so...

A picture flashes in my mind, a picture of my nephew and his brother and their father, my brother Bunna. They have helped their dad put up his canvas tent in nikawiy's yard. I requested this as this was all I could do for the *Treaty Law School* that year. A suggestion had been made for a youth component to be incorporated into the Treaty Law School. I asked my nephews to build it for themselves this year and in the fall. It was their space, I told them.

Nikawiy and I did ceremony in the tent on the one morning and simply welcomed my nephews to the space. It was always most important to do the ceremony in these spaces. It was the observation of protocols and the recognition of these spaces; our frameworks that were

spiritual as much as physical. I have learned there is so much in the ‘emptiness’. These spaces hold our dynamic frameworks that are meticulous in their guidance for the people to observe and celebrate, communicate, with our ways. The energy buzzes and lights our way like fireflies in the night. We are guided.

Now I will look for this picture and remember my nephew. I will sit with him yet. And I will continue to build this school. It is a school he first built with his dad and his brother. Whatever comfort this gives me now, I am grateful for. I first wondered what might be different if my nephew had the strength of our teachings- but I know that ‘what if’ is futile and its’ own type of cruelty. Love is our greatest law and I must choose to live by this only with my nephew now.

I recall nikawiy sitting at her table and how she shared with me some of what she was going through. It surprised me how she talks of her vulnerability, her own sense of such loss. It is extreme so it scares me. After everything in her life, she would come to this point of such vulnerability. Nikawiy is the strongest woman I know.

6.3.5 *kiskino tahiwew ona* (Discussion Notes)

Teachings (reminders, guidance): Gender

The eagle represents the nehiyaw highest law of love, sahkotowin. Love is based upon respect. I recall hearing about respect also as a law. A great divide in nehiyaw (Cree/Indigenous) and Western perspectives is this concept of love and respect- especially as law. Perhaps this leads to another great divide for how women are perceived. Murdered and missing Indigenous Women, MMIW (and girls) is evident and ongoing in Canadian society.

My two-spirit uncle was named for the eagle, I know he is honored by this. When nikawiy prays, sometimes she crosses her arms over her chest to acknowledge both her female and male sides (she calls these ‘genes’ so this is not scientific and only her interpretation). What I also heard is that some men that have strong female sides may not accept this about themselves- it does not necessarily mean that that they are two-spirit- but they may make up for this with hyper masculinity and/or by being homophobic.

When they do not resolve this for themselves then they may strike out as two-spirit men. I believe that is the case with those that are incessant in their targeting my uncle with their disrespect and mean joking/taunting. I have seen men who are supposed to be role models do this regularly, thinking they’re funny. Many make their cowardly comments on social media without even facing my uncle.

My uncle loves to joke. He likely learned how to use his humor as a shield. With his family and friends, he knows he is entertaining us and loves to do so. His banter with my late dad, uncle and now other men in our family is irreverent but there are lines that are not crossed. He was and is always respected, a valuable and much-loved member of our family.

Gender is in the land. In nehiyawiwini (Cree language), land is kikawiyino-aski, Mother Earth. She is not only female, but also our mother. This is the respect that we give to the land- it is the respect that we give to our mothers and to women. They carry our lives.

Again, the terms *responsibility* and *ownership* may be congruous in our connection to our Mother Earth. It is not ownership as in private property. Yet, the first Indigenous language maps illustrate the regions and territories that were here at the first Western contact. These were clearly the spaces we lived and occupied; this was how we survived from ‘time immemorial’.

Today, our language marks our sovereignty. So, we may question what happens when we bring this under Canadian legislation? I know there are okicitaw-iskwew (warrior women) who are fighting this today. The colonial war goes on.

Nikawiy in her legacy work to preserve her nehiyaw language in curriculum based on her mother's teachings and on the circle is also okicitaw-iskwew (warrior woman) in my humble opinion. As her ôtanisa, her daughter, this is how I see her. What I also understand is that nehiyawewin is also not feminine or masculine- it is animate or inanimate. In ways, it is gender neutral.

My late nephew Brandon was also named for the eagle. He, like my uncle, was also honored by his name. He tattooed the eagle on one side of his neck, this is how he identified himself. I also remember my nephew as a young boy who proudly wore a pink t-shirt for anti-bullying day at school. And pink would remain a favorite color for him as he grew to be a young man. His cousin Josh mentioned this at his cousin's funeral in admiration for how Brandon was fearless to wear pink, we all knew he embraced it.

Still my nephew would leave us suddenly. With the sweetest nature, I was also somewhat aware of anger. Anger is hurt. I see my nephew in his little girl who is three now. She has his amazing smile. She calls her mosom, my brother, bunom- she puts mosom and his name we all call him, bunna, together for her own special name for her grandfather. I see my nephew standing at the door of the white canvas tent he helped his father build several years ago. This was the treaty law school that year.

The eagle is not a pretty bird. It is incredibly beautiful but I would not say pretty. It carries strength that commands respect. For nehiyaw (Cree), it embodies the highest law of sahkotowin, love.

Chapter Seven

Findings and Conclusion

7.1 Kiskinaw-kīsikwan- teachings from the moon guide.

7.1.1 *Collectivity and Leadership*

The collectivity of peyokaskan (family) is a threat to the notion of individualism that was at the heart of the 1969 White Paper and the policy of assimilation that would bring us under a foreign law to say then that we were only a minority under domestic legislation. This is an affront to our international treaty with the Crown as *nation to nation*. Nikawiy as a nehiyaw iskwew is a further threat to colonialism that is based on white patriarchy. These ideas of colonialism and events of Indian policy are called ‘historical’ today but this is a testament to their longevity and their entrenchment.

Peyakoskan, family, is also revealed in genealogy. Extended kinship and relationship to ancestors becomes very meaningful when there is an opportunity to make this discovery. Nikawiy’s knowledge was only of her grandparents until later in life. The connection she is able to make to her capanak is personal and strong. It gives support and direction. This was the knowledge that she was cut off from in the residential schools when she was taken from her family.

The goose moon, niski-pisim, is also a definition of leadership. It is not who is ‘boss’ but rather the ‘one who leads.’ Indian chiefs under the Indian Act, colonial systems, are called okimakanak, *pretend chiefs*. Imposed elected systems and elected leadership are defined as ‘not real’.

This is what I see in the sky now. I see our law of collectivity. For me, this breathes new and ongoing, continuing life into our laws and into our treaty.

7.1.2 Kikawino Aski, Our mother earth. Land

Nikawiy is my land, she is my nitisiy (my belly button). In a connection to her ancestors, her capanak, nikawiy also offers critical guidance for the future. These teachings remain vital. Our past leaders remain leaders.

Nikawiy's comment that 'the treaties are for the animals' is given a particular meaning when it is connected to the Creation Story. I know when she made this comment that she meant that we have a responsibility to take care of the animals, to be protective as they are relatively defenseless. At the same time, we are protecting ourselves.

The animals are our clan mothers and this is our governance. *She would say the animals are the most faithful to Creator's laws also. Ayiki pisim, frog moon. Their songs will fill the spring evenings and tell of warm days to come, the new life of a new year, miyo pimatisiwin, good life.*

Appropriation and erasure are introduced in this chapter on an event in history that is often told from one perspective only. This represents deliberate colonial theft and violence that is ongoing in Western academic institutions.

7.1.3 Colonial Violence 'we are at war'

The colonial premise of 'kill the Indian in the child' is as violent as it sounds. From my mother's experience in the Indian Residential school to burying her youngest son as a mother

many years later, the onslaught of colonial violence has been consistent. The wounds are intergenerational.

One of the most striking realizations to me in the course of my mother's life story telling is how much violence she has endured from her childhood to today. From the loss of parents (and grandparents she never really knew about) to the loss of siblings to the loss of her partner to the loss of her son to the loss of grandchildren- *nikawiy* has experienced such violence and trauma over the span of her life. Through it all, she clings to the law of love. This is the strength of her love. This is the light and grace of her leadership.

7.1.4 Healing

Personal leadership is about healing. Due to the event of colonization and as this is an ongoing onslaught and experience, *healing* becomes a personal responsibility. Leadership starts at a personal level and for Indigenous people who have been subjected to colonization, healing is a fundamental requisite. Otherwise, the disruption and pain of colonization is carried in generations and in families, extended families, communities, nations. Part of healing is calling out the spectre of colonization that casts itself over our Indigenous generations and is evident in its carnage in personal lives. Leadership is standing up to this to rebuke and reclaim. These have been the personal examples that I have witnessed in my parent's lives.

Sixteen years ago, *nohtawiy paskwaw mostos kahpimohteht*, my father Walking Buffalo, made his spiritual journey. I sit in the night in a Regina hotel room to recall this sad anniversary. I am close to *nikawiy* and know she is peaceful in her slumber at home during the first snow of this season. There was a storm, too, when dad passed. The snow and ice made travel difficult, if

not treacherous. I recall falling snow as we laid dad to rest in our family burial ground. He was buried on November 10th to avoid Remembrance Day ceremonies on the 11th.

When I ruminate about nohtawiy's teachings for leadership, I think of the team work he espoused naturally throughout his athletic life; he was a team player and he was strategic in ways to meet his goals and purpose. There is a critical difference in strategizing politically especially if this becomes the goal and purpose above ethics or sportsmanship. I think this difference is key in leadership. There are politicians and then there are leaders. The lines may be blurred in this discernment.

As Indigenous people, we adapt and we adopt systems that may be in conflict with our inherent responsibilities. This is colonialism at very deep levels- when we take this into ourselves to use as a tool/weapon against our own. This is individuality above collectivity. This is the individuality held up in the 1969 White Paper and now held up in ensuing and ongoing Canadian government policy for Indigenous people- *gradual and civilizing enfranchisement* and assimilation. This is the power of the damage that can be done by such individuals and this is the threat to our collective rights.

My teachings as I grew up was the importance of the family, that no matter how old I was- or young- I had a real responsibility to serve the greater needs of my family. I would rebel against this as I grew older but then I would come back to this place of *balance* that was inherent in collectivity. I believed this was my responsibility but also now, my privilege, to do so and it is what I am grateful for, to protect the gift that family and *miyo pimatisiwin*, good life, is. These were and are my teachings, particularly as the oldest daughter, from both of my parents. *Hiyhiy*, thank you.

7.1.5 *Miskasowin*, finding one's self.

Miskasowin is a Cree concept that is identified in the book by Harold Cardinal and Walter Hildebrandt, *Treaty Elders of Saskatchewan: Our Dream Is That Our Peoples Will One Day Be Clearly Recognized as Nations* (2000). It was identified by a group of elders that they consulted in the development of this book as a term that was a guiding principle for Cree people. I recall that this was one of several terms that we used from this text for a class on *Teaching Treaties in the Classroom* at the University of Regina. I acknowledge Angelina Weenie and Audrey Amond for their work to develop a course curriculum for this class.

In my own experience and observation, I have witnessed *nikawiy* on her *miskasowin* journey in her life. This has been in her education but also in all of her growth. This has been her lifelong learning and healing.

Esisipiyan, to the best of my ability, is also vital 'letting go' and maintaining balance. It is self-love and self-respect. This was a great teaching from *nokum*, my grandmother, for her *nitanis*, *nikawiy*, my mother.

7.1.6 Treaty protection

I learn from an old friend that the Spruce Grove area was also the location of what was once the Michel band reserve. Some of their members would join other local bands. Michel Band is now the only one to ever become enfranchised in Canada's history. Today some of their members fight to be recognized as a band and for a land base. I had learned about this history in my studies but was not sure of where it once was. Now I understood that it was actually in the Spruce Grove area. This was very interesting to me.

I had heard of Indian individuals enfranchising historically by their own choice, giving up their Indian status and rights, for some monetary compensation and to become a regular Canadian who might be able to vote, for one thing. Others might be enfranchised without choice. Indians were not allowed to become lawyers or go to university and could be automatically enfranchised if they pursued these careers. These exceptions and rules were all arbitrarily laid out or somehow initiated in the Indian Act and this administration by Indian Affairs. With name changes, INAC has had different incarnations through the years but is still commonly known as Indian Affairs (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, INAC).

Bill C-31 was about giving Indian Status back to mainly women who had married non-Indian men and who lost their status in this process along with the status of any children they had. Conversely, Indian men who married non-Indian women had actually acquired Indian status for their new partners. Did Bill C-31 address all status lost through enfranchisement?

