

Learning to Relate: Stories from a Father and Son

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This paper, composed by my father and I, serves the dual purpose of locating myself in my research and witnessing my father's story. Touching on issues of identity, Indigeneity, relationships, nature, and spirit, our stories illustrate processes of physical and cultural disconnection and embody one possible means of reconnecting. It is hoped that this article may be useful to those interested in understanding and overcoming the intergenerational impacts of colonization, fostering more relational identities, and contributing to our individual and collective well being.

Introduction

I began this paper intending to follow the Indigenous protocol of introducing one's self, in this case to connect with other educators and scholars and to locate myself in my research (Absolon & Willett, 2005; Steinhauer, 2001). As I considered the events that shaped my sense of self and research interests, however, I found myself returning, again and again, to the experiences of my father.

My interests in Indigenous science education (Aikenhead, 2001; Cajete, 1999; Colorado, 1988; McKinley, 2005; Snively & Corsiglia, 2001) and Indigenous research methodologies (Kovach, 2009; Rigney, 1999; Smith, 1999; Weber-Pillwax, 1999; Wilson, 2008) have prompted a deeper consideration of my identity, especially with regard to my father's Métis ancestry. I have also been reflecting on the importance of parent-child relationships, due largely to a growing familiarity with my father's story and the recent birth of my daughter, and I realized that ours, as father and son, was a relationship that could use some strengthening. So, in addition to introducing myself, I wish to honour my father, witness his story, and acknowledge his influence on my life.

We have chosen to share our stories because we believe in the benefits of listening to and learning from one another, especially in the context of isolation and disconnection so prevalent today. Many of us have been severed from our roots and forgotten the deep sense of relation with our ancestors, the planet, and the cosmos, that have characterized human experience for millennia. In our view, this disconnection is at the core of today's intertwined humanitarian and ecological crises. The stories we share both demonstrate these disconnections and embody one possible means of reconnecting.

Writing Process

My father never spoke much about his past when I was younger, and has only recently expressed an interest in sharing his early experiences. I felt conflicted about asking him to share them publicly, but when I broached the idea of this paper with him I received an enthusiastic reply. I quickly realized that this paper would move beyond an introduction to myself and my research. My father was ready to tell his stories and to initiate the processes of healing this entailed.

We met often, usually over breakfast, to discuss his experiences and thematic possibilities for the paper. Engaging in 'research as chat' (Haig-Brown, 1992), our conversations took the form of loosely structured, open-ended interviews that I recorded and transcribed (excerpts are included in italics). We began with a chronology of his life, and further questions and topics evolved from there. We worked collaboratively in organizing the paper and selecting its content. While I took on the task of writing, he proofread and checked the text for accuracy.

Living, Learning, and Researching Through Story

Facts are only the random detritus of our lives until they are connected by story ... If there is anything like truth accessible to us in the world, it must be through the ways we tell of ourselves to each other. (Moss, 2003, p. 9)

There are many stories in the world, and while scientific narratives of linear rationality and empiricism have achieved a measure of dominance, resurgent discourses of diversity and complexity are renewing interest in voices from the margins. Story has always been vital to the world's Indigenous peoples, and is a powerful way of communicating and uniting, of connecting us to one another and to the places we inhabit (Archibald, 2008; Dion, 2009; King, 2003; Silko, 1981). As expressed by Smith (1999), the story and the storyteller "serve to reconnect the past with the future, one generation with the other, the land with the people, and the people with the story" (p. 145).

Researchers interested in understanding the richness of human experience have also turned to narrative as both a phenomenon and method of study (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Polkinghorne, 1988). In narrative inquiry, one is always in the midst of "living and telling, reliving and retelling, the stories of the experiences that make up people's lives" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 20).¹ The narrative approach employed here can be considered an example of 'collaborative storying' (Bishop, 1999), a research process where relationships are strengthened through the sharing and combination of personal narratives. While traditional stories embody timeless cultural lessons and wisdom, personal narratives, especially those that convey difficult and emotional experiences, are also important for processes of healing, and in raising cross-cultural awareness of the diverse paths that have been travelled to the present.

