Decolonizing Every Day:
Exploring Relationships, Stories, and Practices for Decolonization

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Adult Education and Community Development Graduate Department of Leadership, Higher and Adult Education Ontario Institute for Studies in Education University of Toronto

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Abstract: In this thesis I reflect ethnographically on ‘every day’ experiences and stories that have shaped my own transformational learning about colonialism and decolonization to inspire and contribute to ongoing discussions and action on decolonization. The struggle of my close friend Natasha (Kwakw̱aḵa̱’wakw) to uncover where she is from originally inspired me to ask similar questions of my settler family. In this research I have learned from: family members, Ancestors, friends and mentors, archival online data and importantly, Natasha, and her friends and family in the birth community she found after years of searching. This research in our respective communities shows the relationships of my family; to one another, Indigenous people on Turtle Island, the Land, Spirit and colonialism. It also demonstrates the vitality of life-giving worldviews and relationships with land, Spirit and each other; with emphasis on the importance of supportive and accountable relationships in decolonizing work.
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I would like to thank my instructors and classmates at OISE for widening my perspectives and deepening my understandings of complex (and often painful) subjects. The wealth of knowledge I have gained from my time with all of you is indescribable, and cannot be fully displayed in this one expression of my learning. Thank you for challenging me and helping me remain humble. I also learned much from my time working with the Centre for Women’s Studies in Education as a graduate assistant. Thank you Lakshya Dhungana, Sarah Anderson and Angela Lytle for all the learning and support you’ve given me. Angela- attending the Brigid Gathering last spring (because of your suggestion!) was a deeply transformative experience for me. Thank you for all of the spiritual support you have given me throughout my degree – even if some days it was just being able to know there was someone else on or around campus who Remembers like me.

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Of course, I could not have undertaken this project without my close friend, Natasha Pittman. You inspire me every day with your bravery and action. I value our friendship and how it has changed and grown and continued to thrive even across great distance and restraint. Thank you for asking me to come visit you in ’Yalis, and for introducing me to your family and friends. To Wayne, Vera, Eva, Andrea, Marcus, Emily, Alan, Stephanie and Donna (and others whose conversations were not used in the final project): thank you for welcoming me into your community. For talking to me, helping me learn, and showing me your side of Natasha’s u’ mista story. Thank you for letting me share your stories in my project, and for (as Andrea said) “loving up” Natasha.

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My family has always supported me in my academic endeavours, even though they know how much of a struggle academia is and has been for me. My grandmother, Patricia Wilson, is a constant source of inspiration. Ever since I was a young girl, she taught me to remember my Ancestors and my relatives who have passed. She taught me how to take care of her peonies that are her mothers’. She cares for the graves of her grandparents and parents, and has shown me how it’s important to honour them and take care of them. She also helped me immensely in genealogical research by calling up every relative she could think of that could help me with sharing information. She provided many of the photos and primary information for this project and for rooting my family story research. My mom and dad have helped me overcome financial struggles while undertaking this research, but aside from that, are always there to hear my frustrations and help me uncover solutions. They have both inspired me deeply because of the learning that they have done by honouring the truths that I share with them. Thank you for being so unconditionally loving, for always showing me support even when you don’t know that you are. Thank you for honouring my transformational and ongoing changes, and for working on changing yourselves too.
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I. Definitions of Decolonization

Decolonization is big, overwhelming... and necessary. Decolonization means a majority of people must recognize the current and ongoing colonial situation, and work to change it. Change in this sense is the entire overhaul and restructuring – the transformation – of kyriarchal\(^1\) societies. This is a multidimensional process that is activated by learning and action, and continued by the interaction between learning about and fighting colonialism. Transformative learning about colonialism can help people in “decolonizing” their minds and taking action. Involvement in actions against ongoing colonialism provides additional pathways for learning while simultaneously assisting decolonizing change to take place. Transformative learning about decolonization is an ongoing conversation between thought and action that includes all of our relationships: to each other, the past, Land, Ancestors and Spirit. When we ask what decolonization is, we have to strive for specificity, “with attention to the colonial apparatus that is assembled to order the relationships between particular peoples, lands, the ‘natural world’, and ‘civilization’ or risk practicing decolonization metaphorically” (Tuck and Yang 2012, 21). Decolonization looks different depending on its context, but across the board one thing is true; we need to re-order our relationships. Decolonization must involve and unsettle everyone because it always includes the repatriation of Lands and the restructuring of society. Decolonization anticipates the end of settler-colonial occupation, so “decolonization is activist, but activism need not be decolonizing” (Morgensen 2012, 805).

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\(^1\) Kyriarchal used in this sense goes beyond Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza’s concept of coercive and domination-based societal organization. I am using it to highlight the consistent interdependence of multiple systems of domination; patriarchy, colonialism, white supremacy, capitalism, ableism, and others (qtd in Neinhuis, 44).
Decolonization and action are inherently linked because action, learning and transformative change are deeply connected and affect one another. Learning about decolonization happens from our relationships, from mentors, Indigenous scholars, oral historians and leaders and from critical reading—also, and importantly, from involvement in actions resisting oppression (Gramsci 1971, Land 2015, 162). There is a relationship between thought and action in decolonization, or any form of transformational learning— they influence and depend upon one-another (Mackinlay 2014, 56). Considering transformative learning in this way allows us to recognize, value and act on decolonization every day. In Ana Oian Amets’ description of decolonization found on her blog, *Awakening the Horse People*, a clear connection between thought, action and change is made. She says,

*Authentic decolonization will so profoundly provoke an awakening understanding of who you are and where you come from that it radically transforms one’s relationship to self, people, place, and all life. The renewal and rebalancing of these relationships breaks the greedy cycle of disassociation, desperation, and destruction that fuels the colonial disorder within an individual.* (Amets, 2013)

So, decolonization is transformational, but transformational learning (like activism) is not always *decolonizing*. She goes on to describe the relationship between our thoughts/learning and actions, asking settlers to consider what it takes to move from shallow motivations to “deeply understood acts of resistance” (Amets, 2013). Tuck and Yang and Amets all remind us that if we are not supporting the active liberation of Indigenous peoples, then we are not doing decolonizing work (Amets, 2013).

To understand why decolonization is necessary in the present and as a pathway forward, we have to consider the past. Settler colonialism on Turtle Island³ has been ongoing since the first influx of settler squatters in the mid-1500s. Colonization was supported by European rulers, who

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² [https://awakeningthehorse.wordpress.com/de-colonize-2/resistance/](https://awakeningthehorse.wordpress.com/de-colonize-2/resistance/)

³ North America
quoted Papal Bulls and the “Doctrine of Discovery” to validate their genocide and overt
subjugation of the Indigenous populations that they came into contact with (TRC 2015, 46). By
the 1890s (so, over the course of 300 years) Indigenous populations in the United States numbered
“slightly over 237,000- a 98-percent reduction from its original size” (Churchill 1997, 97). The
exact numbers of Indigenous deaths in the Canadian context is difficult to uncover, but popular
national media sources are beginning to recognize the process of land theft and widespread
destruction of Indigenous peoples and their lifeways as purposeful and genocidal (Fontaine, 2003).
Colonization has continued through “legalized” land-theft, outright murder, residential schools,
police violence and surveillance, forced relocations, starvation and malnutrition, institutionalized
racism, the disappearance and murder of thousands of Indigenous women, the removal of
Indigenous children from their families under the false guise of “protection” and laws forbidding
Indigenous spiritual and cultural practices (Fontaine 2003, Churchill 1997, Smith 1999, Razack
2015, TRC 2015). Indigenous nations are active today in continued resistance against
contemporary instances of colonial violence.

While reading Decolonizing Solidarity: Dilemmas and Directions for Supporters of
Indigenous Struggles (2015) by Clare Land (who is an author and researcher at Gary Foley’s Koori
History Archive), I had a break-through about the importance of every-day interactions for
effecting change. Land quotes Gary Foley, who is an Australian Aboriginal Gumbainggir activist,
academic, writer and actor. He proposes that “white supporters … go out and find yourself a racist”
(Land 2015, 175).

*Just go home, to the dinner table. You’ll find your racist. Raise the subject of
‘Aboriginal’ you’ll find the really hard core racist arguments that are thrown up. And
if you can’t, as an individual, change the attitudes of someone who’s really close to
you and you personally care about, then don’t think that you’re going to be able to do
anything about changing the attitudes of broader society.* (Foley qtd in Land 2015,
175)
I realized when I read this passage that I had been practicing decolonization in this way with my family for several years. During the early part of my undergraduate studies, it seemed that every night when I came home from class to have dinner with my mom, dad and brother I angrily ranted at them about whatever it was that had enraged me that day: residential schools, the banning of sacred traditions, or myths about alcoholism and laziness. I do not remember when the “ranting at” people stopped, but what I know is that by encouraging my family to approach the issues of colonialism with empathy and understanding⁴, I have inspired the people I love to reconsider and change lifelong racist thoughts and actions. I am not recounting this as a “move to innocence” (Fellows and Razack 1998, Tuck and Yang 2012). The work of Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang (2012) asks us to “consider how the pursuit of critical consciousness, the pursuit of social justice through a critical enlightenment, can also be settler moves to innocence - diversions, distractions, which relieve the settler of feelings of guilt or responsibility, and conceal the need to give up land or power or privilege” [emphasis mine]” (Tuck and Yang 2012, 21). I have no doubt that at times this has been a hefty portion of my motivation to engage in activist solidarity measures, but over time my intent and my vision of decolonization has changed, and is constantly expanding. For instance, it is important to understand that we have all been colonized in some way, but even more so, it is necessary to recognize and act on the fact that some of us are settlers (Tuck and Yang 2012, 17). A key piece of my learning around decolonization is an ethic of incommensurability (Fanon 1963, Tuck and Yang 2012). This is the “acknowledgement that decolonization will require a change in the order of the world […] a break, not a compromise” in the system of domination we are all part of (Tuck and Yang 2012, 2). This, more than unlearning racist stereotypes about Indigenous peoples, has been the difficult piece for some of my friends and family to grasp. What

⁴ Although, the full experience and weight of colonialism can never be understood by those who have not been directly affected by it.
has most driven me to action are learning from those relationships in my life that do recognize and work on radical movements for anti-colonial change.

Although talking to my family about colonialism has changed myself and my relations, the relationship that inspired this project is my close friendship with Natasha Pittman (Kwakw̓a’wakw). Natasha and I have been friends for several years, having met sometime in 2011. A few years after we met, because of mutual experiences of personal difficulty, we spent most evenings for a few months together trying to heal and make sense of our respective situations while supporting each other. Natasha was searching for her birth family, and around this time had made contact with some of her relatives in Alert Bay, BC. Her search to find her family and to interrogate her past so deeply through family story inspired similar actions in me. As Tuck and Yang (2012) suggest, decolonization demands specificity. I began to consider how we can approach specific and systemically minimized stories of the past through our own family story-and how this could be decolonizing, liberating, and change-inspiring for Indigenous people and settlers alike. This project is a story highlighting some of my learning about and action on decolonization so far. I will demonstrate how the reflexive relationships in my life (specifically with Natasha and our families and mentors) have been and are spaces of inspiration that heal and transform.

II. Triad Analysis

I will format the presentation of the stories, relationships and other knowledges that I have uncovered by using this pre-Celtic Irish triad⁵ (shown here surrounding a triskele⁶ symbol). Since

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⁵ The pre-Celtic Irish beliefs were not recorded in depth or with accuracy by the various groups of invaders. From the Trecheng Breth Féne or the “Triads of Ireland” we are able to ascertain a bit about the culture. The original wording of this triad is “Three things on which every person should reflect: whence they come, where they are, and whither they shall go” (Wright, 1995).

⁶ Triskele is used to describe three interlocking spirals moving in the same direction. The symbol is ancient and marks the doorways of many megalithic sites in Ireland and Scotland. Painting was made by the author, February 2016.
I have learned about colonization and begun to support work towards decolonization, it has become clearer to me that we need to know where we were, and where we are to know where we are going.

I have learned of the power held by the stories we uncover about ourselves and our relations to challenge mainstream and nationalistic narratives. I have chosen to explain my learning through a triskele or triad because it captures the multiplicity of circles. Life (and learning) is like a spiral-it urges us to continuously revisit stories or relationships that we think we have already learned from in order to find deeper—and sometimes different—meanings. In The Original Instructions (2008), Indigenous scholar, poet and activist Paula Gunn Allen recounts:

> When I was little my mother used to say that all life is a circle, and everything has its place within it. She used to say that in English. It already sounds weird. All life’s plural, and there are lots and lots of circles, they dither about in circles, all these lives. Within all of those circular, circular, circulars, everything has an interactive capacity with everything else. (Gunn Allen 2008, 139)

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When I make note of nationalistic myths or narratives throughout this project, I am referring to the false-truth of a peaceful and apologetic Canada which so many of us are schooled in.
She said it better than I can. Spirals are circles with multiplicity. They carry that learning of spiraling back, again and again, to learn something deeper. To find the root. This is why I have presented my learning in this triad: decolonization requires *at once* a spiraling backwards, in place and forwards in each specific context. This project is a spiral. Theoretical definitions and the perspectives that ground my learning spiral into the stories of the past that are connected to me, and then flow into the stories that I have learned from Natasha and her relations. I then spiral back to the centre to address where we “go from here” and consider additional spirals of learning shared through the decolonizing practices I have tested and uncovered.

Spirals have also helped me situate my *hyper-consciousness*. Margaret Kovach (2009) is an associate professor at the University of Saskatchewan and quotes Cam Willet who says “I just deconstruct everything, my mind is less, I wouldn’t say decolonized, but it’s certainly a lot less colonized than it was” (Willet qtd in Kovach 2009, 85). Kovach says that this “hyper-consciousness pervades all aspects of our being, creating a heightened sense of responsibility associated with the political nature of our work, be it research or otherwise” (Kovach 2009, 85). Thinking in spirals has helped me find a way to make sense of this *hyper-consciousness*. Most importantly, it has urged me to decolonize *every day* – to keep this goal and its incommensurability in the forefront of my mind and as the root of my actions. This prologue is meant to demonstrate the ‘story before’ this project began in order to situate my words as I explore the triad of my relational past, present and envisioned future in the rest of the paper (Kovach 2009, 3).

**III. Self-Location**

*Tá mé Zoe, agus is cuimhin liom mo Shinsir.* I am Zoe, and I remember my Ancestors. They have directed me and taught me since I was a small child, in ways I am only coming to

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8 This is one of the first phrases I have learned in Irish Gaelic. A discussion of language learning as decolonization is focused on pages 17-20 and in Part II: *Where We Are.*
understand now. The best way I can describe the feeling is an invisible string from my belly-button to a setting I cannot quite place. The more I learn about _where I am from_ the clearer the picture gets. Heather Menzies (2014) in her account of returning to her ancestral homeland of Scotland, suggests a similar feeling; “I caught a glimpse, a faint whisper of affiliation and myself a part of it. A continuity, a thread of connection to the land, the water and the sky of this place. I felt it tug at me like an invisible umbilical cord” (Menzies 2014, 19). It’s also important that I situate myself in relation to this research and to all the details that connect me to it. My research is as much a part of me as I am of it, and there is no better way to show that than to tell you who I see myself to be and where I am starting from.

I was born in what is now Kitchener-Waterloo. Before white people stole the Land and began to give it European names, the Attawendaronk and other Indigenous peoples had lived on and held a deep relationship with the Land that my ancestors settled on- and that I call home. I am the first person in my immediate family to have an interest in figuring out ‘where I am from’. I was sick of the answer “we’re from here” because that ignored the story that I wanted to hear. How did we get here? Why did my ancestors settle in Canada? This will be a _life-long_ discovering, and doing this family story research has helped me consider colonialism in the forefront of my history- and in the present. Fostering a ‘hyperconsciousness’ about colonialism is much harder to do than being content to simply call ourselves “Canadian”. If we are able to uncover and connect

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9 Meaning Kitchener-Waterloo.

10 My greatest privilege in life and another drive to do this research is my family. I am very close to my mom, dad and younger brother and we have always had loving and good relationships with one another. I am also very close with all of the women on my matrilineal side, my aunt and cousin and my grandmother. It’s true that women are often the “glue” in families, they help them stick together. My father lost his mother when I was three, and I only remember her funeral and one snippet from being at her house. I think because of her death and because of distance, my father’s family really only gets together once or twice a year. I hope that we have the opportunity in the future to kindle deeper relationships; especially with my intelligent and potential-filled younger cousins. I recognize the difficulty of doing anti-colonial family story research when families are disconnected or broken. I am unable to address this complex issue within the length of my project, but it demands the attention of scholars and activists in the future.
to stories about our pasts (and the present!) that help us learn about how we are implicated in or affected by colonialism, expressing self-congratulatory allegiance to mythologies about Canada as a utopia (where everyone apologizes, is peaceful and ‘real’ racism doesn’t exist) becomes increasingly difficult.

I have said since I was 12 or 13 that I am a witch. I knew before that too, but I never had come across a concept that fit. I remember the night I told my parents this, I showed them a picture of a triskele, and probably some other symbols, and told them that I remember them and that I want to learn more about what they mean. This was the beginning of my Ancestor-guided learning in this life. Although I realize it is difficult to bridge the gap between Otherworldliness and academe, the more I learn from people who listen to their Ancestors, the more it is evident to me that I must continue to listen. I identify now as an Old European heathen og Eire and pagan or witch (from the Old English ‘wic’ meaning to know). I learned this pathway through the stories of my Mother and Grandmother, and by listening to the hidden knowledge of all women. My spirituality is also guided by my memories of lives I have previously experienced (White 2015). It informs and roots my connection to the natural cycles of the Earth, resistance to all forms of colonialist and patriarchal oppression, and a more recent pursuit focused on exploring other stories of the past. Spirituality and reverence for the Earth is the aspect of my being that influences every

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11 This is not a “new-age” idea or identity. A proper debunking of “new-age” practices is beyond the scope of this project, but should be done with anti-colonialism and the stories of women and gender-queer people in mind. For one perspective on the issues surrounding the complex topic of witchcraft see Max Dashu (Maxine Hammond) feminist historian, blogger and artist who has addressed the topic here http://www.suppressedhistories.net/secret historia/witchpolitics.html

12 Meaning of the heather

13 Eire is the ancient Goddess of Ireland, and where Ireland derives its name- here I am using it to note the sacred and animate understanding I hold of Eire-Land (Condren, 26). ‘Og’ means of.

14 By identifying as pagan, I am noting and reclaiming the histories of followers of the “Old Gods” in Europe (and elsewhere) who have been dismissed as “having no Gods” since the Christianization of the Roman Empire.

15 I use these identifications interchangeably as they all speak to how I locate myself in relation to Spirit and the past. My understanding and labelling of my identity continues to change as I learn more about where I come from.
other- it has encouraged me to find feminism, (more) conscious consumption, and involvement in decolonization and Indigenous sovereignty.

I remember a distinct moment when I realized the world was not as I had been told it was. In such moments, one can either practice denial or face the ugliness and struggle for change. I think that my blood-memory made me interested in genocide. Both because my Ancestors had a part in it in Canada (even if through their complacency or land-grabbing), and because of the tyranny my Irish and Scottish Ancestors endured. I did not realize this at the time, but I know this now. I was in grade 10 and I chose to write my history paper about Roméo Dallaire’s book, *Shake Hands with the Devil* (Dallaire, 2003). I got an A+, but my teacher had one part underlined. I said that “Rwanda was the first genocide since the Holocaust.” He simply wrote, “Is that true?”

I was dumbfounded.

Was it? I didn’t know! I had to go home and get on the computer and try to figure it out. Thus began my obsession with understanding genocide. I read a lot of books about Africa and Europe and Asia. If I came across something about genocide in the Americas, I do not remember it. I thought I had learned everything about genocide, but I never thought about the very ground I was walking on… So think about that. I am in grade 11 at this point, running a student group called P.E.A.C.E (People Ending Apathy Creating Empathy) club- and I have never formally or informally learned about the genocide of Indigenous peoples on Turtle Island (or elsewhere, for that matter). Regardless, I really thought I was some sort of genocide-expert.

Studying at the University of Waterloo (UW) made that change pretty quickly, although I still did not learn about the genocide of Indigenous peoples in a formal class setting until my second last year. I learned about colonialism from my time with the Women’s Centre and the Waterloo Public Interest Research group. My time at UW allowed me to connect with a wide social
network of activists and friends, all of whom I have learned from greatly. As well, during my formal studies, I focused on the witch hunt in early modern Europe and its effects on women’s consciousness today. This was important learning for me because it was one of the first times I had to figure out how to blend my Otherworldly knowing with academic knowledge. I used magick to help me research. I used herbs and talking to my Ancestors to ask for guidance and clarity in dreams. I used my wildwood cards for direction before I would write. I created intention strings on my spindle and left them around campus to keep me protected and on a good path. I did this for myself, because for a long time I didn’t think of my spiritual practice as anything but something I did. This was the first time I really used magick in my research, but I hid this from the finished piece itself – not to the benefit of my undergraduate thesis. In this project I hope to change this.

My institutional learning led me to the Ontario Institute of Studies in Education, where all of my learning up to this point has been both tested and connected in a more complex way. What has been underscored for me - in terms of how we learn - can be summed up in a few words: decolonization, relationships, Spirit and story.

This project is only part of my commitment to Indigenous sovereignty. The recent release of The Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s (TRC) Report (2015) on residential schools and activism by Indigenous groups to resist and raise awareness about missing and murdered Indigenous women are crucially important, and underscore how colonialism is both ongoing and undoubtedly damages relationships. We are part of a living historical legacy which continually reproduces the divide between settlers and Indigenous peoples in order to make it seem irreconcilable. The TRC and similar initiatives have worked tirelessly to show what Indigenous peoples in Canada have been and are facing because of settler colonialism. As a Treaty Person committed to decolonization, it is my responsibility to support these efforts. This project is meant
to suggest one way of rebuilding, reconsidering and re-righting our relationships (Smith 1999, 28). I hope that by sharing parts of my decolonizing learning, others will be encouraged and supported in taking on the task of decolonizing their minds, families, hearts and communities as part of a lifelong commitment to transforming our relationships. Sharing our learning, actions and personal transformations are essential elements of broad social and collective struggles for anti-colonial change because it allows us to re/connect.

IV. Purpose and Intent

It is important that I explain why I want to do this research in particular, even though some of that might be evident from my self-location. The triad of you have to know where you came from, and know where you are, to know where you are going was first made clear to me as a “learning spiral” when I was in my undergrad and came across Envisioning America: English Plans for the Colonization of North America, 1580-1640 (1995) and the photographs found on the next page.16,17

I remember the class that I learned this in. Columbus and the New World. The short paragraph in the centre of the photos is also important, outlining the assertion that because the British had been successful in subduing the savage Picts in Scotland, they could do it again to Indigenous peoples in the New World. Richard Hakluyt is an English writer best known for his support of the colonization of North America. He also used these pictures (drawn by John White at Sir Walter Raleigh’s orders) as ‘proof’ of how savages could be saved through missionizing. I was fascinated about this. As a pagan, I feel like I have understood for a long time that some form

17 Translation: “Some pictures of the Picts, which in old times did habit one part of Great Britain. The painter of whom was one of the first inhabitants of Virginia gave me the three following figures and assured me they were found in an Old English chronicle. I put the figures together to show how the Inhabitants of Great Britain [Picts] have been in times past as savage as those of Virginia.”
"Some pictures of the Pictes which in olde tyme dyd habite one part of the great Breainne. The painter of whom I have had the first of the inhabitants of Virginia, gave me also these 5 figures followinge, found as hy did assured my in an aolde English cronicle, the which I would well sett to the ende of these three first figures, for to shewe how that the Inhabitants of great Bretannie have been in times paste as savage as those of Virginia" (Mancell, 103)
of religious colonization had occurred to the majority of pagan folk who worshipped wells and rivers and the like across Europe. I had never come across such a stark example of Europeans colonizing themselves before repeating the tradition of genocide, land-theft and cultural upheaval on Turtle Island and elsewhere. This hit me on a spiritual level. I know that these sketches and woodcuts were made by authors who never saw a Pict, and likely never had real contact with an Indigenous person in North America. Still, they would not have compared these groups as savages if they were not seen to be so- for being ‘scantily clad’, lazy, violent, tattooed, and demonic. I think most Europeans are still afraid of this recent and “savage” past. Learning about the European “savage” and pre-historic past has helped me to critically interrogate my place, the past, and my relationships. It is true that we “cannot really understand who we are in the present and imagine together and strive to build a better common future without recognizing and reconnecting to our first roots, rediscovering symbols and archetypes deeply buried in our unconscious memories” (Percovich 2004, 27). When I come across a new story that matches my subconscious memories, it changes me. It helps me to see colonialism as a destructive and ongoing pattern that we are all harmed by (although some disproportionately), and it makes me move to change it.

Another experience from my life that has inspired my research is that I grew up being told Indians are greedy for wanting to tax the Land our cottage rental in Sauble was on, and that they’re “lazy, drunk Injuns”. This never sat right with me, even as a kid- but I remember not saying anything for a long, long time because I did not have fuel for a counter-argument. I didn’t know anything about Indigenous people. As I reflected before, it’s been a process of five or so years to get most in my immediate family to understand colonialism to a degree and some of the ways it has effected Indigenous peoples in Canada. My goal is to keep learning, and sharing learning with other people in my close circle. Although it is true that “colonial relationships are reproduced
vertically” because we are born into it, this does not mean that we are always restricted from learning about and working to change this “predestined” arrangement (Veracini, 2014). I have seen the change that challenging our close relations can make. When we have knowledge to share that will improve our closest relations understanding of colonialism, we must take on the role –the action- of inspiring transformative learning in the interest of decolonizing change.

Just the other week my best friend Becca told me that when she was at coffee with a friend, she found out that her friend didn’t know what residential schools were. Becca was excited but also emotional telling me that for the rest of their coffee-date, she taught her friend everything she knew about colonialism in Canada. I know the friend she is speaking of, she is a bit older than us, so I know that she went through similar schooling. She, like us, had never been taught about colonization and the genocide of Indigenous peoples. Becca had learned about colonialism through me, because as I have noted, we never received a decent education about Canada’s past while in public school. Becca studied Radio Broadcasting in college and was not able to access education that included critical histories of Canada after public school. Being my best friend, she was one of those people who listened to me while I worked through some of my learning about colonialism. So it’s really powerful to see how this education can spread, and how it can change people and propel them to action. This is another intention of my project, both a reason I started it and an outcome I hope it achieves: white settlers (in particular) need to do the work of educating and transforming the racism of other white people into action for change. As Clare Land suggests “a key role for non-Indigenous people seeking to be politically supportive of Indigenous people is to educate themselves and other non-Indigenous people, to lessen the demands on Indigenous people to do this educating” (Land 2015, 82).
As discussed above, my close friendship with Natasha is also a “root” that inspired this project. A few years ago, Natasha began the search for her birth family. She was adopted, but always knew that she—as she says—“is an Indian”. Being with her through parts of this process, and watching her overcome pain to be embraced by her home community in ‘Yal’is drove me to question what I thought I knew about myself- and about Canada. Natasha had no choice but to embark on this interrogation of her past, of where she comes from. I began to wonder what it would do if all of us started to reconstruct our own histories, rather than accepting those given to us through textbooks, media and other forms of nationalistic myth.

I realized that relationships were one of these ‘every day’ things and that they were central to my life- both in how I act against colonialism (by educating those around me, urging them to act, or acting myself) and how I learn from and support my close friends like Natasha who resist and survive colonialism daily. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada underscores the importance of renegotiating the relationships between settler and Indigenous peoples in Canada in order to move forward and reconcile. They recommend that we learn from each other:

*Reconciliation must happen across all sectors of Canadian society- Canadians still have much to learn from each other. Past generations of newcomers faced injustices and prejudice similar to those experienced by residential school students and their families. More recent immigrants have struggled with racism and misconceptions as they come to take their place in the Canadian nation.* (306)

Moreover, like Tuck and Yang (2012), the TRC suggests this has to happen in the detailed and specific contexts of our lives. In face-to-face interactions. The TRC notes that Indigenous-settler relations are still “minimal or marred by distrust and racism” (TRC 2015, 307). The TRC urges us to kindle “respectful relationships [which] involves learning to be good neighbours. This means being respectful listening to, and learning from, each other -building understanding- and taking concrete action to improve relationships” (TRC 2015, 307).
My intent with this project is to show from my specific context how every-day things -like stories, relationships and spirituality- (although shaped by colonialism) can hold decolonizing potential that can compel us to action. We can learn more about ourselves and our family story in an anti-colonial way. We can learn stories about the Land that we live on, and the Lands our Ancestors lived on. We can create a commons of knowledge about our collective pasts that rivals “Canadian” and other nationalistic mythologies in our consciousness. We require a re-righting and rewriting of our past, and it begins with each of us (Smith 1999, 28). Margaret Kovach says that “the elders say that if it comes from the heart and is done in a good way, our work will count” (Kovach 2009, 8). My research comes from a heart place because it is tied to every bit of me: my closest friends, my family, and my belly-button. It comes from a heart place because my heart reminds me that colonization and decolonization are not academic concepts- they are real and they affect me and my friends. Kovach also argues that “the strongest potential for fresh discourse rests with the ability of invested non-Indigenous academics to listen attentively to not only what diminishes Indigenous research scholarship, but also to what helps” (Kovach 2009, 157). In addition, Land says that “one of the three key issues in the politics of solidarity is the need for non-Indigenous people to act politically with self-understanding. This means conducting critical self-reflection, and committing to public political action” (Land 2015, 200). These are some of the purposes and intentions that root my research.