Assimilation is related to enfranchisement. There is loss, deliberate or not, of not only legal status but also of identity. The White Paper of 1969 was proposed as a way to get rid of the Indian Act (and Indian Affairs). But Indian leadership nationally refused this as they also saw this as a threat to their 'distinctness' as Indian people (equal does not mean 'same'). The Treaty that recognized their sovereignty would also protect their distinction and ways of life as Indian people. They were to be 'unmolested'. The Indian Act was also binding on Canada. In legislation such as the *Ten-Year Agreement*, Trudeau is said to be, once again, selling assimilation that Indian people also see as termination of distinct rights.

During the Pope's visit, there were calls for him, as Head of the Catholic Church, to get rid of the Doctrine of Discovery. It was this papal bull that declared that the land, now known as Canada, was *terra nullius*- empty land. Therefore, it was 'discovered' by Europeans. Indians who had lived here from 'time immemorial' were not considered to be *human* under the edict of

the papal bull that determined that they were not Christian and so their lands were ‘empty’.

Why, in 2022, would people call for the Doctrine of Discovery to be rescinded? Because it was still in place and in the foundation of Canadian Law. It is the only ‘Bill of Sale’ that Canada has to say it owns this land- and this is to say that there is no Bill of Sale.

The Indian Treaties gave permission to the Crown to allow for European settlement of what would become Canada. The underlying jurisdiction is still the Indian Treaties. The Indian Treaties are still based on Indian sovereignty. Any legislative attempts to place Indian treaties and sovereignty under Canada is an attempt to terminate these rights; it is domestication of international rights.

The call to be recognized as *human* would seem to be an act of reconciliation.

7.1.7 Iskwew leadership

Molly Brant was Haudenosaunee therefore she came from a matriarchal society. It is said that the roots of feminism were inspired and modelled after this society. Other Indigenous societies were also not patriarchal; they largely may have been matriarchal or egalitarian. Indigenous men may have been more accepted as leaders in the process of colonization as this was patriarchal. In contemporary times, we see many Indigenous women also following their father’s leadership. We also see that their fathers are supportive of their daughters in their leadership development.

I recall running in my first election campaign for my band. I did this with the support of my late father who had been an elected Chief of Peepekisis in the early 1980s for three years (1.5 terms). Before this, my mother had also run for Councillor of our band. At one time, dad

also seriously discussed the possibility of nikawiy running for Chief at one election. He believed in her. From all of his political experience, he must have saw her potential to be an elected leader. She has always been a dedicated advocate for treaty and governance development in different areas. Nikawiy brings many gifts in her support and voice; she remains active and responsible in these roles.

7.1.8 Wahkotowin, relations

Nikawiy would wait until summer holidays before taking us to visit with her family in Onion Lake. This was our summer trip and vacation. And this was where I learned how different we were on Peepeekisis. We were treated royally on our visits to mom's home reserve and family. I understood unconditional love from my nokum, grandmother. We were greeted as long-lost family by all. It was always an adventure. This is the difference that wahkotowin, good relations, and kinship makes. I would listen to my cousins, near my age, speak Cree as their first language. For me, travelling 8 hours was like travelling to another country- one I knew I belonged to also. I would never have this sense of familial belonging to my own reserve.

As I grew older, I would be confronted by a much older Peepeekisis band member- he would not be the first- who clearly and angrily made it clear his feeling that we did not belong on the reserve. *We were placements.* We are one big family only when our numbers are needed.

In a recent summer, we have travelled to Onion Lake and stopped to pay our respects to the eight that were hung in North Battleford in retribution for the killing of nine settlers at Frog Lake. This is Canada's largest mass hanging. Indian Residential School children were brought to witness this event. Nikawiy acknowledges that these are her capanak, ancestors. We learn again that our struggle is always about the land.

7.1.9 Keepers of the Home Fire

On November 13, 2022, approximately a month after meeting with Chief and Council to request separation and a new band, a meeting was scheduled at the Treaty Four Governance tipi in Fort Qu'Appelle. It was a larger venue to accommodate more membership. I attended with nikawiy, my brother Bunna, my sister Angie. They had also accompanied me to the Chief and Council where we made our request for band separation and a new band. I would refer to 2004, when our late dad went to see a lawyer with three other band members to seek separation. I would learn of this years later when I also went to see the same lawyer. We were following our late dad's footsteps. He was *Walking Buffalo* and as a buffalo in a winter storm, he was facing into the storm to break a path for others to follow and so were following him now.

We sat in the governance tipi (this is an actual man-made tipi building in Fort Qu'Appelle on the Treaty Four reserve) and I was reminded that women own the tipis. They keep the home fires- their name *iskwew* is derived from *iskotew*, 'heat', 'fire'. They are responsible for this ownership; I think *responsibility* and *ownership* may be congruous in their meaning, particularly from a nehiyaw (Cree) perspective. Furthermore, when it comes to land, nehiyaw may not have considered land as private property but they did have territories and regions. The early Indigenous language maps would mark such territories and regions.

Nehiyaw *iskwew* are key wealth holders in our nehiyaw economies this way. I also think of the great labour that is involved with this responsibility due to the need for constant movement; even today, it is laborious and stressful to make even one household move. As Indigenous people, we are fluid in ongoing transition between our First Nations and urban centers. We are constantly balancing two worlds in different ways including where we live with

our families. Very often, it is the women who bear this responsibility as they still are responsible for the home fires and the shelter of these home fires.

After the election, my 'normal' life came crashing back on me with all of its pent-up demands. There was also another demand now to address development for a new band, for separation, as a type of an amalgamated band. *Ahkimemohk*, "don't give up", would come to me. There was more. There was no time for the words, for the teachings. There was only the 'doing', survival. *Ahkimemohk, keep going forward. Ekiya-pakicik, don't give up, don't let go.*

We sat with *nikawiy*nan, our mother. She also took her place with us and did so to also show her position in this realm of governance. She was our clan mother and in matters of governance, she would always sit with us- visibly and actively, responsibly. Her quiet strength and power were deliberate and felt in this circle.

7.1.10 *niwiciwakan*, the one who walks with me

I am listening to *nikawiy* talk about her late partner, *nohtawiy* (my father). She explains that he is *niwiciwakan*, 'the one who walks with me'. What is implied is that this is an equal partnership though their roles might be different- they were complementary. Together, they were the heads of the *peyakoskan* (family, one unit). When *nikawiy* lost her partner in 2005, she would not walk with any other again.

Nikawiy shared with me that when her and my late father might have had disagreements, that the children would never be used in their arguments. She would not interfere or withhold us ever from our father. She had this much respect despite anything that was happening in their own private relationship. Today, I really appreciate this. I see young couples who are immature and do not hesitate to be damaging or irresponsible in their disagreements with whatever 'power'

they might have. Very sadly, there may be very serious consequences to such young peyakoskan, families.

Nikawiy also comments to me one time that she is one of many widows, nehiyaw iskwewak (Cree/Indigenous women) who have partners who would die before them. In general, their Indigenous life spans are shortened for various reasons but the men were leaving in greater numbers much sooner. Nehiyaw iskwewak, Cree women, have that greater responsibility to carry on alone and very often, as widows.

7.1.11 Round Dance

The time of winter solstice marks a time of storytelling. It is also a time for the round dance. When nikawiy does her presentation on her 'calendar of life, miyo pimatisiwin', she starts with the 'before' of colonization and the Indian Residential school. This is the round dance. It is social but also ceremonial. It is at the heart of her childhood and family memories.

When nikawiy did her Master's defense, she also requested that she do this in a round hall on her original band in Onion Lake. I attended this to support nikawiy and recall how we started with ceremony that morning. Her supervisor Associate Professor, Dr. Anna-Leah King, and the Acting Dean of the Faculty of Education, Andrea Sterzuk, both travelled from the University of Regina to attend nikawiy's defense. Cree speakers from the Onion Lake community were also invited. Several members of nikawiy's family also attend.

As a family, we have also hosted the round dance for the memorial of our late nephew, my brother Michael's late son also named Michael but who we called Mikey. Our cousin David Chief travelled to attend this dance near Peepeekisis where we hosted this in the Starblanket

Lebret hall (formerly the gymnasium for the Qu'Appelle Indian Residential School). He would notice how the dance seemed somewhat different than what they might have on Onion Lake.

Nikawiy discussed this with him in Cree and later told me what he said about how they knew this as 'dancing into the circle'. What he saw here were smaller groups of people who would dance in these fragments of a circle because they were not part of the larger circle- they were not holding hands with others outside of their small group. I noticed this also- that when I went to hold hands with a younger person, they might accept this for a while but then they would let my hand go. I was surprised when this happened.

Nikawiy talked about the round dance of her earliest memories as the 'before' of colonization. She would say this was still the foundation of her nehiyaw knowledge. She would deliberately and very consciously position herself in the circle and reject the Western box that was what she knew in the Indian Residential school. The round dance was also this circle.

nikawiys, little mother

It is evening and I am trying not to cry as I read about nikawiys. We are told not to cry at night. When nikawiys left, it was just before the pandemic. And now it is three years later and we can say that the pandemic is over though covid seems here to stay in some degree.

I recall the planning that nikawiys, my aunt, did for her own funeral. She did this several months before her passing as she knew this was imminent. She purchased the cloth that she wanted her dress that she would be buried in to be made out of. The colors were emerald green and deep purple, they reminded me of the colors that nokum, my grandmother, her mother would often make for herself. Again, nikawiy took responsibility for ensuring that her sister's wishes would be honored.

Nikawiys noted the elder she wanted to officiate. She listed the three women who she wanted to speak at her service: Chief Marie Anne Daywalker of Okanese²⁵, elder Margaret Keewatin of Okanese, colleague Susan Beaudin of Cowessess- my aunt had also been a teacher. I listened to their words and thought how honored my aunt would have been. I thought of the great friendships she had with all of these wonderful women. I recalled my aunt's great sense of humor.

The coming autumn, my aunt's granddaughter Tia would pass away in Winnipeg. She was a young woman, not even twenty, when this happened. Now it was in covid and we wondered how we might travel to the Pas in Manitoba where she would be buried. My other aunt, Vera, dad's youngest sister, took care of the arrangements and found us a place to stay. Nikawiy and I travelled to support my auntie's son Steven who had lost his daughter. My niece would be with her beloved grandmother now- my aunt carried all of her grandchildren in her heart.

Nikawiys reminds me of the circles of women, the aunties, the little mothers who carry us all. Her last request was for women to speak for her. She had dear friends who honored her this way. They also honored us as nikawiys' peyakoskan, my aunt's family. They were also our peyakoskan.

7.1.12 Gender

The eagle represents the nehiyaw highest law of love, sahkotowin. Love is based upon respect. I recall hearing about respect also as a law. A great divide in nehiyaw

²⁵ Chief Marie Ann Daywalker has become the longest serving Chief in Canada. She has also had her picture put on a Canadian stamp. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/saskatchewan/chief-day-walker-pelletier-canada-post-saskatchewan-1.6490488>

(Cree/Indigenous) and Western perspectives is this concept of love and respect- especially as law. Perhaps this leads to another great divide for how women are perceived. Murdered and missing Indigenous Women, MMIW (and girls) is evident and ongoing in Canadian society.

My two-spirit uncle was named for the eagle, I know he is honored by this. When nikawiy prays, sometimes she crosses her arms over her chest to acknowledge both her female and male sides (she calls these 'genes' so this is not scientific and only her interpretation). What I also heard is that some men that have strong female sides may not accept this about themselves- it does not necessarily mean that that they are two-spirit- but they may make up for this with hyper masculinity and/or by being homophobic.

When they do not resolve this for themselves then they may strike out at two-spirit men. I believe that is the case with those that are incessant in their targeting my uncle with their disrespect and mean joking/taunting. I have seen men who are supposed to be role models do this regularly, thinking they are funny. Many make their cowardly comments on social media without even facing my uncle.

My uncle loves to joke. He likely learned how to use his humor as a shield. With his family and friends, he knows he is entertaining us and loves to do so. His banter with my late dad, uncle and now other men in our family is irreverent but there are lines that are not crossed. He was and is always respected, a valuable and much-loved member of our family.

Gender is in the land. In nehiyawiwon (Cree language), land is kikawiyon-aski, Mother Earth. She is not only female, but also our mother. This is the respect that we give to the land- it is the respect that we give to our mothers and to women. They carry our lives.

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maps illustrate the regions and territories that were here at the first Western contact. These were clearly the spaces we lived and occupied; this was how we survived from ‘time immemorial’.

