

my lifetime and it's going to be a legacy that I leave to my grandchildren. I want to leave you with a quote about reconciliation that may help to explain why it was so hard for me to articulate that. Corn tassel and Holder write:

An important element of that confrontation is assuming the right of indigenous peoples to self-determination and preceding any discussions of reconciliation with genuine acts of restitution to establish a clear break from the continuation of a state-centered discourse. Promoting awareness about indigenous histories, ongoing relationships to their homelands, and self-determination strategies should be part of a large insurgent education movement that counters state-based strategies of promoting unity, prioritizing citizenship and implementing 'cheap reconciliation' strategies. (2008, pp. 487-488)

This is something to be aware of in Canada and that we really need to critically think about. How are we going to bring *sahkohtowin* (to care for one another in our actions) into action, into the things that we do? *Hiy-hiy*.

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All the Way Back—All the Way Forward: A Journey of Mobilizing Indigenous Epistemologies and Embracing Reconciliation

[Original title: Remembering Reconciliation]

Angela Wolfe

Welcome to the University of Alberta and to this Indigenous conference. I have had the privilege of being on this team that helped plan this conference and to bring it to the university and to our faculty. I can also recall, very strongly and vividly, the first Indigenous Scholars conference that I went to as an undergraduate student. Being present at the previous conferences was transformative for me. Being able to start this conference with ceremony and presence of our ancestors, and to bring this vision here, is really wonderful and very powerful. I'm grateful that all of you are here. I'd also like to thank those who have laid some of the stones for us to follow and who made my path to be in front of you today. Some of them are not here today. One of them is the late Linda Bull. She adopted me and took me home when I first arrived at the University of Alberta. Linda was pivotal in my direction and scholarship. I recalled her this morning in our prayers and our songs. I wanted to mention and bring her here today. So, my presentation today is remembering and living reconciliation.

I have the privilege of being a student in this innovative master's cohort. A part of our journey has been around Indigenous epistemologies. I don't think that word flowed off my tongue on the first day of classes as easily as it did today, but that in itself is a part of living reconciliation because it was part of a journey back to where I am as I stand before you here today.

So, I must go back 20 plus years, to my first lesson here in this hallowed place, this University of Alberta. I had not grown up knowing any Indigenous person who had ever succeeded at the university or even attended any university. I was the first in my family to apply and to be accepted at this university. I remember being extremely terrified my first days of being a university student in 1992. I was convinced that if they, the university academic elite, found out I was here, I'd be shown the door!

Ironically, one of my first classes was a Cree language class. One day, the guest speaker to that class was an Elder and scholar from my home

community of Maskwacis, the late Walter Lightning. I was humbly in awe of Walter—he stood in front of the class and announced that he had just finished his master's degree. That's when I said to myself, "I want a master's degree." I think I wanted it more than I wanted my undergraduate degrees. The lesson and the learning that Walter handed me and to many of us in that room that day is really pivotal to what I share with you today. It is the cornerstone of how I understand my epistemology.

Walter gave us what I call the Stick Teaching. He had approached an Elder who shared this teaching stick with him. The Elder took a stick 18 inches long and notched it at the halfway point, and he said, "My boy, that first half of the stick is when you are from zero to 50 in age, and from 50 to 100 is the last half of the stick. This is your lifeline. This is what you are going to be learning. From zero to 50, you know nothing. You absolutely know nothing." I vividly remember thinking, "I know something." I felt kind of insulted, because I felt "I'm in my late 20s, I know stuff, I've lived, I'm smart, I'm here." Then he went on to explain that from 50 to 100 you have a hunch; when you're older than 100, you can say that you know something. I think maybe that's where I was most confused, because I thought, "I'll never get there, and how will I ever know anything?"