The protocol of locating one's self through narrative, while important, can also be daunting. Representations of our selves are always partial, inherently incomplete, and subjective. Multiple influences are constantly at play, and deciding which are voiced and silenced is a central duty of the storyteller (Archibald, 2008). I take this responsibility seriously but as an inexperienced storyteller living 'in between' cultures and traditions, I am also intimidated. I proceed here cautiously, noting that although the stories shared here are not the whole story, they are central to the ways in which my father and I understand our lives.

Locating Myself

I am the son of Lee Baker and Shirley Wick. My paternal grandparents are Mah Hee and Anne Hall, and my maternal grandparents are Norman Wick and Margaret Larson. I was born in Uranium City, a small mining town in northern Saskatchewan. My parents had moved there to work as teachers but returned to Saskatoon before my first birthday. I spent the next two and a half decades in Saskatoon, and have recently returned with a family of my own to complete the research component of my doctoral program. My father, Lee, is of Chinese and Métis ancestry and my mother, Shirley, is of Norwegian descent. While little is known about my Chinese lineage, genealogical research² has revealed a wealth of information about my Métis roots, which include Cree, Dene, French, Irish, and Scottish. Interestingly, this research also uncovered a distant relation to Louis Riel, whom I learned of during childhood visits to Batoche, the site of the final battle in the 1885 Métis resistance. My Norwegian genealogy is relatively well documented, and when prompted, my maternal grandparents would share stories about our relatives, including those of my great uncle Stan, a bomber pilot who was shot down over Berlin during World War II.

The cultural orientation of my upbringing was that of a Western, middle class, nuclear family. My parents, like many other Canadians, were disconnected from their cultural heritage through a variety of factors. My maternal great grandparents immigrated in the early 1900s and settled in Alberta, where they experienced difficulties maintaining their culture in a foreign land with a colonial educational system predicated on creating English-speaking, economically productive, patriotic Canadian citizens (Katz, 1976). This colonial mentality was intensified in the establishment of residential schools for First Nations children (Haig-Brown, 1988; Jaine, 1993). Combined with further oppressive policies (e.g., the Indian Act), increasing numbers of European settlers (including my maternal great grandparents), and the collapse of the Fur Trade, deep physical and cultural dislocations were forced upon my Indigenous ancestors. My father, as elaborated in greater detail as follows, was severed from his Chinese heritage at age three when his father passed away.

I come from a family of educators, and obtained my Bachelor of Education through the Saskatchewan Urban Native Teacher Education Program (SUNTEP) at the University of Saskatchewan. I completed my internship at a high school in Aotearoa / New Zealand, which marked the beginning of a long and transformative period of travelling. Over the next decade, I spent time living and working in Canada, England, Italy, Taiwan, and Turkey. These experiences profoundly impacted the way I related to the world and provided impetus for my pursuit of graduate studies. I completed my master's degree at the University of Alberta, with a conceptual thesis drawing on environmental philosophy and complexity theory to describe a biocentric approach to education (Baker, 2008). I am now a doctoral candidate at the University of British Columbia, pursuing research in Indigenous science education, an arena of educational inquiry where issues of equity and sustainability intersect and overlap. Like Battiste (2008), I am attempting to navigate diverse and sometimes conflicting worldviews, and "seek a respectful way of converging Eurocentric and Indigenous knowledge systems, including both the human and physical sciences" (p. 88).

I often feel caught between seemingly conflicting impulses and motivations: the rational and intuitive, the local and global, the human and more-than-human, the present and future. I have come to realize, however, that these spaces of contradiction are also sources of creativity and possibility. It is the complex integration of the contradictory impulses of fire and water, and earth and air, for example, through which life has arisen and is sustained. As Cajete (2000a) notes, being torn between "different ways of living and looking at life is a place of great confusion, but it can also be a place of great compassion and creativity" (p. 189).

My Father's Stories

I was in high school when I first identified my father as a personal hero. In light of the silence surrounding his past, it had taken that long to understand his journey to providing our family with the comforts we enjoyed, and sometimes took for granted. My dad shared many stories during our conversations, so many that some important and entertaining narratives had to be omitted. We agreed to present his stories chronologically before addressing some topics that arose through our discussions.