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7.2 Conclusion

Nehiyaw iskwewak, Cree women, are significant for the sovereignty they embody. As nehiyaw iskwew, they naturally present a threat to white patriarchy. In the literal interpretations of treaty, they have been erased and dismissed this way for any role in these negotiations. The white patriarchal lens could not see them as key holders of resources in a nehiyaw economy. To this day, nehiyaw iskwew are an affront to the ongoing evidence of white patriarchy in ongoing colonization.

215 woke up many people worldwide to the reality of what actually transpired in the Indian Residential schools in Canada. These were defenseless children, and one might only wonder what trauma they endured in these schools, but the evidence was also clear with the finding of the graves of children who never returned to their families and homes. Nikawiy is being interviewed and she talks about how her late partner, my father George, saying how they went war with the children through these schools. Both my parents attended the Indian Residential schools.

When Pope Francis made his visit in 2022 to Canada in the wake of the discovery of graves- there are ongoing searches in other Indian Residential school locations now- there were calls for him to rescind the Doctrine of Discovery. This papal bull is yet in the foundation of Canada and Canadian law. Indigenous people are still living with colonialism; 215 was an

international wake-up call but this is a reality that Indigenous people have been living with from the time of so-called 'discovery'.

What we hear today is that there are more children, many Indigenous, who are in the child care system than there were in the Indian Residential schools. Then, as now, children are commodified. The schools ran on their labour. Nehiyaw families were disrupted with the loss of their children; they had vital roles in their families even as children. They were taught inherent responsibility and value. The price tags on children today does not equal the value that awasisak, children who were bright lights, were in their peyakoskan, families.

The impact of loss of children is dysfunction. Nokum, my grandmother, carried unresolved grief her whole life from losing her children to the Indian Residential school. Nikawiy, my mother, noticed nokum crying once close to the end of her days. Tanike, what is wrong, she asked her mother. Nokum answered, 'I never gave up my children'. My heart breaks to recall nikawiy telling me this. I would almost never see nokum cry. I could only imagine the deep and great hurt she lived with.

I think of the need for healing today. I see how this impacts families and communities when this responsibility is not taken. What evolves from the Indian Residential schools and the abuse that was inflicted on defenseless children is that cycles begin for the dysfunction that is learned. What we also see is bully and gang mentalities that manifest to our governance. Colonial wars still rage today. What happens when we become colonizer to our own people?

When I ran in our band elections, I would often see this phenomenon of dysfunction in our politics. Healing is not easy. It is responsibility. But healing would disrupt dysfunctional systems that have been in place now for many years. It is protection of status quo that serves some very well. The greater well-being may be sacrificed to serve the very few who thrive in this dysfunction. Some would call this corruption.

When our claim award of 150 million was finally granted in 2020, suddenly there was interest from our band as a whole. There was an interest for all off-reserve membership to be involved now. This was a challenge during the pandemic but business was taken care of due to such interest. Now people were calling for transparency, accountability.

I ran for Chief in 2022 and this was unsuccessful. Three days after the election, I went with nikawiy and my brother and sister to attend a Chief and Council meeting. We announced that we were seeking separation now. This is how seriously we take the threat of Canada's opt-in legislation such as the 10-year agreement that our band had signed into four years ago. This is one thing I would have changed if I had been elected. We see the need to be protective this way.

As an amalgamated band, we believed that we had the right and responsibility to seek a new band for reasons of protection and land. In 2004, we also knew that nohtawiy, our late father, had also sought separation. We followed in his footsteps now.

Education is said to be our new buffalo. I have heard this was the call for the treaty right to education. They did not seek Indian Residential schools and the devastation of that experience for their children. Both of my parents went to these schools and both would become teachers. Their aspiration in education was and is the treaty vision.

In her own education and teachings, nikawiy is deliberate to place herself in a circle. She rejects the western box. This is how she develops her nehiyawewin-Cree language curriculum now. With her life and teachings, nikawiy has always taken responsibility for healing and disrupting colonization. This is the sovereignty that she embodies and lifts up for all of her generations to follow.

Ekosi. It is finished.

I do not know what concept of Treaty that my nokum had. I know that nikawiy would speak of the treaties as ‘the sacred promises’. Our nehiyaw understanding is ‘spirit and intent’, covenants that are spiritual and living. Keteyayak (elders) warn not to go by the literal interpretation as ‘that is not to our favour’. The patriarchal lens refused to see nehiyaw iskwewak (Cree women) at the time of the treaty negotiations. What some say now is that the treaties were, therefore, negotiated without the true owners, the nehiyaw iskwewak (the women).

I know that some things in our history were silenced with the hanging of the 8 Cree men in North Battleford.²⁶ Nehiyaw men, in particular, may have been silenced this way. The Indian Residential School children who were purposely brought to witness this event and who were, no doubt, traumatized would also likely be silenced this way. But there would be time again when the sacred fires would be lit and the people would travel on the land and occupy all of their territories this way to sit with each other for these talks once again. They would affirm who they always were and who they continued to be.

Like nokum, they might lift their hands to the sky and cry to the Creator. This was the love she knew for the Creator. This was nokum’s Law. This is Creator’s Law. This is the teaching of the Eagle Moon and the nehiyaw (Cree) highest Law of Love. This is Treaty, our ancestor’s words and promises.

Nikawiy waits faithfully for the Northwind to end the winter. She waits faithfully to hear the frogs sing before she believes it is spring. She was born on the land. She is my land. Ekosi (it is finished).

²⁶ <https://creeliteracy.org/2015/11/26/130th-anniversary-of-infamy-canadas-largest-mass-hanging-27-november-1885/>

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APPENDICES

1. Literature Review
2. Treaty Law School
3. Genealogy

Appendix 1
Literature Review

Source Review and Analysis

Overview

Overall, my perspective is as a Cree Woman/Nehiyaw Iskwew from Treaty Four and Peepeekisis Kiskamanacihk. Through my mother, I am connected to our relatives in Treaty Six and Onion Lake Cree Nation as well as Frog Lake Cree Nation. I think of Harold Cardinal's description of Cree as law with one word opening a foundational subset of information (2007). For each part of my question, there is an underlying building block of information that promises to be part of my discovery. It is the beginning of a structure that will guide my process now. I trust that my journey is uncharted in some small ways and that may be a contribution that I make for my home and family.

The dearth of published literature on the role of Nehiyawak Iskwewak is apparent in my own findings so that much of this information is actually unpublished and in Master's Theses and PhD Dissertations. So, I dedicate a section on this in my source review. There are a few sources that have been published by Cree Women that are included in the Literature Review. Several are autobiographical and generally tell of personal lives. A review of this and related literature in Cree History is necessary to determine if anything is specifically said on the role of Nehiyawak Iskwew and if this role may further tell of particular roles in governance and leadership.

Themes:

- Cree Women
- Treaty History
 - Treaties 4 & 6

- Spirit and Intent
- *Nehiyawak* Cree History
- Indigenous Women and Governance
- Indigenous Feminism
- Community and Nation Relevance
- Spaces of Wahkotowin (relationships) and Miyo-Wicehtowin (good relations)
- Individual and Collective Responsibility

1. Cree Women, Unpublished Sources

A handbook or manual does not exist for the Nehiwayak Iskwew role in governance. It is necessary to take a broad look at accounts of Cree people and Cree women in general to attempt to deduce what the specific roles of Nehiyawak Iskwew are and what they may have been in particular for governance and leadership. Most accounts are from the Treaty Four and Treaty Six areas as well as specifically Cree. As the Cree have expansive and regionally distinct territories, this review may include other Treaty/Cree territories. Any treaty accounts will also be reviewed to determine any significance of the women's role for the numbered Indian treaties. From this broad overview, a contextual understanding of relevant sources for the foundational and inherent role of Nehiyawak Iskwew in governance and Treaty Enforcement today may be gathered.

A source review of unpublished documents includes Master's theses and Doctoral Dissertations on the topic of Cree women in Treaty Four or Treaty Six that have also been written by Cree or Saulteaux women in these Treaty territories. On the topic of Nehiyawak Iskwew, Cree women, by Cree and Saulteaux women academics from Treaty Four, including the PhD Dissertation of Miriam McNab "George Gordon First Nations Women: Partners in Survival" (2016) from the University of Saskatchewan at Saskatoon. McNab's First Nation is George Gordon in the Treaty Four Territory. Janice Acoose of Sakimay First Nation in Treaty Four also did her 1992 Master's Dissertation at the University of Saskatchewan on "Iskwewak-Kah'Ki Yaw Ni Wahkomakanahk: Neither Indian Princesses nor Squaw Drudges" which would

become published as a book by the same name (1995) in to dispel negative stereotypes of Indian women particularly in literature. Other Cree and Saulteaux women academics from Treaty Four have written on Treaty and Policy issues; Leah Bitternose (sister of Miriam McNab and also from the George Gordon First Nation in Treaty Four) has written a Master of Laws Dissertation on “Kihci-Asotamatowin (The Treaty Sovereigns’ Sacred Agreements) and the Crown’s Constitutional Obligations to Holders of Treaty Rights Through Consultation and Restoration of Treaty Constitutionalism” (2014). Alison DuBois of the Pasqua First Nation in Treaty Four wrote her Master of Arts Thesis on “Government Termination Policy and Canadian Indians: A Fourth Policy Reality” (2003). McNab’s dissertation focuses on women roles in general and may include some reference to women’s governance roles. Acoose focuses on Indigenous women depictions mainly in literature. Bitternose and DuBois are from Treaty Four but their work is focused on general interpretations of Treaty and Canadian Indian policy issues. There remains a gap for the Nehiyawak Iskwew role in governance including Treaty issues.

Relevant unpublished sources for Nehiyawak iskwew and governance may also be drawn from Dissertations from Treaty Six academics including: Master Dissertations from Makokis and Wildcat from Indigenous Governance at the University of Victoria and a Doctoral Dissertation from Jobin at the Department of Political Science and the Faculty of Native Studies, University of Alberta that examine perspectives of Nehiyawak/Cree governance to address some of the most compelling issues from a contemporary perspective. Each are strongly rooted in Nehiyawak positionality and the governance issues addressed are also personal to the writers. Makokis, in particular, looks at ‘Cree Women Learning Self-Determination Through Sacred Teachings of the Creator’ (2008). Wildcat looks at ‘Self-Determination, Colonialism and Pre-Reserve Nehiyaw Forms of Power’ (2010); and Jobin looks at ‘Cree Economic Relationships, Governance, and Critical Indigenous Political Economy in Resistance to Settler-Colonial Logics’

(2014).

In a larger context, the research of Cree women governance and roles particularly through narrative interpretation and other academics, Margaret Garrard, takes an anthropological focus in her MA Thesis “Towards an Understanding of Tradition in Cree Women’s Narratives, Waskaganish, James Bay” (2004). She includes chapters with ‘Women’s Lives and Responsibilities’, ‘Gender Roles and Modernization’, ‘The Politicization of Tradition’. Garrard’s thesis is particularly based on the ethnographic field notes of anthropologist Regina Flannery from the 1930s. Accounts of history related specifically to the Onion Lake Cree Nation include Laurel Schenstad-Smith’s Master’s Thesis on *Subsistence and Economic Adaptation in the Onion Lake Agency, 1876-1920* (1983). Pamela White also makes an academic contribution with her PhD Dissertation on the topic of *Restructuring the Domestic Sphere- Prairie Indian Women on Reserves: Image, Ideology and State Policy, 1880-1930* (1987). Finally, Sheldon Krasowski contributes a significant look at oral accounts of the numbered Treaties including Treaty 4 and Treaty 6 with his PhD Dissertation *Mediating the Numbered Treaties: Eyewitness Accounts of Treaties Between the Crown and Indigenous Peoples, 1871 to 1876* (2011).

From a broad context of Treaty History and Governance, a closer look will include Cree History and Treaty Four and Treaty Six. This is the historic background and introduction to a focus on Nehiyawak Iskwew (Cree Women) and their roles in general and particularly in governance in Treaty Four and Treaty Six and before this, in the Northern Plains. From this context and background, modern looks at Indigenous Women including roles for governance and leadership will be examined. The development of Indigenous Feminism is a critical look at an historical and contemporary rejection of patriarchy but also why this movement has not always been embraced or adopted by many Indigenous women. Finally, questions of a ‘middle ground’,

of academic relevance to community and Nationhood development including individual and collective responsibility are looked at for any potential to address governance concerns and issues for Nehiyawak and Nehiyawak Iskwew in their leadership frameworks today.