V. A Note on Language

The English language in many ways obstructs learning stories from Before. In looking into the old stories of my Irish and Scottish Ancestors, I am at a disadvantage because I do not yet speak Gaelic. Oglala-Lakota actor and activist, Russell Means, as well as other Indigenous, feminist and critical scholars remind us that the English language is restrictive. English is
completely focused around property and things (nouns), while in Indigenous languages that I’ve learned about -like Anishinaabemowin- the focus is on action (verbs). The focus of English (and other Indo-European “new” languages) on ownership and objectification has been a powerful instrument in altering subjugated groups worldviews. As Margaret Kovach underscores, it is “no wonder one of the first approaches to erasing a culture is to attack its language because language holds such insight into the social organization of a people” (Kovach 2009, 60). In residential schools and other colonial projects in Canada Indigenous children were forced to speak English instead of their own languages. Still, countless Indigenous nations across Turtle Island (and around the world) struggle to maintain their languages and the knowledge their languages hold.

Knowing Natasha through her journey to reconnect with her family, community and culture has helped my heart understand the damage that losing a language can do- the damage colonialism does. Stories of struggles and triumphs around learning Kwak’wala were everywhere when I visited Natasha in Alert Bay. Natasha is working to learn Kwak’wala and her inspiration has, once again, spread to me. Here are some reasons why I think learning languages other than Indo-European colonial languages can be decolonizing:

1. By learning and teaching our languages, we protect them and keep them alive.

2. Languages construct (and deconstruct) our worldviews. Learning Ancestral languages can challenge aspects of colonialism that we may not yet be aware of.

3. Learning our languages allows us access to stories, conversations and knowledge that English -and other colonial languages- cannot understand.

Reviving traditional languages is resistance to colonialism- but it is more than that. Learning our languages allows us to vision outside of European-capitalist-colonial-patriarchy; to reflect on where we have come from and where we are going simultaneously. The Old languages that are not based on ownership share common understandings. Heather Menzies reflects on this idea and says
reconnecting with our languages “is key to enacting a new social contract, one that includes a new covenant with Creation [...] It’s the language of, relationships and felt connection with each other and with the Earth” (Menzies 2014, 5). I would argue that this is in no way a ‘new’ contract: Indigenous peoples and traditional language speakers across the world have maintained this contract with Creation- it is Europeans who have forgotten. Russell Means says that his grandfather “always told [him], you have to pity the white man because he is like a child, a spoiled child and his language is proof” (Means 2011, 515). We cannot unlearn views like ownership, domination and scarcity without another way to interpret and respond to reality. I have two practices that are connected to this ‘note on Language’ that should be carried with us throughout the rest of the project.

1. I commit to learning Old languages connected to my Ancestors.
2. I will support my friends in learning their language(s) however I can.

Moreover, in my writing of this project I attempt to interrupt the English language in a few ways. Firstly, by capitalizing certain words (Indigenous, Ancestor, Land, Spirit) I am drawing attention to them. I am also distinguishing them from understandings of the words that differ from the distinct ones I invoke here. Indigenous refers to the varied nations of Indigenous peoples on Turtle Island and elsewhere (Smith 1999, 6). Ancestor, Land and Spirit as well as other concepts are capitalized to indicate their magickal, Otherworldly and sacred significances across cultures and peoples who remain connected to the earth.

I resist academic approaches to writing the English language which make it even more inaccessible, inexpressive and difficult to understand than it already is. This will happen partially in the way I present the largely informal conversations which are a fundamental source of data in

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18 Europeans meaning European languages that have Indo-European roots and are thus newer languages (and patriarchal languages) compared to most other Indigenous languages (Condren, public lecture May 2015)
the project. I intend to present the conversations as completely as possible to honour the knowledge and learning they hold. Doing this is also part of a personal commitment of non-compliance with the way the academy wants us to write. I want a lot of people to be able to read about and act on decolonization, so it’s counter-intuitive if I record my learning in a way that makes it purposefully difficult to understand.

VI. Theoretical Perspectives and Background

It is important that I describe my perspectives because our perspectives and epistemologies reflect how we know what is real (Wilson 2008, 33). Shawn Wilson is Opaskwayak Cree and writes and teaches about Indigenous knowledge. In his book, Research is Ceremony, he says that “research is all about unanswered questions, but it also reveals our unquestioned answers” (Wilson 2008, 6). In the following pages I hope to talk about my ‘unquestioned answers’ – or the theoretical perspectives that guide my research - because all research is guided by the pre-existing beliefs and experiences of the researcher. This research is part of my struggle to transform my perspectives and how I walk in the world in ways that actualize decolonization. The perspectives I will share have helped me make changes in my perception of the world and transform my worldview and accompanying actions.

i. Subjectivity and “Real Knowledge”

Who gets to determine what counts for truth and “real” knowledge? (Nienhuis 2009, 58)

The belief in one truth or objective reality in Western academia often obscures feminist and Indigenous scholarship that is focused on attaining new knowledge through personal experiences or subjectivity. For example, history has been utilized over time to impart master narratives about the past to groups of people by the dominant classes in society (Condren 1989 xxiii, Akers 2014). “History” is a privileged set of stories about the past. When these stories are
consumed through textbooks, journal articles and public arenas (like schooling, entertainment, or social interactions) as Ultimate Truths, they can effectively denigrate and erase any other stories about the past. Feminist scholar and quantum physicist Margaret L. Benston critiques the presumption that only Western scientific methods can yield real knowledge, or “knowledge itself” (Benston 1982, 47). Her work helps illuminate the gendered nature of scientific inquiry, and reveals its defining “objectivity” as a “psuedo-objectivity” (Benston, 1982). Benston argues that the belief in an objective and attainable sole reality is really a “pseudo-objectivity”, supported by individual refusal to name and explore personal biases. She also says that this

> objectivity myth is encouraged by the ruling class which uses science to legitimate the subordination of human beings to anti-human ends which serve the purposes of those with power disguised in a kind of technological determinism. (Benston 1982, 59)

I believe Benston’s points have great validity outside of a purely scientific realm, and that we can uncover deepened transformational potential in ourselves if we explore our subjectivity.

French feminist philosopher Luce Irigaray has written extensively about the importance of valuing subjective or personal experiences as knowledge. She says that we should “never give up subjective experience as an element of knowledge. The most transcendental theory is still rooted in the subjective. Truth is always the product of some man or woman. This does not mean that truth contains no objectivity” (Irigaray 1993, 203). Women and racialized others have become objects under patriarchal societal organization, and she urges us to find our voices (Irigaray 1993, 203). By valuing our experiences –our knowledge- we can begin to do this. She also warns that any “theoretical truth that forces us to give up all subjective points of reference is a dangerous one” (Irigaray 1993, 203). As Condren, Irigaray and Benston suggest, patriarchy is built upon dangerous theoretical truths: One God over men, All Men over women, All Whites over others, All Rich over
poor (Condren 1989, xxiii). Women’s and gendered-Others\(^\text{19}\) knowledge from living in patriarchy can help us understand the detailed effects of patriarchal control. The more we are able to understand about our own experiences, the more aptly prepared we are to survive (physically, emotionally and otherwise) and \textit{resist} patriarchal subjugation. Because of patriarchal adherence to dangerous theoretical truths, patriarchy has “erased – unwittingly or through ignorance perhaps – the traces of [any] culture which was anterior to it, or contemporaneous with it” (Keary 2012, 128).

Indigenous, feminist and critical race theorists (as well as activists, ’zinesters, musicians, performance-artists and others outside of academia) have been successful in documenting knowledge that centres personal experiences of misogyny, racism, colonialism and other violence, as well as resistance to these systems of oppression. In the sections following, I will introduce the theoretical perspectives I have learned from my relationships with scholars and activists who have helped me to ‘re-story’ my own experiences \textit{and} motivate me to resist patriarchy, colonialism and other forms of domination.

\textbf{ii. Understanding Matriarchy: Life-giving vs. Death-centered Worldviews}

\begin{quote}
\textit{We claim the contemporary world to be a failure, and thus these theories will not be widely accepted within academia or outside of it.} (von Werlhof 2013, 69)
\end{quote}

When I first began to learn about patriarchy, capitalism, colonialism and other systemic oppressions they were taught to me as disparate and disconnected things. I have come to understand patriarchy as the oldest form of subjugation; the root upon which all of these other oppressions are built. They are not separate from patriarchal dominance and are simply new(er) and more pointed expressions of it. Feminist, Indigenous and matriarchal studies scholars have connected Indigenous and feminist perspectives as well as the worldviews that make up patriarchy, colonialism, capitalism and the like. Valuing our subjective experience allows individuals to

\textsuperscript{19} People who are not expressly male.
recognize, challenge and expand our worldviews (von Werlhof 2013, 68). Unfortunately, as von Werlhof so pointedly states, critiquing the world system and calling for change makes for unpopular scholarship.

Worldviews allow us to categorize and understand the world, and are the ‘store-house’ of our perspectives or what we know to be real. To explain further where we are (patriarchy) and to explore where we have been and where we can go (matriarchy) we need to foster deep understandings of the worldviews informing both systems. Our worldview “is the reality from within which individuals operate” and is often the cause of disputes between differently located individuals (Walker 2004, 530). Mary Condren teaches at Trinity Women’s College in Dublin, is the director of the Institute for Feminism and Religion and wrote The Serpent and the Goddess: Women Religion and Power in Celtic Ireland (1989). She notes that feminist scholarship must “have the courage to break out of those worldviews within which their subordination is held” – we must struggle to put forward stories about the world that centre matriarchal worldviews in order to adequately demonstrate both “time before” and vision “time after” patriarchal domination (Condren 1989, xxv). The influential scholarship of Mary Condren, Claudia Von Werlhof, Heidi Groettner-Abendroth and others who focus on matriarchy in their work have explored areas from the sacred feminine to creating data-bases of matriarchal societies (Condren 1989, Von Werlhof 2013, Groettner-Abendroth 2012). They, as well as other feminist and Indigenous scholars, have also provided analyses of patriarchy that help us understand its development and expression in the past and present.

An activist, doula and poet named Beth Murch was the first person to expose me to Marija Gimbutas and the concept of ancient European matriarchy. I had learned about the witch-hunt in
Europe, but was struggling to find ways to explain it. I read Gimbutas’ texts and learned that only in the last 6,000 years (really only the last 500 for much of North America, Africa, Australia and other parts of the globe) have the matriarchal, egalitarian cultures of Before been dispersed and undermined by hierarchical, patriarchal control (Marler, 2006). Archaeologists, feminists, anthropologists, sociologists and other groups of scholars have all worked to uncover the matriarchal past and present, by extension demonstrating that patriarchy is not a natural or constant societal institution (von Werlhof 2013, 68). Anne van der Meer, a student of the transition from matriarchy to patriarchy in the European context, suggests that after the indigenous cultures of Europe were changed through invasions of hierarchical herdsman cultures, “the societies become unbalanced. People lose sight of the working of universal laws and a dualistic world view is held. Positions, classes and castes are created within society. The conquered people are enslaved; the freedom of women becomes restricted” (van der Meer 2015, 235). Van der Meer also marks the beginning of this societal transition at around 4,000 BCE. Although often criticized by male anthropologists and traditional historians, understanding patriarchal oppression having a distinct beginning can allow us to reinterpret our pasts and vision different futures. Luce Irigaray’s writing underscores that matriarchy is the absence of patriarchy- not a new animation of domination and oppression with women on the throne (Irigaray 1993, 190, Canan 2013, 43).

The worldviews that inform both matriarchy and patriarchy as systems of societal organization can also be understood as life-giving and death-centered. Thinking of them in this way has allowed me to more completely “see” them. Below I will draw from feminist and Indigenous research that has highlighted for me some differences between life-giving (matriarchal, Indigenous) and death-centered (patriarchal, colonial) worldviews.

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20 While her works were simultaneously being belittled and made-fun-of by my archaeology professor at the time.
It is clear from this literature that death-centered worldviews (those informed by patriarchy, colonialism and other hierarchies) are fear-obsessed (Means 2011, 515). These worldviews are maintained by terrorizing all ‘Others’: women, children, people of colour, Indigenous peoples, differently abled people, ‘crazy’ people, queer people. By enacting violence (physical, emotional or otherwise) on those they fear, dominant groups create social, economic and other controls through exporting their terror to others. Means agrees, noting how fear based patriarchy;

[…]both completely lacks and completely fears the feminine. Patriarchy is an imbalanced, fear-based, warlike and truly insane structure because only a patriarchy is on top, obsessed with control and completely inhumane to everything below. What it fears, it wants to control; what it can’t control, it wants to terrorise and destroy. (Means 2011, 515)

In the current and global neo-liberal context, patriarchy remains the largely unacknowledged root of capitalism, racism and arguably all forms of domination. Wherever one looks, women and gender-queer people are positioned at the bottom of patriarchal (capitalist, colonialist, heterosexist, racist) hierarchies. Patriarchy is “a human-over-human conception of human relations, a human-over-nature conception of relations to nature” and works tirelessly to denigrate and devalue the interconnectedness and multiplicity of life (Walker 2004, 529). Patriarchy and systems that are death-centered focus around valuing different things (people, objects, services, etc.) against one another, even though there is no way to compare the intrinsic value of these things (Goettner-Abendroth, 2012, 21). When the value of people and things becomes a measurement of their importance, economic and social systems become increasingly supportive of individualistic, greedy and violent cultural norms.

Life-giving worldviews, as I understand them, are built on connection, relationships and regeneration (or creation) (von Werlhof 2013, 78). In many surviving matriarchies, no private property or concept of ownership exists, and women are the important protectors and decision makers around food and Land resources (Canan 2013, Grottner-Abendroth 2012). Without
concepts of private property or greed, there exists few –if any- socially constructed incentives to fight over Land or to destroy it in order to create advantages for Yourself. Life-giving worldviews are common among societies that are matrilineal and matrifocal. All children “have a place” and a lineage through their mother’s line, so there is no cause for male greed over progeny, and no need to compete through forcing women to give birth to sons. This is life-giving because it values everyone’s needs. The patriarchal ownership of women and children is not socially ordained, so conflicts about guaranteeing whose child belongs to whom, or the monogamy or gender of intimate partners is minimal or non-existent. In life-giving worldviews like those expressed in surviving matriarchies across the planet, political control is shared through consensus at the clan or community house, and as aforementioned- there is no reason to enforce class structure or other forms of domination, subjugation and social splintering (Canan 2013, 44).

There are no dogmatic and oppressive religious institutions - life is infused with the sacred, because life is sacred. The cosmos and the earth are understood as the design of one Creator who has thousands of different names and faces connected to the rivers, plains, mountains and oceans that make up Earth. There is no enforced way to call Their name, and there is no system of domination built on spirituality. Life-giving worldviews connect all living beings together through their innate energies. The majority of Indigenous communities and societies hold a “Circular (or spiral) conception of time, a holistic conception of epistemology, non-hierarchical, shared-power conception of human relations, [and practice] humans in relationship of care and responsibility with nature” (Walker 2004, 529). Many Indigenous scholars have shown how this egalitarian and relational worldview has survived the advent of patriarchy (and its export through colonialism) in many places (Nelson, 2008).
iii. The Relationship between European Patriarchy and Colonialism

In mainstream accounts of history, The Enlightenment or Early Modern Period (1400-1700 CE) is known to be when Europeans began to show the first signs of what has become known as Western “civilization”. Europeans are said to have “discovered” science, diversified their religious beliefs, and rediscovered classical Greek and Roman philosophy and culture. This is perceived as a good thing, in the mainstream view (History.com staff 2016, Duignan 2015). Really, during this period of time Europe was ravaged by wars, plague, environmental issues (drought and the ‘mini ice-age’) and population disparities (Cameron, 2006). The breakdown of religious consistency (under the sole leadership of the Roman Catholic Empire) by divergent groups like Protestants, Lutherans and Anabaptists led to increasing anxieties as to the nature and supremacy of God (Cameron, 2006).

The Church and state simultaneously became re-invigorated around the idea of the Devil and assured the general populous that the cause of all of the destruction and fear they were experiencing was because of satanic evils lurking around them. Feudal patriarchy (in the forms of religious hierarchy and nascent capitalism) helped to support the Church and various European states in prosecuting and executing hundreds of thousands of women as witches during this period, and then continued the violent scourge against “Satan” in the New World (Smith 1999, 58, Denis 2003). This fear of the ‘Other’ and of women is deep-seated in patriarchy, and was ramped up considerably through colonialism. There has been little scholarship about the interactions between spiritual colonialism in the New World and the witch-hunt, although many historians note how much the Puritans and other groups feared Indigenous people because of their “witchcraft”
(Federici, 2003). 21 This is just one example of many which connects European patriarchy to its expansion through colonial endeavors.

Although the early colonial period was starkly marked by this fear of the Devil, science was valued over religion as a method of justifying colonial domination and violence (Neinhuis 2009). As Indigenous scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith notes, Europeans had decided that the world was there for their limitless (and unethical) experimentation. She says that in the European worldview

knowledge was also there to be discovered, extracted, appropriated and distributed. Processes for enabling these things to occur became organized and systematic. They not only informed the field of study referred to by Said as ‘Orientalism’ but other disciplines of knowledge and ‘regimes of truth’ (Smith 1999, 58).

“Regimes of truth” are the backbone of Canadian mythologies both in the past and present. Science (and later, technologies) largely replaced religion in the West as a method of creating, controlling and reproducing knowledge that supports colonial-patriarchal-capitalism. Throughout the onset of settler-colonialism in the New World, religion paved the way for state and scientifically sanctioned experimentation and extraction of knowledge and resources.

Colonialism in the New World “goes back to 1492, when the colonial imaginary goes global” (Tuck and Yang 2012, note 2, 4). Before the arrival of European “explorers”, settlers and colonial violence, Indigenous peoples had their own extensive and complex social systems where life was valued. All people were considered important and had flexible roles within their communities. Indigenous life-giving worldviews were at odds with European-colonial-capitalist-patriarchy’s death-centricity, and Indigenous peoples have had to resist and protect their ways of

21 This is an area that requires scholarly depth and attention that is beyond the scope of this project. I hope to be able to interrogate this relationship between Indigenous spiritualities and the charge of “witchcraft” by colonists in future investigations.
knowing. The genocide of Indigenous peoples has happened through war (caused by settlement or directly by settlers), through forced relocations, disease (and the purposeful spreading of infection by settlers) and other genocidal tactics that forcibly removed cultural and linguistic networks, ties to traditional Land bases, and banned Indigenous spiritual practices.

This is yet another example of how European patriarchy and capitalism were reproduced and exported through colonial legislation and other violent measures of theft and genocide. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada has demonstrated that cultural and physical genocidal tactics have been consistent since the onset of colonialism, and more recently have continued to function through the settler-colonial institutions of residential schools and the systemic removal of Indigenous children from their households by Child and Family Services (TRC 2015, 1). In residential schools, gender roles were strictly enforced, Indigenous languages, spiritual and cultural practices were banned, and the majority of ‘students’ experienced physical, emotional and psychological traumas as a result of extreme neglect and abuses (TRC 2015, 3). The young Canadian state was determined to destroy Indigenous peoples, and as expressed by Duncan Campbell Scott (the Deputy Minister of Indian Affairs) in 1920: “our object is to continue until there is not a single Indian in Canada that has not been absorbed into the body politic” (TRC 2015, 3). By removing Indigenous children from their homes and forcing them into abusive and assimilative environments, the Canadian state worked to divorce Indigenous peoples from their spiritual and cultural systems, their Lands, and their communities.

Settler-colonialism is a form of colonialism that determines its ‘success’ by devaluing pre-existing Indigenous cultures and subsequently enforcing the institutions and governing styles of the colonizer through widespread settlement (Sanchez, 2014). This settlement could only occur,

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22 And continues to occur
of course, after the removal of Indigenous communities, either through physical or systemic (institutional) violence. Patrick Wolfe (1999) notes that settler colonialism is not an event, but a method of societal organization and structure (Wolfe qtd in Tuck and Yang 2012, 5). Over time, Western ways of thinking and doing have been presented repeatedly as the only way of being “ordained by God” and “proven by science”. These and other forms of psychological domination and nationalistic myth-making have allowed settler-colonialism to sustain the view that Indigenous peoples are primitive and backwards, fundamentally ‘different’ and ‘subhuman’, and counterintuitive to societal progress (Smith 1999, 25). Settler colonialism must be understood as a particular form of colonialism and imperialism, because “the horizons of the settler colonial nation-state are total and require a mode of total appropriation of Indigenous life and land, rather than the selective expropriation of profit-producing fragments” (Tuck and Yang 2012, 5). In the Canadian context, colonialism is not something that can be understood as “complete”, allowing for definitions like post-colonialism to have little relevance or applicability. The violence of colonialism is ongoing and is still being resisted; saying that it is over (‘post’) erases this resistance and the fact of ongoing occupation and violence.

The violence of colonial legacies in Canada is evident in a cultural climate where Indigenous women have and are being murdered or disappeared by the thousands. The RCMP reports that between “1980 and 2012, 1,017 Aboriginal women and girls were killed and 164 were missing,” although Indigenous communities report significantly higher numbers, closer to 6,000 murdered or missing women (TRC 2015, 180). Colonial-patriarchy is made visible by Indigenous women resisting this violence. They and their supporters refuse to let this patriarchal and colonial violence be unnoticed or continue without resistance. The former Prime Minister, Stephen Harper declared that this violence was not a ‘sociological phenomena’ and that “… it isn’t really high on
our radar, to be honest” (Kappo, 2014). Besides being misinformed about the meaning of sociological phenomena, Harper consistently forwarded Canadian nationalistic mythologies during his time in office by denying the importance or even reality of the issues faced by Indigenous women. Indigenous women and girls “are disproportionately young, poor, unemployed, and likely to have been involved with the child-welfare system and to live in a community marked by social disorder” (TRC 2015, 180). The ongoing problem of violence against Indigenous women is being investigated by the Trudeau government in a recent National Inquiry (Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada, 2016). Resistance efforts as well as memorials and healing work have been and are currently underway because of the leadership of Indigenous women and their allies. In a recent Globe and Mail article, Angelique Eaglewoman, the dean of the Bora Laskin Faculty of Law at Lakehead University in Thunder Bay Ontario, underscored that these resistance efforts—as well as the National Inquiry—demand the attention and support of all Canadians (Eaglewoman, 2016).

Colonial infringement upon Indigenous Land rights and treaty relationships continues. The Supreme Court of Canada (after the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples in 1996) has ruled that treaty rights can be altered or removed entirely if it can be proven that doing so is in the “broader public interest” (TRC 2015, 302). Despite the existence of a few positive rulings (usually advocated for by Indigenous groups), dozens of cases across Canada demonstrate how this and similar policies have coercively pushed Indigenous peoples off of traditional and treaty-protected Lands, exacerbating externally influenced issues of community disconnectedness, intergenerational trauma and psychological distresses. Indigenous worldviews centre the Land (and connection to it) as a vital aspect of Indigenous beliefs and cultures. As Little Bear has noted,

*In Aboriginal philosophy, existence consists of energy. All things are animate, imbued with spirit, and in constant motion. In this realm of energy and spirit,*
interrelationships between all entities are of paramount importance, and space is a more important referent than time. (Little Bear qtd. in Iseke-Barnes 2008, 137)

By removing Indigenous peoples from the Land -whether it be through attempts at assimilation, cultural or physical genocide, or theft and destruction of the Land- the Canadian state has and is actively perpetuating colonial violence against Indigenous peoples. Colonialism has forced a death-centric worldview and system of social organization on people and Lands that were previously sustained by life-giving ones. Indigenous resistance to these and other varied attempts to remove communities from traditional or treaty-protected Lands (and other colonial injustices) has been widespread and ongoing. The TRC has worked to connect the different forms of colonial violence that Indigenous peoples have endured and resisted as a way to reconstitute stories that have historically been suppressed, maligned or purposefully distorted by the Canadian state (TRC 2015, 184). The TRC has also focused on distilling what reconciliation between Indigenous peoples, settlers and the Canadian state can and should look like. Reconciliation must start from a place of recognition that honours “the destructive impacts of residential schools, the Indian Act, and the Crown’s failure to keep its Treaty promises [which has] damaged the relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples” (TRC 2015, 184).

Linda Tuhiwai Smith writes that the negation of Indigenous realities and views of history has been influential in forwarding colonialist ideologies, “partly because such views were regarded as clearly primitive and ‘incorrect’ and mostly because they challenged and resisted the mission of colonization” (Smith 1999, 29). Experiences with my close family, friends and within the KW activist community have demonstrated to me repeatedly the truths that Smith highlights here. So long as the story of Canada is falsified by settler-colonials, and as long as Indigenous and other histories remain inaccessible to the general population, the majority of people (white settlers in specific) will continue in their ignorance of and denial of colonialism and genocide in Canada.
Smith and other Indigenous scholars have suggested that re-learning these histories is a starting point to encourage engagement with resistance efforts against colonialism.

Indigenous resistance has been minimized by nationalistic mythologies that omit the strong opposition Indigenous peoples have demonstrated against colonial oppression since its onset. Indigenous resistance has and does occur in varied ways and includes but is not limited to Indigenous and anti-colonial scholarship, language recovery programs, land claims, armed resistance, educational programs, spiritual/cultural resurgences, healing and Indigenous governance (Land 2015, 52). These varied resistances to colonialism occur in almost every nation because Indigenous resistance to forced removal and genocide is widespread and global. Often Indigenous resistance efforts are led and influenced by women (Hernández Castillo 2008, 153). The Zapatistas in Mexico (Von Werlhof 1997, Hernández Castillo 2008), Nana Yaa Asantewaa of the Ashanti (Ghana) (Mensah, 2010) and potentially thousands of other examples illustrate the importance of women’s involvement to Indigenous resistance to colonialism over time. Indigenous scholarly resistance is also ongoing, and has occurred both inside of and outside of the academy (Wilson 2008, 45). My research hopes to contribute to the centering and storying of ongoing Indigenous resistance efforts by recounting related known histories of resistance whenever applicable. As several Indigenous scholars have noted, academic critiques of colonialism and scholarly attempts to decolonize history are not enough (Tuck and Yang 2012, Smith 1999). Focusing solely on critiques of colonialism, and forgetting Indigenous-led resistance, allows for Indigenous peoples to be envisioned only as victims (Iseke-Barnes 2008, 135). Feminists too are “called, not just to break our way into patriarchal society, but to challenge radically the nature of that society, the premises that govern its creation and continued existence, and the mythologies that sustain its being” (Condren 1989, xxiv). Condren stresses transformation, noting that
“although we should ensure that we are using our sources responsibly and that we are showing respect to our Ancestors, ultimately our efforts should be directed toward creating the future in the light of our knowledge of the past” (Condren 1989, xxv).

VII. Methodology and Methods
i. Methodology

Indigenous researchers have worked for decades to challenge the settler-academy with decolonizing initiatives and to make space for Indigenous ways of knowing to be seen as legitimate approaches to scholarship by the Western intellectual community. Using traditional Indigenous Knowledge (IK), Indigenous scholars have been able to bring to the settler-academy unfamiliar ways of conducting research. Simultaneously, they have challenged the violence that has been enacted on Indigenous communities by settler-outsiders in the name of “research” (Wilson 2008).

Indigenist approaches to research are focused on goals that assist in the Indigenous struggle for self-determination and are informed by Indigenous knowledge and scholarship. As defined by Lester Rigney, Indigenist research is “an approach which borrows freely from feminist research and critical approaches to research, but privileges indigenous research” (Smith 1999, 147).

Feminist and Indigenous worldviews have been maligned and erased within the academy by dismissing our understandings of the world and of ourselves (our research) as ‘storytelling’ and fiction. Story propels me to use an interdisciplinary approach to research that subverts patriarchal and colonial academic discourse while giving a voice to systemically suppressed worldviews (Wilson 2008, Keary 2012).

As suggested, another root of my multi-methodological approach are feminist research methodologies which focus on women’s voices and knowledge. Subjective voice and experience and specifically the importance of female relationships have been minimized in the academy. For these reasons, centering women’s voices is meant to “[foster] a rich interpersonal examination of
women’s experiences as they are constructed on the boundaries of Western patriarchy’s semantic field” (Keary 2012, 127). I include photographs and art as visual components alongside my discussion, which acts as “an attempt to contextualize the abstract and linear narrative of print” (Keary 2012, 131). My findings are presented through the use of storying and autoethnography, which is a combination of Indigenist and feminist approaches.

