

Reconciliation Through Storytelling

Pamela Quinn

I would like to thank the Creator for this beautiful day that we have today. I also thank and acknowledge my parents, Carl and Florence Quinn. I am thankful for the life that I was blessed with. *Pisimoyâpi niwihowin onih-cikiskwapiwinihk ochi niya.*

My name that I was given at birth is Elizabeth Pamela Quinn. I was raised in Saddle Lake and that is also where I teach Grade Six by day. I'm a student by night, or wife. Sorry—humour is what settles me down. I like to make jokes when I'm nervous. It settles me down. It's a fun life, even in the serious times.

My presentation is about reconciliation through storytelling. Like my colleagues, I say that it's still pretty painful to hear the stories. As a researcher, you're reading story after story, and it's really hurtful at times and you need to take that break to heal yourself.

I would also like to acknowledge that we are on Treaty 6 territory, and I'm so blessed to be here. This is my great great grandfather *Papastew*. That is how my *mosom* addressed him. His father was *Papaschase*, who also took an English name of Benjamin Quinn, and his mother was Marie LeTendre. They were named on their marriage certificate as Marie LeTendre and Benjamin Quinn. So, that brings me to thank you and to thank my ancestors that are here today, that were on this land, and to acknowledge them.

I'm going to tell you a story that I first heard last year. I was sick, and my uncle told me this story of my great great grandmother, Marie. I had never heard about her until that time. I didn't quite remember the whole story. I am only just beginning to tell stories and learning to remember stories. I was given a teaching that if you have some tobacco and you really want that teaching, you will remember it, so that is what I did. I went to go see my dad to ask him about our family history. I felt nervous, because sometimes I am nervous to offer that protocol. But I finally said, "Okay. I heard this story, and I want to know more. I want to know more about this story." I gave him my tobacco.

This story was about my great great grandmother, my *nohkôm nitân-skotapân*. Her dad was *Nehiyo*, who was also from the Pakan band. Part of my family is from the Pakan band from my father's side and also from my mother's side. It's interesting to learn how we all became related. I guess we're all related here on Turtle Island, cousins. My great great grand-

mother, Marie LeTendre, was born in 1862 and lived until 1967. This story is told through her eyes; she was five years old at the time.

During this time [about 1867], there was talk of a treaty happening between the Blackfoot and the Cree. They had a history of war and raids, back and forth, back and forth. There was talk of this treaty down towards Wetaskiwin area. *Nehiyo* took his family and they travelled toward Wetaskiwin area. And during that time they had talks—they were trying to make the peace and the treaty. Marie witnessed the talks. She witnessed that a man stood up and said that he didn't agree with the treaty. And it went on, and it went on, because these things take days. Everybody needs to agree to peace. In time, the man finally did agree. There was a lot of gift-giving happening. They were there a long time—weeks. When the people met at that time they didn't just meet for a weekend; they met for a long time over a period of weeks.

Fall started to come and they needed to start preparing for winter. Many of the families left that area. They went back to their lands where they could prepare for winter. But *Nehiyo* and his family, including Marie, stayed there with the Blackfoot. They continued to visit and to have feasts. Then it came time for the Blackfoot to start leaving. And when they left, *Nehiyo* and his family went with them. They went with them because they were going to go on a buffalo hunt. Now, in that time, the buffalo were scarce. They were being killed off. So, they followed this trail and they went down south toward the Blackfoot territory and across the line into the United States. When I see a picture of a buffalo herd, I want to make a stampeding sound, a rumbling sound, but of course that was in my imagination. They actually only killed one old bull during that time on their hunt.

Don't forget that I'm telling the story from a five-year-old view—five probably, maybe six. And what do I tell you? She remembers that the children's job was to collect the buffalo droppings. The children were collecting the buffalo droppings, probably for fuel. And they were also playing with the buffalo droppings. They had, down south, these big hills, and they went sliding with those buffalo droppings. That was part of my great great grandmother's memories about the last buffalo hunt.

Nehiyo was a good provider. He was also a good hunter. I can also tell you that my great great grandmother sewed a lodge—they had collected enough hide to make a lodge and I can just imagine all the stitches.

Now, come springtime, there was this old man with his horse. And he came walking towards the lodge and, as he came to the lodge, he offered his horse for that lodge. My great great grandmother traded with him and from that trade their family grew to have a herd of horses. In time, the United States Cavalry found out that their camp was there and they were

told to go home. "Go back. Go back to the Fort." They were given some rations and were sent on their way and they came back up across the line. So, that is what I can remember from my story—and especially an important piece of information, of history, with the treaty and with the buffalo hunt. When I think about that, I think about how I felt empowered as a woman because my *nohkôm nitânskotapân*: she witnessed all this.

Of course, I was really curious about reconciliation because I couldn't quite understand what it all meant. So, to my mentors, my mother and my father, I asked, "What do you think this means?" I was given a couple stories, one that I'll share with you. It was a story about Paspaschase. He had a brother and his name was Tahkoots. Tahkoots was pretty close with his brother. They both ended up back in Saddle Lake. There was another fellow there by the name of Akamasiniy and they had a disagreement—Akamasiniy was really mad at Tahkoots. And, so, Tahkoots, after a time, gifted him with a horse for his wrongdoing, to make up for whatever he did. So, that's how I was shown about reconciliation. I thought about these events that have happened over time, time and time again, from the time that the buffalo came close to extinction and the people were starving. The kids were taken, over and over again. So, in my heart—and here I think, "How do I, how do you, reconcile with that?"—I'm still wondering.

I have a few ideas about reconciliation. As a teacher, I think about the children that come into my classroom. I know that our oral stories are really important. The story that I have shared with you today is a story that I can also pass on. Stories are important. They need to be honoured in our schools and everywhere else where teaching is happening. Our children need to be taught the real history of Canada so we need to make sure our teachings are there.

I wish I could have told that story in Cree. It breaks my heart that I cannot tell the story in our language. We have to have our language programs supported to the fullest extent, whatever that may be. If the government is totally sorry about what has happened throughout our history, they're going to give us what we ask for. And it's only then that we can talk about reconciliation. That is my opinion.

There are different ways of mobilizing the knowledge. A colleague of mine, when I was telling him about singing, tells me, "You're singers, but you're also storytellers." And I replied, "Yeah, we are." Your singers are also storytellers. I'll sing you one really quick little verse from one of my dad's songs: *Akamasiniy, papastew, ona pekasiwînow, kiskisiw, iskwewak ekwa awâsisak ...*

When Cree warriors went out to war, went out on a raid, or when they went out hunting, the women would tell them to remember them—to

remember and to bring something back. When I think about educators and scholars, and all the people who acquire that knowledge, they need to bring that back and share it. They need to share it not only with each other but with the children, with the women, and with all our people. These are my thoughts about knowledge mobilization.

I'd like to give thanks to my father. He shared these stories with us since I was young—all kinds of stories about what happened. I'm so thankful for that. *Ekosi kinanaskomîtin.*