2. Treaty History

A focused look at numbered Indian Treaty History will also be examined this way; first to determine what is said generally on governance and leadership roles and then if anything is relevant to the Nehiyawak Iskwewak role in governance, leadership and Treaty. There is a general assumption that there was a marked absence of women involved in Treaty negotiations. For example, there were apparently no female signatories documented (none that I am aware of). A close review of Treaty 4 and Treaty 6 documents will confirm whether or not that assumption is correct. If the women were not at the Treaty negotiations then what may be a reason for their absence? Is it simply because this look has been mainly through a patriarchal lens (that erased them)? What happens when a decolonizing lens is used to look at this history?

From a context of international treaty history to the history of the pre-confederation treaties, the numbered Indian treaties and the Robinson and Douglas treaties, distinctions can be drawn to explain and clarify the critical differences of treaties. *A Study on Treaties, Agreements and Other Constructive Arrangements Between States and Indigenous Populations* (Martinez, 1997) is a United Nations report by Special Rapporteur Miguel Alphonso Martinez who particularly looks at imposed domestication processes for Indigenous treaties and other arrangements between States and Indigenous populations. In a Canadian historical context, *The Treaties of Canada With The Indians of Manitoba and The North-West Territories Including The Negotiations on Which They Were Based, and Other Information Relating Thereto* by Alexander Morris (1880); *Bounty and Benevolence: A Documentary History of Saskatchewan Treaties* by

Ray, Miller and Tough (2000) outline the timeline and development of the numbered treaties including Treaty Four.

Morris was the Treaty Commissioner who actually negotiated several of the numbered Indian Treaties so his accounts are considered official. This is also an example of what is known as the ‘literal’ interpretation of Treaty. This interpretation is considered contentious and is most often rejected by Indian leadership and people in the numbered Treaty territories who claim a ‘spirit and intent’ understanding of the Treaties. The reason for the contention and rejection is that it is so alien from the *literal* interpretation. An example of a particular conflict in understanding is the ‘cede, surrender’ clause of the written Treaties. The Indian understanding was a ‘sharing’ of the land and resources only. Indigenous lawyer, Aimee Craft, asserted in *Breathing Life into the Fort Stone Treaty: An Anishinabe Understanding of Treaty One* (2013) that there was no mention of ‘cede’ ever in Treaty One. Other accounts (Cardinal and Hildebrandt, 2000) also support this understanding that even if this was written in the Treaty templates, literal treaty terms such as ‘cede’ were definitely not well known or in discussions held at the negotiations. The Indian people had their own very clear understanding of what they were entering into.

3. *Spirit and Intent* of Treaty

From an introduction to the numbered Indian Treaties and the ‘spirit and intent’ meaning to this interpretation as a governance framework today, the focus of this look is at Treaty Four and Treaty Six. Comparatively, Borrows (2017) and Fontaine (2013) who each explain the conflicting interpretations in these foundational covenants from the start of these relations between Europeans and Indians with the British Royal Proclamation of 1763 and following Treaty of Niagara. In a critical contribution, Cardinal, and Hildebrandt (2000) interview Cree,

Assiniboine (Nakota), Saulteaux, Sioux (Dakota, Lakota) and Dene Elders in Treaty Four and Treaty Six who interpret ‘spirit and intent’ of these Treaties in their own languages.

In my research, I see an opportunity to address a gap in our literature, stories, and knowledge of our agreements before treaty making with the British Crown. We made treaties with animals to ensure our survival (Borrows 2010, Simpson 2011). Simpson (2011) also refers to Anishinabe elder Edna Manitowabi’s teaching on breastfeeding as a treaty. We forged and continue to maintain solemn agreements with pipe and other ceremonies. We need to recall our original relations, alliances, confederacies, and treaties because they are binding on us and critically; they are still benefiting us and maintaining us today (Treaty Alliance 2012).

The ‘spirit and intent’ understanding is reference to the Treaties as spiritual covenants that are also living agreements. They were entered into in a sacred manner with ceremony as it was understood that there was this gravity to these undertakings. So, they were done with strict protocol adherence and entered into as spiritual law. (Cardinal and Hildebrandt, 2000). There was still notable concern by the Indian leadership and people for this development. At Treaty Four, Indian leadership expressed great concern with the fact that the Crown had purchased Rupert’s Land from the Hudson Bay Company. It was not theirs to sell and this concern threatened to derail this Treaty. In Treaty Six, Big Bear famously refused to enter into these negotiations. Ultimately, the treaties were entered into but not without misgivings or concerns as expressed by some of the Indian leadership at that time. (Morris, 1880; Ray, et al 2000)

What I find is that there is conflict that is also expressed in a contemporary sense most often by Indian lawyers for the interpretation of the Treaties. Some will say that there is no doubt that the treaties were cessation instruments. I recall listening to Justice Murray Sinclair make this statement at a talk on the Royal Proclamation of 1763 250th Anniversary in Winnipeg, Manitoba where he spoke of his love/hate for this Proclamation. At that same time, Indigenous

lawyer Aimee Craft (2013) writes that there was no understanding of ‘cede’ and surrender at Treaty One. Craft would support a ‘spirit and intent’ understanding that other Treaty territories also claimed in their mainly oral accounts. Cree lawyers Sharon Venne (2007) and Harold Cardinal (2007) both from Treaty Six must also be noted for their written arguments to also support a ‘spirit and intent’ understanding.

4. *Nehiyawak* Cree History

In Cree history, *The Plains Cree: An Ethnographic, Historical and Comparative Study* by David Mendelbaum (1940) has been a definitive work on the Plains Cree. An earlier account is credited to Alanson Skinner in 1914 with the article *Notes on the Plains Cree* in the *American Anthropologist* journal. Chronologically, Tobias follows with an article on *The Subjugation of the Plains Cree, 1879-1885* (1983); and John Milloy also reviews *The Plains Cree, Trade, Diplomacy and War, 1790 to 1870* (1990). *Loyal to Death: Indians and the Northwest Rebellion* by Blair Stonechild and Bill Waiser (2010) is an account by a Cree academic that also offer examinations of Cree history in Saskatchewan. Mendelbaum includes ethnographic and comparative studies; Tobias offers an historical account to dispel the myths found particularly in George Stanley’s seminal *The Birth of Western Canada* (1960) and that this process was done so fairly to the Plains Cree or high-minded as Stanley attests. Milloy looks at three eras in Cree history and includes a chapter on Political and Social organization of the Cree. Each account offers insight into *Nehiyawak* organization, governance, leadership. Significantly, none refers to any specific involvement or role of *Nehiyawak* women in governance.

Other Cree historical accounts from Treaty Six include Edward Ahenakew’s *Voices of the Plains Cree* (1995), Dion’s *My Tribe, the Crees* (1996), and Christensen’s *Ahtakakoop and his People* (2000). Reference to women’s roles in Cree society may be inferred in some of these

accounts as they include first-hand accounts of Cree life as it was experienced in the late 1800s to early 1900s. At times they are told in the personal memories of Ahenakew and Dion.

Christiansen takes a particular look at Ahtakakoop and the history of this band. Ahenakew and Dion narratives are from direct memory and make an invaluable contribution to Plains Cree history as such.

Ruth M. Buck's *The Doctor Rode Side-saddle: The Remarkable Story of Elizabeth Matheson, Frontier Doctor and Medicine Woman* was re-printed in 2003 and is the author's story of her mother, the Doctor Elizabeth Matheson who arrived in Onion Lake in 1892 and would stay for 25 years. These accounts are valuable for the history of Onion Lake where my mother comes from in the Treaty Six territory. Fort Pitt was the place where Treaty Six was negotiated and it is a few miles southeast of Onion Lake and is a memorial park today. The significance of Fort Pitt is also related to what was called the Frog Lake Massacre. A monument in this area recognizes Big Bear who was involved in the aftermath of the 'massacre'. Frog Lake is a half hour drive west of Onion Lake and is also home to the Quinney relatives of my mother.

Treaty Six Cree and Metis women writers include Freda Ahenakew and Maria Campbell, each iconic for their early contributions to Indigenous language and literature respectively. Freda Ahenakew of the Ahtakakoop First Nation forged a legacy of Cree language learning with her published contributions to this field. For the purpose of this research, the work noted here is her partnership with H.C. Wolfart to edit *Kohkominawak Otacimowiniwawa. Our Grandmother's Lives As Told in their Words* (1992). Two of the seven women who contributed their oral stories in Cree to this collection are Metis whose first language is Cree. The other five are Plains Cree from various northern locations in Saskatchewan including from Ahenakew's First Nation of Ahtakakoop. The work is a testament to Ahenakew's dedication to the Cree language. All interviews were done in Cree, translated into English orthography and language as

well as Cree syllabics. The interviews focus on daily lives of these women over the past century as well as traditional teachings. Maria Campbell is Metis and her grandmother is from Ahtahkakoop. She clearly testifies the significance of her grandmother in her ground-breaking autobiography *Halfbreed*. Maria as well has fluency in Cree and Michif. The personal stories of women are telling of their leadership in nuanced and embedded ways that may be drawn out in careful review and interpretation. It is most clear from their anecdotes that their very survival at times demanded resources of strength and ingenuity which can be said to be characteristics of leadership.

Academic contributors on roles of First Nations women relating to Cree women include Chuchryk and Miller, editors of *Women of the First Nations. Power, Wisdom and Strength* (1997), a diverse collection of stories and work by ‘Native and non-Native scholars, feminists, and activists from across Canada’. One chapter in particular by Sarah Carter looks at the region of the Northern Plains in “First Nations Women of Prairie Canada in the Early Reserve Years, the 1870s to the 1920s: A Preliminary Inquiry” (1996). Carter is a well-known historian with published work on the development of Indian agriculture on the Northern Plains and on the File Hills Indian Farm Colony which was developed on the Peepeekisis Cree Nation at the turn of the century.

Part of my doctoral research will include continued research on the history of my band Peepeekisis including the development of a File Hills Indian Farm Colony, the development of which has been said to contribute to an interference with our rightful governance. (Carter 1987, 1990, 1991). In Peterborough Ontario, near the home area of Saskatchewan Agriculture Minister Motherwell and Treaty Commissioner Alexander Morris, I am renting a place in a stone house much like what I have seen back in Saskatchewan near my reserve of Peepeekisis. I heard

this summer that these houses built particularly around Abernathy there were in the fashion of the houses built here and as in the hometown of Morris in Perth and in the county of Lanark where Motherwell was from. The settlers including Richard W. Motherwell, first Agriculture Minister of Saskatchewan in 1906, attempted to transplant their more refined ways of living on the prairie wild land. Before the treaties, the planning for what to do with the Indians would start in this part of Canada in the east so that this Dominion might also be extended to the West.

5. Indigenous Women and Governance

What has been written on Indigenous women in governance and leadership includes accounts of modern-day women Chiefs as they forge their pathways into this contemporary elected system. (Anderson 2009, Voyageur 2008). In Treaty Four, Chief Marie Anne Daywalker of the Okanese First Nation was honoured at the Assembly of First Nations in 2016 as the longest serving Chief in Canada. AFN Chief Perry Bellegarde of Little Black Bear First Nation congratulated Chief Daywalker for her 35 years of leadership. Peepeekisis, Okanese, Starblanket and Little Black Bear are collectively known as the File Hills Indian reserves and are adjacent to each other in what is now southern Saskatchewan. Chief Tammy Cook-Searson was also re-elected in 2017 for a third term after first being elected as Chief in 2005 of the La Ronge First Nation in Treaty Six. With these growing developments, there may also be growing accounts of such achievements and what this means for Cree women leadership in Treaty Four and Treaty Six. Clearly at this time there is a lack of sources for this topic of Indigenous Women in governance and leadership in Canada. The larger question for Indigenous leaders is how this may be relevant for Indigenous governance in general today and how this may be practically applied to their problems and challenges? How do Indigenous women assert their inherent

authority today?