I am also methodologically influenced by family history and understandings of identity through ancestry and place. Genealogy has historically been associated with affluent white people who are intent on associating their blood relationship to different Royal and economically powerful families (Osborne 2012, 239). Critiques of genealogy mention that “one of the best things that has happened over the last two decades is that genealogy, the tracing of pedigrees, has been largely replaced by family history” (Currer-Briggs 1992, 2). Family history is “more about the construction of a narrative about the self and the representation of self in the world” and is a communal and relational process (Little 2011, 245). Irigaray and other feminists have contributed to critiques of genealogy, suggesting it supports the continuation of patriarchy through wife/daughter/sister-ownership, loss of matrilineage and absence of sense of self or of personal history (Irigaray 1993, 3). A feminist or Indigenist critique of genealogical research is beyond the scope of this project, but is an important scholarly pursuit to be undertaken by other researchers. Instead, family history is important because it has helped and is helping me to reinterpret myself and my relationship to Land, spirituality and relationships from my own history as a starting point. Family history and traditional (oral) knowledge is crucial to Indigenous resistance and survival, and discussions of family history within this context will also be used to support and contextualize different stories that are shared throughout the project.
Spirituality is the last aspect of my methodology. Indigenous spiritual beliefs and other worldviews, cosmologies and spiritualities that centre the Land as a sacred and living being continue to influence my understanding of the world and thus my methodology and approaches to research. Various surviving beliefs that reflect this worldview are beginning to thrive once again. In this quote, Claudia von Werlhof connects Spirit-guidance to matriarchy:

On the living forms of an ancient matriarchal alchemy [magick]: good examples can be found in shamanism, healing arts, horticulture and agriculture, particular ways of handling food, sexuality, pregnancy and motherhood, ancestor worship, astronomy/astrology, women’s practice of Vamacara, as well as Tantrism, Taoism, magic, plant alchemy, alchemy with animal material, water alchemy, ritual gold, silver, and copper processing, textile and jewelry manufacturing. (von Werlhof 2013, 75)

All of the practices she names – that bring in Magick, energy, mana, Spirit- can help us uncover new knowledge and conduct thorough research. My research is guided by my connection to energies, Otherworldly denizens and my Ancestors. This guidance comes in many forms and when it has arisen in ways that have altered the path of my research, given me new information, or otherwise assisted my data collection I have recorded it in journals or drawings. Deciding to visit Natasha in BC was a spirit-driven action that resulted in my research widening- because my relational web also expanded. Dreams, premonitions, past-life memories, coincidences, animal teachings and ritual (including magick, drumming, medicine, singing and Imramma) are all different examples of how the guidance arises. Often this direction is very clear- like meeting one, then three, then four wild deer after Mary Condren had spoken on the topics of sacred numbers and deer symbolism. I was the first one to see the deer- out the back of the conference centre where I went to be outside.I let two of my new friends know I had seen them, and told them the next afternoon that I had an overwhelming feeling the deer were back. They were. This is one example of how magick flows for me, and I will integrate throughout different examples of how this method
of data collection has unearthed new knowledges to me that would have otherwise left on the Other side of the Veil.  

**ii. Methods**

Methods in research can be understood most simply as *how we approach learning more about what we know to be real* (Wilson 2008, 13). The Triad of *whence we came, where we are, and where we are going* is guided by three sets of questions:

- **Whence we came:** How do our relationships (to the past, our relations, the Land) help us learn new stories about past? What does transforming these relationships look like?
- **Where we are:** How does engaging in honest, supportive and accountable relationships help us envision and work towards life-affirming futures?
- **Where we are going:** What “decolonizing practices” are present in my day-to-day life? How can I expand on these? How can sharing them with others aid decolonization?

I am using a mixed-methods approach that combines the Indigenist and Feminist approaches to research outlined above. I have drawn greatly in this thesis on stories and learning

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23 Figure 3 is a personal photo I took of the deer.
gathered informally from family, friends and mentors over a number of years as well as the more current research outlined below. It has occurred in three different ways.

As aforementioned, my research into my family story was largely inspired by my friendship with Natasha. I share Natasha’s story alongside reflections about my own Ancestral past to underscore the transformational role our friendship and accountable relationship has played in my learning. As this inspirational “fire” was lit in me, I began a year-long process of reading scholarly, activist and non-academic work that discussed decolonization, relationships, Indigenous sovereignty, Spirituality and transformative change. This helped me further reflect, and uncover additional data, about how my learning about decolonization has happened over time – and is still happening. This research alongside listening to Natasha share with me the painful but beautiful process of finding her birth family underscored the necessity of learning more about *where I was from*.

I began my critical family story research by speaking to my living relatives to see what they could teach me about what they understand about my family’s history. Then, I used the information I gathered from them to do online research through Ancestry.ca, generations.regionofwaterloo.ca and other resources which allowed me to delve further into the past and uncover additional information about my family story. During this process, I discovered stories about my family that connected to specific land bases; Ireland, Scotland and Ontario. By considering critical histories –or stories- that are connected to these lands (written by scholars, activists and others) I was able to critically engage with the parts of my family story that helped me change my worldview and actions the most. Storytelling is the method used to present my findings and analysis included in Part I: *From Whence I Came.*
Part way into the initial investigations of my past, Natasha moved to Ottawa and I saw her very infrequently. Even still, our friendship and experiences together continued to be highlighted as pivotal in my learning. She came to visit me one weekend in November 2014, and I mentioned that I was thinking about writing about our friendship as part of my thesis project. She excitedly agreed to be involved, and we talked for a while about what that might look like. At that time, her move to Alert Bay was not official and the project began to adapt when she decided to move to her birth community. When I spoke to Natasha on the phone, Skype or Facebook during the first few months after her move to Alert Bay, she made it clear to me that to properly share her story of repatriation and associated learning - specifically, what she has learned from her relationships - it was important that I come and meet her birth family and also include their stories in my research. The stories that I gathered while learning with Natasha in 'Y̓alís are presented as completely as possible in order to maintain the learning that they inherently communicate, and are recounted closely to the order that I experienced them. Natasha decided who I should speak to, and her family members and friends were chosen because of their relationships to her and because of their influence as mentors during her repatriation. I received permission to record and transcribe short conversations that I had with Natasha’s relatives, none of whom chose to disguise their identity through pseudonyms.

In Part III: Where we are going, I present principles I have found important in decolonizing learning and becoming inspired to act. I am not including a formal conclusion with statements about the particular “successes” and “limitations” of this project. Instead, I will continue to communicate the ongoing nature of this research and the actions it inspires by sharing the decolonizing “practices” I uncovered or tested.

24 Appendix A lists names and concepts connected to Natasha's repatriation in 'Y̓alís.
PART I – *From Whence I Came: Critical Self-Storying as a Decolonizing Practice*

In learning and work on decolonization, I have noticed that it is important for all people to struggle to learn *where they are from*. Patriarchy and its support-systems work to obscure the stories we are able to learn and to re-tell about ourselves. When we struggle to uncover our own stories about *where we are from*, we can begin to create counter-narratives to the false, nationalistic histories that we are often schooled in. As I previously explained, *life-giving* and death-centred worldviews are both alive today. Although *life-giving* ideologies have been purposefully maligned and erased in the interest of *death-centred* ones -especially within the narratives of mainstream history texts- we do not have to delve far (into our relationships, our Ancestors, and the past) to uncover those very recently forgotten or undermined *life-giving* ways. I have learned from my relationships with my family, friends and mentors that decolonization is fuelled through telling, sharing, learning and retelling our *own* stories- not those that the settler-colonial Canadian state would have us believe. There is great power in sharing our stories with people who have different ones to share with us. Thomas King is an Indigenous activist, professor and the author of *the Truth About Stories*. He says that stories construct our reality (King 2003, 26). He wonders what it would do to the worldviews people hold if we were to replace say, the Genesis story with the Anishinaabe story of Sky Woman. How would the worldviews we hold change? We can learn to leave behind the stories that no longer serve us, and bring forward the ones that do. Without a way to story a *life-giving* way of doing things, we have no way to step forward. This is why I am starting with storytelling, and why stories and relationships are the focus of my research.

What is interesting, inspiring, and sustaining about striving to learn where we are from (or *from whence we came*, as the old Triad says) is that in many cases, it can support a *life-long*
discovering. This is another reason that the first part of the triad is so important: it can help us both see and commit to decolonizing practices which are deeply connected to ourselves, our relations, and our past. Finding, learning and telling stories of the past that help us understand ourselves and our relations can support us in returning to these stories for nourishment and encouragement. In this way, learning about and teaching others about our stories of the past is decolonizing and *active*. I’m thinking back now to the first time that I really made a decolonizing connection to learning about my past—those pictures I shared earlier of the Picts and Weroans. This is one example of a master-narrative that slipped up. It did not convince me to believe that my Ancestors and the Ancestors of my Indigenous friends were ‘savages’ or ‘barbarians’. Instead, the pictures helped me connect intimately the effects of domination on my not-so-distant relatives as well on my Indigenous friends, their communities and their Ancestors. So we can learn about our past in many ways, even though master-narratives would have us believe there are only scraps of knowledge left about ‘us’. We can read between the lines they have written—and continue to write—over our history. When we build accountable and respectful relationships, we can learn from each other and from the knowledge that is uncovered through sharing our stories in conversation.

I have been directed to do this work by my Ancestors. I am one of the only people in my immediate family to hold an interest in uncovering where we are from. I have always felt connected—and in some Otherworldly way, remembered—the landscapes of Ireland and Scotland. I have learned of other women (my grandmothers) who had actual ties to these Lands. My maternal great-grandmother, Mary Drinkwater (nee Wilson)\(^26\) is one such example. When she travelled to

\(^{25}\) People whom colonizers, patriarchs and those who otherwise write and benefit from master narratives of history would dub ‘savage’ ‘barbarous’ ‘pagan’ etc.

\(^{26}\) The article beside her picture is from the Galt Reporter. They thought it was pretty out-of-the-ordinary for such an old woman to travel so far to mourn her son and visit her hometown. Retrieved and reproduced with permission from my grandmother, Patricia Wilson.
Belgium after World War I to find her son’s grave, she stopped in her hometown of Roxburghshire, Scotland. She craved a homecoming. We can also learn a lot and be driven to do much by listening to what our Ancestors say. I think a lot of times they talk through those ‘gut’ feelings we would rather ignore than delve into. Other times, they show me distinct memories in dreams or direct me to new knowledge through synchronicity and experiences we try to dispel as ‘coincidence’. There is knowledge about our past everywhere – through the remnants of stories-we just need to be open to carrying the knowledge with us and allowing it to inspire us to make change in the present.

This section is dedicated to sharing the rich data I have uncovered -the stories- about the past that my relationships (to individuals, the Land and Spirit) have given me. The stories I have learned about my past are also connected intimately to specific and varied Land bases where my Ancestors were from or “settled” on. I will begin by recounting what I have learned of pre-

*Figure 4: Picture of Mary Wilson with newspaper clipping.*
historical Europe and its matriarchal origins, the result of research done by some of my mentors. There is decolonizing potential in seeing Europe in a prehistoric light. Linda Tuhiwai Smith urges us to do this. She says that we must look at pre-colonial situations to understand how colonization happened. We must

...have an analysis of how we were colonized, of what that has meant in terms of our immediate past and what it means for our present and future. The strands intersect but what is particularly significant in indigenous discourses is that solutions are posed from a combination of the time before, colonized time, and the time before that, pre-colonized time. Decolonization encapsulates both sets of ideas. (Smith 1999, 24)

I have to note here that this is not to minimize the fact that for the last 200 years in some cases, my family has been active in participating in settler-colonialism and associated violence in Ontario. By learning about the oppressions that my ancestors faced (sometimes as recently as 150 years ago) and their ability to survive, I have been able to become more intimately connected to and supportive of struggles towards decolonization.

Thus, in the section following my discussion of pre-historic Europe, I will focus specifically on the ways that traditional Irish and Scottish understandings of relationships, Land and Spirit were altered. Learning about the colonization of my Ancestors helped me understand differently the colonialism resisted by Indigenous peoples on Turtle Island, and emboldened my support in actions resisting ongoing violence. By re-storying our pasts we are reconstructing a commons of knowledge and learning that can propel our energies into a new cycle; one that is life-giving not death-centred. In the Irish context, Mary Condren notes that “the Irish gift for storytelling has, therefore, preserved for us a fairly transparent and unique account of the issues at stake, for which we can be grateful” (Condren 1989, 114). Without our own stories, the reality of people working against or surviving colonialism, patriarchy and the varied effects of death-centered
worldviews risk becoming overwritten and ignored. Sharing these stories -as I have learned them so far- is resistance.  

Sacred trebles or groups of three are consistent in many varied spiritual systems, but in the Irish context, three together also become a whole One on their own, making another sacred number of four (Percovich 2004, 27). We see this specifically in the Cailleach Bhéara (KAL-ee-ACH ber-ah) who is often described as the hag goddess or weather- ancestor- goddess of Ireland and Scotland. The Cailleach encompasses a treble of goddesses and also the treble stages of life expressed as maiden, mother and crone (or yew tree, eagle and Cailleach, as the ancient Irish saying goes). She is Three and One: she is the sacred Four Directions. This idea was explained to me by Mary Condren when I met and learned from her at the Brigid gathering at Beltaine last year, and emphasized to me by my meeting with the four deer (Condren at Brescia College, 2015). For these and other reasons, the triad of where we were, where we are and where we are going is how I have decided to present the stories I have learned.

I. Remembering a Europe from Before

My relationships - specifically to Spirit, my Ancestors and their associated Lands- have helped to encourage me from a young age to question what I was being taught about the past. I can recall that even in late high-school (although I primarily took history or similar courses) there was still no mention of a Europe before late Feudalism and the rise of nascent capitalism (Megill 1998, 60). Europeans are content in marking the beginning of our history at the widely lauded

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27 This has the potential to be a decolonizing practice (storytelling itself) because committing facts to memory -and connecting them to your heart and your ancestors- offers a different and more connected way of thinking and doing than those privileged in colonial, patriarchal and destructive cultural systems. (Wilson, 2008)
28 I speak about the Cailleach here because she is importantly considered the ancient goddess of the Land in the two places my Ancestors are from in Scotland (Argyll and Bute) and Ireland (County Clare and Killarney).
29 ‘Before’ used in this context refers to the time Before patriarchal, hierarchical and colonial societal organization. Von Werhlof, van der Meer and others date the changes that gave way to patriarchy beginning between four and six thousand years ago in most European contexts.
“Enlightenment” period, which encompassed the latter half of the early modern period (approximately 1400-1700). Many of the things we would like to see as purely European inventions and innovations were actually ideas either stolen or imported from the rest of the world (Crosby, 1986). The most masterful European scientists, artists, chefs, arms manufacturers and clothing designers would not exist without materials and information from various cultures that Europeans have historically and continue today to belittle, denigrate and oppress (Almond 2014, 52).

Thinking about and striving to learn more about Europe in this light helps to remove it from the centre in our consciousness. This is an important step because it can help us re-learn that Europe is mostly pre-historic. Mostly pre-scientific. Mostly a copy of all the cultures, peoples and traditions it wishes to appropriate, bastardize and destroy. I think this really reflects something about my family and the stories we are confident in telling and re-telling (or the ones that have been retold before my time in order to get to me). I know I am German because my German family is proud of their European-ness and their heritage. I do not think this is necessarily a bad thing, but it is when the centrality of this nationalism works to erase all other ways of learning about Europe or non-European histories. Usually, the stories Europe or the West tells about “other” places are “a history of the prehistorical, the primitive, and the pre-scientific’ that keeps open ‘only one option - that of bringing the ahistorical into history’” (Ashis Nandy qtd in Megill 1998, 54). The work of “pre-historicizing” Europe –and learning to value all stories of Before- can be a decolonizing practice. In the rest of this section, and in the following sub-chapters about Ireland, Scotland and Ontario, I hope that my goal of “pre-historicizing” and re-storying Europe can help us see pathways

30 What is fascinating about the timing of this is that the witch-hunt reached its peak in Europe during the beginnings of the Enlightenment period, and yet history books conveniently leave this piece out. I think all modern sensibilities would consider burning people alive to be barbaric and savage, and yet Europeans were doing this at the height of their attempts to be “the Most Civilized”. (Mies 1986, p43 note 27)
forward to decolonization and the rebirth of *life-giving* societies. As I reflected in the prologue, transforming our knowledge about the world from the *death-centric* worldviews we have been taught to a different way of knowing is often a painful process. Colonialism is still killing people every day in “Canada” and elsewhere – so no matter how much this process of learning and personal transformation can dig up shame, anger, guilt – *it must be done*. Challenging our worldviews in this way will also drive us to action: but first we need to learn more about *where we came from* and *where we are* so that we can envision a good way forward.

As previously mentioned, Beth Murch – a friend, doula, poet and activist – introduced me to the work of Marija Gimbutas when I was in my second year of University. Beth is a wise woman, and I think she knew that Gimbutas’ work would give me the hope that I needed at the time. I was stuck in the place of anger, shame, guilt and fear for two reasons. For one; my entire life, I had been taught the world was good and loving and that racism and hatred no longer existed and I had recently learned not only was this not true, but by thinking it was I was helping racist and colonialist erasure. And two: I had only so far come across stories (all new to me at this time) about the brutality of European history - about the Europeanness of colonialism, patriarchy and capitalism. I was feeling really stuck because of all this new information. Although I could feel it changing me - and making me want to act - this energy had nowhere to go. I felt that I didn’t have a way to use it and to resist colonialism. I didn’t see how Europeans could ever *not be* colonial, patriarchal, and hierarchical because as of yet, I had not been told a story of us from Before.

Beth really helped me find some of those stories by introducing me to Gimbutas and helped me move out of “white guilt” into multiple actions towards decolonization. Each time I faced

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31 It also helped me value work that is belittled in the academy, like the work of Gimbutas. She performed amazing scholarly feats in her lifetime, and yet is misquoted or dismissed in archaeology and anthropology circles. Specifically, “Gimbutas’ methodology is not recognized as valid by processualist archaeologists who consider the symbolic dimensions of culture inaccessible to properly scientific investigation. Neither is it accepted by feminist
someone who was not at the place I was with my learning, I became more and more gentle (and thus a better educator) while connecting colonial violence on Turtle Island with examples from contexts that my resistant family and friends could understand. It is important for Europeans to recognize that the most expansive parts of our past are known only in miniscule pieces of the stories that have existed into today (Percovich 2004, 26). Work like that of Gimbutas connects enduring symbols from our recent past to the deep past and demonstrates a continuity of woman-honouring, earth-centric and life-giving cultural practices and spiritual beliefs. Learning about this not-so-“savage” story of Europe from Before helped undo the myths of “savage Indians” that had been taught to me through the stereotypes of drunkenness, laziness and violence wrongly attributed to Indigenous peoples in Canada. I have become passionate about engaging with stories of the deep past which can shed further light on constructed “savagery”. Russell Means plays with this constructed primitiveness or savagery when he says he is “a born-again primitive”. I think his ideas are something we ought to invite into our hearts as one of multiple goals for transforming our consciousness. He asks about European\textsuperscript{32} patriarchy:

\begin{quote}
What gives this man the right? You know, he’s the last civilisation on earth to learn to read and yet he’s named everything [laughter]! He’s named everything, north and south, east and west and this is how primitive he is. He measures time by one little orb hanging in space and it’s revolving around another orb hanging in space, the sun, that’s it. That is his explanation of the universe and time. Whereas we Indigenous people measure time by the woman, the lunar calendar. The whole universe travels in a circle and it takes 280 days, the same period of gestation with the human female, wow! That is why I’m a born-again primitive. (Means 2011, 519)
\end{quote}

It is a detriment to fear reclaiming and re-learning the primitive European past. Europeans –just as Means so eloquently describes- \textit{know nothing}. Our patriarchal warrior culture has performed genocide after genocide on European soil (and then all over the world), allowing for little

\textsuperscript{32} Likely specifically English speaking or with Indo-European roots
continuity of life-bringing knowledge to exist in Eurocentric and patriarchal cultures. I like to see and use words like primitive, savage, and pagan in the way that Means does; as a refusal of the insults that Europeans have cast on ourselves as well as non-Europeans.33 Primitive and savage, used in their intended definition, could and should be used instead to describe the particularity of colonial penchants for violence and domination.

Another reason it is important to and share stories about the erased European past is because it provides us opportunities to learn about, find hope in and take action on matriarchal life-giving worldviews (Percovich 2004, 39). Luckily the lasting vestiges of these beliefs, held in remote villages and counties in Ireland, Scotland (as well as other distinct regions of Europe) and in Indigenous cultures everywhere, show that oral histories of the “savage” and the “feminine” endure. We can choose to seek out these stories and re-tell them instead of reproducing the patriarchal, colonial and Eurocentric myths that have been forced on us. In every context described above, stories from Before have survived in different ways. In my later analysis of the data I have gathered from stories about Ireland, I will reflect on pre-patriarchal Ireland (and Scotland), the transition to patriarchy, and specific things they have taught me that have inspired me towards action on decolonization and revitalizing life-bringing worldviews.

Finally, finding these obscured stories of the past also helps us uncover and explore a European pagan34 past. Europe was not (somehow) always Christian. The transition to Christian monotheism in Europe was violent and expansive, but incomplete (Almond 2014, 51). Mainstream

33 I will explain later how for hundreds of years, the Irish and Scottish weren’t considered wholly European. In many places they are still not considered part of a “civilized” Europe.
34 Using the word pagan is a reclamation of both ancient spiritual practices and a reinterpretation of a once derogatory word placed on Europeans who lived close to the land. Specifically, “the word pagan is, in fact, simply a form of the Latin word for ‘rustic’ or ‘country person’ (paganus). Sharing the prevalent view of city-dwelling Romans (early Christianity was an urban movement), the Christians regarded country people as sub-human brutes” (Stark 2001, 109). Because these country dwellers—my Ancestors—were regarded as “beasts of the field” they also weren’t considered worth converting to Christianity, and in many ways their beliefs in faeries and gods and goddesses persisted.
accounts of history tell a very different story, but by learning the stories about this transition to Christianity (and institutionalized patriarchy) in the Irish and Scottish contexts has allowed me to connect to my pagan roots and my Ancestors.\textsuperscript{35} We all have pagan roots, whether we want to engage with them or not (Besserman 2007, 127). I have been able to connect this violence against indigenous Irish and Scottish spiritual practices (and cultural norms, as I will later explain) to the violence my Indigenous friends in Canada have faced in their lifetimes as well as the violence their relatives and ancestors have survived. Spiritual colonization happened to my Ancestors, and has and is happening where I live today.

I fear sometimes that highlighting formerly minimized or erased stories about our oppressed past and the places of our Ancestors may provide the opportunity for settlers to falsely absolve themselves of colonial violence or to claim their own distant history of subjugation without connection to ongoing struggles. It is possible to stop here, and work no further to decolonize yourself, your worldviews, your actions and communities. I hope that my analysis makes it clear that learning these stories should not occur without simultaneous resistance to current colonial oppression and commitment to build a different future.\textsuperscript{36} So far for me the actions that I can support and participate in have been: educating myself and others about colonialism, attending Indigenous-led events and resistance efforts, supporting my friends who survive colonialism daily, by learning new stories about the past and present. Decolonization can’t be stories alone, but the stories can propel us to action. There is always room to deepen the conversation on decolonization because more approaches and varied ways to think about and do this work means that more people will commit and take action, and progress will be made steadily. Learning stories about my Ancestors

\textsuperscript{35} And by looking at the forced Christianization of many Indigenous peoples
\textsuperscript{36} The blog, \textit{Awakening the Horse People} is very successful in inspiring people to learn from the diverse stories that tell of the ways humans did things before patriarchal and \textit{death-centered} society became the norm in the European context while suggesting ways people can act on decolonization (Amets, 2013).
has given me hope and a way to vision the future. They also help remind me that colonialism is happening right now and we must support movements that work for its end.

II. Decolonizing Inspiration from my Irish and Scottish Ancestors

Here I have decided to draw on the data that I have uncovered about my Irish and Scottish Ancestors. In many ways, there are deep connections to be made between the culture and struggles of indigenous Irish and Scottish people. As well, the Ancestor-guidance and Spirit-guidance that has pushed me to pursue learning from whence I came has been inseparable for most of my life. As I have begun to look critically “between the lines” of the histories that have been written about my Ancestors, I have uncovered both life-affirming and death-centered histories that are specific to context. In the first section about Ireland, my descriptions of pre-Celtic Irish beliefs also speak to the experience of the Scottish people. Both groups had specific matriarchal spiritual and cultural systems that have been overturned and altered since the first invasion of the Celtic warriors from continental Europe. Thus, these ideas also contextualize the Scottish histories I discuss later.

i. Finding Pre-Celtic Ireland and Pre-Patriarchal Europe

Well there’s nothing wrong with our disillusionment. “Disillusion,” my dictionary says, is “to free from that which deludes or is Illusionary,” So what’s wrong with that? The first question isn’t what we should do, it’s who are we and where do we come from? For our confusion comes from not knowing who we are. We have an unspoken fear. A fear that we have no culture of our own, no culture that can defeat patriarchal violence [emphasis mine]. That whatever we had before patriarchy came was erased so long ago, was so primitive, that it has no practical meaning anymore. That the only really modern way of life is the culture that white men made, patriarchal imperialism, with its command of science and industry. [...] Our unspoken fear that women have no culture resonates below words through everything white women do, no matter how much so-called feminists try to pretend otherwise. (Lee 2003, 17)

As I mentioned in my discussion of “prehistoric Europe”, patriarchy and all of the warring, violence and control that comes with its death-centricity is not natural or native to most of Old Europe. Even more so, it is an extremely recent development in Ireland. For centuries before
we mark the beginning of time (or the birth of Jesus) the names of women marked sacred places
in the landscape (Percovich 2004, 38). Women and the natural cycles that they personified were
held as sacred. As Mary Condren notes, in the pre-Celtic Irish worldview

*There was an essential wonder to life and an awareness that all things were connected. The earth might be dry, but soon falling rain would sprout seeds, bring the flowers to bud, and renew the soil. Fruit and vegetables would once again be plentiful and life could survive for one more year. Within their very midst was another mystery. In the normal course of events someone who was seriously wounded, by a marauding animal for instance, was sure to die, but yet women periodically bled and did not die. Indeed women's bleeding in childbirth gave rise to the greatest enigma of all: that of life itself.* (Condren 1989, 26)

This is reminiscent of Russell Means’ ideas about women being the calendar of Life. Somewhere
along the line, patriarchal warriors, kings and priests decided that the Sun was instead the ultimate
measurer of time. By replacing wonder with “certainty”, patriarchal war-lords ceased to honour
Women as creators and sustainers of life, and over time, lost their reverence for the Earth and its
constant cycles of renewal, rebirth and decay. Hilltop settlements, tumuli, or *barrows* as they are
known in Ireland are relics from the Bronze Age (van der Meer 2015, 130). Annine van der Meer
suggests that the Iron Age livestock-herding nomads from Eastern Europe destroyed many of these
settlements marking the beginnings of the transition to patriarchy. The barrows or hilltop
settlements are not only the homes of the Bronze Age matrilineal agrarians, but they are also sites
of their ancestral veneration. The barrows are built by burying many ancestors in one place which
over-time becomes a hill. Often, homes were built on the top of the barrow. van der Meer shows
that there is a particular moment in the archaeological record where we can see a forceful change
of culture:

*In the new mixed culture that emerges from 3800 BCE home rituals in which female figurines are used cease, as do working with copper and mining, the production of refined pottery and decorative techniques, the use of copper spiral-shaped bracelets and uterine-shaped spondylosis shell ornaments, living on hilltop settlements, the construction of larger houses and the practice of agriculture. It is now mainly’*
weapons, in particular daggers, that are made from a new type of metal: bronze. There is talk of an abrupt transition which archaeologists describe as ‘a complete change of a culture’ and a ‘catastrophe of colossal proportions. (van der Meer 2015, 130)

In Ireland the dates are different, as the Celts did not make it to the Isles until approximately 500 BCE. This is another reason why Ireland and Scotland are landscapes in Europe where we can more easily uncover stories of the transition from the pre-existing matriarchal agrarian cultures to the Iron age warrior cultures, like that of the Celts. Until this period, my Irish Ancestors connected divinity with women, for the creator of all life must surely bleed and birth as women do (Condren 1989, 26). Before the invasion, women’s names were attached to the landscape of Ireland, its hills, its rivers, its mountains, its valleys: all named with different faces of Her. As late as the eleventh century this held true, as “Ireland became known predominantly as Eire, a name derived from the Goddess Eiru, the singular form of the Triple Goddesses: Eriu, Banba, and Fotla” (Condren 1989, 26). This understanding of how Ireland got its name is important because it is connected to a Goddess who refused to let anyone enter her Land if they refused to revere her and the other Goddesses. It is also important because this story is connected to the Celtic invasions, and speaks to how the indigenous beliefs of the Irish were held up as a resistance against the war-like Celts. They had polytheism in common, which allowed for the Celts and indigenous Irish to live in relative peace until the Roman invasions some hundreds of years later. This does not mean the culture of Eire was unchanged, but it was still called “the Island of Banba of the Women” (Condren 1989, 26).

The notion of Celtic identity has become nearly congruent with Irish and Scottish identity. Many matriarchal scholars and anthropologists have brought to light a new understanding of the Celt as the first invaders of the British Isles, and specifically as a group of people that changed the culture of Ireland forever. They traced their ancestry through their father’s line (Condren 1989,
The pre-existing Irish population were likely descendants of Mediterranean tribes who made Ireland home thousands of years before the Celts (Percovich 2004, 37). They were of “matrilineal descent, who built megalithic monuments and adored Danu/Dor, as their […] mother” and called themselves the *Tuatha de Danaan*; the people of the Goddess Danu (Percovich 2004, 37). Percovich’s point about their megalithic monuments is extremely important. Marija Gimbutas also points to the connection found and studied between the ancient monuments of Malta and sites like Newgrange in Ireland. Their similarities exist because they were built by people who held the same worldview, spiritual system and matriarchal, matrilineal culture.

![Figure 5: Spiral motif at Newgrange, Ireland.](image)

![Figure 6: Temple at Malta with spiral designs.](image)

Condren tells the story of Macha which helps to understand the ways the matrilineal and matriarchal culture of the pre-Celtic Irish was changed by the Celts. As with all the other oldest goddesses of Ireland, Scotland and many other places, their stories exist for our eyes in versions that depict their subjugation or overthrow. By searching for the earliest stories, and reading

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37 Photo in Figure 6 from Gimbutas (1982) pp283
38 Figure 5: Picture was taken before Newgrange was restored, sometime in the early 1900s. It was taken by Oscar Montelius (1843-1921). Accessed online, theheritagetrust.wordpress.com/category/ireland/
39 Macha’s story has been so altered by the Transition that she is presently known as a sun and war goddess.
between the lines of later ones, we can begin to “see” the Old Irish people and their ways of life. Macha’s sacred landscape is located in modern day Armagh (Ard Mhacha in Gaelic, pictured below).  

