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Narrative as Lived Experience

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Article abstract

My concern is these serious issues will continue to worsen, as a domino effect that our Ancestors have warned us of in their Prophecies (Arvol Looking Horse, May 2010). Aboriginal peoples have walked a long way through a landscape of loss and determination since early contact with Europeans. Today Indigenous authors, healers and spokespeople are asking our people to awaken fully and begin the process of reviving and practicing the seven sacred values that guided our ancestors and ensured that we might live today. The Prophesies and Creation stories contain the encouragement our people need to unburden themselves of deeply embedded historic trauma and loss. We have work to do; to tell our own stories, to actively participate in rescripting the narrative of our lives and representations, and to do this in our own voices (Nissley, 2009). This paper is a narrative of the historic challenges that have shadowed the many since 'his-story' began interspersed with the story of my own lived experience.

Narrative as Lived Experience

It is time, she said, we have strayed far enough and need a light to guide us home, will you hold up your life so we can see? (Cynthia Wesley-Esquimaux, 2009)

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Abstract

My concern is these serious issues will continue to worsen, as a domino effect that our Ancestors have warned us of in their Prophecies (Arvol Looking Horse, May 2010).

Aboriginal peoples have walked a long way through a landscape of loss and determination since early contact with Europeans. Today Indigenous authors, healers and spokespeople are asking our people to awaken fully and begin the process of reviving and practicing the seven sacred values that guided our ancestors and ensured that we might live today. The Prophesies and Creation stories contain the encouragement our people need to unburden themselves of deeply embedded historic trauma and loss. We have work to do; to tell our own stories, to actively participate in rescripting the narrative of our lives and representations, and to do this in our own voices (Nissley, 2009). This paper is a narrative of the historic challenges that have shadowed the many since 'his-story' began interspersed with the story of my own lived experience.

Key Words: Historic Trauma, Complex PTSD, Narrative, Story Telling, Prophesy, Seven Sacred Values, Residential Schools, Cultural Hypocrisy, Identity, Healing, Youth, Victorizing.

Introduction

Aboriginal peoples across Canada have waited patiently for wrongs to be righted and the senseless pain generated out of unresolved historic grievances to cease. Today, by telling our own narratives through a variety of mediums, we are undertaking a heroic journey, a journey that begins with speaking and writing our own truths in regards to our personal and community experiences; in fact, it is a journey that begins with the laying down of seven well known values, values that are stepping stones to an ancestral space some of us have never or rarely experienced.

Those values are; having the courage to step forward, reclaiming respect for ourselves and others, modeling a sense of humility and remembering that our story is not the only story of loss and grief in the world, telling the truth, and remembering that our truths are not the only truths in the world, practicing honesty, and remembering that we can be reflective and tell it like it was/is for us, which we in turn hope will bring us once again to a place of true love for ourselves as a people, and lead us to the wisdom we need to take our children and our collective future to a better place, physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually (Hill, 1995, Morrisseau,1999). This means the gathering up of a collective courage, a willingness to begin, to step out and into what we know to be true from our past and our present and generating release through narratives that can

illuminate our lived experiences and teach others. So, this is my story too, a story that begins like many others and can be told through the experiences of an entire people's history … once upon a time …

There was this event called "contact" and in that experience many Indigenous peoples on this continent, now called the "Americas," died. In that experience "the people" as many tribal groups across this land now called Canada referred to themselves, were pushed from their lands, fought diseases and sicknesses they had never seen before, and watched their children and elders leave this life prematurely and in horrific pain. That pain was the result of what Ronald Wright has identified as a form of biological warfare noting that, "Europe possessed biological weapons that fate had been stacking against America for thousands of years. Among these were smallpox, measles, influenza, bubonic plague, yellow fever, cholera, and malaria – all unknown in the Western Hemisphere before 1492" (1992). In the death and destruction that reigned on this continent for three hundred years, as many as 100 million Indigenous peoples lost their lives (Axtell, 1992, Cook, 1992/1998, Cook, 1973, Denevan, 1976, Stannard, 1992).

Was this carnage just the beginning of many events that the prophets had foreseen, was this a manifestation of the "strangers and strangeness" that it was said would come and change the world as they knew it? Elders from many different tribes across the land said they knew about the coming of the white man long before he arrived. The holy men said that these new people would come and want to live among them. It is said that long before they arrived the elders and holy men had already begun discussions on how they would live with this 'white man'. "Your land - all of it – will be mapped in the future," Nogha said, "Then not long after that, you will be huddled together (on a reservation)," and he continued, "that time has come now. Today the things he told us about have happened" (Dene Tha prophesies, from Wolverine Myths and Legends, compiled by the Dene Wodih Society). The Dene Tha, a northern people, did not then and do not now differentiate between knowledge gained by direct experience and that derived via dreams and visions (Goulet, 1998). They are not the only ones, there were many that foresaw the arrival of a "strange people" who would have a tremendous impact on those already living on this continent, a land known as "Turtle Island" from the creation stories that speak of a woman who fell from the skies only to land on the back of a giant turtle who took pity on her fall (Johnston, 2003; Mohawk,1993; Porter, 2008). Other creation stories speak to the "Earth Diver" the lowly muskrat, who was the only one who could dive deep enough to bring back some mud from the very depths of the waters that the woman might have land to stand on, and some place to grow her food (Johnston, 2003). "Another old man in Lapwai – I forget

his name – used to see the future in his dreams. He would see white-faced animals a little bigger than deer coming over the hill. They would come down Thunder Hill, between Lapwai and the Clearwater River. Behind the white-faced deer was a white-faced man. "Another kind of human being is going to be here soon," the old man would tell his people. People laughed at the old man's dreams, laughed at what he said would happen. But everything he prophesied came true. This is a true story, not a myth or legend" (Nez Perce oral tradition, Indian Legends from the Northern Rockies, Ella E.Clark).