Wilma Mankiller, first female Principal Chief of the Cherokee in the United States who served from 1985 to 1995, writes from experience as elected leader of the Cherokee and gives this rare personal insight for Indian woman leadership in *Mankiller: A Chief and her People* (2000). I had heard of Mankiller before, her name alone was striking, and that she was first female Chief of the Cherokee was well recognized even in my region. As I read about her, I realize that she was the age of my mother and had started a family early as my mother had also. As I review her autobiography *Every Day is A Good Day, Reflections by Contemporary Indigenous Women* including a chapter on “governance: the people and the land” (2004), I read the Forewords by Louise Erdrich and Vine Deloria Jr. that talk of Mankiller and her lifetime contribution as an Indian woman leader. Even the title of the book has a particular significance of Mankiller taking on what has been traditionally male and Deloria explains,

The old war cry “It’s a good day to die” bespoke of the courage and fearlessness of men in battle and indicated that life was not worth living if one approached it with too much caution. Freedom demanded the willingness to sacrifice everything to ensure personal integrity. But what of the long periods between wars and crises? What about the daily lives we seek to fill with substance? Wilma has wisely taken the war cry and shown that Indian women have a spirit that transcends even the commitment to courage and love and holds societies together through the force of deeply cherished personalities. “Every day is a good day,” Wilma tells us, and this insight pervades the lives of Indian women who, regardless of the situation they faced, turned hardship into prosperity and created an identity for their people that could not be destroyed.

Wilma’s book is a collection from 19 women contributors on a range of topics. From the ‘governance’ chapter in *Every Day is a Good Day*, Jaune Quick-to-See Smith writes “Nation to nation becomes rhetoric...Still our treaties are the only thing standing between us and oblivion (in the government’s eyes). We must constantly stand vigilant” (Mankiller, 2004). Others American Indian women writers contribute concepts of *sovereignty* from their American Indian

woman perspectives in Mankiller's book.

Other biographical accounts of Indigenous women related to governance and sovereignty include Lee Maracle's *I am Woman, A Native Perspective on Sociology and Feminism* (1988) and Patricia Monture-Angus's *Thunder in My Soul, A Mohawk Woman Speaks* (1995). As feminist bell hooks notes, "Personal testimony, personal experience, is such fertile ground for the production of liberatory feminist theory because it usually forms the base of our theory-making" (1990, 8). Maracle and Monture-Angus both defined themselves as feminist. I will note here that strong Indigenous women may not always see themselves as feminist; furthermore, I believe their work may nonetheless contribute to such theory. Monture-Angus is a Mohawk that was married into the Treaty Six Territory where she taught at the University of Saskatchewan in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. This would be her home until she passed away in 2010.

6. Indigenous Feminism

Monture (1995), Maracle (1988) , Valaskakis (2005) all acknowledge that feminism for Indigenous women is not without contention. It may be common knowledge that Indigenous women do not buy into feminism easily or at all. At one point, Maracle recalls with regret how she openly said that she did not want to be acknowledged as a Native woman for her achievements, she was simply Indigenous. It was like a denial of her own womanhood in specific relation to who she was as a strong person. Monture refers to a comment by Winona (Stevenson) Wheeler who states that she is not a feminist. Wheeler thought there should be ways to share or unite as women but there were issues of concern with racism in the feminist movement that she could not accept, for one thing. Other writers referred to this issue of racism and feminism as

well. One of the titles of bell hooks books is *Ain't I a Woman?* that also refers to the issue of racism in a white feminist movement. Haraway also points to an identity crisis in the woman's movement. Who determines what a woman is? She prefers the term cyborg as half artificial being and half organic. So, the starting point is not Eve. The determination is socially constructed. Another title of bell hooks books is that *Feminism is for Everyone*. hooks remains a passionate feminist and believes it is for men also. In this complicated movement, where do Indigenous women come in? Monture as a Mohawk from a matriarchal background and history has no problem to claim 'the red roots of feminism' with an account of how feminism had actually drawn on Haudenosaunee knowledge for its inspiration.

From early stereotypes (Pocahontas, Sacajawea, Indian princess, squaw...) that Acoose examines (1995) to contemporary leadership, part of the reality of Indian women is a testimony to their strength. Part of their apparent inherent relation to the land as Mother Earth is also noted as a danger. As land and the nature is subject to control and capture, domination and exploitation as Haraway explains, this is also relegated to the role of women and their 'biology'. Valaskakis refers to Van Kirk's *Many Tender Ties* and the 'country wives' of the French fur-traders that were abandoned as the trade died out and as more European women became available. Today we may see Missing and Murdered Women in Canada as an extension of that erasure. What is important to note is how societal complicity is manufactured in such a disregard for Indian women as human.

Throughout my readings on Indian women overall I found myself being confronted with grief and a sense of loss to realize that some of these early academic Indian women leaders were now gone. Paula Gunn Allen, Wilma Mankiller, Gail Valaskakis, Patricia Monture come to mind. I had the opportunity to briefly meet Patricia and her young daughter Kate in 2006.

Monture indelibly impressed me in this short time and I have great respect for the legacy that she leaves to us now.

It is important to note the chronological development of Indian academic women, both American and Canadian, as we are recognizing the pioneers of these academic inroads and realizing the contemporary significance of their work. In a Canadian context, the Royal Commission on Aboriginal People that followed from the Kahnésatake Resistance in 1990 also marked a period of seminal work by Canadian Indian academic women (Maracle, 1988; Monture, 1995; Valaskakis, 2005). Now what I am seeing today in 2017 in my source review is the beginning of new work, both published and unpublished, by Indian women academics on the topic of women and treaty.

My review of Indian women is a very recent one for me and so I have been introduced to this field of writers and women who are new to me. I find that much of their work is not overtly feminist. This is a great contrast to work such as Donna Haraway's (1990) article on cyborgs (half organism/animal and half machine) that is a technical academic critique of social-feminism. I would also mention bell hooks here as a Black feminist academic who writes on the topic of racism as it intersects with gender and with class. Haraway and hooks never lose a focused gaze as they critically examine issues that are fundamentally feminist even when they make reference to women of color. Monture (1995) and Maracle (1988), in particular, state that they are indeed feminists, but their accounts are not focused on this either; they are telling personal stories of their lives as Indigenous women and what this struggle means. Valaskakis makes reference to feminism but her collection of essays is more academic than personal.

Reference focused on Indigenous feminist perspectives and the struggle to be 'equal' may also acknowledge that not all Indigenous women including Nehiyawak iskwew consider themselves feminist or with these aspirations. One of the reasons for this is conflict that seems

inherent with 'tradition'.

Unless we can have conversations about what traditions are, how they affect men and women in their gendered roles and what the implications of this are, we are moving a powerful socio-political critique off the table. (Green, 2007)

Green and others ask, 'what if such tradition is misogynist or elitist?' Arguments based on tradition may also be considered 'essentialist' as in polar opposition to assimilation. (Kidwell, 2009) In critical theory, this is considered pre-colonial and 'static' much the way that anthropologists have been criticized for writing about Indians merely as existing in history and from the past.

Andrea Smith in "Native American Feminism Sovereignty, and Social Change" (2005) acknowledges and examines some of the reasons why Native American women reject feminism is a matter prioritizing 'Indian and survival as Indian first' including a notion that 'sovereignty comes first'. She maintains "Nevertheless, we can be part of a collective, creative process that can bring us closer to a society not based on domination" (131). Joanne Barker's, Editor of *Critically Sovereign, Indigenous Gender, Sexuality, and Feminist Studies* (2017) is similar to her earlier work, *Sovereignty Matters: Locations of Contestation and Possibility in Indigenous Struggles for Self-Determination* (2013) that further looks at a range of regions and critical Indigenous gender, sexuality, and feminist perspectives from Hawaii, Navajo, Gender, Inupiaq men, Indianness, Queer politics, Eco-eroticism.

From a traditionalist perspective, early American Indian feminist Paula Gunn-Allen in "Red Roots of White Feminism. Who is Your Mother?" a chapter from her classic *The Sacred Hoop, Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions* first published in 1986 writes,

I think this is the reason traditionalists say we must remember our origins, our cultures, our histories, our mothers and grandmothers, for without that memory which implies continuance rather than nostalgia, we are doomed to engulfment by a paradigm that is

fundamentally inimical to the vitality, autonomy, and self-empowerment essential for satisfying, high-quality life.

Overall, as Nehiyawak and as First Peoples in this land, there is undoubtedly inherent conflict with patriarchal colonial systems that remain in force today.

Paula Sherman writes on this experience from a Canadian perspective in “The Friendship Wampum: Maintaining Traditional Practices in Our Contemporary Interactions in the Valley of the Kiji Sibi” (2008). Under external pressure from various groups, her Omamiwinini community would eventually develop a schism as some members would be drawn away from a foundation of the Seven Grandfather Teachings and these principles in their community’s policy,

...it is important to recognize that the laws of Canada do not supersede the intention of the Creator in placing Omamiwinini people here and giving us a way of living and a sacred responsibility to this land. It is this relationship that is the highest authority and from which all Omawinini people must take guidance...we are also our own worst enemy when it comes to having confidence in ourselves and articulating our autonomy without fear of reprisal by those forces who want to see us disappear from the land and waterscapes in our own territory.

Despite the manipulation of the outside groups who did not agree with Sherman’s community and their plans for a community hall, the Algonquin Ardoch people struggled to maintain and not abandon traditional jurisdiction.

Much like the American civil rights struggle, there is a question of whether that is also our struggle as Indigenous people? Are we seeking ‘equality’? Pan-Indianism may not serve our governance needs especially if our inherent governance is based on regional distinction. For example, not all regions are in the numbered treaty or pre-confederation treaty territories.

Several writers are critical of the ‘modern treaties and the idea that they are comparative to the numbered treaties including Cree lawyer Sharon Venne (2007, 2012), academics Taiaiake Alfred (Mohawk) and Jeff Corntassel (Cherokee) (2005) and lawyer Janice Switlo (1999). In variations

of ‘manufacturing consent’, ‘shape shifting’, and ‘certainty as extinguishment’, all provide their interpretation of what is really going on behind policies with the actual intent and purpose to undermine Indigenous self-determination. Despite these objections, other writers would counter their arguments in favour of comprehensive land claim agreements including Coates and Poelzer (2015), Flanagan, Alcantara and LeDressay (2010). As Indian leaders established in their rebuke of the White Paper in 1969 (Chretien 1969, Cardinal 1969) when they collectively said no to a Canadian notion of *equality* that they asserted was policy with a ‘hidden agenda’ of assimilation (Weaver 1981).

7. Community and Nation Relevance

Finally, what place does academic development have in public policy discussions today? Is there a gap between Indigenous leadership and academics? The mantra I grew up hearing on my reserve was to get an education. Not only that, it was just as important to bring that back as a resource to my band. Despite this much-touted message, the reality was far from this. The fact is that our governance does not always uphold education at least in terms of who becomes elected in our political structures. Education does not matter, time and time again, the people say this loud and clear. In my discussion with one of my MA and PhD Committee members, he said this was true and we should just be taking our children out of the schools. Why tell them to get an education?

I also recall bumping into a seasoned politician from back home and in our social banter, he remarked that he saw that academic reports just sat on shelves. Vine Deloria Jr., esteemed American Indian academic heartily concurs:

Perhaps we should suspect the real motives of the academic community. They have the Indian field well defined and under control. Their concern is not the ultimate policy that will affect the Indian people, but merely the creation of new slogans and doctrines by which they can climb the university totem pole... Why should we continue to be the private zoos for anthropologists? Why should tribes have to compete with scholars for funds when the scholarly productions are so useless and irrelevant to real life? (Deloria 1969)

Although Deloria takes particular aim at anthropologists, he does also ‘suspect’ all of the academic community. Though he made his criticisms at least in 1969, it is clear that appropriation issues are ongoing. Yes, and why should Indigenous academics be any different from other academics that put forth their reports without any commitment to their actual use; the larger question is of relevance? From my friend’s comments, there seems to be timeliness to issues that research may not be able to keep up to. There is also an issue of pertinence to specific governance issues as Indigenous nations are autonomous and distinct.

As a past elected Headman for my band Peepeekisis Cree Nation in Treaty Four Territory, I have community-based experience with our Indigenous governance issues. As a PhD student in Indigenous Studies, I am given an opportunity to address these issues in a different way as an academic. One of the questions I need to ask in this process is if there is also a gap between academics and Indigenous elected leadership? ²⁷ Furthermore, as a *Nehiyaw Iskwew*, I must also look at my own relationship with patriarchal systems.