![Figure 7: Emhain Mhacha in Ulster.](image)

There are several different accounts of how her name was given to the ancient site. By studying these tales, we can uncover “the transitions in status that each goddess underwent in the course of time” (Condren 1989, 30). The oldest tales of Macha depict a matriarchal and life-affirming worldview:

_Macha of the Ruddy Hair (red mane) was the daughter of Aed the Red. When he died, she was the only heir to his throne. She fought the other kings and assured her place. After seven years of kingship, she refused to give up her throne, as she had fought for her place rather than received it in the agreed-upon way that the other kings had, thus breaking the previous agreement of only seven years of Kingship. The King Dithorba (who had died in the first battle) had two sons who fought Macha again, but whom she defeated. She took the third King, Cimbaeth, to be her husband. She was unsatisfied with having only banished the Dithorba brothers, and went in search of them in the countryside. In the disguise of a lepress, she tempted each man individually into a glen, where upon their advances, she subdued them and tied them up. Coming back to the fire after each one, she noted to the others that their “brothers were hiding, ashamed for lying with a lepress.” The men decided that this was no shame, and each went to lay with her. Each was subdued, tied up, and brought back with Macha to Ulster. There, the men of Ulster wanted to kill the captives, but Macha said “Nay, for me it_

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40 Figure 7 reproduced from [www.medievalhistories.com/archaeology-celtic-myth-exploration/](www.medievalhistories.com/archaeology-celtic-myth-exploration/)
Macha’s stories are understood as the telling of “the Irish Fall”\textsuperscript{42} (Condren 1989, 30). They all take place during the first invasions of Ireland when patriarchal culture was being brought to the island by warrior invaders. This story of Macha shows us three things. First, it shows that she sought, struggled for, and received Kingship as a woman. In all likelihood, this was not an anomaly at the time, which is why the new system of seven-year kingship was so easily overthrown by her arguments. It also shows us that she was upset with the way women were being treated under this new warrior-king worldview, and demonstrates her rage through the seduction and slavery of the revengeful and violent kings. Lastly, her refusal to kill these kings and princes was based on an understanding that death is not a useful punishment, as “she rejected killing for its own sake and preferred non-violent (and purposeful) forms of punishment” (Condren 1989, 31). I think in many ways this story also depicts how the sovereignty of Ireland is connected to the ancient goddesses who were seen both as Ireland itself, and as protectors of its vast Lands.

With the introduction of patriarchy, reverence of death within the cycles of life and nature changed and became \textit{death-obsessed}. In the oldest stories, “the conception of Death that emerges […] is that dying is something full of meaning, a necessary phase of a process” (Percovich 2004, 32). The transition to patriarchy was not fully actualized with the Celtic-warrior invasions, and in actuality the most violent arms of control were not substantially destructive until the introduction of Christianity centuries later. What did change was the new prevalence and totality of war and of men holding the primary and most powerful positions in communities and early governments. As well, “they arrived on horse, they had nomadic and violent habits, they came with the iron

\textsuperscript{41} This is retold from Mary Condren’s telling of it in the \textit{Serpent and the Goddess}, p30.

\textsuperscript{42} The “fall” is used by Condren to describe the Irish descent from matriarchy into patriarchy, brought by the warring tribes from continental Europe.
technology, they were hierarchically organized and they brought a completely new set of values, all linked with fighting and conquering, the virtues of the warriors” (Percovich 2004, 31). Where physical violence did not succeed in forcing the transition to patriarchy, “the cultural shock performed this effect” (Percovich 2004, 31). The stories around the Sacred Marriage also help us understand this transition. In the oldest tales before the transition, “the king, as kings did throughout the ancient world, participated in an annual rite of sacred marriage. The king ‘mated’ with the Goddess, ensuring fertility for the land and for its people in the year to come” (Condren 1989, 24). His masculinity was not yet tied to violence and control, but was instead based on his ability to ensure fertility for the coming year. In the Irish tradition, kings would be ousted if the mast (crops) did not return fruitfully every year, if there was a failure of dyestuff (dying materials was a woman’s art), and if women died in childbirth (Condren 1989, 30). His power of fertility was based on the rite of the Sacred Marriage, usually something that took place on Beltaine, May 1st. Rites with the maypole as a fertility symbol are still performed every May Day in Ireland, Scotland, and elsewhere in the Isles and greater-Europe. In one myth, the Ulster hero Cu Chulainn “kissed a dragon (rather than slaying it) and it turned into a beautiful woman” (Condren 1989, 24).

The stories show us how this understanding of masculinity was changed when warrior cultures began to tie male power to control through violence. They also show us that by destroying the power of the Goddesses, the power of women in political, cultural, spiritual, social and economic roles was changed and in some ways, revoked.

As other scholars, I use the term Celt loosely to describe the “hoards of warring tribesmen who came to Ireland from Europe” (Condren 1989, 59). 43 They struggled with the particular issue of developing a travelling polytheism, something contradictory from its onset. They had many

43 Deciphering and describing the variations in Celtic belief are beyond the scope of this investigation, but could provide knowledge into the transition between matriarchy and patriarchy in future studies.
gods and goddesses who were also tied to specific places in their home territories, and who were not easily amalgamated into a spiritual system that could be transported during the process of land-acquisition and theft (Condren 1989, 59). For this reason, the matriarchal and polytheistic culture of the Irish was able to survive amidst the pantheons of the Celts whose patriarchal and war-like culture slowly gained traction. As I will describe in the following section, the matriarchal and peaceful indigenous Irish had no way to resist violence, as violence was not an inherent part of their culture. Macha’s refusal to use violence against the men who attempted to “defile” her speaks to the aberration of physical violence or death used as a method of control.

**ii. From Goddess of the Land to Patron Saint: Brigid and the Transition to Celtic-Catholicism**

*As the patriarchal revolution progressed, men became married to God rather than women and served Him by conquering more lands and forcing them to be Christian. The hero’s eventual search for immortality would destroy the goddess cultures of Before.* (Condren 1989, 24)

As Macha’s stories teach us about the transition to patriarchy in the Irish context, the goddess Brigid (who was later re-named St. Brigid) can teach us about the transition to Christianity. By learning these stories, as a “Canadian” with Irish heritage, I have been able to connect on a deeper spiritual, historical and emotional level with my Indigenous friends. In so many ways Christian, English and other colonizers “cut their teeth in Ireland” by violently subduing, “settling” and in many cases wiping out the indigenous Irish populations (van Krieken, 41). This aided the systematization of colonial processes which assisted later European colonists in their violent acquisition of lands on Turtle Island from the Indigenous peoples. Academics consistently over-look the specific cases of Ireland, Wales and Scotland as “testing grounds” for English and Christian colonialism. As well, the connections between the worldviews of Indigenous
peoples in Canada and those rural “natives” of Ireland, Scotland and Wales has remained largely unaddressed.\textsuperscript{44}

I think we can learn some things from Brigid who in many ways is a “bridge” between different ages of Ireland. Her stories are as old as the Land itself. Her stories are far-reaching; she is known in Scotland as Bhrìghde, in Manx as Breeshey, in Welsh as Efraid, in England as Brigantia, and in France as Brigandu. In Ireland she has many names, but is most commonly known simply as Brigid or Brid. The ancient goddess of poetry, healing and smith-craft, and Brigid has been honoured for generations in Ireland at Kildare (from \textit{Cill Dara} or “temple of oak” in Gaelic) (Condren 1989, 66). One thing that the landscape of Brigid teaches us is that “wherever Christian sanctuaries are located […] you can be certain that there are sacred remnants beneath them, which were dedicated to the Lady in a pre-Christian period” (van der Meer 2015, 294, Condren 1989, 67). In so many cases, as van der Meer continues, these sites are either appropriated and made into a Christian place of worship, or are given names containing words like “devils” “satan” or “pagan” in order to demonize the Old women-honouring and land-based beliefs (van der Meer 2015, 295). So as Christianity spread, it overtook these sacred places on the Irish landscape- either by demonizing them into obscurity, or re-making them in the name of the Christian God (Condren 1989, 59). As Mary Condren’s quote at the beginning of this section shows, the Goddesses of Ireland were connected to specific places in the landscape.

St. Brigid is an example of where Christian appropriation of a pagan goddess into its pantheon of Saints was both incomplete and, in my opinion, unsuccessful. I do not know the stories that are told of St. Brigid in Christian church services, but I do know some of the stories that Mary Condren has taught to me about how she is seen by Irish people. She was and is the goddess of

\textsuperscript{44} Non-academics have been doing this work quite consistently (Archer, 2015). Note that the work of the few academics who have done this work has been maligned and under recognized.
sovereignty. Stories exist of Brigid taking up her giant green cloak and covering the land so that it is hidden from invaders. These stories date as far back as the first Norman invasions, and probably predate that as well. Throughout every invasion until that of Christianity and the later English colonization, her stories (and the stories of other goddesses) are able to persist because they are tied so intimately to the land, and are retold by the people connected to that particular land-base. This is still the case in terms of the Cailleach, because even time, colonization and spiritual upheaval cannot remove the face of a Goddess from a mountain.45 46

![Image](figure8.jpg)

*Figure 8: Ben Cruachan, Argyll and Bute, Scotland.*

As Christianity spread, traditional Irish beliefs were amalgamated into Christian belief. As I said, this part of the conquest (on a spiritual and symbolic level) was incomplete, because the stories about Before are still found in the Christian retellings, and the ancient Irish symbols for the goddess are still found engraved in the earliest Christian sites.47 What Christianity did

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45 This also reminds me of the mountain in Thunder Bay called “the sleeping giant” where Nanabozho is said to lay sleeping -waiting to awaken- in Anishnaabe belief. The photograph is of Ben Cruachan, the tallest mountain in Argyll and Bute, Scotland, where the Cailleach nan Cruachan is from. She is also associated with specific parts of Ireland like the Cliffs of Moher in County Clare and Beara Peninsula in County Kerry.

46 This is one of many landscapes associated with the Cailleach. Reproduced from scotlandinview.com/2011/05/18/mountain/what-a-difference-a-month-makes-%E2%80%93-ben-cruachan-in-the-sunshine/.

47 Shee-la-na-gigs on Irish churches are just one example of this (Condren, 66)
“successfully” in Ireland was change the social and political arrangements of the native Irish and pave the way for English colonists. As Condren argues, “Morality and mortality were now intimately connected. Centralized hierarchies would become the norm in the political and religious spheres, dictating the conditions for the achievement of immortality” (Condren 1989, 24). The ways from Before that followed the land and the sacred denizens associated with different places helped nature; it “enhanced [it] and helped it to fruition” whereas the religion of God the Father wanted to conquer, own and exploit nature and instead develop the “spirit” (Condren 1989, 16). When women, nature, sexuality or other spiritual beliefs from Before got in the way of the new Christian worldview, they were “kept firmly under wraps” (Condren 1989, 16). This is a gendered issue in the Irish context (and arguably, most others), because “the sacred space of male history has often been carved out, literally, over the bodies of women” (Condren 1989, xvii).

Like Condren, I am interested in the discourse of Brigid and what it can teach about women in early Irish history and about Irish resistance to Christian and other colonialisms. We are not however concerned with the mythological or historical reality of Brigid (Condren 1989, 56). This is the importance of story. Story can bring us awesome, renewed understandings about our current situation by reminding us that our realities (whether historically, mythological or otherwise constructed) are storied into existence. The stories we tell, the stories that have been retold, make up our understandings of the world. We can decide which stories to retell.

Since becoming a Christian site, Kildare has been a convent of nuns who kept alight the ancient fire of Brigid. Her name comes from the Gaelic breo-saigit or “fiery arrow” (Condren 1989, 57). Some suggest her fire could be connected to the ancient Druidic tradition of being “baptized by fire”. Instead of seeing the woman as dirty after childbirth (as in many Judeo-Christian beliefs), both the woman and her new child were “encased in a ring of purifying and
protecting fire” (Condren 1989, 81). The area of Kildare was occupied by native Irish pagan people until at least 400AD, only being Catholicised 90 years later for the first time. The Irish Triads remark that Kildare is “the heart of Ireland” (Wright, 1995). The (potentially) historical Brigid (whom the Saint is named for) lived until approximately 520AD. It is important to understand that only 120 years separate the pagan site of Kildare with the use of it by the historical Brigid and her original nuns. In many ways, understanding this woman as a Catholic is a stretch, and many scholars see her either as completely mythical, or (more interestingly) a priestess of the Goddess Brigid at the pre-existing pagan site, who was charged with the task of transforming Kildare into an acceptable Catholic convent (Menzies 2014, 33). Nearly 500 years after the death of Brigid, the fire at Kildare was still being kept and maintained by the nuns. In 1220, “Henry of London decreed that the fire at Kildare be extinguished, after revolt by the local people the fire was relit until its final disbanding in 1540” (Condren 1989, 107). The fire is a symbol for the Ireland of Before. Knowing that a King would go to great lengths to destroy it helps to underscore the connection that the local indigenous Irish people still had with the Goddess and the Land- something that had to be violently removed.

Extinguishing many of the remaining vestiges of Irish paganism, the treble Goddesses with their various names and their rivers, mountains and valleys were replaced and at once made mobile by the trinity of “the Father-God, Son and Holy Spirit” (Condren 1989, 49). Outsiders would for centuries -and arguably do today, to some extent- view the Irish as uncivilized and backwards because of this incomplete Christianization. Gerald of Wales (1146-1123) travelled to Ireland alongside the Normans and was responsible for recording what he saw and experienced. Although Gerald of Wales saw the Irish as heathen and uncivilized we can learn much from his

48 Unlike polytheism -with its various gods and goddesses tied to specific places in the landscape- Christian monotheism was able to travel and missionize.
stories by reading between the lines. His writings can help us “see” how my Irish ancestors were viewed. Of the Irish, he says:

This is a filthy people, wallowing in vice. Of all peoples it is the least instructed in the rudiments of the Faith. They do not yet pay tithes or first fruits or contract marriages. They do not avoid incest. They do not attend God’s church with due reverence. Moreover, and this is surely a detestable thing, and contrary not only to the Faith but to any feeling of honour – men in many places in Ireland, shall not marry, but rather debauch, the wives of their dead brothers. They abuse them in having such evil and incestuous relations with them. (Gerald of Wales 1983, 106)

Gerald is convinced that the Irish are not quite Christian enough. They still follow their own ways, their own traditions. He talks in detail about how the faith of the Irish is indeed a faith, but not one that submits to God the Father. What is even more fascinating than his descriptions of the Irish as backwards, drunken and wayward (which is congruent with how English colonizers described the Indigenous peoples of Turtle Island upon contact and throughout colonization) is Gerald’s focus on these very Irish beliefs. By recording all of the things that he saw that were not quite Catholic enough, we are able to uncover additional truths about the ways that the Irish people kept their beliefs from Before alive.

For instance, he speaks at great length about “the wondrous nature of Wells in Ireland” (Gerald of Wales 1983, 40). One in particular can turn any fabric into stone, and there are some wells which only men can drink out of, or which will kill horses. Reading about his descriptions of the Wells (and the underlying importance of them to Irish belief) I was reminded of a story that Mary Condren told me at the Brigid Festival in May 2015. She said,

I went to the Cailleach and I asked “What do you know about the first day of the world?” and she instructed me to ask the Eagle. Eagle said he was not old enough, and that I should ask the Otter on the Rock. He too said he was but new to the world, and that I should ask my question of the one-eyed (half-blind) salmon. Salmon are keepers of wisdom in Irish tradition. Salmon said that “on the first day of all the world, I jumped out of the water and landed on ice. A sea-gull ate one of my eyes and the blood I shed melted the ice and created all the Wells in Britain.”
In Ireland, this old story still explains how wells are viewed: as the “eye of divinity” connected with generosity and giving. Gerald goes on to talk about the “giants dance” and how the stones were transported by Merlin from Ireland to Britain (Gerald of Wales 1983, 69). He makes great effort to compare the Irish to animals throughout his description of the landscape, suggesting the “bearded women” are part cow, and that the women have sex with goats and lions (Gerald of Wales 1983, 74-76). He even suggests that the species of animals found in Irish are odd amalgams of normal species, like half-cow, half-stag creatures. He talks about an ancient stone that always contains wine, and underscores how important “bells and staffs” are to the Irish (Gerald of Wales 1983, 80, 116). He says that “they value them much more than the gospels as they will not even swear on these things” (Gerald of Wales 1983, 116). Gerald even tells us about the convent at Kildare, and helps us understand why even a hundred years after Gerald’s death, the King of England was still deeply concerned about un-Christian things occurring at the convent of Brigid. I am certain that Gerald’s description of Irish Saints as “more vindictive than those of any other land” was a reflection about how incomplete the Christianization process had been (Gerald of Wales 1983, 91). These “vindictive saints” still carried the characteristics of the earlier gods and goddesses they were fashioned after. He writes about how the hedge at Kildare -which protects the sacred fire- can never be crossed by a man; and that the pastures that surround Kildare have never and cannot be tilled (Gerald of Wales 1983, 82-83). This could very likely be connected to the ancient beliefs across Europe that the goddess is physically expressed in the land, and by tilling (or harming) the pastures of her “belly” she would lose fertility and become barren (Gimbutas 2001, 208). He says that a man who did try to cross the hedge of Kildare went mad, and another lost his leg (Gerald of Wales 1983, 88). He speaks of many other “miracles” at Kildare, like the fire that can never go out or be extinguished but whose ashes never increase, and that virgin nuns
and “holy women” have kept it lit since the time of Brigid. He notes that there are 19 nuns who each take turns to watch of the fire, and on the 20th night it is left for Brigid to watch over (Gerald of Wales 1983, 81).

iii. Crofting and Resistance: Some Lessons and Stories from my Scottish Ancestors

In Scotland, someone with no ties to the land is called a ‘broken man’ (Menzies 2014, 29)

Buinidh mi do. (“I belong to this place”)49

Like Ireland, the Scotch-Gaelic speaking peoples of the Highlands of Scotland (and in many cases, other Scottish people as well) have kept their own traditions alive for centuries while resisting colonial and Christian influence. And, here too, it is Scottish folk stories and traditions that inform us about the beliefs from Before. The Mac Dodrums of the Hebrides say they are descended from seals, or the Selkie (Menzies 2014, 32). The Cailleach, as in Ireland, is the ancient Goddess of the land in Scotland as well. She is the “white faced lady of winter and the protector of the deer” (Menzies 2014, 32). In medieval Scottish tales, the Cailleach is a symbol for lamenting and mourning the loss of the wyl-deer-ness (wilderness) or the place where the wild deer are (Menzies 2014, 13). Salmon and other animals were sacred, and in many stories seen as the keepers of Wisdom (Menzies 2014, 32).

The Picts (who were located in the north-west of Scotland beside their Gaelic Highlander relatives) received their name from the Romans, who called them Picti or “painted ones”, but could also derive from their own word for themselves, Pecht, which likely meant “Ancestor”. Stuart McHardy as well as other scholars of Pictish history note that it was most likely that their namesake comes from their own name for themselves, suggesting both that they honored their Ancestors and

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49 Mentioned in Menzies (2014). The way Gaelic people express where they are from. People belong to lands, lands do not belong to people.
were themselves an ancient people (and the indigenous people of the land). The Picts had many
gods and goddesses who were tied to places in the landscape and specifically to wells, springs,
fields, trees and tract ways as well as the elements, weather, and practically all aspects of life that
humans depended on for survival.

What I have learned from studying the beliefs of my most temporally distant Scottish
ancestors are similar lessons to those gleaned from the Irish context. I’ve learned about time Before
(patriarchy, Catholicism or English colonialism) and how the land-based belief systems were time
and time again maligned by invaders. I have also learned about *crofting*, *cottars* and *commoning*
and how the very way of life of my ancestors was a direct threat to English colonialism. In the
following paragraphs I will discuss what I have uncovered about my ancestors through
genealogical work and critically engaging with the histories connected to them. In my family, this
is the first time some of these stories have been uncovered since they were told by my relatives
sometimes centuries ago. In most cases, these are the stories of the matrilineal lines of my family,
those stories that were most quickly lost because of patriarchy and the silencing of women’s
stories. Although there is also much to learn from my patrilineal ancestors, it is most pertinent to
this investigation to search out and retell the stories of the women.

First I will start by talking about the Scottish worldview from Before, including *commoning*
or *crofting*, the spiritual beliefs of the Picts and Highlanders, as well as tracing some aspects of
their “fall”. In the following section, I will look at Scotland and Ireland together to understand the
English colonialisms that both my Scottish and Irish ancestors had to resist and survive. It is
important to look at the two situations together because even the oldest stories link the two lands
through Spirit and relationships. As Condren records, “the Venerable Bede in the eighth century,
when writing about the Picts of Scotland, maintained that they traced their descent through the
female line and that was because, when they left Ireland, the Irish gave them wives on condition that lineage continue to be traced through the female line” (Condren 1989, 27). Studying the situations together reveals how clearly colonialism attacks very particular sets of beliefs; those beliefs that honour the Land, that honour Spirit, and that honour relationships (especially those where women have autonomy).

The Picts may be one of the most under-studied cultural groupings in the British Isles. Frank Battaglia describes the practices of their matrilineal culture as “hidden riches” and “a very neglected fact of our country’s early history” (Battaglia, 17). The Picts remained unconquered until 900CE. The fact that this matrilineal culture has not been studied in detail reflects what stories we have chosen to tell, and which we wish to ignore. Pictish settlements in Angus, for example, were occupied until at least 500CE and can be linked to sites in the same locales from the Neolithic period (Battaglia, 17). This is another example of what Russell Means suggests is becoming a “born again primitive”, or in my words, “a born again pagan”. How can we so easily submit to the stories that England and Canada would have us tell of the past, when the Picts and groups like them still have so much to share with us? And they can share with us not only about the past, but about what we can do in the future. What does it mean that England and Canada, and other colonial nations would rather their citizens not know about (or better yet, scoff at) the ideals of matrilineal culture? There must be resistance in these stories. They must be a threat to colonial, Christian (and now capitalist) rule.

As Mary Condren, Gerald of Wales and Frank Battaglia have shown me, it is “a well known historical-mythical fact that the Irish gave the Picts wives under the sworn promise that kingship would always be traced through the female line, as has been done in Ireland forever” (Battaglia, 18). I think we can assume this is a largely historical fact, even though in so many ways
it has been relegated to the realm of myth. In the north of Scotland, in Pictland to the east and the Highlands to the west, matrilineage continued longer because those areas were “more equipped to resist Roman and other domination” (Battaglia, 23). Picts, like Highlanders, had complex systems of self-sufficiency. In many areas they lived in cave networks called *souterrains*, which were partially above and partially below ground (Battaglia, 24). The Picts “were primarily farmers, producing crops by hand cultivation, obtaining milk, meat and wool from cattle, sheep and perhaps pigs. But they hunted deer and other game and harvested mussels, crabs and other food from the sea” (Battaglia, 26). Structures like the *souterrains* and barrows or hill-forts –as mentioned- are found across Europe, and suggest yet another “proof” for a wide-spread pre-hierarchical, pre-patriarchal culture that existed for thousands of years.

Some may wonder how the Picts and the Highlanders could be largely non-hierarchical and even matriarchal given that they governed through systems of kingship. As Battaglia and Condren, as well as other scholars note,

> *we should understand the restriction of Pictish sovereignty to males as applying only to the office of a “high king”. Both before and during the historical Pictish period, women were leaders of various peoples in north Britain. Indeed Tacitus says of the Britons generally at the end of the first century AD that “they recognize no distinction of sex among their rulers.”* (Battaglia, 30)

He goes on to tell the story of one Pictish leader, who was the Queen of the Island of Eigg in the Hebrides. She resisted the Christian missionizing of St. Donnann and had him “and the monks accompanying him assassinated in 617CE. In short we do not presume that men held all important positions in Pictish descent groups” (Battaglia, 31). On all Pictish sites, like the majority of Old European remains across the continent, concentric spirals, chevrons, and animals connect the sites from Before as parts of a matrilineal, and largely *matriarchal* society (Battaglia, 40).
My crofting and commoning Highlander ancestors, the Camerons, are from Salen on the Isle of Mull and the surrounding Islands of Argyll and Bute. In Gaelic cultures, “people belong to places rather than places belonging to people” (Menzies 2014, 28). So, Buinidh mi do Argyll. I trace this ancestry through my fathers’ mother, Patricia, who died when I was three. As I noted in the introduction, she has always been a bit of a mystery to me. My Opa (her husband) and my father both only tell me about her and maybe bits and pieces about her father, Alick Randell. No one could ever tell me much about her mother, Ethel Elizabeth Breen. She is Irish from her father, William Dawson Breen (pictured in the black frame to the left, below), whose story I will tell later. She is also Scottish, through her mother Elizabeth Ann Rosborough (pictured at the far right and bottom left, below).

Figure 9: William Dawson Breen and Elizabeth Ann Rosborough of Sarawak, Ontario.

50 Photos retrieved and used with permission from a personal connection on ancestry.ca.
Elizabeth’s mother was Sarah Agness Cameron. Sarah’s mother was Angess Cameron, and her father was John Cameron. Agness and her family seem to have lived in Salen on the Isle of Mull for generations. I am still working on this piece of my family story and am unsure about how enduring their connection to this Land is. I do know that they were part of Clan Cameron, were Highlanders, and subsistence farmers. **Crofters**, as they would have been known in Gaelic. As Alexander Mackenzie says in *The History of the Highland Clearances*, on the Isle of Mull “according to the Government Census of 1821, [the population] was 10,612; in 1841, [the population was] 10,064. In 1871, we find it reduced to 6441, and by the Census of 1881, now before us, it is stated at 5624, or a fraction more than half the number that inhabited the Island in 1821” (Mackenzie 1884, 228). Angess Cameron had left with her husband and child, Sarah Agness (my great, great, great grandmother) during this specific time period following the 1840s. I am still uncovering more about my family story from this area, but alongside searching for *whence I came* in this way, I have simultaneously been tracing the history of the Highland crofters and commoners to understand the relationship that my Ancestors had to the Land and to Spirit. Heather Menzies also studied Scotland in this way, tracing her ancestry and finding places in the Scottish landscape to return to, and to learn from. She says that

> *This deep knowledge of interconnected relationships, people to animals and animals to land, is part of my heritage. It’s a heritage of consciousness, and identity too, one that is connected to the land, even embedded in Creation.* (Menzies 2014, 29)

Like the Irish, the Scottish say they come from the *Tuatha* (“the people”) and were nomadic herder-farmers. Commoning was a way of life in the highlands. People were tied closely to the land, so much so that in the 1800s this earth-connection became more closely associated with Scottish identity in the mainstream. Menzies remarks about how everything in the landscape had

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51 In many stories the *Tuatha de Danaan* are also connected to the ancient Faery race
a name, “each with a story tucked into the Gaelic word or words for the place” (Menzies 2014, 17). These are yet another example of how we uncover the stories from Before. They are embedded in landscapes. As I learned from Anishnaabe friends here in Ontario, the language lives in the land, and even if we lose it, the land will teach it to us again. Both the ancient connection to the land and commoning are ways of “seeing” the past in a new light, but can also provide to us better ways forward; ways to resist the constant privatization and land-grabbing that has only increased over the last 500 years across the world. As Silvia Federici says, the idea of commons “expresses a broader conception of property, “referring to social goods-lands, territories, forests, meadows and streams, or communicative spaces-which a community, not the state or any individual, collectively owns, manages, and controls” (Federici 2011, 41-42). This, I would argue, is the natural state of humanness. We are meant to work together, and to find solutions together, connected to our Lands and each other. It is the unnatural interruption of the matriarchal structures of commoning by patriarchal, hierarchical ones that convinced so many of us that we cannot exist through community-reliance alone. This was not a simple process, or a peaceful one. In the next section I will address some of the more recent expressions of this hierarchical, patriarchal and colonial violence in Ireland and Scotland.

iv. An Gorta Mór and the Clearances: Two Instances of English Colonialism on the Isles

The English encounter with the people of Ireland, Wales and Scotland constituted an important watershed in the development of what both civilization and barbarism were, the former defined in relation to the latter, and formed the basis for their subsequent encounters with the Indigenous population of North America. (van Krieken 2011, 33)

The 19th century was a time of great institutional and directed violence by the English against the Scottish Highlanders and the Irish poor. Simultaneously, the early Canadian state was institutionalizing parallel violence against the Indigenous peoples of Turtle Island. By studying the colonialism that my Ancestors fled from -bringing them to Sarawak county and other lands that
were promised to stay in the hands of Indigenous peoples forever- I am working to see the “in-between” of dichotomies of innocence and purposeful, genocidal settlement. I think there is a truth in the in-between in many cases, but this does not minimize the effects of the violent colonialism that Indigenous peoples in Canada have been resisting for the better part of the last 500 years. What this can do is help us contextualize our current situation, find connection between our diverse worldviews, and struggle to know *whence we came* in order to uncover *where we are going*.