According to many scholars, issues such as contact and resulting stories of colonialism belong largely to the historic past and that discourse has been replaced by inequality and domination in other forms in the present. However, Indigenous researchers have proposed that the historical experiences of First Nations peoples which disrupted the process of Aboriginal lives, communities, and cultural identity formation has continued to resonate loudly into the present, and that the harm done in the past has continued to manifest inter-generationally into peoples lives today. This harm can be extrapolated into virtually any area of Aboriginal life-ways and community narratives; including physical and mental health, having a sense of well-being, continuing education, and social and community development. A great deal of effort has more recently, perhaps only in the last twenty years, been dedicated to explicating some very specific areas that were adversely affected by contact with Europeans and whose impacts on the people continue to manifest into the present day (McCormick, 1997). And, even thought the creation stories are still told, the hurt inflicted by the period directly after contact and the destruction that has continued have not been resolved nor well represented in story telling or print into our present.

Infectious Dis-ease

Influences include waves of disease with the resulting death and dislocation of healers, medicine people, teachers, and spiritual leaders, outsider greed for land and resources, and unwanted or forced interpersonal interactions between invaders and Indigenous peoples across the continent. These negative forces have made it very difficult to create and delineate clear models and best/wise practices for continuing to strengthen and reinforce First Nation capacity for social resolution and social action in the present (Thoms, 2007, UNESCO, 2000). Therefore, it has been necessary to work hard to locate and understand the various mechanisms of control put in place historically by colonizers to marginalize and downgrade native people's personal and communal roles and destroy their cultural life-ways and beliefs. These mechanisms; armed force through guns and other weapons, European rule of law which was brutally

enforced through the death and destruction of leaders and entire villages, theft of children and women, banishment of medicine peoples, and the outlawing of ceremonial practices, served to destroy Aboriginal culture and social domains, to restrict their social mobility, to disfavor them in access to resources, and to create or accentuate inequalities within and between Indigenous communities continentally (Wesley-Esquimaux, Smolewski, 2004). Some of those mechanisms, like the early spreading of contagions such as influenza viruses, although initially not conscious or deliberate, became a chosen method of extermination as time passed (Duffy, 1951, Thornton, 1987). All of these tools ultimately had a devastating effect, deliberate or not, on Aboriginal identity, social/cultural capacity and the building of cultural and social capital since the arrival and enforcement of Europeans and their laws and economies on this continent (McCormick, 1998, Salee, 2006).

It has been pointed out many times that historic colonialism and intense contact with European society has produced a profound alteration in the socio-cultural milieu of subjugated societies globally. We must recognize that North American Aboriginal peoples do not stand alone in the annals of historic injustice (Weine et al, 1995). Glaring examples include the Jewish Holocaust, the colonization of India, the internment of Japanese nationals in Canada, and the stolen generations of Indigenous children here and in Australia. Colonial powers introduced sharp status distinctions, imposed strict rules for governing conduct, controlled the system of social rewards and punishments, and overtly manipulated power and status symbols (Wesley-Esquimaux, Smolewski, 2004). These alternations are generally discussed in reference to past events, but it can be readily argued that these impacts have contemporary and generational application and effect. A variety of disciplines can be called upon to illustrate and elaborate on the phenomenon of (inter/intra) generational impact and traumatic consequence, including history, anthropology, psychology, psychiatry, sociology, social work, and political science. Each of the sciences can provide different perspectives and interpretations on how historic trauma can be understood as a valid source of continuing dis-ease and reactivity to historic and societal forces in Aboriginal communities across Canada and the United States, and perhaps as importantly, around the world.

Historic Trauma

Aboriginal scholars have come to refer to these various impacts as "historic trauma," a phenomenon that has become a part of Indigenous peoples' common experience, and which has covertly shaped individuals lives and futures, and has had devastating consequences for entire communities and regions. Since first contact, First Nations people(s) in Canada have experienced several waves of traumatic experience on social and individual levels that have contributed to the health crisis in Aboriginal communities and have continued to place enormous strain on the fabric of Native societies across this continent. Aboriginal people have experienced unremitting trauma and 'complex' post-traumatic effect since these contagions burned across the entire continent from the southern hemisphere to the north over a four hundred year time span, killing up to 90% of the continental Indigenous population and rendering Indigenous peoples physically, spiritually, emotionally, and psychically traumatized by a deep and unresolved grief (Herman, 1997, Wesley-Esquimaux, 1998). The reason this experience is referred to as deep and unresolved is because we now know that the epidemics hit Indigenous populations across the Americas, on average, approximately every 7 to 14 years, not allowing Indigenous peoples the time necessary to regroup and reformulate their population bases, societies or economies (Wesley-Esquimaux, 1998), or conversely, the time necessary to properly grieve and resolve their immense losses.

Over time the myriad effects of historic trauma, also known as a "complex or cultural post traumatic stress disorder" (Herman, 1997) have become deeply imbedded in the worldview of Indigenous peoples, sometimes manifesting as a strong sense of separation and learned helplessness. Historic factors strongly influenced Aboriginal peoples locus of personal and social control (decision making capacity), engendered a sense of fatalism and reactivity to historic and social forces, and adversely influenced inter and intra group relations. We have learned through experience, that when all the compartments of a social structure become damaged, a society cannot exist anymore; it loses its social self, which is a group's cognitive, psychological, spiritual and emotional definition and understanding of themselves as related and humane beings (Bussidor, 1997). Through these reactions, and in the eyes of non-Aboriginal populations, Aboriginal peoples became silent, powerless constructions of "otherness"; a representation of which was bounded but never relational (Wesley-Esquimaux, Smolewski, 2004). These complex processes, located between the inscriptions of marginality imposed on Aboriginal people by the dominant culture, and Aboriginal integrity translated into negative cultural propositions, have never really been fully understood by Aboriginal peoples or non-Aboriginal societies (ibid). Only by deconstructing historic trauma and (re) membering the far distant past, are Indigenous peoples enabling themselves to see each other from the oppositional realms they presently occupy in existing dominant and resistant cultural structures. This awareness is the only path to healing and the reconstruction of positive life-ways. The creation of inspiring narratives to guide people home can only come from within

the circle of timelessness that has become our mutual lived-experience.