Mah Hee's Death

Like me, my father was not born in Saskatoon but moved there at an early age. The first child of his parents, Anne Hall and Mah Hee, he was born in Grande Prairie, Alberta in 1946. His family lived in a large house and his father earned a decent living as owner and operator of a restaurant with his brothers. Things changed rapidly, however, when Mah Hee died in 1949.

My father doesn't have many recollections from this early period of his life, especially regarding his dad.

... the pictures sort of remind me of my dad but if I hadn't seen the pictures I wouldn't have any idea of what my dad looked like. I know he was shorter than my mom, and kind of pudgy. Maybe that's one of the reasons why I never felt bad about being overweight [both laugh]. I have a sense that he was a very good man.

Shortly after his dad's death, the house was sold and my father moved with his mom to Saskatoon to be closer to family.

In addition to the loss of his father, Mah Hee's death initiated further readjustment of my dad's family context. Through the execution of his will, the presence of Mah Hee's first family, a wife and two girls who had remained in China, was revealed. My dad is unsure if Anne had known about them previously, but when the estate was divided Mah Hee's brothers ensured that Anne received a third, the wife in China received a third, and that the remainder was split among the three children, with my dad's share held in trust.

Mah Hee's passing also marked the beginning of a tumultuous period of my father's youth while in the sole custody of his mother. A few years after moving to Saskatoon, my father's mom and new stepdad convinced the authorities that they needed his inheritance to support him. My father never received a cent, and believes most of it was spent on alcohol, as there was rarely food in the house. As my dad succinctly puts it, *'My mom robbed me.'* Anne's neglect continued with her further seven children, and my dad took on a parenting role at an early age. He remembers actively caring for his two nearest brothers when he was only five years old. He still has a tendency to dote on people he cares about, constantly ensuring they are fed and warm.

A Youth of Play and Violence

Like many urban Indigenous people, my dad moved frequently in his youth. He lived in four houses and attended three schools before entering grade three. My dad spoke a little about his school experiences, including how he hated the first day so much he had to be sent home. He also talked about being left at home with an ear infection when he was six, and accidentally rupturing his itchy eardrum. When Anne returned he was on the floor, barely conscious. He was rushed to the hospital in critical condition and spent the rest of the school year recovering.

Most of the stories from my dad's youth were about playing in the summer with his brothers and their friends.

We used to go over to the stockyards as kids and play in the hay. Under the roofs they had all the bales stacked up. We'd go in there and build forts and throw bales at each other. We got chased out of there several times.

There was a sand pit they liked to play in, too. A couple of kids died there when a tunnel they dug collapsed on them, but the lure of the soft sand was too much for my dad and his friends to resist. My favourite story was about playing at the river. I had also spent a lot of time around the river in my youth, and could almost imagine myself there with him.

We used to sneak a can of beans or something from the house and go down and meet the other kids at the river, and somebody would have a can opener and we'd open the can of beans and build a fire and cook the beans by the fire. Sort of like Tom Sawyer. We'd swim in the river and have mud fights and then lay in the river ...

It was great to hear these stories and to know that my dad had a lot of good memories, too.

It wasn't until asked directly about experiences with violence that my father shared some less pleasant stories. They were very hard to listen to, and deciding which to include was equally difficult. We decided some needed to be shared they are part of my father's experience, and addressing them is an important aspect of his healing—and similar stories unfortunately remain part of the experience of many youth today. While I found hearing and relating these stories emotionally arduous, my dad was able to discuss some of his encounters with a touch of humour.³

I got some good lickings from my stepdad. He caught me playing hooky down by the sanatorium ... and he took a willow and whipped me ... and my ass was really, really sore ... I think that was the last time I played hooky [laughs] ...

This was one of the few incidents related where my dad was the recipient of physical violence. His mom, however, wasn't so fortunate.

Despite Anne's neglect, it was obvious that my dad still cared for her. When I first asked about experiences with violence, this was his reply.

I saw my mom beaten by my stepdad so many times I said when I grow up I'm going to kill you ... And finally when I did grow up and when I did run into him again and I saw him ... he was all withered up and skinny and old. I just thought, if I hit you once as hard as I want to hit you, I'll kill you. And I thought, this is so maddening. I've wanted revenge for years and now I can't do it because I know I'd end up in jail ... So, yeah, I saw a lot of that, a lot of other violence too.