Elizabeth Cooke-Lynn asks *Who Stole Native Studies?* (1997). She recalls that a gathering of early Native Studies academics convened at Harvard University in 1974 and

²⁷ In my experience and observation, academics may generally not be called on by elected First Nation leadership to support or develop governance capacity especially if the academic is from this First Nation. This may be due to lack of resources that includes the priority of governance capacity development. I recall being told that we need to get our education as Indian people but also to come back to our communities/First Nations. Even if we are told this is a responsibility, there may be a lack of positions or lack of political will to facilitate the return of academics to their First Nations.

determined that this field should have a focus to uphold sovereignty in support of Indian government. What had actually transpired from that time and in this development left Lynn to observe how this was derailed which left her to pose this question ‘who stole Native Studies’? As I look at the development of a Treaty Law School that is basically a one-week summer institute on Treaty issues that I facilitate in Regina/Treaty Four Territory, I am instinctively seeking academic space or spaces within this academy to uphold sovereignty. My first Treaty Law School was in 2015 and I dedicated one day to what I called an Academic and Leadership summit. It was the quietest day of that week and I am learning that it may be a significant challenge to bridge this particular gap. As an academic and former elected Headman of my band, I want to know why this is.

bell hooks is a renowned African American feminist who writes on “Theory as Liberatory Practice” (1991). Even as a young girl, hooks sought solace and even healing in *theory* from a life that was violent for her crime of being black and female. To ask a question for a status quo that criminalized her in such a way made her ‘dangerous’ even as a child. “This lived experience of critical thinking, of reflection and analysis, became a place where I worked at explaining the hurt and making it go away” (2). In this process, there should be ‘no gap between theory and practice’. As an adult academic, hooks would be dismayed to hear grassroots people who dismissed theory then as ‘enough talk and no action’. The insight that she offers significantly is the fear to speak out in these community spaces that are so critical to be engaged with. The purpose would be for a forum for voices to be heard that had essentially been silenced so how could one question or criticize? In time, she would resolve that no matter how uncomfortable that she would need to address such issues to ensure that the critical value of theory would not be dismissed. She could not defend theory that was not meant for practice but rather an arrogant positioning of exclusivity. If it was simply not accessible for activism and

social change then it deemed itself irrelevant as a gap between theory and practice, ‘any theory that cannot be shared in everyday conversation cannot be used to educate the public’. (5) How could this be healing and liberatory? In fact, such theory was a threat to liberation. bell hooks passionately testifies to the intrinsic value and need for feminist theory that we have yet to collectively determine as it is for all of society; she ardently advocates for feminist theory where there is no gap between this theory and feminist practice. Reading bell hooks helped me to make sense of what I was instinctively trying to do with the Treaty Law School.

8. Spaces of Wahkotowin (relationships) and Miyo-Wicehtowin (good relations)

Evelyn Peters “Geographies of Self-Government” (1999) and Mishuana Goeman in *Mark My Words, Native Women Mapping our Nations* (2013) examine the spaces that are prerequisite to Indigenous nationhood and this autonomy. With the challenges of traditional territories now colonized and occupied they discern what these shifting ‘spaces’ are today. Richard Wright’s historic contribution of *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815* (1991) looks at how Indian territory is defined with first the French and then the British in this time period. Wright explains that there was an agreement made between equals with the French and shared space that was negotiated in economic terms. The British would abandon this practice for one where they assumed more authority and control of the Indian people. Obwandiac would reassert Indian authority. Any American dealings were reduced to violence without any diplomacy toward Indian people.

It remains to be seen and it is the challenge for our governance today for how the promise of ‘nation to nation’ relationships will be forged with the new Trudeau government and First

Nations. There are two foundations that shape the current Indigenous and Northern Affairs of Canada (INAC) Department policy: one is based on legislation that becomes legally binding on INAC and the other is based on statistics that become interpreted as performance indicators which are, in turn, intended to illustrate meaningful trends as part of transparency and accountability standards. Both foundations are brought together to provide an overall performance story for the Canadian government. When it comes to treaties, and in my own experience, I have witnessed how these interpretations continue to be made without any consultation with Indian leadership. A major distinction is between Modern and Historic treaties in terms of allocated resources, objectives, and gaps between Indigenous and INAC interpretations. These are significantly different agreements and to put them together as ‘Treaties’ is not just a mistake in interpretation, it is a threat to the *sovereignty* (how that may be interpreted for Nehiyawak understanding) that was recognized at the time of the agreements, and which continues to exist to today. The foundations are law and governance. The foundations are *wahkotowin*/relationships where ‘we speak for ourselves’.

In these disparate and opposing positions, where is *wahkotowin* and *miyo-wicehtowin*? Where are these spaces? How necessary are they? In my MA Thesis, I started to address this concept of a *middle ground* in Indigenous Governance. Such spaces remains my topic of ongoing investigation as an inherent principle or framework for governance. Furthermore, in our Laws, which we often find in relation to the land and our inherent environments, how do we take direction in our governance today? (Borrows 2010). Do we find resolutions in our inherent Laws to the overwhelming challenges we face in our leadership, politics and governance today? Can we draw on our Laws for our governance today? Overall, and in relation to a question of governance responsibility: *How do we measure Wahkotowin/relationships as a concept, indeed a Law, that is central to our politics and governance in Treaty Four today?*

I ask these questions in relation to the territory I am from which is Treaty Four of the numbered treaties. These are also known as the ‘historic treaties’ from a Canadian government perspective. As an Evaluation Intern with Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development of Canada (AANDC) in the summer of 2015, I came to understand the crux of opposing perspectives between the Canadian government and members from my Cree First Nation of Peepeekisis as I recall hearing throughout my life on this reserve. The picture on the Queen’s Treaty medals is of a European settler and an Indigenous man shaking hands with the sun shining, the grass growing, the river flowing in the background. This is the Indian perspective of a relationship forged in this union. It is still relevant today as ever. It represents a law of *wahkotowin*, ‘relationships’ (Borrows 2010) for *miyo pimatisiwin*, ‘good life’ (Cardinal & Hildebrandt 2000). It is uttered in the prayer of *All My Relations*.

9. Individual and Collective Responsibility

Today we are reluctant humanists, some more than others. Even our governance often appears to act as individuals that can be removed from the grassroots collective that they are to represent and give a voice to. And within our collectives. Where is the unity? Whether we live on or off-reserve, as domesticated buffalo we live within fences today. If anyone may know our frustration and aggression within these circumstances, it is what we may express to each other in our isolated states and again, whether we are on or off-reserve. Furthermore, as individuals we may want the benefits of the collectivity and so it seems at times rights without responsibility.

Related to this topic of inherent responsibility, there are issues with any emphasis on the individual as opposed to the collective in our development. Again, we saw this most clearly in Liberal individualism of the 1969 White Paper that was rejected by Indian leadership as a

collective whole (Cardinal 1969, Chretien 1969, Weaver 1981). Patricia Monture-Angus in “Power, Identity, and Indigenous Sovereignty” (2008) explains,

We, as Indigenous people, do not see ourselves as separate from our people or our land. This gaze, which has authenticity as its central focus is contrary to Indigenous epistemologies where identity is not an isolated phenomenon. First Nations identity is a function of community and belonging to that community. It is a fundamental component of both Indigenous knowledge(s) and the voices that breathe life into those knowledge(s).

Despite any urban exodus from the time, we could leave the reserves, via enfranchisement or not, individuals who made the choice to leave the herd perhaps for their own survival may also acknowledge today that there is also an element in the collective that is still vital to their survival even as an individual. How do we claim individual rights without taking collective responsibility? If this is possible, at least it may not be fair and it is antithetical to our nationhood.

Conclusion

Indigenous scholarly writing has emerged in the field of Indigenous governance and politics. (Alfred 2009, Borrows 2010, Coulthard 2014, Corntassel 2011, Fontaine 2013). Traditional principles are considered for their contemporary relevance. What is distinctly and inherently ours? In a process of decolonization, how are we able to draw on such principles for our governance today? Or perhaps we may only recognize what does not work and the colonial structures that must be rejected for our own survival as distinct people and nations. It is clear that our foundations are critical to our survival and well-being today. To determine the pathways and frameworks that are protective today, there must be a rejection of colonial mainstays that have eroded our inherent structures and this understanding today. To willingly compromise

survival is not an option and it is not a way forward as descendants of our ancestors. The pathways are fraught with unseen and unrecognized danger and perils that these authors and academics have identified in their own contributions to mapping out the ways that we retain and protect who we are as Indigenous people today.

From historic looks at Treaty and Cree History to Indigenous Women roles, both in an historic and contemporary sense, to concepts of Indigenous Feminism and a ‘middle ground’, this proposal is for a determination of what the roles of Nehiyawak Iskwewak are in governance and leadership are and particularly in relation to upholding Treaty ‘spirit and intent’ as an Indigenous Law today. As a Law, Treaties are to be enforced rather than merely *implemented* as a tool. Again, this may be a reference to a distinction between *literal* and *spirit and intent* understanding and interpretation of Treaty as a Law or not. *Cree law contains many fundamental principles...wahkotowin is viewed as the overarching law governing all relations... with implications for individuals, families, governments, and nations.* (Borrows, 2010)

Wahkotawin is said to be a Law of “Relationships” in Nehiyawak/Cree Governance in Treaty Four and Treaty Six Territory. What is the inherent role of Nehiyawak Iskwewak to *enforce* Treaty and Wahkotowin as a Law? What is the role of the Nehiyawak Iskwewak alongside other Indigenous leaders who are forging the way for decolonization in Indigenous governance today?

Appendix 2

Building a School of Indian Treaty Law

Honouring a legacy of Nohtawiy ekwa Nikawiy.

Introduction

Nohtawiy, my father George Poitras of Peepeekisis Cree Nation attended Qu'Appelle Indian Residential School in Lebret, Saskatchewan in Treaty Four Territory for 13 years. *Nikawiy*, my mother Marie Alma (nee Quinney) attended St. Anthony's Indian Residential School for 9 years in her community of Onion Lake on the Alberta and Saskatchewan border in Treaty Six. My father passed away in 2005. I accessed his Residential School education credits²⁸ with the approval of his executor, my mother, to develop a one-week Treaty Law Summer Institute at the First Nations University of Canada and Luther College of the University of Regina in Regina, Saskatchewan from August 23-29, 2015. In August 2017, I changed the name to School of Indian Treaty Law. As I had been advised at the School in 2015, I also sought a name for the School in ceremony and "The Universe is Listening to Me" is translated for this namesake. I acknowledge this gift from *Paskwaw Moostoos, Hiy Hiy*.

I recall listening to Harold Cardinal in a 1999 interview that I did with him at his home on Sucker Creek Cree First Nation relating how the Indian Residential Schools had the blatant purpose 'to kill the Indian in the child' (Poitras 2000). The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada that would be set up from 2008 to 2015 further stated,

Indian Residential Schools date back to the 1870's. The policy behind the government funded, church-run schools attempted to "kill the Indian in the child". Over 130 residential schools were located across the country, with the last one closing in 1996. <http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/index.php?p=39>

John Milloy also contends in his book *A National Crime, The Canadian Government and the Residential School System, 1879 to 1986* that Indian Residential Schools were 'violent' from

²⁸ "The Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement stipulates that once all Common Experience Payments (CEP) have been made, if more than \$40 million remains in the Trust Fund, the funds are to be made available to CEP Recipients, upon application, in the form of non-cash Personal Credits of up to \$3,000 each for educational purposes." http://www.classactionservices.ca/irs/Personal_Credits/PCA-Home.htm

their ideological inception (1999, xv). He refers to David Nock's writing on Captain Richard Henry Pratt, principal of Carlyle Indian Industrial School in Pennsylvania for a policy to 'kill the Indian in him, save the man' (Nock 1988, 5). Pratt founded the school in 1879 and as long-time superintendent until 1904 utilized a notion of cultural assimilation that some consider to be cultural genocide.²⁹

Our education now must have the purpose to nurture and support our Indigeneity the same way we love our children and our Ancestors. As a *Nehiyaw Iskwew*, a Cree woman and PhD student, this is the critical education that I have always been seeking but which I do not find in any education Institution. In many instances, we unwittingly adopt colonized perspectives and frameworks as our own that perpetuates colonized agendas. If we do not see and correct this in time, we may forfeit the *inherent sovereignty* of our Ancestors who lived this way of life and who left us this legacy that is also responsibility. Although the term *sovereignty* may be seen as problematic as well (Alfred 2009, Rifkin 2011), this is precisely the call for a space for this dialogue such as the School of Treaty Law. Perhaps more recently a term of *nationals* is also more commonly used to reference Indigenous nationhood as what existed before and what continues to exist as autochthonous and unfettered despite colonial incursion. Overall, we need to ask ourselves what the consequences are for adopting what is not our own or *internal* in terms of frameworks and terminology? This is a question also relating to protocols and our own law enforcements. We sit with our Ancestors as we have always done and we reconstitute our circles of sharing on these matters as any ceremony.