There are multiple inter-linkages between specific areas of historic impact as well and more contemporary forces that have continued to play themselves out over and over again over time. The good news is that Native peoples across the country are presently in the process of critiquing the dominant culture on their own terms, forging individual strengths, and renewing their collective unity. To do this, they are looking both inside and outside of their cultures and political structures for the tools that will address and hopefully rectify the societal and cultural breakdown they have been forced to grapple with for so long. Expressing narrative as lived experience has been shown by Indigenous healers and authors to be one very powerful tool for that desired change.

What does societal and cultural breakdown mean? Soon after contact with non-Native colonizers, Aboriginal peoples were stripped of their social power and authority through relentless pursuit and warfare over lands and resources. Once they realized that they could neither control, nor escape catastrophic events, many began to exhibit helpless "giving up" behavior patterns. Many, by default, withdrew individually and socially, thereby lessening their social and psychological investment in communal and societal relationships. They reduced their cultural and spiritual activities, sending some underground, and became engaged in displaced re-enactments of conflict which led to disruptive behavior, social alienation and profound psychological problems which manifest to today as alcoholism, drug addiction, domestic violence and sexual abuse (Wesley-Esquimaux, 1998). Coupled with increasing external and internal reactive abuse, is the loss of storytelling and the use of narrative as lived experiences that can teach and comfort from a traditional perspective and be a deterrent to a continuing loss of spiritual practice facilitated by governmental suppression of cultural activities and mores.

Anthropology and other disciplines could become better 'allies' in the process of recovering Indigenous narratives, and reinforcing people's abilities and experiences of "shared remembering". This shared remembering, as Staub (cited by Chataway & Johnson, 1998:234) says, together with "building a cohesive internal community, and rituals, which bring the suffering to light and in which grief and empathy with oneself and others in the group can be felt and expressed" are important elements in group healing. According to Taylor (1992), a positive cultural identity is a crucial feature of a sense of self; to acquire or retain an identity, a group needs communal celebrations, ritual enactments and public opportunities to embrace their traditions. Kirmayer et al, agree and state that, "The collective representations and images of Aboriginal people

in the dominant society become part of Aboriginal peoples' own efforts to re-invent themselves, and to rebuild self- and group-esteem damaged by the oppression of religious, educational, and governmental institutions" (1993/94:69). Unfortunately, many educational institutions remain at a loss as to how to better integrate and celebrate the infusion of Indigenous narrative and learning into their broader academic curriculums.

According to Berry (1976: 1985), there are four different patterns of response to the acculturation experienced in Aboriginal communities; integration, assimilation, separation and marginalization. How a person or a community responds to acculturation is influenced by two factors: whether cultural traditions and cultural identity are seen as valuable; and whether positive relations with the dominant culture are perceived as desirable. Kirmayer et al. (1993/94:64-65) conclude that integration and assimilation are viewed as positive outcomes by the dominant society, where the acculturation models assume that a dominant culture "absorbs, overwhelms or replaces a subdominant or less powerful culture". For example, Dorothy Lee, a white anthropologist interested in how people from different cultures perceive their immediate environment, described what she saw while looking at trees outside her window: "I see trees, some of which I like to be there, and some of which I intend to cut down to keep them from encroaching further upon the small clearing I made for my house" (1959:1). In the same passage, she contrasts her own perceptions with those of Black Elk, a Dakota visionary who "saw trees as having rights to the land, equal to his own … "standing people, in whom the winged ones built their lodges and reared their families" " (cited in Lee, 1959:1). When Aboriginal people start agreeing with the perception of place as indomitable and that development rules, we believe they have moved to a model of living that precludes the deep respect and protection of the "standing people" of their past, and have internalized the processes Berry iterated in his model (1985).

Residential Schools

And then, there were residential schools, and because of them I was born to a generation of refugees in their own lands, because they didn't come from anywhere else, they were simply taken long ago from what they knew, they were changed, and their light was extinguished. Imagine being born into the dark, into an emotional and physical landscape of grieving that permeated everything and made living a difficult and dreary experience. A landscape that stretched so far back into time that more recent events, such as the imposition of these fairly recent educational systems, were seen as the most pivotal events in our collective history. My generation, born into an enduring anger and sadness, could only look through the lens held up by our parents through which they viewed the ubiquitous "they" and never

know why it was so painful, because it was still a story untold, and yet every generation born since the late 1400's have been reluctant witnesses to the unspeakable and silent expression of a violent and unrelenting process of loss, assimilation and social degradation. This is where the concept of holding one's life up so others can see becomes a critical expression of the journey; we need the light that shines from multiple stories of success and survival to illuminate new mechanisms of change and self-efficacy.

The results of these schools across Canada and the United States have been documented by both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal writers, and the aftermath of contact and residential school attendance has not been substantially different in the far north or the south, or even from anywhere in the United States. Even in more recent generations issues like youth suicide and family dysfunction have become a contemporary social by-product of those decades of physical, mental, emotional and spiritual abuse experienced by previous generations from many Indigenous communities. It is not just those that attended who are continuing to suffer; their children, grandchildren, and now great grand children are also feeling the effects of unresolved trauma and grief generated by the experiences of children who could not understand what was happening to them, and yet could not speak out because of parental commitment to the 'goodness of the Church'. Aboriginal playwright, Tomson Highway, a Cree from Brochet, Northern Manitoba, shared that although he and his brothers went home every summer, and were relieved to get out of the clutches of the priests that abused them, they never told anyone about the abuse they suffered. They did not tell anyone, because of the faith and belief their parents had in the Church, and because they did not want to hurt them as they, the children they unknowingly sent into harm, had been hurt. Tomson noted that he wrote his book, Kiss of the Fur Queen (1998), to unburden himself of the pain that he had carried since childhood and that for him, "it was a matter of write the book or die" (Personal Communication, Summer, 1999). In many Aboriginal communities across Canada people are still not willing to openly talk about or acknowledge the effects of that harm on themselves, their parenting, or their relationship skills. In many communities, the effects of Residential School attendance are only very slowly being acknowledged as a deeply painful issue that must now be dealt with everywhere. It took Tomson Highway almost 50 years to actively confront his own pain and confusion. The silence around this issue is based on deeply painful memories and anger, both of which 'the people' have been taught to keep to themselves. My own research has examined how much of a role the phenomenon identified as "(inter/intra) generational grief" by agencies such as the Aboriginal Healing Foundation, have played in creating dis-equilibrium in the Aboriginal community. I understand

today that this phenomenon is believed to affect every single Aboriginal person in Canada and the United States in some way that is not always readily apparent, and is directly related to attendance at residential schools by previous generations who embedded images and memories of trauma in the collective social consciousness (Haig-Brown, 1988; Johnston, 1988; Knockwood, 1992, Wesley-Esquimaux, 2009).