The important part of that lesson for me, and to share with you today, is that it's only been in the last year and a half that I completely comprehended that lesson. That was and is the Indigenous way of learning and teaching because it went all the way back and all the way forward. All the way back is the connection to my ancestors and their ways of knowing and being, and all the way forward is my connection to my descendants and their ways of knowing and being. The thread that is weaved through each—all the way back, all the way forward—and through me is rooted in Indigenous epistemology. That Stick Teaching stayed with me and lived within me. The seed was given to me so that I would revisit it, watch it grow, and try and make sense of it. That little insult that I took offense to—that I'm so proud to say to you today—is that I don't know *anything*. I've got three more years of that (until I'm 50) and I'm going to hold on tight to those years. I understand that now. I understand the wisdom of that. And I'm really looking forward to having a hunch.

Living in this era of reconciliation, I think it's really important that you know a little bit about where I have come from because, as Shawn Wilson (2008) says, "Relationality requires that you know a lot more about me before you can begin to understand my work" (p. 12). My home community is Maskwacis but it wasn't always Maskwacis. I was taken from my community in late 1969 to early 1970. I was born in 1967 to a family of seven children. My parents are both residential school survivors and so are

my brothers. My mother told me that my father was not around when I was born. I didn't ask why and I'm still not too sure how to ask that question. My mother tried to raise her children on her own and she was extremely stretched, to a breaking point, that I was taken away or given away. To be honest, I don't think she put up much of an argument. I imagine her to have been defeated in so many ways at that time.

I was put into a home with a white man and an Indian woman. Similar to my birth mother, my foster mother was a survivor of religious education. She had lived with her older sister in a nunnery for a time. When she spoke about that time in her life, you could tell it was with harsh and negative painful memories. Ironically, it was *Dad*, the white man, who was the most accepting of me. He cared deeply for me his whole life, even though he and my foster mom separated when I was seven years old. I knew kindness as a child because of him. He was a good man. My foster mom never had any children of her own, and I'm not sure if there was a physical problem or she just chose not to have her own children. I was the child chosen by her but she never let me forget that this burden was something for which I was supposed to be grateful. The home I was raised in was riddled with complex dysfunction. I suffered from sexual, emotional, physical, and mental abuse. I felt like I never belonged. I felt like I lived in borrowed skin. This was the disconnect that I had to reconcile in order to make amends.

Because I was so disconnected, I struggled so much in my learnings here in the university. Now I realize that, for myself, through this conference, through this program, reconciliation had to start within myself. I had to start with my mother, with both my mothers. As a woman, as a human being, as a mother, and now as a grandmother, I realize that is where it has to start. Because even before I am a scholar I am all those things, and I bring all those things to my scholarship.

The journey to reconcile with my own mother was quite a challenge. I wrote that story down and I don't think I could retell it in a better way. I wrote this part of that story in a ceremony for one of our courses in this program. So, I'd like to share that with you:

The paradoxical gift of growing up in the home that I did was that it was riddled with physical, mental, and emotional abuse. Yet, I did not blame my own birth mother. And in trying to understand how my foster mother could be the way she was and how she let all the abuse happen, I started to do some research about the Indian Residential Schools (IRS), because with my whole heart I did not want to hate my foster mom and because I wanted to know why both my mothers made the choices that they did.

The domino effect of the IRS was devastating to Aboriginal people by separating their children from their families and communities. And it completely broke down our traditional ways of being, knowing, learning, and teaching. I've cried so many times during my own healing journey, but I have also cried for my foster mom, and my own dear mother, for all

that they've suffered. I left my foster home when I was only 15 years old, never to return, and never to resolve or reconcile anything with my foster mom.

I did make the journey back to my home community, but not for three more years. And when I did it was not to my mother, but to my oldest sister, who led me to my family and to my community. She paraded me to my maternal aunts, uncles, and cousins. Her house became a place to bask in the familial love, and Maskwacis became my home.