The Clearances were a process of replacing the *cottars* or *crofters* (self-reliant communities of farmers) with plantations of sheep farms often run by English settlers. Crofting can be understood as

*a system of land tenure that exists only in the Highlands and Islands of western Scotland, with a basis in traditional land use practices of the Scottish clan system. Although crofting communities differ throughout the seven crofting counties, crofters share a culture, history, and often language that binds them in a cohesive unit. Crofting is characterized by small individual landholdings and common grazing areas on land of marginal agricultural value, held in heritable tenancy.* (Lowman 2007, 665)

As the Enlightenment ideologies gave way to industrialization, people in the Highlands became increasingly at risk for continuing their *commoning* economies. Beginning in the late 1700s, the elite classes in Scotland (who were at this time, mostly English) aimed to turn crofting into a more viable economic activity. Thousands of Scots were forcibly removed from lands that they had lived on for generations and in some cases, for centuries. These crofters, seen as idle, poor and a “surplus population”, were “ejected […] from the inland and rural districts of the various counties to wretched villages, and rocky hamlets on the sea-shore” (Mackenzie 1884, “Isle of Mull: Tobermory”). They were either forced to live in squalor in these villages, where they could no longer farm or even keep a garden by law, or to move away. Great numbers of Highlanders left their homelands forever, hoping that life in North America would provide better for them (Harper 2004, 42). As always, the poorest crofters were most affected, and nearly “80,000 were removed
to America, Australia, Canada and Europe” (Lowman 2007, 670). The ways in which this coerced migration increased the ability of the English to secure great numbers of white settlers as land squatters in North America has not been studied in great detail. It has the potential to deepen our understanding of colonialism, underscoring how it has been most effective by disenfranchising and altering life-affirming cultures into death-centric ones. I have no interest in aligning what my ancestors did by settling in Ontario as “innocence”. Instead, I am tracing a cycle of violence. This removes no blame, but traces a history of upheaval, disenfranchisement and genocide. We must remember that this process “emerged in the Old World and, by way of the colonising process, was carried to the New World where it took root and expanded” (Stevenson 1992, 28). My disenfranchised ancestors were a reason that colonialism was so easily transferred.

*An Gorta Mór*, or the Great Famine, was one of several historical famines brought on the Irish deliberately by the English. Between the years of 1845-1852, Ireland was depopulated by 25%. At least half of that number (close to 1 million people) perished, the other half emigrated to the United States, Canada and Australia (Nusteling 2009, 57). In Ireland, “the sword became the English strategy of choice” (van Krieken 2011, 39). The Irish had become over time more than only socially inferior to the English, they were now seen as “culturally inferior and far behind the English on the ladder of development” (Stevenson 1992, 39). As Gerald of Wales set the tone of viewing the Irish as backwards and less than human, “such assertions gave licence to the systematic devastation of the Irish” (Stevenson 1992, 40, Van Krieken 2011, 40). In the centuries leading up to *An Gorta Mór*, the English routinely burned Irish crops, destroyed villages, and killed women and children. The English were becoming experts in the “theory and practice of total war [involving] premeditated terrorism” and genocidal tactics (Stevenson 1992, 40). Most of the English gentry (the people organizing these crimes against the rural and poor native Irish)
“believed that in dealing with the native Irish population, they were absolved from all normal ethical constraints” an ideology that the English used to later justify their land-grabbing, thefts and violence against Indigenous peoples in Canada (Stevenson 1992, 40). The practice of burning crops, of forced boarding schools, and other specific tactics against the Irish “was expropriated to north America where it was used against Indigenous peoples” (Stevenson 1992, 40). Stevenson continues, saying that for Indigenous peoples “such extreme devastation was in their eyes irrational and broke the codes of war” (Stevenson 1992, 40). This, in a nut-shell, is the genocidal truth of colonization. It is not a fair or just war, it is not the peaceful use of “empty lands”; it is genocide.

Like the story of my Scottish Cameron Ancestors, my Irish Ancestors have never had their story told. When I began this search, it made me question everything I thought I knew about myself and my heritage. It was a deep comfort to find reasons why the stories of my father’s mother’s mother’s side have never been told. Part of this is the patrilineage of current genealogy. But it was more about where she came from. Ethel Elizabeth Breen’s father, William Dawson Breen, was born in Woodstock, Ontario but lived for most of his life in Sarawak County, near present-day Owen Sound. His mother, Catherine Dawson Likely (later Breen) was pregnant with him while she and her husband, John Breen, fled Ireland at the height of the Famine with their children. Catherine and John were both from the south of Ireland, from Cork and Killarney. I wonder to what extent this story never came forward because of the struggle associated with it. I think that families often edit their history, removing these painful parts of the past. It is also very likely that because of anti-Irish racism, they did not want to deeply associate with their homeland once in Canada. By finding and telling their stories, I am revelling in the unspeakable becoming speakable (Keary 2012, 128). I am thankful that I have a more concrete answer for all of the Spirit-guidance I was given as a young child and teenager. I knew I was from Ireland before I could
prove it, before anyone told me I was. Every time I was told “you’re from Canada” it seemed to fuel my fire to show that we are from elsewhere. The fact that now I have a landscape and a homeland that matches my earliest “memories”, premonitions and dreams from childhood helps me to see this as an Ancestor-given duty. Knowledge comes in many forms, and it has taken me until this realization to value these early lessons as knowledge. Sometimes, “memory comes before knowledge” (Eber Hampton qtd in Absolon 2011, 76).

III. Undoing the Peaceful Settler Stereotype: Decolonizing and Transformative Learning about Kitchener-Waterloo’s Past

*Academic research, concerned as it is with knowledge, is a highly relevant site. As a community of researchers, if we do not contest the formidable patterns of settler-Indigenous relations that continue to define us, if we do not take a field trip into our own mutual history, we are bound to replicate – subconsciously or not – the unsettling historical pattern.* (Kovach 2009, 163)

*Without the stories, land turns into real-estate.* (Mark Abley quoted in Menzies 2014, 54)

As scholar and archaeologist Garry Warren shows, “the story of Canada is a predominantly Aboriginal one” (Warren, 154). As I was growing up in Kitchener-Waterloo, this fact was very absent from my learning. My parents -who to their credit, have struggled to change many of these ideas in the most recent years- raised me as they had been raised; upholding racist and colonial stereotypes about Indigenous peoples. Moreover, they (and by extension, my young self) “never saw a Native in Kitchener” and concluded that they were mostly “gone”, or even more so, “had never been there”. An exception to this invisibility of Indigenous peoples would be Owen Sound, Sauble Beach and other areas on the southern Bruce Peninsula where we rented a cottage- there, Native people were visible. As my mom recalled, all Indigenous people became categorized as “the drunk native guy on a bicycle, and by their unkempt homes.” My fathers’ mother, Patricia Miller (nee Randell) grew up in Owen Sound and had overtly racist views towards Indigenous
peoples. To this day, my relatives on the Millers’ side have on occasion referred to Native women as “squaws” - we undoubtedly have a lot of learning (and unlearning) still to do.

I have worked to explain to my parents what I have learned from my Indigenous friends and from scholarly works by other Indigenous people and their allies. One thing that has been clearly communicated to them is the horrific effects of colonialism and residential schools on Indigenous peoples. I tried to do this by making them think about what it would be like if colonialism happened to them. I know that they cannot ever fully empathize, but empathy is a basis to recognition and to change. So that’s where I started. I remember when my dad finally connected with the idea of me being taken away from him by government officials. He’s a strong man, a mason, and has somewhat of a ‘brick-like’ exterior. He had tears in his eyes imagining this prospect. As I noted in my introduction, Indigenous scholars and activists have set out a challenge for settler-activists. Find yourself a racist, right at your own dinner table. If we cannot talk to our own families and friends about the history of the land we are on, and its contestable future, then how can we possibly address the issue with ‘strangers’ and really practice transformative learning in our communities?

Part of the reason that this racism has persisted has been the inability of much of my family to attend any learning institution outside of public Canadian schools. Throughout history, “powerful people have often mobilized all at their disposal in defence of a particular reading of the past, however, memory remains fluid and untameable” (Farrugia 2012, 123). When my parents were in high school receiving this sub-par education, Indigenous people their age and younger were still being torn from their parents and forced into residential schools across Ontario (TRC 2015, 63). Indigenous people were actually made invisible to them. When I came to this conclusion
in my learning, I stopped being as angry at the lingering racism because I saw ways forward; ways to *change their thinking*.

But at what point is changing the thinking of racist genealogies enough? I believe the change in thinking is simply the first step (Fanon, 1963). When we change our stories, we change our reality. This is because “people make sense of their lives through developing accounts of themselves and their worlds. They organize and give meaning to their experiences through the storying of experience” (Brown 2007, 182). These are “baby steps” towards decolonization, but they are the necessary work that I am (and so many other educated settlers are) able to do. We must remove the burden of tracing these histories from Indigenous people alone. Working together, recommitting to the *two-row*[^52], is what this research is all about (Hill 2009, 386).

I am a firm believer from my experiences that it is the perspectives—the stories—of settler people that need adaptation. Settler people must come to an understanding that colonization has been happening for quite some time, and that we are active pieces of its *continuation*. This one strategy for decolonizing is “to create a sense of the complexity of colonial oppression and how it is systematically exercised […]” because we must strive to see that “this colonial system is of central importance if students [and all learners] are to begin to consider how it has historically oppressed and how it continues to oppress and then to understand how this can be disrupted” (Iseke-Barnes 2008, 124). Similarly, the title of J. Edward Chamberlin’s book is important, and it

[^52]: In David McLaren’s *Encountering the Other: Racism Against Aboriginal People*, he explains the traditional expression of the Two Row Wampum. He says about the treaty process that “The results of these Councils were chronicled in wampum belts that helped their keepers remember and recite the agreements between the Crown and First Nations with an accuracy and fluency that stunned the British. One such belt is called the Two-Row Wampum. Two rows of dark-coloured shells are separated by three rows of white. It symbolizes the path of the Crown and the Haudenosaunee as they travel together on the same river as allies, but neither interfering with the other. Their parallel paths are separated only by the three rows of shells representing peace, respect and trusting friendship” (McLaren 2007, 29). The two-row wampum was first used as an agreement between the Haudenosaunee and the Dutch, and was re-invoked here with the British Crown. These are the histories of promised partnership I am connecting to when referencing the *two-row*.  

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is becoming my “opening” for these conversations. We must ask, “if [you think] this is your land, then where are your stories?” (Chamberlin, 2003). My answer to myself about that was “in Europe, somewhere…”, so I spent a lot of time (maybe too much time for the short length of this project) trying to figure out where I came from and what my stories are.53

Amidst all this, what my parents – and many settler residents of Kitchener-Waterloo54- continue to struggle with, is the fact that we live on land that is part of an active land claim. We live on land that is rightfully Haudenosaunee land. We must also realize that no, we have not “always been here.” We must realize we live on stolen land55 and work towards reconciliation.

Very late in this project I came across Victoria Freeman’s work. She wrote a book about the history of her settler ancestors and their roles in colonialism called Distant Relations: How my Ancestors Colonized North America. In an interview with Freeman I found online, she said she believes that

we have a collective responsibility to unsettle the settler stories that are usually taught in schools, related in local histories, or passed down in families. Too often, these settler narratives are essentially creation myths—highly selective accounts of national or familial origins that are meant to instill pride and a sense of purpose. The stories most children learn speak of “settlers” and discovery and Puritan forefathers; they obliterate or minimize the ways that the Europeans pushed out the original people of this land. Let's be honest about what our people did: not just the political leaders or the government or the army, but also what ordinary settlers did or condoned (Freeman in interview, Common Place, 2002).

In keeping with Freeman’s words, the research I present here serves a few purposes. Firstly, I hope that it helps to continue to challenge my family members. In the larger scheme of things this is a miniscule goal, because aside from this, I hope that settler people begin to interrogate their false

53 But, as Iseke-Barnes suggests, the histories and stories of colonialism hidden in the past must be the focus of this research, or it risks becoming a project in “navel gazing” (Iseke-Barnes 2008, 124).
54 And all of “Canada”
55 Part of the “truth” in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. We must commit to redefining our truths and then (and/or simultaneously) work at reconciliation
claims to the land of Kitchener-Waterloo as I and some others have. Potentially by seeing an example of what this can look like, it will drive people to commit to similar research. One point remains true, “as the past slowly but inexorably slips through our fingers, we become all the more devoted to these sites where memory lurks” (Farrugia 2012, 123). And, as Chamberlin says,

\[ \text{None of us—white or black or yellow or red—will ever be able to rest in the Americas and call this place home until we acknowledge the brutal campaign, by design and by default, to deny the humanity of aboriginal peoples.} \] (Chamberlin, 59).

This critical family story research is a continuation of what will be a life-long struggle to teach all those calling Kitchener-Waterloo home that this “home” might not be theirs (and probably isn’t). Linda Tuhiwai Smith reminds us that “these contested accounts are stored within genealogies, within the landscape, within weavings and carvings, even within the personal names that many people carried” (Smith 1999, 33). She continues, noting that so many valid histories have been labelled as “oral” and thus somehow less legitimate than the histories which the Canadian state distributes and instills through the schooling system (Smith 1999, 33). By reading Indigenous histories of the land against those popular stories propagated by the Canadian state and its affiliates, we can begin to uncover hidden truths.

No one wants to see themselves as land grabbers. No one wants to think of themselves as the progeny of genocide. Yet, it is when we can face these hard truths about the past that we can find better ways forward. When I approached the question of whence I came in the Ontario context, I began to understand why my family had told me that I was “from here” but I also uncovered painful truths about my family pushing Haudenosaunee people off of the land that we think is

56 Smith is speaking broadly, I am noting the specific “Canadian” situation in which I find myself.
57 Truths hidden to many outside of or disconnected from Indigenous knowledge and oral history.
58 Through the Bock/Grody line, we have been in Waterloo Township since 1800. We have been in the Americas (ie. Pennsylvania) since the early 1700s.
“ours”. My location as a descendant of these original Mennonite and Loyalist “land-grabbers” grants me a unique responsibility. Although we have a rich history of “pioneer settlers” in Kitchener, this has rarely been challenged by anyone except Indigenous scholars, activists and allies. I can no longer distance myself from the horrific genocide, land acquisition and institutional (and physical) violence that happened on the land where I grew up. So, it is my duty to explore these stories as deeply as I can, and share them with whomever I can. I hope that this work will be replicated, critiqued and challenged so that I can learn more, and so that others can learn about where they come from. This is a contribution to a much larger conversation, and is simply a talking point. We have much work to do.

i. An Indigenized History of the Grand River Lands, to 1800

Up until the last few years, the histories I have been taught about Kitchener-Waterloo were absent of Indigenous people. In the first term of my Master’s degree at OISE, I took a course called Race, Space and Citizenship with Dr. Sherene Razack. We were tasked with writing about a specific space that we are familiar with, and from which we were to perform a spatial analysis of the racialized and colonially arranged relationships held and reproduced there. I chose a park near the neighbourhood where I grew up. For most of my life, the “Huron Natural Area” did not exist as it does today, a manicured, official, “natural” space. It was a dumping ground in the middle of an Industrial basin. Before that, it was a pine-plantation. Before that, it was the outskirts of a growing Mennonite settlement in nearby Doon. But before that, I learned, and for thousands of years, it was one of many seasonal hunting and fishing areas for the Haudenosaunee and before them, the Attawendaronk. My investigation of this space changed my relationship to it, because

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59 I know that part of this duty of decolonizing work is one given to me by my ancestors who have survived similar colonialisms in Ireland and Scotland. It is an honour to do this work for them, just as it is an honour and a duty to support the resistance and land claim efforts of my Indigenous friends.

60 Commonly known as the “neutral” nation.
it changed all of the stories that I knew about it. I began to uncover an under-recognized story about the origins of Kitchener-Waterloo. This story countered the declaration of *terra nullius*,\(^{61}\) demonstrating that the area where KW now stands was once a space where complex and varied nations of people lived for upwards of 13,000 years (Warrick 2012, 157). Peoples who -if not devastated by disease and dispersal by settler populations- would have continued to live on that land past the mid-1600s.

I have focused on the work of Indigenous scholars and Indigenous-led online projects which “attempt to reorder the portrayal of the Haudenosaunee […] in the historical record” (Hill 2009, 486). As I have learned, “nearly all of the existing secondary sources were produced by anthropologists and historians approaching the issues from the perspectives of their own Canadian and American cultures and assumptions” (Hill 2009, 486). For this reason, my short history of time Before white settlement in what is now Kitchener-Waterloo will borrow from and re-tell aspects of the stories told by those *other than* settler anthropologists and historians. Susan Hill points out that most of the sources written on this topic (and especially about Waterloo region) are written by settlers. Looking for Indigenous perspectives on the past is important, as is re-reading and re-interpreting the sources that these settler anthropologists and historians\(^{62}\) have utilized. As I indicated earlier in Part I, we can uncover much about the past by reading between the lines written over other stories.

The Attawendaronk were the earliest inhabitants of the area, and as aforementioned, lived near Ohswe:ken\(^{63}\) (“Place of the Willows”, the name given to the Grand River by the Haudenosaunee) with close ties to their Haudenosaunee and Anishnaabe neighbours. Before the

\(^{61}\) Empty land

\(^{62}\) Some settler anthropologists and historians approach their research from a heart place, and work to assist Indigenous struggles for sovereignty.

\(^{63}\) Hill, 2009.
epidemics brought to the area by colonists in the 1630s, it is estimated that they numbered around 40,000 and “were distributed among 40 or so villages and several small hamlets that were concentrated east of the Grand River, as far west as St. Clair” (Hall 1988, 14). Some stories by anthropologists note the “complete annihilation” of the Attawendaronk during the epidemics, but Indigenous scholars and oral histories recognize that survivors became part of other nations. As well, Iroquoian creation stories note that the Attawendaronk were the most ancient ancestors of all Iroquoian nations (Hall 1988, 14). I hope to keep learning more about the Attawendaronk peoples who were the first to make a home where I do now, and were some of the first to resist colonization by refusing to participate in the colonially-driven fur wars.

From what I understand, from the 1630s until the late 1700s, the area was sparsely populated by groups of Haudenosaunee hunters and fishermen who harvested animals on the land seasonally (Good 1998, xxxiii). In the 1780s, “permanent Haudenosaunee settlements were made along the [Grand] river” (Hill 2009, 490). These settlements were part of the “original government, the Haudenosaunee Confederacy Council” which governed the territory following the American Revolutionary War (Hill 2009, 490). Haudenosaunee right to the territory was confirmed through various treaties between the Haudenosaunee and the crown “beginning with the 1701 Albany (Nanfan) Treaty, often referred to as the Beaver Hunting Grounds Treaty” (Hill 2009, 483). From this history we can realize that Haudenosaunee rights to the land surrounding Ohswe:ken actually precede the famous Haldimand Proclamation. This promised territory was much more substantial than that promised by Haldimand after the Revolutionary War, and encompassed “north of Lake Ontario and surrounding Lake Erie, encompassing all of southern Ontario, most of central Ontario, and much of the Ohio River Valley” (Hill 2009, 484). In 1784, following the British defeat during the revolutionary war, many of these lands were relinquished to the Americans without
consultation with the Haudenosaunee (Hill 2009, 483). This had a devastating effect on the 6 Nations or Iroquois confederacy (at the time), separating the numerous different Nations between a constructed border between the 13 Colonies and Upper/Lower Canada (Taylor 2002, 58). This was a violent process of dislocation, which “also promoted malnutrition and disease, combining to reduce Iroquois numbers by a third, from a pre-war 9,000 to a postwar 6000” (Taylor 2002, 58).

The Halidmand Proclamation followed this forced movement and violent upheaval of Indigenous communities across south-western Ontario. Hill notes that “some people erroneously assert that Governor Haldimand “gave” the Six Nations this land when in reality he was simply reaffirming promises made by the British eighty-three years prior,” so claims that this “promise” was never a formal legal decision can be countered (Hill 2009, 484). Haldimand’s reaffirmation of the previous legal promise from October, 1784 states:

*Whereas His Majesty having been pleased to direct that in consideration of the early attachment to his cause manifested by the Mohawk Indians and of the loss of their settlement which they thereby sustained - that a convenient tract of land under his protection should be chosen as a safe and comfortable retreat for them and others of the Six Nations, who have either lost their settlements within the Territory of the American States, or wish to retire from them to the British - I have at the earnest desire of many of these His Majesty’s faithful Allies purchased a tract of land from the Indians situated between the Lakes Ontario, Erie and Huron, and I do hereby in His Majesty's name authorize and permit the said Mohawk Nation and such others of the Six Nation Indians as wish to settle in that quarter to take possession of and settle upon the Banks of the River commonly called Ouse or Grand River, running into Lake Erie, allotting to them for that purpose six miles deep from each side of the river beginning at Lake Erie and extending in that proportion to the head of the said river, which them and their posterity are to enjoy for ever.* (sixnations.ca, 2016).

Although this Proclamation has been studied at great length, I think there is still much to be uncovered from it, and applied today to the ongoing land claims forwarded by 6 Nations (ontario.ca, 2013). Firstly, it illustrates again the vast territories that the Haudenosaunee (and other nations part of the Iroquois Confederacy) lost during the wars between the 13 Colonies and early Canada. This cannot be seen as another casualty of war, but as direct and purposeful land theft on
behalf of the early United States. It must also be seen as intentional disenfranchisement of the Indigenous populations which were then “welcomed” into Canada, into lands where their histories were largely divorced. This is how “the Grand River became home to members of all Six Nations along with refugees from other nations such as the Delaware, Nanticoke, and Tutelo” (Hill 2009, 484). The Haudenosaunee (and other members of the 6 Nations) are clearly promised the lands of the Grand River “which them and their posterity are to enjoy forever” (Haldimand, 1784). “Forever” in this case lasted about 50 years.

By 1840, extensive settlement had occurred on the lands promised to 6 Nations. Some of those settlers were my great, great, great, great grandparents. They pushed Indigenous people further and further from the areas that later became Waterloo Township. Susan Hill summarizes this process,

In short, the Grand River Haudenosaunee were repeatedly dispossessed of land during the early 1800s—over 600,000 acres. Starting in the 1830s, Crown officials told Haudenosaunee leadership the only way they could protect Haudenosaunee land against squatters and land speculators was to have the Haudenosaunee sell certain tracts, allowing for legal white settlement in those areas [emphasis mine]. The government also pushed for the council to subdivide the land into individual holdings, making Indian land more consistent with English common law—and presumably easier to defend against squatters in colonial courts. (Hill 2009, 485)

By looking “between the lines” of the Mennonite and Loyalist histories written over the truth of Haudenosaunee land ownership, I have learned about the process of this land acquisition through the illegal sale of lands to settler squatters.

ii. The Bocks and The Shupes: My Family in Waterloo-Township, the Haldimand Land Grab and Decolonizing the Lies of “Peaceful” Settlement

Indigenous scholar Polly O. Walker says that in Indigenous methods of conflict resolution, “sometimes people will go back for generations to describe some ancient wrongdoing and a history of relationships. It is proper, because it gets to the bottom of things” (Walker 2004,
It is all too convenient for settlers in Kitchener-Waterloo to forget our history of relationships. It is not a particularly kind one, however the myths propagated by the “pacifist” Mennonite founders would have us believe otherwise. I also use this quote from Walker to underline the necessity of ongoing conflict resolution on the lands surrounding the Grand River. The 6 Nations land claim that began with road blocks in Caledonia is still ongoing (Hill 2009, 479). By interrogating the stories of Kitchener-Waterloo’s origins, we can maybe get to some (additional) roots of this conflict. We also need to honour the fact that this is a conflict; that this is an ongoing issue with historical roots, and that it requires resolutions and reconciliation.

Ezra Eby wrote *From Pennsylvania to Waterloo: A Biographical History of Waterloo Township* between 1895 and 1896. From what I can tell, this work seems to be the basis of most of the histories written about Kitchener-Waterloo. Eby was a descendent of the original Eby’s who travelled from Pennsylvania to Waterloo Township around 1810 (Eby, 1896). My ancestors, the Shupes, were some of the first people to make the “arduous journey” from Pennsylvania to Waterloo. The vast majority of these early settlers were Mennonites who had fled Europe nearly a century earlier to escape persecution. Their beliefs stem from the Anabaptist heresy, a group of Christian-like believers who were not “Christian enough” for the Catholic Church or the later Protestant Church (Eby 1896, 17). When William Penn established a settlement in early Pennsylvania, the “refugees” fled from their respective homes in the south of Germany, France and parts of England (Eby 1896, 17). Those that fled were Mennonites, Quakers, Puritans and other off-shoots of Christianity that the European states viewed as “non-conformists” (Eby 1896, 17).

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64 The Waldensian and Anabaptist heresies have much potential as additional insight into the spiritual control that the Catholic (and other powerful sects, like Protestantism) Church enacted across Europe and most of the world. Beyond this project in scope is investigating how “Christian” control over spirituality has been an agent of colonialism world-wide, but by pushing various sects out of Europe, this effect can be seen quite obviously.
Eby’s book contains the short biographies of some 8,500 individuals (Breithaupt 1925, 13). Two of the earliest “settlers” from Pennsylvania to take over land near the Grand River are my 5th great-grandfathers, John Shupe and Jacob R. Bock (Eby 1896, preface III). He says that Shupe’s family had been in the Eastern coast of the US since around 1700, and that in “1801 he, with his wife and family moved to Canada and settled in Waterloo county, on the east bank of the grand river, near Freeport, where he died November 8th, 1812 and [his wife] died March 21st, 1825. To them was born a family of seven children” (Eby 1896, 477-78). Jacob Bock was also born to a Mennonite family who resided in Pennsylvania since around 1750 (Eby 1896, 283). Eby says that Bock “came to Canada when a mere lad and made his home with his uncle, Christian Reichart, who resided at Freeport, Ontario. He was married to Catharine, daughter of old John and Elizabeth (Diefenbacher) Shupe” (283). Where Reichart had built his home was the banks of the Grand River (Eby 1896, 478). The Bock land is said to have added to this, extending the Reichart “property” (Eby 1896, 478).65

Figure 10: “The Bock House” on the Grand River.

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65 Figure 10 was retrieved and reproduced with permission from a personal connection on ancestry.ca.
It is not plausible that they decided to take up land in the most densely forested areas; instead they took over land that was partially cleared to make way for fishing and other activities along the river-bed. Jacob Bock is also known as the “earliest” Mennonite ceramics maker to live in the area, and when I was wading through the lengthy resources about him on Ancestry.ca I came across the Census from 1851 where he described himself as a “potter and craftsman” (Ontario Census Returns 1859, p69, Hege 1986). He was initiated as the Deacon of Blenheim Mennonite Church in 1841, and was a farmer for income (Burkholder 2010, pp280, Fretz 1989).

Eby says that he is not interested in telling the stories of all residents of Waterloo Township, only “of such who formed the most conspicuous part in the assistance of forming the early settlements” or those settlers who most effectively took what the Crown saw as empty land and turned it into economically viable projects like farms and mills, or in Bock’s case, the making of pottery and the dispersal of religious observances (Eby 1896, 17). Even though Eby addresses the confusion over rights to the land (he notes at points that deeds to the land were not actually theirs, and had to be purchased from the Crown), he focuses more on telling a mythologized version of the settlers, making them “heroes” who are subduing the unforgiving Canadian wilderness:

*No other class of settlers have ever been known to be so universally successful. They have always had the extraordinary fortune to select the very best part of the country in which they settled and with those natural advantages combined with their great industry which has ever resulted in making the locality of the state or province in which they settled the best to be found.* (Eby 1896, 19)

As I have learned from Indigenous scholars, historians and oral history, the area of Waterloo Township was already “settled” by Haudenosaunee people. He also lauds the “innocence” of these Mennonite and Loyalist settlers, noting that they were fleeing persecution in America because they refused to take sides or fight in the Revolutionary War (or, in the case of Loyalists, had sided with
the British), which works to obscure the responsibility of choosing to come into the area that is now Waterloo (Eby 1896, 19). They may have been pushed out of Pennsylvania, and out of the United States, but it was their choice to come to the area of the Grand River and settle on this fertile land (Eby 1896, 24). When he says that in 1816 or so, “Berlin was a dense and impassible swamp, in habited by wolves, bears, foxes and other wild animals” we are given the illusion that it was an uninhabitable place, one in which even the most wild savage could not survive (Eby 1896, 46). It both makes it seem historically implausible that Indigenous people would have lived in the area, and chocks up points of bravery for these early “pioneers”, featuring heroism rather than land theft. They came to this “the-way-out-of-the-world country” because they did not want to compete with other settlers for the profits that fertile farm land could provide them (Eby 1896, 27). They chose this area on purpose. We must not obscure land theft as accidental or caused because these settlers had “no choice”. Reading Eby’s book we can realize that they had many choices, and out of all of their options, they chose to purchase the “cheap” land of Block 2 on the Haldimand Tract, along the fertile banks of the Grand River (Breithaupt 1925, 14).