Recent studies (Kirmayer, 1993/94:69) also suggest that traumatic events that Aboriginal people experienced "were not encoded as declarative knowledge but rather 'inscribed' on the body, or else built into ongoing social relations, roles, practices and institutions". When I have talked to people about this 'inscription of harm' on their perception of self and cultural habitus, many admit that being sent to residential schools taught them about isolation and they learned to fear it, as fear itself became something that tangibly 'inscribed their bodies' with profound difference. The fear and isolation they learned 'outside' their home community in residential schools and sometimes in a contemporary sense during extended hospital stays, is considered something that "teaches people a very different way of being with each other" and – repeating after Kirmayer et al. (1993/94:69) again, this "something", together with grief over what has been lost, becomes deeply embedded in "social relations, gender roles, family practices, and institutions."

All of this chaos then becomes the backdrop to my personal lived narrative, because the process of extermination by disease and warfare, the process of assimilation by force and the faulty education of an entire people through colonial legislation only 'shadows my story' because I did not live it directly. No, in many ways my story has been lived in spite of everything that has happened, and mine has become a story of challenge, change and a returning home to the richness of being "self" and the re-membering of a far distant past as a real 'present' where light shines and people have hope. Telling my story has meant picking up the shattered pieces of my youth and forming them into a narrative that celebrates the overcoming of events into the present, while at the same time, working diligently to understand and integrate the historic past for myself and my community of origin.

Acculturation and Identity

Much has been written about the effects of acculturation and the "dis-eases" that resulted from externally generated alterations in living conditions and expectations. These factors are important to explore because occurrences such as suicide and alcoholism in the adult population in particular cannot be changed or stopped if things are not brought under some social/cultural control. People become numb to – what might be – if what is happening around them or is said to them has

become their 'norm' even if that 'norm' is not publicly or socially sanctioned. It should be noted here as well that, "For many modern historians and anthropologists, what people imagine or believe might have happened is just as important as what did happen, because historically "untrue" statements are still psychologically or sociologically "true". Since people act in accordance with what they believe is true …" (INAC, 1996:7). The main consideration here becomes that they take action to re-enliven a narrative of possibility and hope for the future.

As an Aboriginal person from Southern Ontario, I see that the lessons learned by southern First Nations through overt assimilation and forced acculturation may have value to those in the north. This does not preclude people in the north learning their own lessons in survival as they have always done. It simply places the southern experience in the position of an elder or teacher in a certain way, since most southern reserves transitioned through acculturation traumas earlier and have been doing so for longer spans of time than those in the north. Aboriginal people often express that it is incumbent upon elders and teachers to identify their own life experiences and share those with younger and less experienced generations. If southern Aboriginal experiences can shed light on the present transitioning processes in the north and offer help by actively sharing learning about their own resistance to acculturation and the many problems they overcame, this then could become a helpful and healing tool for Indigenous peoples throughout northern Ontario. It might also help southern First Nations in their own healing by reinforcing a growing sense of community, national or regional unity, and promote new access to cultural safety and cultural preservation. Sharing stories more effectively for our own healing needs will come out of compassionate sharing with others.

Stories create a 'place in time' that imbues people with identity. As George Copway, a Mississauga/Ojibwa Indian from a southern Ontario reserve noted 150 years ago, (he was an "acculturated" Ojibwa Indian who saw the Christianization of his people as being a good thing, and who actively encouraged education for Indians in white man's schools), "the Ojibwas have a great fund of legends, stories, and historical tales, the relating and hearing of which, form a vast fund of winter evening instruction and amusement. Some of these stories are most exciting and so intensely interesting, that I have seen children during their relation, whose tears would flow most plentifully, and their breasts heave with thoughts too big for utterance. Night after night for weeks I have sat and eagerly listened to those stories. The days following, the characters would haunt me at every step, and every moving leaf would seem to be a voice of a spirit …. these legends have an important bearing on the character of the children of our nation. The fire-blaze is endeared to them in the

after years by a thousand happy recollections. By mingling thus, social habits are formed and strengthened" (Copway, 1850: 95-97). Where did we lose those long winter nights of comfort and engagement? Yes, we still tell stories, but what have we been saying today, not only through our words, but our actions to our children, and when will we acknowledge that the path forward may mean the releasing of a negative historic narrative that we no longer have cause to carry?

Oral Traditions and the Value of Stories

In Aboriginal communities across Canada, story telling used to be a cultural 'anchor'. The old stories that young people were told and the cultural activities in which they participated provided a social 'security blanket' that helped people situate themselves firmly in an everyday context, to comprehend every day meanings, and to construct a strong social identity. The mundane 'going about of doing one's business', living one's life and telling one's cultural story were all connected in the nexus of lived experience. No one part of life was abstracted or detached from another. Communication about life in the bush through story telling is now a rare occurrence and those adults who remember some of those stories say they haven't heard them since childhood. Again, modern influences and long buried traumatic experiences and memories have been allowed to get in the way of and obscure valuable teaching experiences between parents and children. In far too many cases today, television tells the only stories the children in our communities will hear and assimilate. This is unfortunate, because, as Malinowski once observed, "Daily life is fraught with inconsistencies, differences of opinion, and conflicting claims. Oral tradition provides one way to resolve those claims. People reflect on their oral traditions to make sense of the social order that currently exists" (1926). The historic damage done over time, has unseated much of the efficacy of consistent social supports and communal narrative exchange, at least the kind of narrative exchange that once provided healing and a strong social/cultural identity. The interesting thing about this loss is that there was at one time fairly strict controls put on everyone's behaviour and there were clear expectations from the community about how people lived together. Now, people are increasingly reluctant to get involved or provide any sanctions for what people (including the youth) do, whether the acts are positive or negative. "A long time ago, people did things for each other because they cared about each other. They didn't wait until things got out of hand. They dealt with the matter right away. Today…the government gives us money to hire workers to do that. So, there's a mentality that has developed that since the government is giving money to hire workers, there's no reason to worry about things" (Justice Research, 1994:70).