In a later discussion we talked about how physical abuse was part of Anne's childhood, and how it had become normalized in her relationships.

... it was ironic, because my mom was always bigger than him, and if she would have stood up and punched him once, he never would have got up. She wouldn't fight back. She had learned not to fight back ...

My dad was clear in stating that he did not divulge all of his stories in our conversations, and only shared enough to provide an idea of his experiences.

Reflecting on the violence perpetrated within and upon my father's family, and how frequently these patterns are repeated across generations, I am especially grateful that my dad was able to interrupt them. The few occasions when he lost his temper with me are much more understandable in light of the context of his youth.

Kilburn Hall and Pearl Martin

Things started to turn around when my dad was nine. He's not sure exactly how, but he and his brothers ended up in Saskatoon's Kilburn Hall, which at the time functioned as an orphanage.⁴ He immediately appreciated the attention from the matrons, describing it as *'like having a whole*

bunch of mothers.' In addition to providing a constant source of care and support, Kilburn Hall presented opportunities for my dad to realize his passion for art and his love of nature. Ms. Pember, my dad's grade four teacher, encouraged him to hone his artistic talents. He took her advice, eventually obtaining a Bachelor of Fine Arts and pursuing a career as a high school art teacher. He recently returned to Kilburn Hall to lead a workshop on soapstone carving, and still paints and sculpts when time permits. Kilburn Hall also facilitated my dad's first experiences hiking, camping, and canoeing, as each summer the boys attended a camp at Wakaw Lake.

After four years at Kilburn Hall, my dad and his brothers were sent to join their stepdad and Anne in Fort St. John, British Columbia. They had moved a few years earlier, shortly after the boys went to Kilburn Hall, in an effort to start over. On his arrival, my dad was surprised to find that he had a baby sister, and that they were living an hour out of town, without amenities. Things were okay at first but it wasn't long before his parents found new friends to drink with, and old cycles of violence and neglect reappeared. About a year later, Anne received word that her father was ill and she returned to Saskatoon with my dad to see him. They hitchhiked back, only to find him perfectly healthy. When Anne returned to Fort St. John, my father chose to stay in Saskatoon. He lived with his grandfather, a part-time bootlegger, for a short time but eventually, for the sake of his education, decided he was better off at Kilburn Hall. At the age of thirteen, he called child welfare and had himself taken back into care.

Soon afterwards, my dad encountered the key figure of his youth, his foster mom, Pearl Martin. Pearl was an enduring source of stability and love, and was, for all intents and purposes, my grandmother. She noticed how much that visiting his mom and grandfather upset my dad, and encouraged him to limit his contact with them.

I could see they were still doing the same thing. They were still drinking ... I was just disgusted by the fact that it was still going on ... They weren't doing anything about it ... There was no way they were going to change. So I realized I had to give up on them. There comes a point when you can't just keep on hoping ...

My father lived with Pearl for eight years, through high school and university, until he married and moved to Uranium City with my mom in 1969.

Adult Revelations

Five years and two children later, our family returned to Saskatoon so my dad could pursue his Fine Arts degree. He needed a birth certificate to apply, and while ordering one was surprised to learn that he did not exist.

... when I went to get my birth certificate there was no such person as Lee Baker. It was Lee Hee ... So that's why we had to have all of our names changed legally ...

His brothers were also registered as Bakers but no one is sure why. My dad thinks it must have been shortly after Mah Hee's death, in an effort to distance herself from it, that Anne started using the surname Baker.

Until recently, my dad had relied on the story Anne told about his father's death. According to her, it happened while they were away on a trip:

... he fell in a hotel and hit his head on a bed, he went to the hospital and then he died ...

A few years ago, during a discussion over dinner with his brother and sister, my father heard a different account.

We got talking, and they mentioned something about my mom having killed my dad. And I said 'What!?' ... They were so surprised that I didn't know ... That was the first time I heard that my mom had killed my dad.