He also gives us a glimpse into how settlers viewed Indigenous peoples at the time. For instance, when my relatives travelled through the lower part of Ontario before reaching Galt, they would have passed Hamilton. He says that “they were informed that there was an encampment of Indians near Hamilton who were particularly savage against all coming from across the boundary” (Eby 1896, 45). The author seems to breathe a sigh of relief, adding “fortunately, however, these savages had left the day previous to their coming” (Eby 1896, 45). He also talks about how Indigenous peoples were a consistent sight in the early days of Waterloo Township, and that they lived in relative “peace” with the early settlers. He says that

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66 The name given to Kitchener before the anti-German sentiments following WWI.
The settlers had no want of venison or fish. For a small loaf of bread and a six penny crock of thick milk the Indians would bring them the nicest quarter of venison or a large basket well filled with the finest speckled trout. In those early times the Indians were very numerous and if kindly treated would never injure any one. Parents often left their children alone and the Indian children would play with them and the squaws would take care of the white children. As a rule the young people always rejoiced to see the Indians come. Often during cold nights when inmates of the house had retired to their respective places of rest, their kitchen would be taken possession of by the Indians who would spend the night sleeping warm and comfortable around the large fire place. (Eby 1896, 47)

From this we can see that there was a relationship between Indigenous peoples and setters in early Kitchener-Waterloo, although Eby is overlooking the coercion and violence that often supported these interactions. We should question his romanticism and “honourable mention” of this relationship, especially as he describes it in the second part of this quote. What dispossession had made a warm fire in a settler’s house preferable to one in their own home? How common was it for settlers to peacefully allow Indigenous peoples to take up their living rooms at night? I raise these questions about Eby’s portrayal of the relationship because from other sources, we know that violence was not absent from this area. In 1840, William Ellis (a local justice of the peace) “chanced upon an Indian tied to a tree and two white men whipping him… [near Blair road] a little to the west of where Preston now stands” (Good 1998, 161). Reginald E. Good recounts another story about Old Jack who was one of the Indigenous inhabitants actually named by Eby. Good (quoting Eby) “describes an incident that occurred in 1808; when Nathaniel Dodge built a grist mill, Old Jack and other Mississauga’s swiftly burned it down” (Good 1998, 158). When John Eby began a similar construction project, Old Jack threatened a group of young Mennonites, and when they did not leave the area he shot one of Eby’s companions in the arm. Thus, another myth contributing to settler invisibility can be lifted; colonization was not a welcomed process and was one that various Indigenous groups and individuals resisted and organized against. Also, in 1808 Mennonites complained that some people in the town traded spirits to the Mississaugas, making
them drunk, scary, beasts (Good 1998, 159). Old Jack’s words sum-up this historical relationship better than any amount of “reading between” Eby’s words can do. He illustrates the process of land thievery that was begun by the Mennonites, saying

*Before the white man landed on our shores the red men of the forest were numerous, powerful, wise and happy. In those days nothing but the weight of many winters bore them down to the grave... Then a strange people landed, wise as the gods, powerful as thunder, with faces white as snow. Our fathers held out to them the hand of friendship. The strangers then asked for a small piece of land on which they might pitch their tents; the request was cheerfully granted. By and by they begged for more, and more was given to them. In this way they have continued to ask, or have obtained by force or fraud, the fairest portions of our territory* (Good 1998, 155).

In 1840, following the alleged rape of a white woman by an Anishnaabe (Mississauga) man, Indigenous people were banned from Waterloo Township (Good 1998, 160). When the Indian Act passed about 35 years later, Indigenous peoples would be legally restricted from passing freely within the area, would be forced to send their children to abusive and traumatizing “schools”, and by law, declared second class citizens. It was not until the last forty or so years, as Shawn Wilson and other Indigenous scholars remark, that Indigenous people were able to enter Canadian post-secondary institutions and begin “formal” research around colonialism, Indigenous worldviews, history, and resistance.67

In 2006, “a small group of people from [Susan H. Hill’s] community of Ohswe:ken (Six Nations of the Grand River Territory) reclaimed a parcel of land that is part of [their] historic territory and adjacent to [their] contemporary settlement” (Hill 2009, 479). This resulted in “national and international attention, with many people wondering why Six Nations people would feel justified in stopping construction of a housing project and refusing to leave the land” (Hill 2009, 479). The more that we learn and share about the historical relevance and justification of this action the less likely people will be to submit to the ideologies similar to those presented by

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67 Among many other important endeavours. (Wilson 2008, 52-61)
Christie Blatchford in her book *Helpless: Caledonia’s Nightmare of Fear and Anarchy, and How the Law Failed All of Us*. I attended the University of Waterloo when protestors took over the stage where Blatchford was supposed to speak about her book in 2010. At the time, I was not ready to be one of those protestors, as I was just beginning to learn about colonialism and Indigenous resistance in Canada. Now, I look back and am so proud that there was enough bravery on and around campus to show her that, as Dan Kellar remarked, “ignoring history is a dangerous thing to do” (Buckler, 2010). This claim is on-going. More information about it (from the perspective of the Ontario government) can be found online, through the official Ontario website (https://www.ontario.ca/page/six-nations-grand-river). I would suggest working to learn about this land claim, and ways to support it, through Indigenous-led projects and resources like the interactive map of the Haldimand Tract68 and the wordpress blog, 6NationsSolidarity.69

**IV. Closing Remarks**

I have attempted to link the various histories of colonialism that I am personally connected to. From uncovering a pre-historic Europe, to analyzing the life-affirming beliefs of my Irish and Scottish ancestors, An Gorta Mór and the Highland clearances, to how colonialism came to Kitchener-Waterloo by way of my Mennonite ancestors- this is a complex and incomplete story. My intention, and one I hope other people will take upon themselves, is to keep challenging and learning more about these stories. In this way, my “project” will never be complete. What I do know for sure is that I could have learned nothing without my relationships. If I had not experienced Marija Gimbutas, Annine van der Meer and other works by feminist anthropologists and matriarchal scholars, I would not be able to see the process through which patriarchy as a

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68 https://6nsolidarity.wordpress.com/2012/05/14/new-interactive-map-haldimand-tract/
69 https://6nsolidarity.wordpress.com/
death-centric system of societal organization forced itself into existence. I would still consider
patriarchy (and colonialism, capitalism and its oppressive siblings) was natural systems, and
worse; I would not be able to see a way forward by reaffirming humanity’s matriarchal history
with its life-affirming worldviews. Without meeting Mary Condren and hearing her speak so
elocutently about the ancient Irish past, I would not have been able to connect the expansive and
complex interworking’s of English colonialism against my ancestors there, and how it was brought
to Canada by essentially the same process of genocide, land theft and institutional violence.
Without her work, I would not know that my pre-Celtic ancestors’ beliefs mirrored the worldviews
of Indigenous peoples worldwide.

Some of my relationships have made a larger impact on my project that others. My close
friend, Natasha Pittman, is a survivor of the continued 60s scoop that removed Indigenous children
from their parents under the guise of “protection” by the state. Her life-long struggle to find her
community and her family is a root of inspiration for my project. She had no choice but to take on
this bitter-sweet work, because she needed to know where she was from. Again, “memory comes
before knowledge”- even when Natasha was unsure about her identity, she kept searching until
she found her home (Absolon quoting Eber Hampton, 76). The difference is that I have had a
choice to take on this project, while so many Indigenous people are forced to wade through
colonialism in order to survive. The painful past in so many ways constructs our present situation.
Similar work as what Natasha has done, or what I am doing, has the ability to reconstruct a
commons of knowledge about colonialism, and thus, a commons of knowledge about how we move
forward.

Part II of my project is focused on time I spent with Natasha this past January in her
Kwak’waka’wakw community of ’Yalis or Alert Bay, an island off the northern tip of Vancouver
Island. Her story is one that should be told, so that it can continue (as it already has begun) to inspire other people to do this difficult work that she has carried her entire life. Our relationships help reconstruct our stories. My voice will be largely absent in Part II, as the knowledge and stories that I am sharing are coming as uninterrupted from Natasha and her family as I can manage. Without Natasha as my close friend and sister, I would still be confused about my role as a settler, but also as an Indigenous ally. I could have also missed the decolonizing importance of struggling to uncover where we are from. This is why our relationships are so important: they teach us things books and research and history can never communicate.
PART II - Where We Are: Learning from Relationships

Indigenous and feminist scholars alike have stressed the importance of our storytelling and our relationships in pursuing new knowledge (Wilson 2008, Keary 2012, King 2003, Maynes 2008). When considering decolonization as Tuck and Yang describe it, we have to foster an *ethic of incommensurability*. Part of this means we need to re-build and re-right our relationships (Smith 1999, 28). I think that we are in dire need of a way to “see” healthy relationships: with each other, the past, the Land, and Spirit. One way to learn in this way is to look at our relationships, and the stories that they can teach us. It is decolonizing because changing our stories is one of the first steps to working towards actualized decolonization in the form of Land repatriation and Indigenous sovereignty. The conversations I am sharing below, and my reflections on my learning and relationship with my close friend Natasha, contribute to the ongoing discussion of decolonization in the academy, and hopefully, outside of it.

I have included this collection of stories as Part II: Where We Are for a few reasons. For one, Alert Bay was physically *where I was* to do this learning alongside Natasha. As well, focusing on our relationships and Natasha’s repatriation story as “*where we are*” is meant to emphasize the living and ongoing reality of these stories. Rather than providing an unequivocal answer to my guiding question, I repeat it here to emphasize the contextual nature of decolonizing work. It is also meant as a way to frame the learning I did while spending time with Natasha and her relatives in Alert Bay. I ask of myself, and ask others: “How does engaging in honest, supportive and accountable relationships help us envision and work towards life-affirming futures?” More simply put, how are we learning and transforming as a result of our relationships?
I. Our Friendship

The hardest part of writing this story was realizing that so many of the important conversations I’ve had with Natasha and others have been ‘carried with me’ in my heart, but aspects of them have been lost from distinction in my memory. What matters is the stories that we do have with us. One thing is for sure, we both have strong belly-button knowing – we remember our mothers, and their mothers, and their mothers- and that strong umbilical tie has and is pulling us together in friendship, and towards our Ancestors. Moreover, through this connection and our relationship, we are finding ways forward.70

![Figure 11: Natasha and I at a wedding in Alert Bay.](image)

I have had the chance to record one of our conversations that sums up a lot of what we’ve talked about in the past. Following this, I will recount some of the things that I remember from our

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70 Figure 11: photo taken by Natasha, shared here with her consent.
early friendship, and moments that stand out for me because of how they’ve helped me learn and grow.\textsuperscript{71}

\textbf{Zoe:} So we’ve talked about a lot about this in the past, but what did you know about your identity growing up? Like you’ve told me you would always say you were Hawaiian to people before you knew where your mom was from.

\textbf{Natasha:} I always knew that I was brown and that my parents were white. So it was always known that I was adopted. And my parents were always really open with talking about it and sharing with me what they knew. My adoption was closed so their information was limited. The information we had to go on is that I was a little Hawaiian baby born to a drug-addicted prostitute that could not take care of me. So yeah growing up I always knew I was different but I didn’t feel right feeling bad about it because I had a really good childhood, so I didn’t feel that I had the right to be sad.

But yeah I always kind of wondered and always wanted to search for my biological family. They knew I had some Native in me. It was suggested that I was Hawaiian so we had thought for a long time that I was Kanaka which is another tribe on the West coast that came from Hawaii. I remember calling someone… I found an author of a book that we had on the Kanaka – he had done research on the Kanakas- so I found him, and found a lady I thought was my family and called her and she had said that she had already gone through this with another son and that she wasn’t willing to go through it again, and hung up on me. That was like a double abandonment in my mind. That really hurt for a long time.

And I think when the adoption records were unsealed and I could apply for identifying information… Like that hurt kept me from finding, from calling because I looked up when I found my last name and knew that my last name as Johnson and my mom said she was from Alert Bay I remember looking up Johnson in Alert Bay and there only being a few people here. But I was too afraid to call. Yeah, like intuitively I knew that my mom was gone and I just stopped looking for a long time, and life took over.

And that was when I decided to come out [to Alert Bay] two years ago. Just walk on the ground that she used to walk on. I didn’t really expect or know what I was going to find. So it’s been quite the journey. There has always been that void that, not knowing-who-I-was. Especially growing up in predominately white communities where people are like… Like I always stood out.

\textbf{Zoe:} Yeah and people always ask “where you’re from”…

\textbf{Natasha:} Yeah. “You’re so exotic looking” and like even though looking back there were lots of compliments but I would always just freeze and feel like I would have to tell them that I’m a little abandoned baby! So I just started telling people I was Hawaiian. Years ago- probably in high school. Then when I found out that I was not Hawaiian, and when I found out I was Native and found out the differences between nations as well. Because when I grew up my parents tried to involve my ‘culture’ in my life, and they didn’t know the difference between Indians either! So they hired some local Indians off the Rez to teach me about my culture.

\textbf{Zoe:} Like from Ontario?

\textbf{Natasha:} Yeah, yeah. I think they were Mohawk…So I learned about… sweat lodges, and powwows, and went to my first powwow… And yeah I dunno I still had that thought that like “you’re Indian, and this is what an Indian is”. When I moved closer to Six Nations and experienced some racism, I would identify just being Hawaiian and not Native, and say, “you know that I had a little black in me,” that’s what I told people. So coming out here and getting in touch with my roots that void was filled.

My first time in the Big House, I’ve never felt something so deep in my core. I’ve always felt energies in my chest, but nothing has ever went so deep inside me as when I heard the men on the

\textsuperscript{71} A picture of Natasha (right) and me (left) from the wedding we attended at the end of my time there (mentioned in the conversation with Vera Newman).
log the first time. And I saw the dancers, and I just became a whole person it felt like. The first time an Indian blanket was put on my shoulders I remember crying and saying this is like the best hug I’ve ever gotten. And connecting with my mom that I never got to meet, feeling her presence around me. It’s an identity!

When I got my Indian name…That was one of the best days of my life. I felt like so much healing happened that day. I also, like… I’m still scared of energies but I’m much more comfortable with my gifts and feeling energies around. It just makes me happy and makes my spirit happy when I’m in my home territory. So even though I was given a lot, everything I wanted as a kid, there was always that void that couldn’t be filled ‘til I found out who I was, who I am!

Zoe: What did you learn in school about native people? Do you remember learning anything?

Natasha: I don’t remember learning anything about Indians. I remember… I remember the story of like people finding this Land but I don’t remember anything about Indians, I didn’t know what a residential school was… Yeah I didn’t know anything about Indians! I grew up with that Hollywood perspective of what an Indian was.

Zoe: Yeah me too… I remember when I was really, really little learning about people in longhouses and building longhouses out of Popsicle sticks-

Natasha: Yeah and that Indians lived in teepees!

Zoe: So, what changes have you noticed in yourself since moving to Alert Bay?

Natasha: I’ve never really been super secure in who I am and that I’m doing the right thing until moving here. Especially when I was on the move out here. Someone asked me this week if it was a hard decision to make and I said that it wasn’t even a decision to come out here like, I knew that I was coming out here and that it was what needed to happen. It just all happened a lot sooner than I expected and in a different way than I expected. It was the hardest thing to actually do, to leave my mom and my family and my friends and the security of having a job for 8 years at the salon… To pick up and move across the province was hard enough but I think it was a stepping stone to be able to move across the country. And when I think about that, I can just see how everything bad that has happened to me has brought me to this point- it happened for a reason. I couldn’t make those connections before. I just feel whole and like I’m exactly where I need to be, and with who I need to be with. I’m still not sure why I’m here but I feel an overwhelming sense of responsibility. And yeah, I just know I belong here.

Zoe: Is there anything else you want to talk about, about what you’re learning since coming out here?

Natasha: Yeah! The anger that happened when I found out that my papers were full of lies. That yeah, my mom had addiction issues but directly resulting from residential schools. The fact that I grew up thinking that I was an abandoned baby and that my mom didn’t love me and finding out that that wasn’t the case and that she wanted to keep me, that I was the first baby that she wanted to keep. Like, that changes core values that you have. Like I’ve been telling myself since I was little that my own mom couldn’t love me, who else could ever love me? When I found out that she did love me, and that she did want to keep me, and finding out how fucked up her childhood was… And having an overwhelming anger towards white people.

But then, feeling guilty about that because white people raised me, they did everything they could for me and they are amazing people who happen to be white too! So dealing with that and keeping that in check and balanced. Yeah it was just… learning about the 60s scoop and learning that it wasn’t just the 60s. The more I find out about Indigenous issues, it makes me really angry, which in turn makes me realize I’m exactly where I need to be. That was a big deal though, when I found out that my papers were a lie. My [adoptive] dad was a social worker and worked for the government his whole life, and worked for child and family services his whole life… Like he’s an honest man, he did whatever he could for the children- and to know that blatant lies were put in my papers, I just I don’t
understand how people could do that. And how lucky I was to be one of the lucky ones and be placed in a good home. So yeah that was a big one too.

I met Natasha about 5 years ago now, in the second or third year of my Undergrad. She was a mutual friend of my close friend, Ethan Jackson. During a Litha (summer solstice) community gathering that I had co-organized with Ethan, I saw Natasha across the Circle. She came over to me and gave me a little bear carved out of beeswax and told me it was a gift for the Altar. I was stunned, people usually bring their own items to leave on the Altar for the night, and then bring them home with them. Natasha, being who she is, brought me a beautiful gift and she and her partner at the time noted that it was a thank-you for the effort of putting on the gathering. That night we bonded over ceremony and have really been friends since. During extreme personal difficulty in my own life a few years ago, I ended up at Natasha’s dinner table nearly every night, just for someone to talk to who understood very deeply what I was experiencing. It was around this time that Natasha had come to an intense place in the process of finding her mom, Marion. There were a few nights where board games and shenanigans were the only things that could help us feel better. And there were quite a few where tears were the healing medium. Healing is a complicated thing, but I am blessed to have had someone as wise as Natasha at my side during that period of time. And I am also blessed to have been able to be there to support her when she needed it too.

II. Sharing Natasha’s Story of Repatriation

Raven Sinclair is an Indigenous scholar and educator from the Gordon First Nation in Treaty #4 area of southern Saskatchewan. Part of the focus of her scholarship has been around the repatriation of Indigenous children and more generally, the continuation of colonialism after residential schools by way of the 60s scoop, acquisition of Indigenous children from their homes under the guise of “protection” through Child and Family Services and the child-welfare system
Sinclair says that aside from issues of racial identity being inadequately addressed so far in scholarship, “the voice of adult Aboriginal transracial adoptees has [also] been absent in the literature, with the exception of a small body of grey literature that can be found on the internet” (Sinclair 2007, 69). With Natasha’s encouragement, I have included a piece of her repatriation story in my thesis not only to show the value of our friendship and of the inspiration Natasha has sparked in me, but also give voice and space to the ongoing reality of repatriation issues in Canada. Sinclair shows that there is a saddening lack of voices like Natasha’s, whose story tells of her re-connection with her relatives, community and Land base. She continues, noting that “resiliency amongst Adoptees is an area that beckons inquiry. The influence of repatriation to birth culture is another that needs exploration. It appears that many adoptees, at some point along their journey, found a level of truth and certainty within Aboriginal culture that provided a critical source of healing and renewal” (Sinclair 2007, 75). It has been my intention to share how I have seen these things happen for Natasha. It has not been an easy journey, and I know that the transition to moving to a completely different area of Canada, from knowing everyone to knowing only a few people (at first) has been very difficult for Natasha at times. But, as talking to her relatives has shown me, the more that she opens herself up to her home in Alert Bay, the more healing has and is taking place.

Figure 12: Sign welcoming people to Alert Bay.
III. A Brief Story About 'Y̓alís (Alert Bay)

When I first got to 'Y̓alís, Natasha, her partner Stephanie and myself sat down and watched documentaries about the history of Alert Bay. I had never had a chance to see the films before because Natasha had purchased the DVD’s from 'Y̓alís’ cultural centre, U’mista, after moving from Ontario. I remember feeling overwhelmed by how much I did not know about Natasha’s Kwakwa̱ka̱’wakw culture. This fear dissipated early, because upon meeting some of Natasha’s relatives I realized that I was here to listen, and that it was okay that I didn’t have a lot of context. But there are some things that I remember from those DVD’s and that I want to share here as a bit of background. The films were all made by and feature ’Namgis people who have lived in or around Alert Bay their entire lives.

The first film we watched is called *Box of Treasures*, directed by Chuck Olin and the U’mista Cultural Centre. It was about the legalized theft of Kwakwa̱ka̱’wakw ceremonial regalia, masks and other objects by the Canadian Government under the Indian Act and the banning of the potlatch. In 1921, Chief Dan Cranmer held a large potlatch on Village Island and many of the people who attended were arrested, and their masks and regalia were confiscated by the Canadian government. I remember talking to Natasha’s relative, Wayne Alfred, who told me about this process. He said that he remembered a story from his grandpa, about their relationship with the Japanese:

Yeah and we were pretty good friends with the Japanese too, when they were here. My grandpa told me a lot of stories about them. Twenty years before that we were running around trying to sell our masks because they [the early Canadian governments] were going to take them anyways and burn them so we thought we better sell them while we still have a chance at least get a couple bucks out of it anyways. So after they [the British] practiced on us they did the same thing to the Japanese. After the war there they were running around selling their

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72 Figure 12 is a personal photo from my trip. It is the sign at the wharf in Alert Bay, welcoming people in Kwak’wala and English.
boats for ten bucks a piece, and a lot of the guys were breaking into their homes- drinking their Saki and taking things.

The Kwagu’l, ’Namgis and other Kwakw̱a̱kaw̱akw peoples of the North-West Coast, as we can see from Wayne’s story, did whatever they could to resist the Canadian government’s attempted destruction of their traditions and sacred objects. Gloria Cranmer Webster tells in the documentary how this resistance to erasure continued, even when their masks, cedar blanket-boxes and other objects were stolen and held in the Museum of Man in Ottawa. She remarks that even though the Kwakw̱a̱kaw̱akw are well-known -“one of the most highly anthropologized groups of people in the world”- those that have studied them and read about them still claim that the Kwakw̱a̱kaw̱akw are all dead, gone and disappeared “because we were the vanishing races” (Box of Treasures 1983, 2:36). Even in the museums housing Kwakw̱a̱kaw̱akw objects, the descriptions noted that they were nearly extinct people.

After years of resisting the Potlatch ban, and working to get the masks back from the museum, in the 1970s a small portion of the collection was returned on the condition that they build a museum to house them. This was twenty or so years after the amendment of the Indian Act in 1951 removed the Potlatch from legal codes. In 1979 construction of U’mista began -using a traditional Big House design- and by the summer of 1980 it was almost complete. I went to U’mista with Stephanie Joseph, Natasha’s partner, shortly after watching these documentaries and on one of my first days to Alert Bay. It is one thing to read about the space, and an entirely different thing to enter it. As Stephanie and I discussed, energy is held in that place. The name itself works to sum it up: U’mista means the “return of something important” and “coming home” (9:43). U’mista is
not a museum celebrating a dead past but a testament to Kwakw’kwakw’ resistance and ongoing cultural survival.  

Another film we watched was directed by Barb Cranmer and is called ‘Namgean’s Om Dlu’wans Awinagwisex – We Are One With the Land. I learned that the ’Namgis connection to the land stretches back some 4,500 years. Archaeological radio carbon dating has helped them in their ongoing land struggles by proving the length of time that they have lived there. Stephanie’s uncle, William Wasden Jr., speaks about this connection to the land, describing that “Everything we are comes from our land. Our spirituality, our language, our songs, our dances, our artwork. That’s why we’re unique, because our land is unique to the other nations beside us.” This made me think about some of the things I was learning at the time about my ancestors in Ireland as well, and that this connection between groups whose spirituality and culture comes from the land also had to do

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73 Figure 13 is a personal photo, taken with permission.
with a constant struggle against colonialism to remain not only, on their land bases, but existing as a people. One woman in the documentary, Patti James-Lamothe, summed this idea up for me: “I know who I am and where I come from, and there’s this invisible umbilical cord that connects you to your people and your land, but how do you teach that to children in a classroom?” (19:08).

How can we learn about the lessons of the Land(s) that have been taken, hidden and obscured? As I said in my introduction to this section, as Patti remarked, and as Heather Menzies says so eloquently upon returning to her lands in Scotland, “I caught a glimpse, a faint whisper of affiliation and myself a part of it. A continuity, a thread of connection to the land, the water and the sky of this place. I felt it tug at me like an invisible umbilical cord” (Menzies 2014, 19). In these ways we can learn from the Land we are from, as well as those Lands that we find ourselves on and connected to through our relationships. This became remarkably clear in ’Yg lis, where I could look across the Bay from Natasha’s kitchen window and see the face of one of their ancestors as the mouth of the Nimpkish River, the Gua’ni.74

![Image](image14.png)

*Figure 14: The Nimpkish River viewed from Natasha’s back porch.*

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74 Figure 14, photo by author. Unfortunately you cannot clearly see the mouth of the Nimpkish in this picture, but it is located near the centre of the photo, about 2 cm to the right.
Another film we watched was a recent documentary made by Barb Cranmer entitled *I’tustogalis: Rising Up Together – Our Voices, Our Stories* and memorializes the “demolition ceremony of the St. Michaels Residential School [on] February 18\(^{th}\), 2015” (Cranmer, 2015). Natasha shared with me how it was difficult for her to not be in Alert Bay at the time of the demolition and ceremony, so for her the documentary is a way to experience the healing the gathering and demolition provided without having had the chance to attend. St. Michaels residential school opened on Alert Bay in 1929 and was the largest residential school operated by the Anglican Church of Canada. Over nine thousand children were forced to attend the school over the 46 years it remained in operation. The documentary was focused around the healing that demolishing the school provided to the community living on Alert Bay, and for those survivors and their relations who attended the demolition. Healing from St. Mikes is an ongoing process for the survivors, something that I first realized while watching the documentary. It was made clear to me repeatedly through speaking to Natasha’s relatives and friends.

**IV. Storied Learning in ’Yalis: Connection to Relations, Place, Spirit and the Past**

In January, 2016 I travelled to Alert Bay. I found Natasha and Stephanie as soon as I got off the plane in Victoria, and was greeted with hugs and excitement; even though it was almost midnight! The next day we drove all the way up the Island and took the ferry across to Alert Bay. It was hard to think that I was doing “research” when I was there, because it felt like I was just doing what I had always done, which is listen and learn from those around me. That is research though. And it’s a blessing that I went about listening in the way I did. This is a journal entry from after the first week of being there:

*We planned a trip to a cabin that the Band owns for the weekend, which should be really fun. I have not found the words to ask some of the questions that I want, to do*
some of the research that I was thinking about. But I am somehow constantly reminded that I am researching, that I’m learning and that I am changing my understandings as a result. And I am following Spirit which says “wait, and let flow do its work.” I am excited for what will come of the relationships I am building here— that we are building together.

The learning and the stories that are encapsulated in the following conversations speak boldly for themselves. I will recount my time there, and share some of the conversations that I was able to participate in and record. Wherever possible, following the conversations I will describe what I learned from them. I believe they communicate some of the transformative learning Natasha (and by extension, myself) have done. I was moved to take on the research about my family story, and began to see it as a potentially decolonizing practice, because of Natasha’s drive to find her family. The learning and healing that she has done is extensive and cannot be fully described by what I recount from my time there, or by noting the things that I’ve learned or that changed me. I hope that by sharing my learning in this way, others may begin to see the intricate patterns of learning and connection that derive from their own relationships. In Part III: Where we are going I will discuss some of the decolonizing practices within the stories from my investigations into my own past, as well as those I learned while in Alert Bay. These two seemingly disparate experiences are connected through our friendship because our relationship has been a point of learning for both of us.

i. Blanket-Making with Andrea, Eva and Vera

Stephanie and I are both quiet, introverted people. One night, Natasha had to work late and that happened to be the evening that Blanket Making was held at the community centre. Natasha suggested that we go without her, and I still remember the look on Stephanie’s face. But I am glad that we both got over our unsureness together and decided to go. I think this is one of
the examples of how and why Stephanie and I became friends so quickly; we just understood how each-other walks in the world.

That first blanket making session introduced me to Kwak̓wala culture and their extensive work to keep their beliefs, language and practices alive and flourishing. Vera Newman, who I speak to below, opens blanket making each week with a half-hour lesson in Kwak’wala. She had everyone participate and introduce themselves in Kwak’wala. I tried to listen as others were introducing themselves around the circle, but when it came to me, I stumbled over the words of this new language. By the end of my time in ’Yalis I had learned a couple new words, and a deep respect for the journey that both Stephanie and Natasha are on to learn their languages.

In that first blanket making session was the first time I had ever seen one of the beautiful blankets made by Kwak̓wala people. They are absolutely massive and have extremely intricate designs made from nearly one solid second piece of material affixed to the back of the blanket, which is detailed with all other types of buttons, ermine skins and fabric designs. It was not until the next blanket making session, when Natasha also came along, that I was able to see the beautiful piece she is making for her birth-brother Rolando. Like so many moments when I was visiting, I realized how much Natasha both needed to be home in Alert Bay, and deeply belonged there. There was no distinguishing her blanket from those of more advanced blanket-makers. My eyes were brimmed with tears seeing it, it was a “full circle” creation for Natasha. I could feel her joy and how proud she was.

After showing me her blanket, she asked me who I wanted to talk to! I said that we should talk to anyone who helped her make a home here, whoever the first people were that she talked to, or whoever she thought I needed to hear from. The first person she brought me over to was Andrea

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75 Stephanie is also Nuu-chah-nulth
Cranmer. She introduced herself, and then we started talking about how she came to reconnect with Natasha.

**Andrea:** My English name is Andrea Cranmer and my Kwak’wala name is Nomnasola’ka, and I’m ‘Namgis and Mamalilikula and from here, from the Kwakw’ak’wakw. And I’m related to more tribes but when I say who I am I say nu’gw a om Nomnasola’ka. And, what do I want to say about myself? I love culture. Culture is a whole way of life. And I was really young - I was 19 - when I first started teaching it. My mom was a teacher, and my granny was a teacher and I’m a teacher. And um, all good things come from learning about who you are. And another thing that I wanna say about myself is that when I was young, when you’re young, you think you know everything. You’ve gotta know that! And I bounced along in life and made some mistakes but I was introduced to many different healing models, and then I ended up training in the healing model. So I had to do a lot of personal healing, which has really changed my life. So it’s really enhanced all the goodness of the culture. A lot of times before when people would talk about history, I would get riled up easily about what’s happened to our people. And then now that I’ve gone through a lot of healing, personal healing, and facilitating a lot of healing work all that, all the rage and that. I don’t have to present in that way anymore, I can present from a calmer place. Where people will um, feel it in their hearts- because I’m coming from a heart not just a head place.