The other thing Aboriginal scholars have learned is that we are increasingly addressing ourselves as individuals, as a sense or experience of community it is becoming difficult to meet on familiar terms. And, it is becoming more and more apparent, that when we begin to address our lives as individuals, it becomes a matter of everyone for themselves. And so we also begin to neglect the teachings of our elders, the very people that have gone through their lives, learned from their own experiences, and are now moving towards the end of their journey. We begin to neglect the direction handed down by our spiritual teachers, our healers, from our Churches, and from our community leaders. Although as a chief from the far north of Ontario once said to me, "some of us I should say [have neglected their elders]. I shouldn't say everybody. I myself am guilty of certain aspects of [that] neglect" (Vince Gimaa, 1994). And individualism, of course, weakens traditional practices, which are founded on a communal ethic (Spirit River Report, 1994:70).

Without oral traditions from our elders that can situate our people, and in particular our youth, we are left with a disconnection to the environment around us. Shared language, and shared narrative as lived experience is surely a teaching tool that can become a vehicle of social and cultural meaning and a force that bonds people together, allowing for different, individual contexts to come together to form a shared cultural context of community. As Bakhtin (in Gates 1985:1) writes, "... it lies on the borderline between oneself and the other. The word in language is half someone else's ... the word does not exist in neutral and impersonal language (it is not, after all, out of a dictionary that the speaker gets his words!) but rather it exists in other people's mouths, in other people's contexts, serving other people's intentions: it is from there that one must take the word and make it one's own.

Narrative as Lived Experience

To share my own lived experience I decided to adopt story-telling as the method, as I consider my own narrative an exercise in establishing avenues of communication between my "old" world and the world in which I became an "Indian-educated-in-both-ways". I do not consider this an exercise in "analogical anthropology" which, according to Dennis Tedlock (1983:324), a Zuni scholar who always argued for a need to use a dialogical approach to analyze Aboriginal cultures, "involves the replacement of one discourse with another ... Ana-logos, in Greek, literally means 'talking above', 'talking beyond', or 'talking later', as contrasted with the talking back and forth dialogue". Agreeing with Tedlock (1983:324), who sees dialogue as a "continuous process [which] itself illustrates process and change", as opposed to an analogue which he sees as a "product or result", I sometimes "travel in circles", instead of presenting my life story or those of the past, linearly or chronologically. Mainly because I want to acknowledge and preserve the process of social relations and retain the power of our original Aboriginal voices which – I hope – speak loudly through the narratives as lived experience we are beginning to tell. I am fully aware that my emphasis on the process rather than the product creates difficulties in textualizing my own applied research experiences and community observations. It is not so much that I believe in a greater value of unmediated experience over interpretations; it is more about seeing dialogue as Tedlock does, "not a method, but a mode, a mode of discourse within which there may be methodological moments" (Tedlock, 1983:323).

So what is so special about my life? Nothing really, other than that I am the product of a generation that has moved from almost total marginalization in mainstream and rural societies to what I have termed "victorization" and cautious engagement with dominant mores, mostly, thank goodness, on our own terms, and I am considered "successful". However, I started my life like so many others from the Aboriginal community in Canada. As child of residential school attendees, there was a lot of confusion in my household and far too much residual terror. My mother shared many stories with me about her experiences while living at the Shingwauk Residential School in Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario. There she said, and this is but one poignant example, "I remember when I was a young girl being forced to kneel every morning with all the other girls, the matron was a large black woman, and I'll never forget how every morning, she would make us kneel and pray, and she would say very loudly "God bless these poor little savages!", and we always wondered why she said that, who was she to call us savages?" (Personal communication, JP, December 2000). My step-father, who lived at the same school from the age of 4 years, never did learn how to put down the burden of shame he was handed there, other than through the alcohol that fueled his defeat and eventually became destructive. He did not know what to do with the anger that welled up out a frustration born of a child's helplessness and fear. He could not understand what a child [me], could possibly need when he had never had the opportunity to be comforted in his own right and had been brutally abused when all he had wanted was a gentle touch. So I never received those comforting assurances either and I too had to learn to live without them. Over time, I have learned through my own research and lived experience, how to handle and place this painful and volatile history into a 'sacred space' in my life and how to work with others to help them integrate similar life experiences and find peace in their hearts and homes.

How am I accomplishing this? As I noted earlier in this text, many Aboriginal scholars have been reviewing the historical record and building an understanding of what really happened

historically, and then they have corroborated that information with many elders through their traditional knowledge. The recollections of the very old and the written materials that have come out of anthropological narratives and ethnographic accounts has been extremely helpful in piecing together the story of our collective journey under the yoke of colonial power.

We now know that all students were 'released' from residential school upon reaching the age of sixteen regardless of their academic standing, and that at residential schools, Native children had much of what would have constituted their "cultural identities" wiped from their lives. The children's days were spent learning the English language, being punished for speaking their own languages, working in the fields and doing manual labor. Their days were full of activities and they were kept busy because they were expected to be working at all times. It was the nights, at least for those like my stepfather, that were spent mired in loneliness, abuse, and deep emotional and spiritual pain. His description of those years was painful to hear, although the experience of living them must have been infinitely harder. When he was an adult, he attended a Shingwauk Indian school reunion on my prompting, and he shared how as he walked up the road to the school entrance, "I just wanted to take a bomb and blown that damn place up, I hated that school, I hated those people, and I hated those memories" (personal communication RW, 1999). It was that anger simmering just below the surface of my parents' memories of early life experiences that contributed to chaotic childhood years for me, years filled with rage, neglect, family violence, and alcoholism as constant companions in our home. In fact, many of the Native homes my family frequented in the city while I was growing up, and most of the children in those homes, were regularly exposed to the same contemporary trauma and dysfunction from alcohol abuse and cultural confusion that my own family struggled with. We now know unequivocally where it came from, a deeply embedded, repeatedly reinforced, historic and now intergenerational holocaust.