As the story goes, she hit him on the head with a bottle while they were drinking, but was never charged. There is probably no way, now that so much time has passed, to know what truly happened.

My father admits to some resentfulness toward his mom for spending his inheritance and removing his father from his life—certainly from his name and perhaps physically through an act of violence. Despite the confusion and pain, he has also managed to retain feelings of empathy.

She probably suffered from depression [and] her way of coping with it was alcohol ... I had no idea the whole time I was growing up that she had done that to my dad. So there was probably a really heavy guilt complex bothering her that whole time too.

Like all of us, my grandmother was influenced by her environment. The traditional lifestyle of her Métis ancestors was disrupted with the collapse of the Fur Trade, and many families grew dysfunctional as they struggled against marginalization from both White and First Nations communities (MacDougall, 2010). Anne's parents' relationship was characterized by violence, neglect, and abuse. In Anne's life, alcohol was a crutch for everything.

I only met Anne once, a brief encounter taking her to the bus station with the family when I was eight. She sat in the front and turned around to look at us kids for a second. I think she said hello, and that was it. Listening to my father speak about her brought on a range of emotions, including sorrow, anguish, anger, and confusion. With further reflection, I have also found reason for hope and a desire to know more about her. I believe the dysfunction that plagued her life was largely a product of colonization, and if we are products of our parents, my father is strong testament to the fact that, whatever her weaknesses, there was some good alongside Anne's failings. I have come to respect and love her for doing what she could—for bringing my father (and thus I) into the world, for giving us life.

Nature and Spirit

In addition to the essential physical and personal support my father provided, experiences backpacking, canoeing, and cross-country skiing with him helped to foster my sense of connection with the natural world. For my dad, these excursions were more than just an excuse to get out of the house.

I've always been in awe of the power of nature. Like a tree that can grow on a rock when there's not a bit of dirt around, or a plant that will shoot up between a crack in the cement. Nature is really powerful, and I just like being a part of it.

Although spirituality has become increasingly important to me, it had never been part of my relationship with my dad. Yet when the topic arose in our discussions, he spoke readily about experiencing the presence of spirits throughout his life.

I feel like there has always been somebody watching out for me ... I feel like it's my dad. There's a spirit watching out for me. Plus, I think Nana's probably watching out for me, and a lot of other people in my life.

As we discussed the topic, other aspects of his understanding of spirit emerged, including a sense of humility with respect to the grand mystery of creation, the idea of an underlying plan or purpose in nature, and the presence of a power that animates all life.

Water, earth, air, fire, they are all-powerful. We are a long way from ever mastering them ... We're not that important. But we're important in terms of fitting in to the overall plan ... [Ir]regardless of what we do, nature is going on with its own plan. We're just going to have to catch up ... We design insecticides and the bugs get stronger. We design penicillin and the diseases get stronger. Everything is trying to survive. And there is something in that power ...

Perhaps my father's compassion for his mother can also be attributed to this spiritual understanding of nature and life. We are all part of creation we are all imbued with spirit and doing what we can to survive, and therefore deserving of respect. My father's words also resonated with my own evolving sense of spirit, fuelling my desire to live a life of balance, with an awareness of the mystery and miracle of our existence.

Identity and Research

As a person of mixed ancestry with experience living in diverse cultures, I am sometimes hesitant to engage in discussions of identity. I was curious to hear how my father would describe himself.

Jeff: Another question I've come up against ... is what are you? Are you White? Are you Native? Are you Chinese? Some kind of a hybrid ...?

Lee: We're all hybrids ...

Jeff: So, how do you identify yourself?

Lee: Sort of a Popeye mentality, 'I am what I am.' If you don't like me, that's your problem. If I don't like you, it's my problem.

My father seemed to be heeding Smith's (1999) caution "that we exercise restraint in becoming too involved in identity politics" (p. 187). Debates

over authenticity and accusations of essentialism are central to these politics, and often work to divide individuals and communities, thus limiting the potential for collaborative action.