²⁹ "A great general has said that the only good Indian is a dead one, and that high sanction of his destruction has been an enormous factor in promoting Indian massacres. In a sense, I agree with the sentiment, but only in this: that all the Indian there is in the race should be dead. Kill the Indian in him, and save the man."- Richard Thomas Pratt at a convention in 1892. Bear, Charla. May 12, 2008, NPR, "American Indian Boarding Schools Haunt Many". Accessed October 15, 2017. <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/4929/>

Our history of governance must have a place in our education today. This is not any program legislated by the Canadian government. In a School of Treaty Law, I seek our Indigenous governance frameworks as our Ancestors stipulated. I seek to honour the legacy of my mother and my father, *Nikawiy ekwa Nohtawiy*, as the ones who gave me life and as Indian Residential School survivors. I seek to honour the legacy of our Ancestors as well as their fight against colonialism that was simply in their own way of ‘good life’, *Miyo Pimatisiwin*, to honour Creator’s Law given to them and that allows me to be here today as a *Nehiyaw Iskwew*.

Intergenerational

My father George Poitras of Peepeekisis Cree Nation and my mother Marie Alma (nee Quinney of Onion Lake Cree Nation) were married in September 1962 after meeting in Onion Lake where my father was a teacher at St. Anthony’s Indian Residential School. This was the same school my mother attended until she was transferred to Assumpta Academy in North Battleford to stay in residence there for her grade nine completion. My father is the oldest of eleven children that my grandparents Enock and Martha (nee Brass of Key First Nation) Poitras raised on Peepeekisis. He attended the Qu’Appelle Indian Residential School (QIRS) in Lebret, Saskatchewan from grade one until his graduation from the St. Paul’s High School division of QIRS in 1957. My mother comes from a family of fourteen and her parents were Charles and Marie Cecil (nee Watchmaker of Kehewin First Nation in Alberta) Quinney. Both of my maternal and paternal grandparents attended Indian Residential Schools. My father was the only one of my parents and grandparents to graduate from High School.

My parents met when one of the nuns asked my father, as a teacher at the Residential School, to give my mother a ride back to her residence in North Battleford. My mother was

trying to stay at home as she did not want to return to school. Somehow my father convinced her to take the drive back to North Battleford with him and back to school. She would complete her grade nine that year. Later that year she would also marry my father and they would move to live on Peepeekisis. They would have six children and I am the oldest, their daughter.

In my own grade eleven I opted to also attend the Qu'Appelle Indian Residential School in Lebret. As they did not have a grade twelve then at that time, I tried a couple of high schools before directly entering the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College associated with the University of Regina in Regina, Saskatchewan. In 2015, I started the first year of a PhD program in Indigenous Studies at Trent University in Peterborough, Ontario. The proposed subject of my dissertation research is the *Nehiyaw Iskwew role in governance and Treaty Enforcement, Treaty Four and Treaty Six, Nikawiy teachings and narratives*.

Indian Residential School

In 2000, I produced my first documentary on the history of my band “To Colonize A People: The File Hills Indian Farm Colony” which tells the story of how the Indian Agent William Morris Graham came to the File Hills reserves, Peepeekisis, Okanese, Starblanket, Little Black Bear, and Carry The Kettle to start his development of an Indian Farm Colony on Peepeekisis (Poitras 2000). This was a unique initiative and it would come to be known for its controversial social engineering and ‘rapid assimilation’. Indian Residential School graduates would be mainly selected from local schools and brought to the Colony to encourage them to become farmers.

In October 2017 and after a process of 30 years from when it was first submitted in 1986, the File Hills Colony Claim³⁰ was accepted for negotiation with the Canadian government. From a 2004 Indian Claims Commission Report, this conclusion had already been made,

The Crown could have avoided a serious breach of its lawful obligations simply by developing the farming Colony on Crown land outside a reserve and by following its own statutory procedures. Instead, it decided to save its resources by using the reserve of an unsuspecting band that was without leadership the whole period. Through the ambition of one Indian Agent, William Graham, and with the approval of the Department of Indian Affairs, the Crown embarked on a series of illegal practices which seriously infringed on the Peepeekisis Band's legal interest in its reserve and forever changed its identity as a band (Indian Claims Commission 2004, 4).

Years of division have followed the initial development of the colony that included an imposed isolation from the rest of Peepeekisis achieved through the close monitoring of Graham. Labels of 'originals' and 'placements' are still known in the community.

In my final undergraduate year of Film Studies, I began research on the history of Peepeekisis. I planned to go to the elders first of all. At my very first visit, I encountered the anger of the elder I went to see. He spoke angrily of my family as we were 'placements' and he considered himself to be an 'original'. He passed away many years now so shall go unnamed for this writing. Even so, I have rarely mentioned my experience until now. He basically told me that I had no right to ask about our history. I was stunned and went home. I let my father know what had happened. He was quiet and did not say anything much that I recall. He knew where I was going and what I was trying to do. He could not warn me and then I realized that he was not surprised. No matter what, he gave that elder his respect. I am sure it must have hurt my father deeply to know how his daughter had just been treated but he would not respond in anger. This

³⁰ "From 1894 to 1935, the Band had no recognized leadership. In 1898, Indian Agent William Graham established a plan, called the File Hills Scheme, to bring Indian graduates of industrial schools, who were members of other bands, to live and farm on the Peepeekisis reserve. The File Hills Scheme was a unique experiment in Canada to further the education of Indians and their assimilation into the non-Indian way of life. Indian Agent Graham strictly controlled the everyday lives of Peepeekisis band members." *Peepeekisis First Nation Inquiry, File Hills Colony Claim*. (Indian Claims Commission, March 2004. V)

was not cowardice on his part but rather much more about a type of courage it takes to rise above misguided cruelty even if it was directed at one of his own. It was a lesson indelibly inscribed upon my own consciousness and my father's courage became my own. The old man was pitiful in his rage...and suddenly not my *keteyayak*, my elder.

In the end, the story in the documentary I produced was about the Indian Residential School although I did not always realize this even as though I was part of gathering and telling this story. At the time in 2000, there was not much being said about the Residential Schools it seemed, especially by the students themselves. In my first experience doing research in 1988 on the history of my band, I realized that people were not talking about the schools and if they were students, they were not talking about their experiences. In 2000, when I finally produced my documentary I realized that this story was among the first that were starting to be told in public. There were few documentaries at that time that were about the Residential School. Because our band history including the history of the Colony was so intrinsically about the Residential school experience as the Colony members were specially selected as graduates of the Residential School, our band history and the story of the documentary is about the Indian Residential School experience. The Indian Agent Graham would boast that 'in nine times out of ten, the student returns to their communities and their education becomes a complete waste of time. The influence of the old ones was too great...the Colony was how he had solved this *Indian problem*' (Poitras, 2000). In our community stories, I cannot recall hearing anything positive about Graham.

Resilience

Niya Askitako Piasew Iskwew. I am Blue Thunderbird Woman. This is who I am. And where I come from is trauma, yes. Colonization alone ensures that I am a product of this history

and upheaval. On a summer morning I am having breakfast with *Nikawiy*, my mother, in a small local city, we eavesdropped on a conversation at the next table where three farmers talked about land in terms that were truly foreign to us. *Kikawiyino Aski*, our mother earth, was strictly commodified in terms relating to sales, ownership, resources. We were acknowledged as much as ghosts at the next table quietly munching on our eggs and French toast. Yet as ghosts there was no doubt we flitted in their subconscious at the very least...we are still here...we still live in parallel universes with different tongues, different worlds. More than ever, they could not help but feel our spiritual presence. No doubt their little hairs stood as we passed them by. A pipe and arrow are both made of stone and wood. In time, the wood might disintegrate but the stone pipe bowl and the arrowhead remain indefinitely. For the *Nehiyawak*, the Cree, the stone is alive. It is our grandmother and our grandfather, so closely related to us. For me, this is a definition of resilience and it is also an interpretation that colonialism is an ongoing trauma and struggle. It is that “good fight” that lets me know that we are still alive and that we still hold our inherent place in this world and on *Kikiwayino Aski*, our mother earth.

It is this “good fight” that I bring to my development of a School of Treaty Law. In my master’s studies Indigenous Governance program at Winnipeg and on one of my road trips from Peepeekisis in Saskatchewan to Winnipeg in Manitoba, I thought of what I wanted to see in Treaty work. I believe there is a gap for an understanding of Indian Treaty as a law. I relate this specifically to the numbered Indian Treaties and also to my own region of Treaty Four. For my dissertation studies now, I propose that I also relate this to my mother’s original region of Treaty Six and I will focus part of my research on her teachings including narratives particularly to me as her *Nitanis*, daughter. I had applied to use my Education Credits from the Common Experience payments for Indian Residential School students to attend a summer International Law program but the process was so lengthy that although my request was accepted, it was too

late. I was disappointed but I realized that what I really was seeking was a law program related to Indian Treaty. I believed any existing academic institution in Canada or anywhere did not offer this. I was not seeking a Canadian interpretation or this framework as I considered it antithetical to a Treaty “spirit and intent” Indian interpretation of the Indian Treaties.

In a School of Indian Treaty Law thought, I am seeking Treaty governance frameworks as our Ancestors stipulated before and at the time of Treaty. I am seeking this alignment with our inherent principles of nationhood and sovereignty. These are all foreign terms but I am trying to make this articulation for a contemporary understanding of what this grounding and framework mean and as a framework that is more spiritual than theoretical. In an Indigenous language session *Nikawiy* and I attended, others mentioned “land-based...ceremony...pre-amble...our perspectives...our understanding...inherent borders”. I am listening for this conversation, this dialogue today. Despite an onslaught of national news and Institutional mandates contrary to these voices, I am catching these individual and collective comments and statements that resonate however faintly or deeply with an alignment to Indian Treaty as a Law and as our Ancestors stipulated. This is not necessarily policy or politics or legislation. This is protocol and pre-amble denoting our inherent governance.

School of Treaty Law

In examples of what may be called alternative schools independently based on Indigenous culture and teachings, there has been the Red School House in St. Paul, Minnesota in 1972 (Benton-Banai 1988), the Akwesasne Freedom School on Akwesasne in 1979 (Porter 2008) and an Anishinaabe Bimadiziwin Cultural Healing and Learning Program in Burleigh Falls, Ontario in 2002 (Bell 2013). Today these programs are now defunct with the exception of

the Akwesasne Freedom School. Both the Red School House and Bell's program were specifically based in urban settings. The Akwesasne Freedom School is rural and community-based with a significant part of its funding coming from the community and its families (Akwesasne Freedom School website). All of these educational institutions were initiated and developed with the concern that the education being offered to Indigenous children were void of cultural teachings and meaning, including language, stories, and history.

The initiation of alternative Indigenous schools as well as the growing Indigenous studies graduate programs mark a growing awareness of acknowledgement for the value of Indigenous knowledge and history but a paradigm shift to center this knowledge has not yet developed substantially to bring this knowledge from the fringes of Eurocentric authority. There is a relation to exposing hegemony in education where elite power structures are upheld inadvertently by the rest of society: "*Counterhegemony* refers to the illumination of so-called universal interests as partisan interests that help the elites garner even more social, political and economic power" (Orlowski 2012, 3). The purpose of the School of Treaty Law is to make a paradigm shift so that such invisible and inequitable power structures are similarly brought to light. Furthermore, and beyond a critical analysis, the distinctive purpose for the School of Treaty Law is for an alignment with inherent and appropriate foundations.

Creating the space for a School of Treaty Law is an initial step and challenge. The space is ideological and informal. Moreover, it may not be formalized under 'foreign' jurisdiction such as provincial or federal incorporation. How can one nation's laws be brought under another nation's especially if it is the *founding Nation*? The Canadian state recognizes only two founding nations: British and French.

The challenge and even downfall for the alternative Indigenous schools was stable funding to maintain their operation. Most funding sources are under Canadian jurisdictions. In

2015, the National Indian Brotherhood Trust Fund (NIB Trust) was announced to be administered by the Assembly of First Nations and based on funding that was initially part of the Indian Residential School Common Experience payments. Competitive funding programs for organizations and individuals could be applied for starting early in 2016. The main eligibility requirement for the organization funding was a registered charitable status and number. This immediately disqualified the overwhelming majority of Indian Bands and Indigenous organizations. They could apply for this status but none could be ready for the initial application deadline. The particular dilemma for the School of Treaty Law was an acknowledgement that incorporation and charitable legislation would bring the School under a Canadian jurisdiction. The funding was presumptively tied to conditions that were antithetical to the jurisdictional foundation of the School that was based on Treaty.