My mother and my sister had a strained relationship. I did not reunite with my mother for the first few years upon my return to Maskwacis, not until we had a tragedy, not until my second oldest sister died. She passed away in the late 1990s. I drove home that sunny, summer day to bury her. And it was the longest drive. Navigating the rough reserve roads to my father's home for our sister's wake, I was filled with trepidation.

This had nothing to do with my father. It was because I knew my mother would be there. As I turned into my father's driveway, I gasped. My nervousness stole my breath. I pulled up to the house, and I parked. I turned my car off, and I sat there for a moment thinking and feeling like I had no idea what to do. I was left with no choice other than to get out of my car. Just then I saw my sister standing in the doorway. I found the strength to walk up those porch steps. She and I hugged, and she told me that our mother was on the deck with everyone else.

I knew in that moment that I had to go to our mother, the woman who abandoned me. And it seemed like a million steps to the doorway that led to the deck. The moment I walked on the deck, there was complete silence. The only sound I could hear was a summer breeze and my deep breathing. I just knew the woman that was sitting with my aunt was my mother. It was instinct. I stopped for a moment, I saw her, and she saw me. She looked at me, and then she quickly looked down. I know it was only seconds, but for me, it felt like it was minutes before I could move. And in those minutes, I saw her, human being, woman, and my mother, who had just lost a daughter, with a daughter standing before her that she had lost years before. I took the empty seat on the other side of her. I truly felt so bad for her—that she was about to bury a daughter. And without looking at her, I took her hand in mine. And without words, we held each other's hands. That silent conversation was one of the most important conversations of my life.

I now know that was reconciliation, and it was only in preparation for this presentation today did I realize that it was probably one of the first most powerful moments of reconciliation in my life. It was not just about holding her hand. It was about coming to terms with who I am, all the way back and all the way forward. It was about holding her hand, and knowing from where she came, all the way back and all the way forward. It's about holding my own daughter's hands, because I know where she goes, all the way back and all the way forward, and for my wee little granddaughter, it is the same. I am hanging on tightly to the thread that goes through me, all the way back and all the way forward, for all my relations. That is what I bring to this scholarship and to this research about reconciliation and about epistemology.

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Mobilizing Indigenous Epistemologies: Re-visioning Reconciliation Through Literature

Eileen Marthiensen

My name is Eileen Marthiensen. We are here to share our own truths, our stories. I am so humbled and honoured to be here today and to be in front of the scholars I respect. I have read your words, I have reread your words, and I have quoted you. I have taken so much of your thoughts and your energy into my own heart, and I just want to thank you for the opportunity to share my own story with you.

I am Inuvialuk. I was born and raised in Tuktoyaktuk, Northwest Territories. I am the Inuit member of the master's cohort and I have been welcomed with incredibly open arms. The program and learning opportunity have been such a privilege and an incredible journey. For me, it's been the reawakening and rediscovering about who I am and where I'm from. I have spent my life going back to the North, sometimes physically and sometimes in the recollection of memories, such as the sound of geese flying or the first snowfall. What I have realized through this learning journey is that I've carried much of the North with me.

To begin, I am W3-2449. This is the Eskimo identification number that was imposed upon me at birth by the Government of Canada. I am a recipient of what we called the Eskimo identification dog tag, implemented in order for the Government of Canada to *track* Inuit. This system was introduced and implemented until 1970; it demonstrates a denigrating and minimizing view and lack of respect for Inuit history and identity. Once the Government of Canada realized the Eskimo identification system did not work, they began Project Surname, led by Inuit leader and Northwest Territories councillor Abraham "Abe" Okpik. He travelled to every community in the Arctic, to ensure that every Inuk had a first name and a surname. The complexity is that, historically, Inuit only had one name. The traditional name given at birth recognized a respected person in the community with the intent to remember and honour their spirit. The Inuit person's singular name became their surname and, if Inuit did not have a first name, the missionary often provided one. Imagine the impact on one's family tree.

I have experienced much in my lifetime and I am representative of Indigenous students that I currently serve in my job. I understand their