In Toronto I was raised in a Native community without reserve boundaries, a community that had Aboriginal people, but not a strong cultural grounding. We were the children of residential school attendees; we were raised in a never-never land of lost or abandoned identities and shifting cultural mores. It was a many Nations experience as well because people in Toronto were from all over Ontario and Canada, north and south, east and west. There was no specific way of being "Indian", understanding culture, or even language, because in those days almost everyone came from somewhere else. For me as a child, there was the additional confusion of being illegitimate and coming from a mixed Aboriginal heritage, and therefore not fitting into any single tribal grouping, or having any real knowledge of language or family lineage. Although my step-grandfather spoke only

Ojibwe to me during my early childhood years, the language was not reinforced or used conversationally in our home, mostly because my mother did not speak the language with any fluency.

My tribal background is Chippewa/Mohawk on my birth father's side and Pottawatomi/Odawa on my mother's, although, because my mother had not married my birth father, nor retained any kind of relationship with him after she became pregnant, there was no grounding in family values or tribal affiliation. Therefore, I was not only lacking a strong cultural grounding, I was lacking the influence of an entire paternal family relationship. This was true of many of the young people that were born into the 'Indian' cultural milieu that was Toronto in the 50's and 60's. Because our parents came from so many different points across Ontario, and spoke so many different Native languages or none at all, we were a generation that grew up without understanding and appreciation for the significance of language and tribal or First Nation affiliation or traditionally based communal (reserve) living.

The Aboriginal community in Toronto was however, fairly tight knit and people were well known to each other through the 50's, 60's and even 70's. In many ways it was not a healthy community however, and it seemed everyone knew about and experienced the effects of alcohol and family violence, but in those days it was never talked about out loud, nor was the fact that most had come to the city directly out of residential school. It wasn't until much later, in the late 80's and 90's, when people began to understand and accept the need for public education on those issues that people began to talk about what happened, and then actively sought and received help. For many Native people, like my parents, in the early days, drinking, fighting, hating, separation and divorce were the only solutions they felt they had access to.

My interest in Aboriginal traditions, transitions, and transformation began during those childhood years in Toronto. I saw that many people generally worked and maintained themselves as best they could during weekdays, including my own parents, although my stepfather drank almost everyday. Most people in their age group more often than not spent only their weekends in "party" mode and this is when they did some very heavy drinking. My stepfather frequently took beer to work in his lunch bucket. The weekend scenes I witnessed as a child closely paralleled those in the 1995 film "Once Were Warriors", a Maori commentary on love, family, violence, and social relations immersed in alcohol consumption (Lee Tamahori, 1995). As in "Once Were Warriors", the violence and heavy drinking at house parties were what I remember most about Aboriginal people being together in the city. The 'norm' of an every weekend experience of drinking excessive amounts of alcohol, or even alcohol based perfumes and strong colognes, and abusing

themselves, their children, and their homes was my personal experience of what was "normal" for who we were and what we did. In those early days there were hardly any social gatherings or cultural activities that people could go to for spiritual renewal, or cultural sustenance. There was an "Indian" club, a small friendship center downtown, and annual dances for members, but from my personal vantage point, an annual or even bi-annual event does not a solid cultural foundation make.

The negative role modeling for being an "Indian" was a much more powerful force on the young people in our social circles, and this role modeling fostered more contempt than a positive Aboriginal identity. The summer pow wows, year round celebrations of cultural dancing, singing around a group drum, and regular emphasis on Aboriginal teachings came much later when I was closer to adulthood, and thankfully most of these activities have continued into the present for many young Aboriginals in Canada and the United States, although many are still left without consistent rites of passage or spiritual support.

Traditionally in North America young people achieved their "individual wholeness" through the development and enhancement of their spiritual connection with the "other" world (Fiddler, Stevens, 1985). Youth in a clan would fast and open their minds while lying alone in the forest or on a mountain for several days at a time. Males were taught to survive this difficult climate and environment through the use of their visions and dreams. These visions and dreams would be used to lead them to the animals they could kill for food. When a boy reached the age of sixteen, his father would show him how to survive by using his mind and his dreams. The visions were sought during a very specific time of year, when the ice was thawing, migrating birds were returning, and the leaves were starting to grow back. Parents instructed the boys to seek the migrating birds, the winter birds, the animals, and the plants in their visions. It was understood that it was the boy's dreams that would continue to help him throughout his entire life. He would learn to respect the plants and the trees that gave him his tools and his medicines for curing himself and others. He would learn to respect and thank Manitou for his gifts (Fiddler, Stevens: 1985). This is no longer done in most communities, rural or remote, and the boys in particular are left without this important rite of passage to confirm their transition into manhood and to foster a deep appreciation of the land and waters, or even their own families.

I have lived and worked within the Native community in the city of Toronto and on various reserves across southern Ontario my entire lifetime. I have spent the past 35 years working in a variety of capacities within urban Aboriginal Organizations, First Nation governments, community based claims development processes and assisting in self-government negotiations. I have spent considerable time within the Aboriginal healing and

wellness movement in Canada and the United States, and more recently have worked as a trainer and professor of Aboriginal Studies and at the Faculty of Social Work at the University of Toronto. I have been an independent consultant and facilitator for the past 25 years, and have had the privilege of working in many First Nations across Canada and the United States, as well as with Indigenous populations in other countries. I have watched transitions occurring in Aboriginal communities over those years and have marveled at the speed of change and development both in the city and within "on-reserve" communities. Much of the change can be perceived as positive, but some of it from a cultural standpoint has been detrimental to individual health and in maintaining a strong sense of community. As Aboriginal people have shifted into a more acculturated and non-native mode of living, they have all too frequently lost touch with what the term "community" once represented. Aboriginal people still live on reserves, but they do not interact with each other the way their grandparents did. Wanda Big Canoe, an elder in my own First Nation, Georgina Island, shared during a personal conversation, "When I was a girl, we used to visit all the time, it was perfectly normal to stop in and see each other for tea or something to eat, or just to chat, now people either don't do it, or you have to call first and practically book an appointment because people do not have the time or interest" (Wanda, 2004).