There are always multiple factors influencing identity, however, which can shift, along with one's sense of self, through place and time. While I try to honour all of my ancestors, I most strongly identify with my Métis roots. There is a natural similitude between the complexities of my mixed ancestry and the Métis emergence from First Nations and European roots. I have also lived most of my life in Western Canada, the land that shaped the perspectives of my First Nations ancestors, and influenced the Métis who followed them. It wasn't until I was twelve, the result of a superficial lesson on Indians, that I really began reflecting on my identity. The lesson confused me but raised some important questions that remained dormant until my enrolment in SUNTEP, my first prolonged encounter with Indigenous people and culture. It was a very positive experience, one that initiated a long, uneven, and ongoing process of reclaiming my Indigenous heritage.

Completing my internship in Aotearoa/New Zealand also contributed to this process. About half the students I taught were Maori, and several Maori teachers and staff worked at the school. I was struck by how similarly the Maori had been impacted by colonization but also buoyed by their progress. In addition to the presence of Maori staff, there was a marae⁵ on the school grounds where Elders provided counselling and taught Maori culture and language classes. While racial tensions still exist in Aotearoa/New Zealand, my experiences there helped me realize that the depth of the racial divide that characterized my experiences in Saskatoon was not inevitable. As a light-skinned, blue-eyed, Métis, I am often not recognized as Indigenous. I have still experienced a great deal of racism, however, and am all too familiar with strategies of 'passing' (i.e., feigning Whiteness) and 'keeping your mouth shut' in response (Richardson, 2006). Through my studies, experiences, and discussions with my sister,⁶ I have learned how I benefit from both 'white privilege' (McIntosh, 1990) and 'male privilege' in today's racialized and misogynized societies, and draw on this acknowledgement as a continuing source of motivation for my work.

Experiences travelling have also influenced my sense of self, strengthening feelings of interconnectedness and empathy for diverse people and places, and amplifying my awareness of the magnitude of humanitarian and ecological crises (e.g., poverty, water and other resource shortages, climate change, HIV/AIDS, biological and cultural diversity loss). While these experiences helped foster my understanding of global interdependence, they also highlighted diversity as a frequent source of conflict. I began searching for common ground, as both a foundation for collaborative action and a means of remedying my own internal contradictions (e.g., the Métis experience of being 'oppressor and oppressed' (Richardson,

2001)). It was in this context that I began considering the value and concept of 'life' as a source of commonality, which provided the focus for my master's study on biocentric education (Baker, 2008).

Considering life through the lens of 'complexity thinking' (Davis & Sumara, 2006) helped broaden my conception of life, and of myself, from that of the individual organism to one that includes relationships with other organisms and the nested systems (e.g., ecological, geologic, social, economic, cultural) that sustain us (Capra, 1996). Reviewing literature by Indigenous scholars sharpened my awareness of some congruencies between these ideas and Indigenous worldviews (Barnhardt & Kawagely, 2003; Cajete, 2000b; Little Bear, 2000; Urion, 1999).⁷ Cree Elder Stan Wilson (2001), for instance, has described an Indigenous view of 'self-as-relationship' that extends beyond the individual and includes more than relationships among people. These similarities have become a focus for my research in Indigenous science education, where I am attempting to draw from Western and Indigenous knowledges to inspire the development of more relational identities and more reverential views of life—a project that I believe will help to facilitate more equitable and sustainable ways of living.

Closing Reflections

In *The Truth About Stories* (King, 2003) we are reminded that stories are powerful, and that once told, can never be taken back. Considering these words, I am unsure if I have done the right thing in sharing these stories. While I wished to honour my father's story and acknowledge his influence on my life and research, my intention was neither to lionize him nor demonize his mother. I have shared these stories simply because they are part of my story. We are always 'in the midst' of stories, with some beginning where others end (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Each of these stories carries multiple possible meanings, and what is evoked depends largely on the interpretation of the listener or reader (Archibald, 2008). Unlike the generalizable results desired of positivist inquiry and statistical analysis, stories and narrative are notoriously open-ended, and thus embody numerous opportunities for individual growth and learning. Accordingly, we have chosen to close these narratives by sharing a few of our reflections.