**Zoe:** Yeah.

**Andrea:** Yeah. And I like being Andrea now. I’m 49 years old, I just turned 49, and before through all the bumps and bruises- sometimes I didn’t like myself. But now? I really like being Andrea. And I really love people feeling empowered and being themselves. And whatever means to get them to that place, that’s all good, I just always encourage people to love themselves because there is only one person that’s ever gonna be like you and that’s yourself. Yeah.

**Zoe:** So how do you know Natasha? What was it like meeting her and getting to know her?

**Andrea:** Oh! We were at Culture Shock! I think Art... I think Art was working?

**Natasha:** Mm hmm. He called you.

**Andrea:** And he called me down there because there was this beautiful lady down there and he wanted me to meet her because he wanted me to help her. And he didn’t really know what to do so I went down. And sure enough! And she explained a bit about, you said a bit about who you thought your-

**Natasha:** Because at that point I had already been to the visitors centre and had seen Noreen, and I went to see Trevor at U’mista and then I got to you!

**Andrea:** And then she got to me and like we weren’t gunna stop until we figured out who she was-

**Natasha:** (laughing) We just sat there and called everyone!

**Andrea:** So you know like I phoned different people that may know who her ancestors were. And it was so moving because she was so emotional which made us emotional because we really were called to help her out! I think it was a really Spirit-driven exercise of love!

**Natasha:** Ever since the moment you started looking-

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76 I was unfortunately unable to confirm the correct spelling of Andrea’s Kwak’wala name, so I have spelled it phonetically here.

77 A coffee shop and gift shop on the Island.
**Andrea:** We just started going for it and sure enough! Like, I think we even phoned my mom, we phoned Pauline, we phoned a bunch of people. Do you remember? And then realizing later that through all of this interaction that she’s our relative! Because we were talking and the Hunt that stayed with my Granny, Agnes Cranmer, there were three of them two boys and a girl and they were distinct looking. You know? They had darker skin, you know what I mean? They had a different look about them. And my sisters talked about them, I didn’t really know them at the time, because I was just little. And that’s who her mom was! And it was just like a really holy shit moment. It was like, “she’s our relative!”

**Natasha:** Yeah.

**Andrea:** And your mom was with you!  

**Natasha:** Yeah because you hugged her!

**Andrea:** But just like, we knew that when she came here that there was no way she was leaving without knowing who she’s connected to. And it was really nice that she found her way back home and that she took the risk to come and explore. And then we told her that she’s related to like, probably, 2000 people… [laughing]

**Natasha:** [laughing]

**Andrea:** Welcome to the family! [laughter] And from there it just, that love for her and knowing who she was and extending that because then she got connected to more people, and I think that’s one of the things about like my Mom being who she is. She just wants people to know who they are. And she’s really helpful that way. And we’re all like that! Donna would just stay home you know and show you your lineage that way but me and Art were right into investigating! [laughter] We just felt like ‘CSI’ really kicked in that day! But yeah. That was awesome. That was awesome. And now she’s spreading her wings! You know, and when you hang around and love people then you just feel loved and you learn more and more and more. So I thought that was really cool, that it was awesome. And now she’s here!

**Zoe:** Yeah! Now she’s here to stay!

**Andrea:** Yeah. She’s here, she’s home. And the thing, when she shared her story, I couldn’t even imagine how she felt. Like being somewhere else, and looking different, and knowing that these people love me here but there’s something missing here. And then to come all the way across here and finally have that sense of home. Yeah that sense of feeling of being home. So that, to be a part of your life has been a good thing. It’s not a bad thing. Now if she was haywire [laughing] we’ll send her to Fort Rupert! Where she’s partly from! No, just kidding! [laughing]

**Natasha:** [laughing]

**Andrea:** But yeah. It was quite the experience. And yeah this is the second time this has happened to me. Her, and then I was working at a school once and this happened to another girl. And the only reason I knew that she was from here was because when we were kids we played at the house across from Culture Shock that was the Rufus house, and our sister she’s not here anymore, she was flipping through this photo album and her sister was with a blonde girl and she was the little dark girl. She goes “this is my little sister and she was adopted out, I don’t know where she is but she was adopted” and then all of a sudden, I was working at the T’lisalagi’lakw school when it was down in the St. Mikes building and a phone call came in and it was her! And I knew it was her so she came and met her family. And then she came- Natasha came! And it was meant to be.

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78 Andrea is talking about Natasha’s adoptive mom, Betty.
Natasha: It was really special to me when you thanked my [adoptive] mom…

Andrea: Yeah. [pause] Go ahead! Cry, and share!

Natasha: And yeah she hugged my mom and thanked her for taking care of me… And bringing me home….

Andrea: And that takes huge unconditional love for someone to be willing to take that journey with someone you love so much that she thought her home was that way, in the East of Canada. But all the healing? That’s why I encourage people to go inward and heal what bothers them so that they can have those moments. Where it’s like real. There’s nothing fake about it, it’s heart to heart. You win your heart back. So yeah I was really thankful to your mom! For taking that journey with you. Because she could have totally been just like, “no, you’re not doing that, you could get hurt, you don’t even know who they are, what if they’re really mean” she didn’t do any of that she just brought you here. Or maybe you brought her here… [laughter]

Natasha: [laughing] Yeah. I brought her here.

Andrea: “Like I’m going and you’re coming…” [laughter]

Natasha: Yeah, yep. And it was really last minute too- I was like I want you to come with me and she was like oh, okay!

Andrea: And for us it’s like gaining a new family member and the opportunity for Natasha to learn about who she is, and the opportunity for Natasha to heal, to heal stuff for your family so they can be free. Because every family has a lot of- in our history, in our lives and in our family lives there is a lot of damage that has been done to a lot of families. But now that you’re here and even if they aren’t here you can help their Spirit along on their journey. And that’s good that you made it home. Otherwise you’d be sittin’ on the East side of Canada going “Something’s wrong and I don’t know what’s wrong!”

Natasha: [laughter]

Andrea: So she’s lucky, she’s got double sets of everything! She’s got the West, she’s got the East, she’s got a [adoptive] mom, and she’s got her mom that was her birth mom, family everywhere! And they say in our culture that you’re wealthy when you have lots of family. So if there is ever a day when you doubt yourself for who you are you just go and see your family and they’ll love you up.

Andrea taught me so much in this conversation. Or maybe she confirmed a lot of things for me. She underscored for me the importance of doing personal healing, of interrogating your own struggles, before you attempt to educate others. As she said, you cannot approach that sort of thing with rage. For a long time, I did not believe that rage and anger could be fully healed, but she helped me realize it again. It made me think of transformational changes that have happened for me, and how I began to approach difficult subjects from a heart place so that people could feel what I am saying “in their hearts.” I think she also really reminded Natasha and myself how Spirit was driving her return to her home. How Spirit drives everything. Natasha usually says that she
“doesn’t know why” but she just had to leave, had to come home. More and more I am realizing that when we have those moments of “I’m not sure why I did that but I really needed to” they are Spirit driven. Although these feelings are sometimes incomprehensible in the moment we see later are necessary.

Andrea’s story about meeting Natasha for the first time is important because it shows how Natasha was embraced by her community. This was so important to Natasha, because as she said in the first conversation I shared, she had overcome immense struggles and feelings of rejection to get to this place. It was indescribable to hear how Andrea -and everyone, really- has embraced Natasha. She is home. Andrea is such an important educator in the community and has demonstrated great support for Natasha. I am so blessed to have met her, and to share her account of Natasha’s story in this way.

The next person we spoke to that evening was Eva Dick. She is an Elder that Natasha had told me about a few days before. She is one of the only people with knowledge about traditional Kwakwaka’wakw medicine. Learning about traditional medicines and herbal healing is a Spirit-level passion for me, so I was excited to talk to her for this reason as well. Natasha also described her as a tough woman, someone who would call her out if she was not doing the right thing. After Natasha introduced me and I said hello and explained my intentions, this is what we talked about.

**Eva:** My name is Eva Dick. I am a mother of five children, ten grandchildren, one girl. I am from village Island but my mother was from here, ‘Namgis, and my father was Mamalilikala, And I married into the tribe too, so I’m here to stay! And I’ve made Alert Bay my home, and the only time I’m Mamalilikala now is when I am in the Big House and then my place is in the Mamalilikala. I come from a Potlatch family, my father hosted many many Potlatches, more than anybody today!

**Zoe:** Woah!

**Eva:** And lots of feasts, so we grew up with the teachings. And then we were lucky enough that our grandmothers lived ‘til they were fine old women. His mother and my mother’s mother. And they were very strict of their teachings. So I guess you can say we are a cultural family. You can see we’re a family doing this for the community, like blanket making. Teaching other people where their origin is. And it’s important to know who you are and your history or where you come from so you’ll know where you are going in life. It’s our family’s philosophy.
Zoe: Can I show you something? I just like how much it connects. This is what made me understand why I want to do this research. This is an ancient Irish triad.\textsuperscript{79}

Eva: There you go! You’ve come to the right person! [Laughter]

Zoe: But yeah, that’s exactly what I think is important. Knowing Tash has made it evident to me.

Eva: Do you know, if you don’t know who you are, that means that you’re not strong in Spirit. And when your Spirit is strong and you have your identity, nobody can knock you off your block. Yes you can be hurt if something bad is said, however your Spirit will be stronger because that’s just the way it goes. And if your Spirit’s not strong you’ll become lost. And all you gotta do is look around here and a lot of our people are lost- in alcohol and drugs and whatever else they do with their lives. So having said that, I feel that you never stop, you never give up on your life and what you choose to do with it. I’m a person who believes that you’ve come into this planet earth to fill a promise that you had with your creator. You sign that contract as you come through the birth canal. That’s how fast it is, right. And then you take a look at a baby? The baby looks right through you and sometimes you become afraid or your heart starts to pound. You know, because of the connection. The purest, you know.

Zoe: It’s so true... We just spent a weekend with two babies and we felt that a bunch of different times.

Eva: They are amazing teachers if you allow them to be. But um, but overall you have your will to do what you need to do and then your path. Wherever you choose to go, you are faced with many, many challenges. It’s not the challenge that’s important it is how you deal with it that’s the most important. So with Spirit you come to this place and then you say oh, okay I can handle it, you say I can do this. Then it doesn’t matter what he says or she says or your boss says, you know where you belong and you know what is right and wrong for you. Because you need to listen to that inner voice\textsuperscript{80} and it guides you, all the time. You just need to be quiet.

So where I am right now in my life is that I have come to do medicines, I don’t know, I’m not a medicine woman. I know ten maybe. I make them into a salve. I have a formula for it but I was made to promise that I would never disclose the information until I know in my heart that it is the person I can pass the information on to. But all of my family have a piece of my formula and if they all came together they could do it. And I’m not allowed to put it in “the box”. And I never knew what “the box” was until I was making a label a couple of years ago, and it was a computer! I had four different times where I was trying to make a webpage for my salves to help me with my sales but nothing. Even my baby went to school to make a webpage for me and nope! I said I promised! You can’t go against the promise. Spirit is protecting it, protecting the medicine.

Because as first nations people across this continent—well I can’t speak for anybody else but for my people for sure— is that they’ve taken everything away from us. But not the medicines, the plants. And my people make grease, ooligan grease. They just about took our language away, you see us struggling to bring it back. Because I still speak it, my sister Vera speaks it, and I’ve committed myself to help her to teach it because it’s her passion in life. My medicine is my passion. And then to talk to people because my goal... with my medicine is that if you’re a diabetic you can make the tea out of one of my medicines and you can stabilize the sugar for diabetes. Yeah! Just like St. John’s Wort! It can help clear up HIV/AIDS. But the pharmaceutical institutes don’t use it because it’s all about money-making. So there are many things we can talk about. But guide me- what are they?

Zoe: The other main question that I had was just about how you came to know Natasha and how it was meeting her? Or knowing her as she is finding her roots, anything about that.

\textsuperscript{79} I was deeply moved by Eva’s words here, and showed her the drawing I made of the Celtic triad. Here is one example where worldviews connect on a level that is nearly indescribable through text.

\textsuperscript{80} This is the Spirit-drive I explained in Part I using umbilical cords as my example. Because that’s usually where I feel the pull that Eva is describing here.
Eva: I happened to be at the Elders centre, we were having lunch there.

Natasha: Oh, right!

Eva: And then this young woman walked in very beautiful, very dark. And all by herself. And she just burst in there and said "Hi!" and I looked at her and I said in Kwak'wala "who is she?"

Natasha: [laughing]

Eva: and they said, um that's Kenneth Hunt’s great grand-daughter. And I said Oh! And when I got introduced to her I said, welcome home. What else can I say?

Natasha: Yeah.

Zoe: Yeah.

Eva: You just embrace her, and because of her history, you know we just embrace those kids. That they feel lost? Because that's our culture. But I don't wanna play games with her. Whenever she needs her bum kicked I do a good job!

Natasha: [laughing]

Eva: [laughing] I told her the last time I saw her! Then she didn't even bring her mom to see me because she’s afraid of me! [laughing] So um. I don't know everything about who I am I just know what feels good and what feels right.

Zoe: The other question I had but I guess you kind of answered it, is just any stories you have about the land or history that you want to share. I’m hoping this project will help inspire people to work against colonialism and change the way things are in Canada right now.

Eva: Be Honest. No cover, you need transparency, you need to speak the truth, and you can't wipe away whatever has happened. You need to stand up and step into leadership and say this is enough I am going to make the best I can with my life. All you can do is that. Be an example. And being sober or in recovery gives you that opportunity to do something. I just hope that we make sobriety a trend so that when people are waking up so hungover or with their body screaming for another fix that people will be tired of their lives and think maybe I can change it.

And with colonization, we’re better at it then the white people are. We’re better at it, we’re clones, we do a really good job of doing it to each other now as what the white people have done to us. So I don’t have any answers but if you address a problem… My people do potlatches so that everything is public so there is nothing to hide. Everybody else already knows what everyone else is doing. So I’ve come to this place in my life where I can say what you think of me is none of your business, and I’m 'Namgis, and 'Namgis people don’t do this. You know? So you do the best that you can. That's what I always tell my grandchildren. Like Trevor. Trevor is my grandson and he took Natasha in when she first came, because he knew that we are family right? So you know he was her stepping stone when she first got here.

And everyone has fallen in love with her you know- she is very dear to all of the people here. And she stood up in the Big House and was given her name and she’s got the feelings, the sense of belonging. And then we do things to help our people find if they’re lost. The apprehension of native children by the ministry is astronomical- it’s no different from the residential schools!

Zoe: No, they just found a sneakier way to do it like you said.

Eva: No, it’s no different. And except it’s in a private place- you just hope they’re not being sexually abused or being taught mind-games and that they’re loved instead. It’s that abandonment you know and people end up with abandonment issues. That’s like reconciliation, it’s all about abandonment
issues. And there’s a lot of hate in that, from abandonment issues right. But we’ve got to be able to believe in ourselves to get through it- to be able to stand up for what we believe in. And to find out what is your purpose in life. Whether its medicine, or maybe a hairdresser like Natasha, or a chef you know? Or someone like Trevor who does historical collections and researching.

Because you kids today are educated, there’s no reason to be in that space where you’re talking about colonization- I believe that we’ve risen above it. We need to know now where we’re going to go with it. What are my goals, what are my objectives? And I mean yeah, we were colonized and um, however- we need to move forward now. Because I believe that the First Nations people and this planet mother earth are those to change the planet to a better place. And it may only be a handful although there are millions of us on this planet I heard 144 million First Nations people on this planet, I don’t know if that’s true. You’ve got the Laplanders in Greenland, the Celts wherever they come from in Britain I guess. You’ve got Ainu’s in Japan, the Hawaiians, you know. We’re not allowed to be who we are! You take a look at the Dalai Lama. He’s the only person that can get out and trip around the world like that, but his people at home are mistreated. Just like here you know, we don’t have any rights. That’s what we need to take back is our rights. To believe that I am who I am, I have this right. Instead of saying, you know, getting out of the place of ‘lack’. People believe you know, oh, I can’t do this, I can’t do that- what are you doing talking about lack? You’ve got a big house, you’ve got a beautiful car, you have a job, you’ve got your salary and now you can’t go and do this? How come? What’s important? What do you value, what is the value of your life? I’m not a Christian person but I’m not an atheist either, but I look at who I am as a parallel of the teachers that are out there. Whether it be the Taos or Hari Krishna, Buddhism, I look for the parallel. And you know what? My people have the same teachings. If not better. Because the number one priority with my people is our children. You know and we love them unconditionally. We try not to put limitations on them because then they get to that place of lack, and you’ve defeated your purpose.

If you get over the feelings of lack, feeling like oh I don’t have this I don’t have that, like I burned the motor out of my car and I don’t have a car. I didn’t grieve for my car. I said I’m sorry that I didn’t treat you special like I did my other car. I didn’t bring the angels into this car because I didn’t like it! It was a stick shift, it had a sun roof, everything you’d want- a black Audi sports car! But I didn’t like it. When I was 50 I would have loved it, plummed my feathers in the air, but at 72! So many gauges on it, its chaos! As human beings we do this, we’ve become addicted to it. Creating chaos. So it’s really important to figure out what is of value. And because I’m valuing less I have less stuff in the house, right. That way you don’t have to keep cleaning. But with lack… If I decide tomorrow I’m going to tell the universe that I need a car and that I’m going to go to Vancouver island on the fourth and fifth of January, I need my car. Now. Today. And I am specific about what I want, and the universe is gunna provide. Every day I say thank you for my perfectly healthy body. Thank you for my perfectly healthy blood. Thank you for my perfectly healthy bones, because those are my problem areas. I’m strong in the heart, no cholesterol, none of that kind of stuff right. No diabetes. But I have a bum bone, I mean I have like five fractures in my body, and I’m in pain all the time. But I don’t dwell on it you know?

Oh and I’ll tell you, my little dig at the white people, my mother’s mother lived to be 100. If not more. And she could never understand the white people. And she went to school to grade three, and she couldn’t understand the plural. In my language, the plural sound ‘s’ is to urinate, ess. And she couldn’t understand why the white people wanted to pee all over everything.

Zoe, Natasha: [laughter]

Eva: She couldn’t understand it! Til the day before she died she said watch out for those guys they wanna pee all over everything. How come, you know? She wanted to know why! [laughter]

Eva helped me “heart check” in this conversation (Wilson 2008, 60). Her description of Spirit-guidance and of healing your Spirit helps to explain some of the things I mentioned earlier (like “gut” feelings), but also highlights the work that Natasha has done and is doing to heal herself.
and her birth family. She also emphasized to me the importance of moving past the focus on studying colonization that has happened in the past -although she says that this is also a good thing to do- she urges us to move forward and find ways to heal and help the Earth and each other. She says First Nations people and those connected to them (like the Ainu, the “Celts”, etc.) are the ones to lead this work, and that it’s clearly already happening. She, like Andrea and so many others I spoke to emphasize the great importance of knowing where you come from. She talks about how this is an important part of healing, and being who you were intended to be; to complete that contract with the Creator.

The next person Natasha and I spoke to was Eva’s sister, Vera Newman. Vera was the one teaching language to Stephanie and I when we attended the first blanket making. She made me feel so welcome, and I am glad that I was able to have a conversation with her and learn from her stories.

Vera: I’m Vera Newman, I’m ‘Na̱mgis, I’m from the Mamalilikula, I’ve lived in Alert Bay most of my life except for when I re-married and moved up to Bella Bella for about 12 years. But I was born here, in Alert Bay. I grew up part of my life on Village Island because that’s where my dad is from, but I’m real ‘Na̱mgis now.

Zoe: Could you tell me how you met Natasha or what it was like to meet Natasha?

Vera: It was very emotional for me because I knew her [birth] mother. Her [birth] mother came to live with my children’s grandmother and she must have been about the same age as my granddaughter, maybe eleven? Ten, eleven… But she used to come visit my girls all the time, my two girls Barbara and Donna. She was always with us. And then she came home for a while, Marion. She came to live here for a while. And then she had to leave because of her lung transplant, which was supposed to happen. But she passed before that happened. And so when I met her [Natasha] and found out who she was, I was just emotional you know. Because I know her family, my grandchildren are connected to her [Natasha]. Because their dad Frank is the great-grandson of Kenneth Hunt just like he is. I was fascinated that she would find Alert Bay.

Zoe: It wasn’t easy so I’m just so happy that she did…

Vera: Mm hmm, mm hmm… I can’t imagine, I can’t imagine what that would have been like. Because I’ve always had family around, grew up with my dad’s side on Village Island and my mom’s here. I never travelled alone I was always with my sisters or my aunts. I never ever ventured by myself. So for her to come all the way over here, to move over here, wow. Amazing girl.

Zoe: That’s why it’s important to her, I know, that she gets to learn her language now and reconnect with all these things.
Vera: It’s so wonderful. I just wish Big Granny was still alive, the kid’s grandmother we called her Big Granny. Her older brother was her [Natasha’s] great grandfather, Kenneth Hunt, I just wish she was still here to see her because she would just embrace her. Because she would be so thrilled that she’s interested in all this.

Zoe: And that it’s ‘in’ her.

Vera: Yeah, yeah! It’s just rekindled what was already in her. We never grew up seeing Potlatches, my sister Eva and I. We were born at a time when we were not allowed to be Indians! Yeah so, this is all a rebirth what you see today. And I just know that when you’ve got strength here, when your culture is strong, you’re gunna do well.

Zoe: My other question is, um that Natasha inspired me to learn more about my own history and my family history so I’ve been doing some of that work. Spiritually I’ve always been a pagan, someone who is close to the land. Even as a little girl I had a lot of questions. And I think I have memories which is why I am brought to do this work. And for that reason, coming here and learning about how Natasha is learning all about the beliefs of her Nation… Yeah I guess anything you want to share about the Land because I’ve felt a lot of similarities between what I’ve learned about my Irish ancestors and what’s also been lost there, um. Because I think it’s good, anything that brings us back to the Earth will move us forward in a good way.

Vera: For sure. My girls, maybe about eight years ago they had a gathering in our territory because that’s our traditional home is the valley. And they were all sitting on a table in my dad’s house and were asking how we say ‘gaining strength’ and I said łaxwe’gila. And just when that happened the phone rang and it was my aunt from Kingcome who was very well versed in our language I said “Auntie, how do we say gaining strength in our language” and she said łaxwe’gila. So that’s what we call our gathering, every summer we go up there. Eva does her medicines, and my daughter Donna who is a weaver and teaches weaving, and I talk about some of the histories and our songs. We have a song for our river. We have a grease trail song that tells of how we used to trade with the Mowachaht people up in Friendly Cove. They had a different language, different culture, but we have connections there- some of our people. Last year we went to a cabin in Mt. Cain, an immersion weekend, with the people who wanted to learn our language and those who are fluent speakers. And that’s the scariest for me because once we go, I don’t know who… There’s not too many people much younger than us that speak our language fluently. And I think that’s a sad thing for me. One of our customs is to burn food, -and I don’t care if no one understands it- for our relatives who have passed to the spirit world. That’s one of our ways.

Zoe: They understand though.

Vera: Yeah. And um, so we did that and Eva had to leave early so I was the only person left that spoke our language there. I said we can’t speak English when we do this [ceremony] because our ancestors won’t understand us. I had to do the speaking. But women don’t speak in our Big House, the chiefs are the one at the Potlatches that are the speakers. We support them and our roles aren’t any less important, that’s our custom. Our role as women is to uplift the men. And we go through our dad’s side. Some people are through the mother’s side but ours we go through our dads. And it was really, really wonderful and heartwarming for me because I drove my daughter Donna to go meet them, they already had the canoe up there. In Wa’as Lake. And in Wa’as there were some of our boys canoeing and singing coming around the corner. And oh! The feeling of that. I thought, our children have come home. Because these young ones are the ones who make the connection back

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81 Speaking of the ancestors that they are burning food for. This was also a widespread tradition in Ireland and the other places where the Old Ways have been maintained. On Samhain we put food out for the ones passing to the Otherworld, and light their way with candles. This is where the Jack-O-Lantern tradition comes from.

82 Wa’as Lake is where we travelled to on our cabin adventure during one weekend. Picture in Figure 15 taken by the author.
there. And they've actually went on the grease trail to go over to the West coast side and that's where our grease trail song comes from. So we go every year and I guess I'll continue to go until I can't move, you know because I fully support that because we grew up so ashamed of being an Indian because the whole society was geared to make you feel that way even in school we learned about Jacques Cartier as someone who 'discovered' us. And no one ever said he was just the first to venture out. And he called everyone on the west coast the Nootka which means 'going around in circles' and we weren't going around in circles! We knew where we were. So the more we learn, you know, we're all learning together. And I'm fortunate that I knew my language so that I could understand granny. You know and so, my job now, for my sister Eva and I, we're in our seventies. We're the old people now. We don't have the luxury of having an adult to go to, to get that nurturing. It's always a different feeling when you get nurtured by an auntie or a granny. So I think it's wonderful that people are interested. People like you that don't necessarily come from our nation you're the one that sparks the interest, sparks the interest for us to find out more about who we are. And when we were being taught in the schools, it was one non-Indian teacher who taught us to be proud of who we are. I was always embarrassed to speak in English because I can't say my S's properly. And all he said was the reason you're having problems with that is because it's not your first language! You only spoke Kwak'wala as a little girl. And he showed us that we were lucky to be brought up with two languages, that we were lucky.

Zoe: … to not have English as your first language!

Vera: Yeah! And to be able to sing and you know... And us, we were all busy being embarrassed when we were young, growing up. That feeling of being inferior to the white people. Because that's...
how it was the whole society even movies – cowboys and Indians- we came out of that theatre wanting to be cowboys! Not clueless Indians.

Zoe: One of the things that made me want to look into this more and the relationship between Irish and Indigenous history here, there was a woodcut in a book called Envisioning America where one guy... Was it Raleigh? Compared a picture of a Weroan man and woman to a Pictish man and woman. And he was saying that the English had to learn to destroy the Picts, or parts of themselves, before they could do the same in the New World. So I guess if settler people started to ask some similar questions to what you are suggesting, we wouldn't be so ‘afraid’ of Indians.

Vera: Yeah. My dad told me about this guy who was a game warden who got stranded out on the water in rough weather and an old couple lived in a cabin just in one of the islands further down so they rescued him and brought this white man into their home and got him dry, fed him, looked after him. And they opened a can of deer meat to feed him, and he charged them for it! It was out of season to have deer. “That’s a white man!” my dad used to say. We knew all these things. So my dad always taught us about it. You know Hudson’s Bay Company? He’d always talk about how they gave Indians guns so that they could make money. That’s where Hudson’s Bay comes from. It’s also important though for me now in my age to not stay bitter, because it just destroys you.

And when they pushed our people out of the fishing industry a friend of mine, who I consider my brother Gilbert Cook, turned his fishing boat into a tour boat for tours from Germany.

[Interruption; someone showed us a blanket that they had finished attaching the design to]

Vera: I don’t know where Minnie was from. They were the last couple to leave the river. And the reason why, my mom said, the reason they moved us- the last family they moved was Bruce’s family... I guess that’s the Nelsons because Sarah Scow was a Nelson. They came over for a Christmas concert here and when they went back some of the family members drowned because of the weather, going back over to where they lived. So they ended up all moving, moving to stay in Alert Bay. The schools were here, the hospital... That’s one of the reasons that when I lived on Village Island that it became deserted because there was no school or teacher...

Zoe: When would that have been?

Vera: Well we moved here... Like I was born in ’44 and Eva in ’43 and um she was six years old she had to come here because that was the law. When you’re 6 you had to be in school. And the next year I followed her. But we stayed with Granny and Grandpa because we didn’t go to residential school because our Grandfather had a big house right by the girls’ store, Culture Shock? That big cement slab? That was our grandfather’s house. That’s where we grew up, big family. And Granny didn’t put any of us- I think, I think only a couple of our family members went to the school. Huxley came out of the TB hospital and he was there for a year because they thought there was going to be a cure or whatever they thought. But Granny wouldn’t allow them, anybody to take the kids. Because Marian’s mother, she had TB and she was in the TB hospital for years in Nanaimo. She didn’t just go for three months or something she was gone for years. That’s another place I’d like to go see is Nanaimo TB Hospital. Because that’s where they did all the experiments, with the drugs that they used on our people. You know, and some of it wasn’t successful. That TB, tuberculosis, was rampant you know. Just like smallpox was. My sister Tina, Maureen’s mom, she was in there for about nine months. My cousin Leonard, because we went there, we went to visit and um. Yeah. All kinds of stuff. All kinds of stuff. But we don’t wanna stay there...

We were talking about going back to my job [the conversation from before about Gilbert] and I said “what are you talking about Gilbert?” He said just speak your language, and sing, tell some legends and culture like... But he paid me to travel with them [the German tourists] on this boat. So those Germans they had connections eh to people in Germany who were already studying us so they had an inkling about what we were all about. So they had some knowledge about who we were.

So I did, I went and travelled with them. We went to Village Island. That’s where I grew up, and I was very emotional- I was crying, because there was nobody there its deserted. It’s been deserted for quite a few years. And I was trying to not cry, I had a drum and my sunglasses so it
wasn't visible. I was singing my grandfather's song. And I just kept thinking, don't cry, don't cry, but I could just see my grandfather near my granny and my mum - I could just... It was very emotional, very sad. So we get to the beach, and I spoke in my language to the ancestors and asked permission, I said I know this isn't our way but these people are interested in who we are, we've got no more jobs anymore our fishermen are being pushed right out of the industry, and I just wanted them to know that we weren't doing anything that was destroying the language or anything like that. And I was speaking like this in my language instead. So we walked back to the village and I told them why our village had its name, and our little creek on the side, and the legend about it and um we got back on. I showed them about my childhood, where we went to school at the turrets and when my dad took us there we used to scream after him, after my dad when he used to leave us here. And he finally took us home in grade three because we were old enough you know and we had a teacher there in Village Island so we went from grade 3 to grade 7 there. But we had to come back for high school.