This was/is a common observation among the elders I visited with in both the near and far north and I have heard it from many older people I have the opportunity talk to today in the south. Now people are careful about whom they visit, when they visit, why they visit, and they generally do call first, and carefully knock and wait for a response before they enter anyone's home. But it is more than that, much more, as our people are beginning to realize, and the loss is deeply insidious, as we watch our children increasingly losing touch with their culture, languages, and identity and more significantly, in our northern communities, their reasons for living.

Speaking the Unspoken

It is not impossible to hypothesize that holding a certain belief (expressed by some of my own informants) that, "things are just the same as they were before" helps people to protect their identity in times of crisis. It may give them an impression of security and it may even help to maintain a protective sense of cultural distinctiveness. Nevertheless, I have determined through my own life experience, and through the therapeutic work I have undertaken, that there is an embracing of what I would term a kind of 'cultural mythology' about the people who once were alive. Perhaps even a 'cultural mythology' about who we are as a people in today's world. Fred Wheatley once said, "You have to live in the world in which you find yourself."

Unfortunately, in the world in which we find ourselves there is a steady undercurrent of personal and family dysfunction and negative cultural transitioning that is not being acknowledged. There is a sense of everything being well, and nothing being well. The 'hypocrisy' aspect is hard to articulate, but it is as if people say, "We are supposed to be this thing, this way, and therefore we are", but through active family violence, depression, and alcoholism they communicate an entirely different message or 'story' to our young" (personal communications). I concur, and far too often I have observed that our children are left hanging between two worlds, one that is a warm reminiscence and one that is coldly real and hard to negotiate.

In the end the question remains: what kind of story is being told by Aboriginal peoples versus what kind of story is being enacted and re-enacted in everyday life? The term "cultural hypocrisy" may sound harsh, but over time, I have developed a very strong sense of another "story" of aboriginal "being-ness" that does not necessarily demonstrate oft stated traditional or cultural activities. I am well aware that there is an Ojibway cultural standard for traditionalism, which invokes the seven, sacred teaching of the seven grandfathers Nezhwahswe Mishomisuk which I threaded through the opening section of this paper, and which suggests that courage, respect, humility, truth, honesty, love, and wisdom are 'the' essential values of Aboriginality. The general day by day living conditions still existing across Canada in too many Aboriginal communities often present themselves as the opposite of these 'essential values', with a chronic lack of self-care, substance abuse, spousal assault, various types of child neglect and a general lack of personal responsiveness for family well being. Julie Cruikshank suggests that there is a basic principle in the social sciences which suggests that, "All societies enunciate rules about ideal behaviour that may be generally shared but not necessarily followed in every instance; that in fact, social organization is usually riddled with contradiction, that people are quite likely to say one thing and do another, and that rules are confirmed as much in the breach as in the enactment" (1998). This is what I hang my research and trainer hat on; that in spite of the dichotomy of behaviour I have observed throughout my life and written about here; there remains a strong and viable method in the madness.

The 'old stories' being told can mediate between what is socially enacted today and what the traditional 'ideal' actually is. Perhaps the Aboriginal peoples of Canada know it "instinctively" and this is why they are ready to accept all the "daily" contradictions to mostly unspoken traditionally based rules. People still consider themselves "Aboriginal" even when what they do is seemingly incongruous with traditional Aboriginal values. These contradictions implicitly tell people more about "what to do", than "what not to do", and those "ethical pointers"

are, just as Cruishank (1998) predicts, embedded in seemingly chaotic social organization.

Nevertheless, there seems to be a chronic lack of continuity between the world as-people-remember-it and the world as-it-is, and this causes endless confusion for our youth who are looking to their parents and elders for clear explanations and unambiguous instructions on how to locate themselves in between the adults' memories and the youth's sometimes terrified "here-and-now".

It has been well documented in the literature that many indigenous, and colonized people around the world suffer today from the very same social problems. Hezel (1995) in his study on Micronesian youth suggests that uncertain relations between young men and their families lead to a growing frequency of suicide and family dysfunction. Hezel analyzes factors such as weakening bonds of the family and the larger community, as well as the cultural upheaval from modernization that takes its toll on the family: the family roles become relegated to other institutions, and the effectiveness of the supporting role it once played for the young erode. People caught up in-between two worlds: the "modern" one and the "traditional" one, became "decentered selves", people who are "a part of an immense discontinuous network of strands that may be termed politics, ideology, economics, history, sexuality, language and so on" (Guha & Spivak, 1988:12). If one agrees that, before contact, family, community and spirituality were at the center of indigenous people's social and cultural lives, then it can be agreed that the recent "de-centering" of traditions has left Aboriginal peoples without a core in their social relationships. The loss of communal cohesion and family support in First Nations across Canada has exacerbated an ongoing and increasingly hurried descent into a cultural transition that leads to even more loss and deeper social uncertainty.

I have eventually come to realize that there is a genuine need and value to artificially or deliberately creating, co-creating, or re-creating community and family closeness especially when there has been a loss of identity for our young, or when a community has grown too quickly, whether it is urban or rural. This kind of directed activity can be regarded as necessary in many Aboriginal communities because as noted, over time people have drawn themselves into a more westernized type of "individuality". It has become difficult to sustain a sense of collectivity when everyone goes back to their own houses, their own social spaces, and seemingly have no need to commune with anybody else, or to help resolve growing social problems. In important ways people need to be drawn back out into real and messy communal interaction, at a level apart from feasts, butchering moose, hunting celebrations, birthday parties, and bi-annual hunts. I believe that the level of communal relations

we are neglecting as a larger community of Indigenous peoples has a great deal, along with unrepresented historic trauma, to do with growing issues of conflict, stress, dysfunction, abuse, family violence, and alcohol consumption. Deaths of our children by suicide come right out of a narrative of silence which, for many people, has become the norm rather than the exception. Also, as in many Indigenous communities in colonized countries, "internal animosities, corrosive factionalism and jealousy are endemic. There is no 'treatment' other than learning how to diffuse situations, by using techniques such as conflict resolution" (Tatz, 1999:7). As an example, inevitably blame for education problems go to the teachers and directors of our local schools, and it is virtually impossible to get parents to accept an active role in sorting out child behavioural issues. Yet, at the same time, there seems to be an underlying request for personal and community change that remains somewhat indefinite and unreal, as if each person is always waiting for someone else to make the first move.