Some of the challenges faced with appropriate jurisdiction is that these boundaries may be unseen or not easily discerned. Such jurisdictional frameworks are often drawn in ceremony. What is clear is that Indian people today maintain recognition of protocols and beliefs that still guide their lives. These are still Laws. What is also maintained is that what is spiritual may also not appropriately be written or documented and so these may be dismissed in a Western lens or context but as long as there is an observance of this knowledge in Indian people's lives and ways of life then they are alive and meaningful in this *practice*. Laws live in the people but may also be abandoned by the people as well. People have rights as opposed to organizations having rights and this is often noted when it comes to Provincial Territorial Organizations (PTOs) or Non-profit Government Organizations (NGOs) and other organizations such as the Assembly of First Nations. Without the authority for representation of the people and their rights other than as explicitly delegated by the people, the organizations are advocacy groups and they are not governments.

With the initial announcement for the signing of a Memorandum of Agreement (MOU) in April 2015, 2017 between Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and Assembly of First Nations (AFN) National Chief Perry Bellegarde, a seemingly new political practice was quietly being enacted and one that wary watchers noticed with some alarm (Jago 2017). When the MOU was actually signed on June 12, 2017, Indigenous support for this event was not unanimous including the Ontario and Alberta Regional Chiefs of the AFN who did not endorse this MOU. As APTN News reported, there was backlash evident in social media from grassroots and other critics who believed that the signing was not appropriate (Lamirande 2017). Indigenous inherent rights holders do indeed also have the sovereignty to be a party, unwitting or not, to the termination of their own rights. This remains the contention and controversy for the danger implicit in ‘hidden agendas’ of Canadian legislation and long-standing national mandate for Indigenous people to be assimilated under Canada’s jurisdiction (Weaver 1981). This is the suspicion of those who are watchful of attempts to initiate new political practice. *How can there be ‘nation to nation’ in an ongoing Canadian mandate for assimilation* is one of the queries to be closely looked at in a School of Indian Treaty Law.

The School of Indian Treaty Law is the creation of a space to address a current gap for the critical analyses of how Treaty may be protected and enforced as Law. It seems clear that there is this need for protection. True “nation to nation” relations may be recognized as *wahkotowin*, relations. Such a principle translates as authority and protection as Law that is mutually binding just as the Treaties were intended to be. Until a true “nation to nation” relationship is achieved there will be a need to create and sanction protective spaces such as the School of Indian Treaty Law. Indian Affairs is the third largest Department in the Canadian government with a budget of approximately 8 billion dollars. So where is the capacity support

for Indigenous governance? It is not found in Indian Affairs nor can it appear that it will be found in the reorganization of Indian Affairs into two Departments.³¹

Just as in 1969, there is a need for rebuttal and address of Canadian legislation and their White Papers. This argument cannot be made by assimilated so-called First Nations if they have already marched themselves down to the river and to the tune of the Indian Affairs pied piper. This is one of the greatest misunderstandings today and that is we make these choices for ourselves of whether we are enfranchised/assimilated or not. Tragically there are those who have already made this choice even though they may not understand this. This is the danger of constitutional templates that can have the effect of terminating that Nation's inherent link to their rightful foundations. Just because something is not written does not mean that we do not already have our Spiritual and unwritten constitutions that we know as Creator's Law for millennia before any pen was brought to this land and among the longest in the world. Despite MOUs and signing on to this legislation that may seem fine to a Canadian lawyer whether Indian or not, this is not the same as political practice and is lacking in a foundation of constitutional process to make such changes in Canada's own laws. Clearly they do not teach these complexities in any school of Canadian law.

Today we still need our own articulations and rightful representation in Red Papers. We need the protection of appropriate pre-ambls to any written agreements to ensure that we are basing our positions rightfully in our own legal and lawful frameworks. The School of Indian Treaty Law is identified as *Indian* as a reference to Canada's own Law and binding obligations with the Indian Treaties. Appropriate provisions were supposed to have been made in the Indian Act to uphold Canada's own duty to the Honour of the Crown. The Monarchy is still the Head of State in Canada. It is not Indian inherent sovereignty that needs to be questioned as this was

³¹ "Prime Minister Justin Trudeau split Indigenous and Northern Affairs into two departments and named a second minister. The two departments of Indigenous Affairs will have one side focusing on a new relationship with Indigenous people, such as First Nations working on self-government agreements, and the other will continue providing services for all First Nations. Minister Carolyn Bennett will lead the new department becoming the minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs, former Health Minister Jane Philpott will become the minister of Indigenous Services". <http://aptnnews.ca/2017/08/28/ottawa-splits-indigenous-affairs-into-two-departments/>

already assumed in the Treaty negotiations that allowed for the development of Canada's constitution. Indian people had lived under Creator's Laws from the beginning and much longer than 150 years. The School of Indian Treaty Law is a calling to a modern day 'tribe' today who still speak a common language of Indian sovereignty and Indian Treaty as a Law not to be implemented but as a Law to be enforced. This Treaty Tribe speaks the language of their Nationhood in terms of the protection of rightful land and laws that remain in practice and a critical responsibility as such today.

Conclusion

In my doctoral studies, I am further relating the Treaty Law School and Indian Treaty alignment to the role and leadership of Indian women³². There is clearly a gap for the role of women and treaties. At the Indigenous Language session previously noted, one of the delegates who is an elected representative of her band mentioned "women and the land" with relation to land-based association with language. My mother who is also a Cree teacher and Master of Education student would also call this a "natural curriculum". Women have the gift of life-bearing as *Kikawiyino Aski*, our mother earth is also life-bearing. We are her children that she gives life to and we are subject to Creator's Law for all of these gifts and responsibility. It is a reciprocal relationship.

In this association, what is the inherent role of women for Treaty and this governance today? Why is there virtually no mention of Indian women when it comes to the Treaties? Where is the leadership of women today? In my own experience, I am hearing that women have

³² As many *nehiyawak iskwewak*, I am reluctant to label myself feminist. It is not so easy as taking up a label despite any merit to assume this also. Again a conversation is needed, a dialogue needs to happen internally and externally of our social systems to articulate what a meaningful association might be.

a duty and leadership role today to uphold when it comes to Treaty Law. Therefore, *Women and Treaty* is one theme for the School of Treaty Law. For four days, mornings started with ceremony to open a plenary mandate for the development of the School of Treaty Law in 2017 and beyond. The prayers mark a protocol and a sanctioned space created for an inherent understanding and teachings of Treaty Law and this enforcement today.

The need is to be protective. It is clear that colonialism is ongoing in contemporary legislation. The historic position of Canadian relations with Indian peoples is stalwart on assimilation as legislation and termination. This ‘hidden agenda’ has been called out from its beginning yet remains the Canadian mandate (Weaver 1981). With resources at hand, the Canadian government can afford to fund programming that meets its needs in opposition to Indigenous sovereignty and inherent governance.³³

Poverty is an effective weapon and the lack of resources is one great reason why there appears to be little to counter this “official” position. In my own experience as an elected Headman of Peepeekisis, I understood clearly that Indigenous governance capacity remains minimal with virtually no funding allocated through what is budgeted through Indian Affairs. Independent funding is the greatest option but these sources are not available for all First Nations. Sovereignty may not be the mandate of a Nation who is willing or perhaps not aware that there is any detriment to Canadian legislation that they choose to comply with. Part of such Canadian policy is illustrated in the development of the Indian Residential Schools. The School of Treaty Law is a proposal to counter this education.

In 2005, my father would pass away of complications due to diabetes including heart failure. He was only 68. In the following years we would do memorial events, including an

³³ An example of such legislation that has the effect of Indigenous rights termination is the First Nations Land Management Agreement as explained in *Apple Cede* by Janice Switlo.

annual walk/run for Aboriginal diabetes awareness and an annual hockey tournament at Lebret, that is now owned by the Starblanket band who had the Eagle Dome ice rink arena. As a filmmaker, I documented these events and would eventually produce my second documentary, “Buffalo: A Memorial” based on my father’s life and the Indian Residential School experience (Poitras 2014). Both my parents were teachers. My mother only recently retired but remains busy as a part-time Cree teacher, as a *keteyayak* and elder, and finishing her master of education. *Nikawiy* remains vital in her work and at the heart of our family.

The Indian School of Treaty Law is the legacy of *Nohtawiy ekwa Nikawiy*, my parents George and Marie Alma Poitras of Peepeekisis. This legacy is a much greater story than can be told here but I know that I am only here and doing the work that I do because of their inspiration, influence and support. I am here because of their love and their own inherent sovereign positions in the lives they modelled for us. This choice was for me to make only and this was the freedom that they honoured me with. How I choose to honour my parents and ancestors is as a Law, so it is my responsibility to help to ensure that the great value of our ways maintains the critical and good life, *miyo pimâtisiwin*, that is given to us this way. They tell me who I am, *ekosi*.

Appendix 3

Genealogy

		McKay, William		Mary			
		Ouyezakwan					
		QUINNEY, Charles Thomas		GROSSMANN, Lubelle			
		Marito Nekk Nekkiviss					
Benjamin		Angus		Joseph		Eliel	
m: PTT, Margaret		m: HUNTER, Maria		m: VIVIER, Gladys		m: DILLON, William	
William		Ernest		Charlie		Myles	
m: MASON, Mary		m: HUNTER, Douglas		m: WATCHMAN, Mary Cecile			
Helen		Charles		Gordon		Josephine	
Liz		Charles		Donald		m: PARENTAU, Charles	
John		Charlotte		Aime		Wilfred	
Walter		Luan		Quina		Philis	
Valerie		Mary		Charles		Iris	
Uweart		Lillian		Sunny		Victor	
Victor		Myles				Lloyd	
Victoria		Marina		m: PARENTAU, Alex		Edna	
Catherine Marie		Walton		Stella		Mary	
Mary Louise		Christina		Oliver		Christina	
Harriet		Roy Lloyd		Fred		Fred	
m: Whitstone		Lloyd		Mary		Catherine	
		m: Stanhaan, Edna		m: HARRIS, Peter		Victor	
		Violet Fay		Vita		Fred	
		George Alex		Pat		Thomas	
		Walter S.		Christina		Emma Julia	
		Elizabeth M.		Baby		William Franklin	
		Marvin W.		Belen		Raphaie	
		Marion G.		Joseph		Lena	
		Helen Boyd				Harvey	
		Lidia				John	
		Landra Fay				m: DINGWILL, Mary	
		Bridget Mary				William Francis	
		Alan				Frederic	
		Don				Alan	
		Elias				Eva	
		m: GARDIN, Sarah				Christina	
		John Gordon				Lloyd	
		Edward F. J.				Liz	
		Catherine Joy				Henry	
		William James				Francis	
						Rena	
						Cameron	
						Theresa	
						Eva (Edith ?)	
						m: Stone, Irvin	
						Douglas	
						m: MARGENT, Margaret	
						John	
						Myles	
						Lloyd	
						Rudolph	
						Harvey	
						Alan	
						Adina	
						Josephine	
						Martha	
						George	
						Alan	
						Liz	
						Richard	
						Pat	
						Reneeth	
						Angus Henry	
						m: Wallace-Steinhilber Margaret	
						Roderick	
						m: Hunter, Caroline	
						Raphaie Thomas	
						Charlotte	
						Harriet Sylvia	
						Charles Lawrence	
						Howard William	
						Jeffrey Austin	
						Edwin Frank	
						Aldna Lendon	
						Archie Edgar	
						Joseph Gary E.	
						Mary Gloria	
						Percy Ronald	
						Freda	
						m: Watchmaker, John	
						Yvonne	
						Lawrence	
						m: Stone, Margaret	
						Jean	
						Raymond	
						Donald	
						Ronald	
						Martha	
						Larry	
						Alan	
						Gordon	
						Paul	
						Jony	
						Ducky	
						Angeline	
						Lily	
						Christina	
						m: Dingwall, Joseph	
						Bridis	
						Berneth	
						William	
						Clifford	
						Eva Bernice	
						Jean Alex (Jack)	
						Joanne Mary	
						Raymond Joseph	
						Max Cecil	
						Cyril Benjamin	
						Elnor Adrian	
						Maxine Yvette	
						Marianne	
						Muriel	
						Mary Ellen	
						Floide	
						Muriel	