My father is very satisfied with his life and finds it hard to believe the success he's had, considering where he began. He is also very proud of my sister and me. By taking socially responsible approaches to our studies, he sees us doing what he had wanted to do in his youth—working to remedy the injustices he and his family endured. Pursuing collaborative storying (Bishop, 1999) with my father has been an important process of reconnecting for both of us. Spending time together, sharing our thoughts and stories, and listening to one another, has brought us closer and provided a

valuable perspective on who we are. I am still getting to know my dad, I am still learning from him, and am realizing that I inherited much more than his sweet tooth. I now view my life and work as a continuation of my father's journey, taking the strong social consciousness and privilege given to me, and attempting to pay them forward.

In addition to connecting with my father, since returning to Saskatoon I have been exploring my Indigenous identity by learning to speak Cree,⁸ participating in ceremonies,⁹ and attending other community events. While I am grateful for these opportunities, the process has not been easy. Reclaiming one's Indigenous identity means remembering, and to some extent reliving, the painful legacy of colonization. Beyond the loss of language and tradition, the introduction of alcohol, high-sugar foods, inactive lifestyles, and learned/enforced economic dependency, have proven a deadly combination for Indigenous people—including my grandmother, whose death arose ultimately from complications of alcoholism and poverty. Listening to my father's stories helped personalize my understanding of this colonial legacy by evoking previously repressed emotions—bringing these historical facts to life and inspiring hope for the future.

In reflecting on our stories, I am also intrigued by the centrality of formal education in our lives. Contrary to present trends for Indigenous males, we were both drawn to careers in education. Formal schooling, however, has played a different role in each of our stories. For my father, it provided a way out, a means of disconnecting from an unhealthy family situation and forging his own path. For me, it has provided an opportunity and source of encouragement for reconnecting, especially during postsecondary studies. For many Indigenous people, the harsh reality of residential schools has edified formal education as a place of violent disconnection from family, language, culture, and land. There can be little doubt that today's form of schooling has interrupted important cycles of intergenerational learning that are especially valued and practiced by Indigenous peoples. There is some evidence, however, including my own research and experience, suggesting that this reality is slowly beginning to change. The circle is widening, and historical systems of oppression are being transformed in response to a growing acknowledgement of the contemporary value of Indigenous ways of knowing and being (Barnhardt & Kawagley, 2005; Brayboy & Castango, 2009).

Reflecting on my own identity, and on my journey toward a more Indigenous, relational sense of self, has also helped me comprehend a strong correlation between who we believe we are, how we feel, and what we do. Reconnecting, through story or otherwise, can alter the way we think of ourselves, contributing to a phenomenological change in the way we experience and act out our lives. Building relationships through story is a powerful means of developing the trust necessary for effective teaching

and learning, of raising the awareness needed to inspire responsible action, and of nurturing the empathy required to create a more equitable and sustainable world. My father and I learned a great deal in the process of writing this paper and hope that it may also be useful to others, perhaps inspiring some to strengthen their own sense of self-as-relation (Wilson, 2001). As Frank (1995) intuited, "People tell stories not just to work out their own changing identities, but also to guide others who will follow them" (p. 17).

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Notes

¹While the relational orientation of narrative inquiry is consistent with Indigenous epistemology (Barton, 2004), narrative inquiry itself is distinct from 'Indigenous narrative inquiry,' which emanates from an Indigenous paradigm and observes relevant ceremonies and protocols (Benham, 2007).

²Conducted primarily by my wife, Dr. Sandy Bonny, with assistance from Tammy Morin and the historical research of Dr. Brenda MacDougall (2006; 2010).

³See Taylor (2005) for a series of amusing and informative discussions regarding Indigenous peoples' use of humour.

⁴Kilburn Hall is now a secure facility for young offenders.

⁵A sacred and traditional cultural meeting place.

⁶Carmen Gillies, a scholar of anti-racist education and doctoral student at the University of Saskatchewan.

⁷One important exception is the limited attention given to spirit and the absence of an explicit value system in complexity thinking.

⁸Anne's grandparents from Sakitawak (Île-à-la-Croix) spoke a Cree-heavy dialect of Michif (MacDougall, 2010).

⁹I am deeply indebted to Mr. Don Speidel, a Waakiye (traditional helper) with Saskatoon Public Schools, for the opportunity to learn about and experience Indigenous spiritual practices.

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