We need to remember for the sake of our children, that many changes in lifestyle were brought back to reserves and urban centres directly from residential schools, others were learned in the cities that people migrated to when they left home looking for work, and of course, some changes were introduced, adopted and entrenched right at the reserve level. Different ways of life have been brought onto reserves over the years by missionaries, non-Native teachers, Indian Agents and the myriad government workers and officials that have "looked after" the interests of Native peoples on reserves while actively encouraging assimilation and acculturation. Many residential school attendees from my parents generation and probably long before, never went back home, but stayed in the cities, married, and raised children there. This "staying away" had its own special effects on the wellbeing of the communities they left behind, and it has created new effects as people return home in their retirement years.

For Aboriginal people born and raised in the city, it is easier to fit into the anonymity of 'off reserve' life. Many people, like me, today return 'home' to our reserves bringing different ideals, values, and expectations, which are not necessarily welcomed by the middle aged or even the young because they often mean challenging the status quo. Through the course of my lifetime, my work, and later through doing academic research, my observations of the number of changes among Aboriginal people in the south, even though they are not always obvious, have been validated.

Through my community work over the past 35 years, I have journeyed a long distance, running through a forest of pain and anger generated by mostly misunderstood and denied personal experiences that have profoundly impacted not only myself, but

the Aboriginal collective. More recently, I have regularly, but gently, admonished those who have not yet found their own stories, who are still seeking a sense of personal respect and reality, to "mine their lives for the diamonds" to survey their lives for lessons hard won, and times well lived. I have learned to live and love in this way, and my personal narrative is like that, a story of getting back up and trying again, of taking risks and being honest with myself and others, sometimes losing, sometimes winning, but recognizing the tremendous gains realized out of a tumultuous life lived focused on the past, and the wisdom earned through learning how to stay balanced in the present, practice kindness, and walk in a humble way into the future.

There are many different stories that people tell about who they are and who they would like to be. There is a life narrative, as it is "lived" by the adults, and there is a narrative of death in far too many places in Canada, as it is "lived" by the youth (McCormick, 1998). This interrelated reality and this dichotomized reasoning that people practice is, as Jay says, "necessarily distorting [in its tendency to take all difference as a matter of presence/absence, existence/non-existence] when … applied directly to the empirical world, for there are no negatives there. Everything that exists … exists positively" (1981:48). Maybe it is this polarity itself that makes it extremely difficult for the adults and the youth in Indigenous communities today to find a common ground to stand on so they can open new avenues of communication, especially as nothing was ever dichotomous in Aboriginal world views before. If the pure fact that "there is a community" (that people live together, remember, and plan for the future) is taken as an undisputable "positive", admitting that things do not work as they should (or could) would introduce a "negative". As such, this then, might infuse necessary conflict and therefore opportunity, and, would disturb and shift the communal status quo that was born at one point in time out of the people's shattered past. We all need to remember that Aboriginal people in Canada, like many other dispossessed indigenous populations around the world, fought very hard to create a "good life" for themselves and to preserve their identity in the midst of an ever-present vagueness that surrounded and threatened to permanently destroy their hopes.

Victorizing into the Future

Regardless of the problems Aboriginal peoples are continuing to experience now – they have in fact succeeded to a large degree. Recognition of these binary oppositions (ie., two different narratives, two different communities) may actually help explain [to them] the non-sensical nature of the colonial domination that created the very dichotomies they live in today. The presence of dissonant narratives, however damaging to community, may give people hope, because if one of their stories

is, what Bahr (1989:316) calls, a "victimist history… which tells how one people was damaged by another", the other one is a story of survival, perseverance and determination. What I have come to call a 'victimization' and celebration of survival. The multiple stories we have to tell, the tapestries of pain and perseverance that have long shrouded our ability to speak with authority can and are being flung back and shaken to release strong narratives of recovery and strength (McKegney, 2007). The tears that are being shed in conferences, healing circles, and community confrontations with the past are tears of health and relief. We are rapidly moving from tales of victimization to narratives of resilience and pride, tales of victorization and wellness. We have broken through the buckskin ceiling and flung open the buckskin curtain (Cardinal, 1999), and demanded that the light of traditional knowledge and historic truths be brought forth to shine and illuminate the path into our collective future.

It is women like me and many others, who are now called upon to open the gates of change and to re-instill the confidence and balance of responsibility, respect, and reverence that has been stilled by historic events. Jeanne Herbert (2003) says that "applying traditional knowledge to healthy families today is a process that will take time, since we need to re-discover the essence of traditions in creative ways, and if you have lost the culture, you have to live it to regain it" (Herbert, 2003:4). This means that we all have to participate in the active victorizing of our lives, our cultures, and positively enlivening the entire circle of our communities and our work. The breaking of silence in our communities and organizations is an important element of building sustainable and instructive change. It means creating an active presence in political and spiritual forums and insisting that feminine and youth issues be fully represented in policy and legislation, both internal and external to each community across Canada. It means rescripting our history and our lives with a new narrative, because the old story and his-story generated by European thought no longer serves us as a re-emerging force in Canada (Nissley, 2009). It also means giving a full measure of respect to ourselves, our children and our leaders so that we can (re)gain it in our homes and communities. So much has been taken away from the Aboriginal population over the years, but we are fighting back in ways that are becoming indelible in the social consciousness of Canada. We have found that we can provide new role models and enlightening events to revive those who were beaten into submission in residential schools and through Indian Act regulation and exclusion, and we can learn to re-live and practice our traditional seven sacred values in our everyday lives.

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