So when we got back on the boat with the Germans, Claus, had said to me, "you sharing your childhood with me brought back all the pain of my childhood we were very ashamed of what Hitler did we had nothing but to run and hide and protect our grandmother..." And it was like someone went thud [she put her hand to her heart]. Sigh. I never thought about other people's suffering, I just thought about our people's rights and were gunna fight for our rights you know - I just thought about our people, not about other people. So I started to change my attitude. I started to look at life and people... And the more I meet different nations, the more I meet and I'm just open I'm not because you can just tell right away. I would not talk to you if you were arrogant and treated us badly, I would say no I have no time to talk to you. You know, I don't have to be rude, but I just I know. Because you can feel it when people really come with a good heart. Hey? And you know if they don't come from a good heart, I won't waste my time. You know so I really changed my attitude. Because I know it's not doing me any good to be bitter, and angry and I know that all of us have to heal, to heal our hopelessness you know. We're not any different. And the more I did healing work with other nations the more I realized we're all the same. Yeah we're all the same. If you lose and I win, I'm not the winner. If I lose and you win, you're not the winner. You know, we've gotta be together. We have to look at what's going on in the world now.

Zoe: Thank you so much for talking to me. I really appreciate it.

Vera: Oh you're welcome. I'm sorry we didn't get a chance to get a meal together here- but on Saturday we're having - my niece that's right next to me she got married in Las Vegas.

Zoe: Yeah, I've been hearing all about it! [laughter, Vera, Tash]

Vera: But we're embracing her husband into our family on Saturday, yeah. Are you still here Saturday?

Zoe: Yeah!

Vera: It's at 4:00 in the council hall

Zoe: Yeah I think we're going to come, right Tash?

Natasha: Yeah!

Vera: You're more than welcome to come and be part of it.

Zoe: Thank you

Natasha: She just told me about it!

Vera: So yeah, come, come.
As Vera and her sister Eva emphasized to me, we need to value each other—but with truth and accountability as the root-and move forward together. Honesty and love flows from both of them, which are some of the most important traits for any teacher to have. Natasha is surrounded now by her Elders and her Aunties, and is learning so much through her healing process. Through coming home, from her u’mista. Vera also spoke much about how to move out of anger into more productive emotions as a way to make change. Reflecting on my process of moving from rage to a place of honesty and love in my teaching was spurred by these conversations. Who can learn from someone who is bitter and angry? And how can we connect to each other when we are bitter and angry? It is life-changing to know that the people who have taught me this lesson have some of the most legitimate reasons to feel bitter, to be angry. This is why Elders like Vera and Eva are leading the way for the younger generations and showing them a good way forward. Clare Land also expresses this experience of unconditional love, noting that “A politics of friendship in a settler colonial context is possible where Aboriginal people continue to assert radical title and continue to express concern for the rights of all people. This generosity, this ethic of unconditional love is evident and humbling for those who will see it” (Land 2015, 122). Knowing the righteous balance of anger and love is so important, and their knowledge of this is one of the many reasons that their traditions, language and other aspects of their culture have been kept alive and are continuing to flourish. As well, those “parallel” moments that Eva spoke about became very clear in my conversation with Vera, especially when she spoke about burning food for relatives who have passed. These traditions are old, old lessons about how to communicate to Ancestors. It still makes my heart swell, or feel that “thud” feeling that Vera spoke about, when I think about this connection. So many people who have resisted and remain connected to their Land bases know these ways of communication with the Ancestors and how to listen to Spirit.
ii. Shop-Talks with Wayne Alfred and Marcus Alfred

Someone who continued to make those points clear to me, and to point out other lessons, while teaching me pieces of Kwakw̱aka’wakw history and beliefs was a master carver and relative of Natasha’s, Wayne Alfred. Our first conversation happened in Natasha’s salon when he was getting his hair cut, and the rest of our conversations happened over a few nights in the wood shop. Since we spoke so much, I am including an abridged version of our conversations.

Zoe: So how was it to meet Natasha and to know her while she is finding her roots?

Wayne: Yeah I met Natasha when she first came here. A long, long time ago she came to the Passin’ Thyme in the basement there. And that’s when she was a blonde. She came in with her friend and she told us who she was and that she was looking for herself again- who she is, and her roots and her family. Because she was adopted. Then I asked her who she was and she told me a couple people and I knew who she was after that, just because we all know everybody- all of our family is related.

Zoe: How long have you been a carver?

Wayne: I’ve been a carver…Geez, all my life! But off and on. First when I was carving I tried it on my own and cut myself and found it really hard to do and then I said well, I’m a natural- a natural artist, natural carver but you bet it’d make it a lot easier to have a teacher. So I waited around ’til I had someone who could guide me. Because the Hunts are all carvers eh, they’re all good carvers. Yeah, all creative in some way or another and pretty well-known. And she [Natasha] comes from the Hunt family, she comes from Kenneth Hunt. I met her family a long, long, long time ago when we were kids, when they first came to Alert Bay for the school. And then they came again later on, this was in grade one or grade two, then they came later on again when we were 16 or something. They lived you know, by the river. In this old shack over there. And they met some white kids. And they came to school over here and uh-

Zoe: Is this Natasha’s mom?

Wayne: No, Natasha’s mom and her Aunties and Uncles. Then they came over here they brought white kids with them too. They were all far-out, dressed funky, like psychedelic or ‘Sly and the Family Stone’, that sort of time, era eh? I knew they were our cousins, I knew they were coloured but they were still our cousins. Yeah their grandmother she’s my grandmother’s sister or first cousin, in the Indian way eh. But we say sister because in the old days we lived in Big Houses. And the Big House was 50x50. So you’ve seen our Big Houses. Then on the inside there are many different families inside, like the oldest son, oldest daughter, you know- they all lived there. And they were brought up in the house so that when you become aware in the world you start to see your brothers and sisters and there could be fifty of them because they come from different families but you’re all born in the same house. So your first cousins become your brothers and your sisters. And that’s our way, on the north-west coast. Northern guys do it a little different, they go by their mother’s side- we go by the father’s side. I think we’re more right down the middle though, I think we do both.

Zoe: Both?

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83 A restaurant on the Island.
Wayne: Yeah, I don't think we favour, you know. The woman has a contribution in life - in our tribe they were pretty powerful. Like Chiefs in public act like the boss but when they're at home they're like one of the kids, you know? Yeah they're very strong. When my mom would say “woah” I'd stop, eh.

Zoe: Yeah, ha ha.

Wayne: Yeah so I’m Canadian but I was brought up as North-West Coast first and foremost. Kwagu’l. That’s what I am. Within the Kwakwa’wakw nation there’s like 30-something tribes, and the Kwagu’l tribe is on top. And then is the M'gamlliliḵala, and after that is the 'Nəmgiš…

Zoe: Oh, okay. I thought ‘Kwagiulth’ and Kwakwa’wakw were the same.

Wayne: Kwakwa’wakw are people who speak our language. And the Kwagu’l is the number one tribe that the white man used and called all of us ‘Kwagiulth’. But we are the only Kwagu’l. And then after us there is the M'gamlliliḵala, after the M'gamlliliḵala are the 'Nəmgiš, after that there is Ławit’sis, after Ławit’sis there are the Ma’mtagila after the Ma’mtagila there is the Dą’n_sdka’xw after the Dą’n_sdka’xw there is the Dzawada’enux̱w after the Dzawada’enux̱w are the Gwawa’enux̱w and after the Gwawa’enux̱w are the ‘Nak’waxda’x̱w after the ‘Nak’waxda’x̱w are the Gwa’sala after the Gwa’sala are the Tl’alq̓iḵwa and then Gwat’sinux̱w.

And Natasha’s also part Tlingit because the Hunts are part Tlingit and my grandmother married, her name was Mary Ebbots Hunt, the daughter of Chief Ebbots, and the granddaughter of Chief Shakes. Who are some great, well-known Chiefs probably the well-known chiefs among the Tlingit. And then if you were in Hudson’s Bay [company] and you married a woman and had children with them, then your children became the queen or the prince of the land. So if he’s the prince of the land how are you going to kick his dad out? See what I mean? It’s a good thing they went by their female side up there. Because she had the power, right. If we did it down here it wouldn’t have made much sense. Yeah, yeah yeah. So they moved down here and looked after the Fort and had my grandfather George Hunt, who is her grandfather and all of our grandfather’s. Many of us, we are blue-blood. Not only are we First Nations but we’re blue-blood. And that's something we go by, is the oldest. Who was the first, and all that stuff you know. Like when you go in a line up in a store, or waiting for the bus and someone jumps in front of you. You say, “Hey! I was here first!” We always use that when the white man jumps in front of us. We jump in front of the white man and say, “hey, I was here first!”

Zoe: I’ve noticed there are a lot of younger carvers as well, how does it feel being a teacher or mentor to them?

Wayne: No, no I’ve been teaching for a while. There are a lot of youngsters now, a lot of them, and I’m the only one that can really, really teach well. Because as I was learning I was struggling and I said ok, nobody else is going to struggle from here-on-in. As soon as I learn I’m going to make sure I know everything I’m thinking and I’m going to help them. You know? Because I remembered how hard it was. I remembered how hard it was to learn. I remembered about my struggles so I wanted to help them with their struggles. I wanted to be a teacher just not because I can say I’m a teacher but because I wanted our people to be able to be the greatest out of all. So that our culture never fades out. Like Pewi, my daughter, is teaching the language. Trying to, as best she can. Also teaching singing, dancing, and so do I and so does Marc [Marcus]. So we do it, they do it because it’s a hereditary obligation as leaders in one of the older families. We were taught, taught to be that way and from there I passed it on.

I grew up in a world where there was lots of white people around but there were still lots of old, old Indians. At one time they were just in canoes and then we landed on the moon- they saw all that happen, hey. Switching from canoes to big gas boats with big motors, but at one time all they remembered was driving in canoes. So they saw it all, the whole world change in front of them. And so I hung around with all the younger people, probably your parents age, and they were too busy trying to be like the way the world is- they were losing their identity. And then I just started hanging around with the older people because I thought they were way cooler than the fake and phony people being this way and that. We already have a culture! The pathway is already set down before us. And
why disrespect it? Especially when they fought so hard to keep the Potlatch, how could we throw it away after the battle...? Not in my generation will we let that happen. There’s a lot of people who know who they are and where they came from, and are hard to budge. You know what I mean by that? We worry about our nation first and our individuality later. Yeah because this "me, me, me, me" stuff is pretty selfish. Especially when you’re an ethnic person trapped in a world full of dominant people in a changing society. We have to maintain ourselves and we’re having a hard enough time without bouncing from wave to wave rather than just staying put. So we need to stay with our roots. And who we really are, and not who everybody's trying to make us be.

**Zoe:** Or yeah, ‘filter’ you down to be, because even with you naming all of the different names and everything now is making me see it in a totally different way.

**Wayne:** We know who we are. We know everything; every nation, every mountain, every river... You know they all have real names. We have names for those places. They each have their own meaning and story that goes way back, like to the days of Abraham and the days of Isaac and the days of Jacob.

**Zoe:** …and even before that.

**Wayne:** Yeah! Back to the flood …. And [talking about the Bible] they sent a raven out, where did that raven go? It didn’t come back! [laughter] Just kept going! He was too hungry and curious, the raven. Wild and such, so that’s why he didn’t come back. He’s curious and gets into mischief. I don’t know why they put the raven in that, in the Bible story, but that might be part of it eh. And what about you? What nationality are your parents, grandparents, grandparents’ parents?

**Zoe:** My dad’s dad is German- 

**Wayne:** Oh yeah you told me that last night…

**Zoe:** My dad’s mom- I don’t know anything about her really. She grew up in Owen Sound in Ontario. But aside from that I don’t know much, she died when I was 3. 

**Wayne:** Oh really? Geez. Bummer.

**Zoe:** And my mom’s mom is ‘Scotch-Irish’, like on everything I can read and find out it just says that. So the further I dig, maybe I’ll finally find a place in Scotland or Ireland to actually go back to.

**Wayne:** The closest thing to being a native is the Celtic people. [laughing] Because they really got it good, those guys. Yep, they pushed and pushed and pushed them until they’re on the edge of the world now- in Ireland and Scotland. That’s all that’s left compared to when they were all over Europe and some of Asia even.

**Zoe:** Yeah… [pause]

**Wayne:** So how much longer are you here for?

**Zoe:** Um, in Alert Bay only for two more days, then we’re going to go trip down Vancouver Island and see some different things again.

**Wayne:** Well that’s good you came over here to check it out. [pause]

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84 Since January when I had these conversations, the need to discover where I was from was rekindled, and I uncovered the Irish and Scottish histories about my grandmother’s ancestors.

85 I did find “somewhere to go back to” in Ireland, the grave of my great-great grandfather, Alexander Bingham. I also uncovered the Mennonite histories that I shared in Part I.
There's truth in every legend. Especially in ours. For instance when we talk about our warriors who went up the river there, in our legends they fought against the sea monster, they fought against the grizzly bear—a giant, giant bear, a cave bear—that's how long ago that was. It was a cave bear, a big, giant bear. And each time they turned it into stone with the sisiyut, and so coming down the river you know that stone used to be a grizzly bear—bigger than a grizzly, a great, great bear. So now when you come down you can see that stone and say "I'm in the right spot at the right time. This our rendezvous and where are they, they're late!" You know, [laughter] So that's how you know. Inside that legend there are places and names, people that were named all the way down the river. Like those stories I told you that are from the Bible times. These are the ancient ancestors, comes way down 'til it reaches us. Inside the stories you come across these landmarks and names of the landmarks and what era or time—how close to the flood, they'll say. So in each legend there's a bit of truth. So when you get back to those Amazonians fighting against the Greeks and them, along the line something happened—it could have been a battle between 2,000 people a piece or it could have been a battle between 40,000. But it was a big war and the Sarmatian and Sumerian, their women fought alongside their men. That was unheard of amongst the Greeks.

Zoe: Yeah, same with the Picts and the Iceni...

Wayne: Should be locked up in the kitchen according to the Greeks!

Zoe: ‘Oikos’ I think is what they call it. ‘The house’...

Wayne: The Greeks were freaks, yeah. You’re allowed to peek out, and giggle! [laughter]

Wayne: Yeah... So yeah those legends, there are truths in them. And so maybe there is some in that legend. And I could go on and on about how it goes down through the female side. A lot of times it comes down the female side, even though they say it's just the male side. Not just ancient times either. Sometimes because of circumstances, sometimes because it was their prerogative— they [the women] just felt like doing it. Basically, it was supposed to be [matrilineal] but it wasn't— and I'm coming from a different point of view, from the male side. You know, because of all the hunger and greed of the females trying to take our dances... [he said so jokingly and we all roared with laughter—it was directed at Stephanie who is a female dancer]

Zoe: [laughing] you just look at Steph

Steph: [laughter] watch out, now!

[pause]

Wayne: But we’re all still ‘n̓əmwiyut, ‘one kind’ you know. But it’s important to never forget what we are. We could learn a lot from the Jewish people, who got kicked around for 2,000 years and never gave up. That’s a good example. Yeah the Kwagu’l got it bad, out of all the native tribes in the northwest coast, in America, in the north and south even, got wiped out of every valley, every river, every lake. The slate was cleaned so they could come and it wasn’t just colonizing— they wiped us out. Like 90, 92% of us. At least in America they both fought and looked like heroes, Custer’s remembered and Sitting Bull is remembered, and others are remembered. But those chicken-shit guys, they came here and wiped us out with small pox. They did it on purpose. And our ancestors they never forgot that, they told us this— it’s been handed down to us. No there’s no hero, we don’t have a Custer, a Sitting Bull...

Zoe: And sometimes you don’t hear the stories of the resistance that did happen.

Wayne: They’re way better at the Americans at being that way! At being sneaky and you know what I mean? Hitler even said the British are better at PR than they are. Made Goebbels look like an amateur. So yeah they came and they wiped us out with smallpox- I don’t know if you call that colonizing.
Zoe: Its genocide.

Wayne: Colonizing is when you come in and just sort of move them aside, and for a handful of idiots to think that way... lest we forget, and we won't. At least I was taught not to. And all the ways that they think out there- all were trying to do is maintain our own way of thinking you know. I talk to Europeans about their culture because I study it. Know your enemy as you know yourself you know. So I tell them about their own history and they turn their ears off! They don't wanna hear about their own legends, their own stories. They say you've gotta 'move ahead'. What do you mean, 'move ahead'? So phony you know what I mean? As if they know and have control and all that...

I had a friend tell me "oh you guys aren't doing anything to help out with stocking oil" and I said "listen, you guys are just Johnny-come-lately's and we've been trying to tell you since you guys got here that you're destroying the land! You're raping and pillaging it! We were warning you a long, long time ago. Now you've got the nerve to say that and we're supposed to jump on the band wagon? F you guys! We've been telling you over and over." I said, "did you ever read Chief Seattle's speeches? Where he is warning us not to do all this stuff?" This is how he ends it, "in the end when everything is gone, only then will the white man know you cannot eat your money." And they think they're smart destroying the world and leading us all... And some of us have been trying to stop it since they got here.

Wayne is a store-house of knowledge. Like many of those I spoke to, upon learning about Natasha’s relation to Kenneth Hunt, he could recount her histories. Natasha has told me how important it is to her to learn these stories about where she comes from. His description of the genocide that the Kwakwaka’wakw peoples have survived shows how these histories are covered up, and how the colonization and genocide of Indigenous peoples in Canada occurred in different (“sneaky” as he says) ways than it did elsewhere. One of my big take-away’s from this conversation was when he asked me where I was from, and then also talked about how European people don’t know (and often refuse to know) their own history. This demonstrates again the importance of struggling to uncover where you are from, and the ways of the people who lived on those Land bases. As he said, “there is truth in every legend”. I think if we found ways to honour this and learn from each other’s legends (or stories of the deep past) we would be focused on making connections rather than deciding that we’re different. He also really challenged me on the way that I saw the difference between patrilineage and matrilineage. They are not mutually exclusive to patriarchy and matriarchy in all settings. There are many aspects of matriarchy that
are present in the Kwakw̱ə̱k̕w̱ə̱k̕w̱ even though they are patrilineal. As Wayne illustrates, the women have power and are honoured deeply.

I spoke a bit with Alan Hunt who is one of the younger carvers that Wayne and the other carvers has helped teach. He was making an amazing mask even though he has only been carving for four years. He did not always live in Alert Bay, but he notes that moving here and reconnecting with culture helped him immensely.

Alan: I think Alert Bay saved my life. I was doing a lot of partying and carrying on… Fast cars and loose women and all that… And wasn’t really getting anywhere. Then I kind of found my purpose in life. Coming from a strong family we have a well-known line of chiefs, the last 200 years or so. Now there’s over 2000 of us. Coming from a family like that… It’s awesome to feel that you’re part of something and to be comfortable where you stand, knowing that you’re looked after.

In this way, Wayne and the other Elders have helped Alan, Natasha and other young people reconnect with their vast history and strong culture, which in turn has strengthened them and helped the community to continue healing. One of the other people I met while I was hanging out at the shop with Stephanie, Wayne, Alan and the other carvers is Natasha’s cousin Marcus. He is Wayne’s son, and was a bit shy to talk to me about Natasha in front of everyone else. He said he wanted to be honest and that he’d be more honest just talking to me. So that’s what we did. Here is a condensed version of our conversation.

Marcus: So what are you asking about? Just about me first? What are you really looking for, though?

Zoe: About Natasha, and you meeting her, and how it’s been for her to find her roots here and anything that you kinda think is important to say because it’s about relationships. Like, my friendship with her has taught me a lot and being close to her through everything that she’s gone through- to come back here and to find everybody, kind of shook me and made me realize you know, I need to pay attention.

Marcus: Kind of a sad story about that too, how that all happened.

Zoe: Yeah it was really tough, you know. Even talking to Steph’s grandma today and yeah…

Marcus: Yeah.

Zoe: So this is something I’m passionate about, I’m trying to convey her relationships and she’s been saying that she wants me to talk to you, and just like anybody she’s said she wants me to talk to that’s who I’m talking to.
Marcus: So, my name is Marcus Alfred. I’m from the Alfred family, the Sun Clan. I’ve been an artist all my life. I have my dad Wayne who is a master carver so I was always there, watching him and learning what I can you know. And you can see here [at the shop] with all the artists in there, everybody’s related in here. But we’ve all got our own styles of work. So with my dad being a master carver, when we were younger he lived in Vancouver, so we went down there and there were artists from every tribe pretty well. Working together. So I got to see all the different things you know all the different styles of carving. Because we’re all not the same, you know- we are in some ways, but down that way it changes compared to what we do here.

Zoe: Going to U’mista it was really clear to see that, Steph was pointing out you know “that’s Nuu-chah-nulth and that’s this and that’s this” and you can see there are similarities but there are really big distinctions too.

Marcus: Yeah that’s right. So um so yeah then when we were down there, Beau Dick -he’s a master carver and considered one of the best artists out of all the people- so I started working with him and now I’m 34 and lived here all my life. Except for off and on trips to go see my dad down there. You know at the time I thought it was really really tough, coming from a broken family I guess you could say. You know with my mom and dad not being together, you know, you had to go down there and go visit and you had to come back… It was a big thing but I really made use of my time. I can’t say I’m a master carver or anything like that but you know after you’ve been carving for 23 years you start to pick up on things. I’ve got some cousins of mine that are learning how to carve now, and all the stuff that I’ve learned over the years I’m passing it onto the next generation. So it’s going to continue on and I’m happy about that.

Actually I’d go to school smelling like wood chips all the time because I lived in a carving house. You know so I’ve always, actually no never in my mind really thought about really taking it serious. Until I was in grade 9 or 10 I think my dad said “well it doesn’t look like you’re going to be a lawyer or anything like that so” if I wanted to take carving serious “let’s do it” he said. So from there it was like what you’re doing right now, schooling- with my dad. And that’s one of the biggest things too for me is that me and my dad can sit in here, like father like son, but at the same time we’re really really good friends. Being an artist and coming from different villages – I don’t just come from alert bay- I’m ‘Namgis I come from Fort Rupert and my grandmother was a Raven and Bear princess. She comes from Alaska.

When the Hunts first came, my grandfather Robert Hunt was running the Hudson’s Bay Company and this is where we get to mine and Tash’s connection, is through our Hunt side. So Robert Hunt was, I don’t know if you would say manager, but he was the boss anyways of the Hudson’s Bay Company in Alaska. And I guess he was with my grandmother and he had 11 kids and Robert asked to move to Fort Rupert so he could run the HBC down here. In the mean-time Robert and Anisalaga were having kids. Anisalaga is Mary Ebbots she comes from the Shakes family in Tongass, Alaska. So we’ve got roots that go that far down there. And we have family we don’t even really know that we’ve got down there! Because I haven’t got to meet them or anything.

Our grandmother came down this way with Robert Hunt, all the women got married into the people from the HBC and all the men got married into big-time princesses of our people. When we say princess, it’s the oldest daughter of a mother and father, and she’s the one that holds on to everything, keeps you strong, holds the names, and how do you say- she’s the book that isn’t written. And even though ladies aren’t able to speak in our Big House, they can talk to their chief or their husband and he’ll be the one to speak for her. So even though they can’t speak they’re still the boss because they’re yelling in the Chief’s ear or their brother’s ear or whoever because they’re the ones with all the knowledge. Not saying that we [men] don’t have knowledge it’s just that they’ve got their part and it’s really, really important. So yeah, their daughters got married to people from the HBC, so they kept that part of it strong. A foot in every door I guess you could say. And their boys ended up marrying wives in how we say “Indian marriage” every tribe does it just like how they do it over there or over there, right. So yeah, out of the sons, they ended up having kids and then they ended up having kids, until three or four generations later when there’s, I don’t know, close to 800 of us? That come from the Hunt family. And I’m just talking about the Hunt side! When you come over here to my Grandmother Pauline’s side, we’ve got the Dawson family, the Scow family, the Willie family, all
different family members. So we probably have, geez, 2000 cousins I guess? All over the place. There’s supposed to be a thousand people in our Alfred family.

So back to the Hunt family, Natasha’s grandfather is Kenneth Hunt who comes from George Hunt and George Hunt is the oldest son of Anisalaga and Robert Hunt. Now you have a half-breed there, my grandpa, because Robert Hunt was a white man. He was English. But yeah everyone’s so connected it’s hard to connect the dots sometimes. On my Grandmother Pauline’s side, her dad, my grandfather Bob McLeod is also a half-breed. He came all the way this way from over there in Scotland and ended up in one of the villages around this area and ended up having kids with my grandmother. They had seven sons, and because my grandmother was of such a fine rank, and she was with a white man our grandfather Potlatched and stood our grandmother up with all of her kids and said that no one should ever talk badly of my family now because I am standing them up and everybody is going to recognize them—no one can ever say they’re ‘white’ or whatever because the world my grandmother wanted her kids to live in was her home she didn’t know nothing else but here. And all of her boys got married into princesses again. So I’m only four generations from that—we have some ‘white’ in our blood too [laughter]. And as much as it seems like a tourist thing those poles we have put up, they are there because someone died, like big Chiefs and that. Now it brings people here and it brings people here for the Big House and the tallest totem pole in the world.

Also, I’ll say this—we’re one of the strongest tribes out of all the people from here. All of the leaders of our people come from here. Like I said my Granny Pauline she knows where we all come from, she has five leger books, so with my granny being in that position her oldest son is my uncle George there’s my dad and there’s seven of them all together. So I’m the oldest grandson of a big-time princess from our area! And I’ll move onto my mother’s side. My mother’s father is from Turner Island. And he was the third-oldest son of the Smith family. She comes from Turner Island too, Natasha. We’re probably related that way too, now that I think of it. So our grandmother Abaiya, where Bruce and them come from, and then there’s Peter Smith, Tom, and our grandmother Margaret. And I ended up getting a Chiefs name from that side as well. So we grew up strong leaders of our people. We grew up really into our traditional ways. Whether it was going out and hunting or going fishing and doing all the different things.

[pause]

But yeah when me and Tash first met I can’t really name the day but ah we talked and talked about our connection. And we were pretty much telling her about it because she was asking us. And I knew her mother too, right? And she was a beautiful lady, you know. She used to come up to my Granny’s and come visit up there.

Zoe: I remember the first time I saw a picture of Marion I was crying because I just couldn’t believe how much they looked the same.

Marcus: Wicked, eh?! Yeah so, from what I hear from Tash she had a really good life where she was—like I said I can’t speak for her— but at the same time just from what I can feel from it I think that she was in a good place. She turned out to be a beautiful and smart lady. And having her come back home after all of these years and find her roots you know, she’s connected to a lot of people. She’s been here for, what did she say?

Zoe: About a year almost.

Marcus: About a year. But she’s been here before that, two years ago for the first time. But that was kind of just checking things out she’s learned way more since living here.

Zoe: Yeah she has blanket making in her, it’s amazing what she made!

Marcus: Yeah eh. So we hit it off right away, enough to make me call her sis you know, because she’s my sister. In our Indian way she’s a really close relative of mine. So um yeah I’m happy for her to come back home and see her people, learn about who she is. And now I can get a haircut whenever I want! [laughter]
My conversation with Marcus confirmed a lot of the things I was learning about in Alert Bay, and demonstrates how close Natasha is to everyone I spoke to. As a sister, a relative, and someone who needed to come home. When Marcus was talking in such detail about where his family comes from, and all of the names, and places and events he knew, I realized on a different level not only the resilience of his people to resist losing their traditions, or being shamed for marrying white men, but also how much the majority of people have lost by not knowing where they come from. Stories are held in family histories and they can teach us about the past in ways that challenge nationalistic narratives and our own understandings of self and of Canada. Moreover, it can help us begin to re-right our relationships by telling our own histories of the past, that begin from small communities and echo out. Because as Wayne, Marcus and Eva -well most people I spoke to- illustrate, we need to know where we come from, and where we are to know where we are going.

iii. Stephanie and Donna Joseph

The next two conversations that I am including from my trip to Alert Bay were with Stephanie, Natasha’s partner, and Stephanie’s gran, Donna Joseph. As I mentioned earlier, I am blessed to have come to a place I’ve never been to visit one best friend, just to leave a few weeks later saying goodbye to two best friends. Natasha was very busy being one of the only stylists on the Island and during the days when she worked, Steph and I would just find things to do! We’d go to the Shop and watch people carve, we’d draw, go for drives, explore Gators and attend blanket making.

86 Figure 16 is a personal photo. Gators is a boardwalk through a marshy part of the Island that is captivatingly beautiful, but also has an eerie sense to it. Stephanie told me later that the dzunukwa (or giant wild woman/wild man of the woods) had been heard there before. It seems that a few years back, when cryptozoologists came to Alert Bay looking for ‘bigfoot’, they were attracted to the area by sightings but also by misunderstanding these stories of dzunukwa. The CTV news coverage of this can be found here http://vancouverisland.ctvnews.ca/very-eerie-bizarre-howls-sasquatch-hunt-on-remote-b-c-island-1.2578210
One of the first days we ever spent time alone (which was difficult at first, being we’re both introverted) was when she brought me to U’mista, the cultural centre on ‘Yglis. I can only describe how I felt during my walk through the simulated Big House as ‘floating’. I never felt fully present, but at the time was hyperaware of the energies in the room, and also of my deep connection to seeing the Kwak’wala words for the faery we have in Ireland. They too have mischievous elves, wild men and women of the woods, depictions of shape-shifters, of sacred serpents. I think even that reading the text version of our conversation will illustrate how we spent the time connecting on a spiritual level with our beliefs and histories. It was a very powerful day for me.

**Stephanie:** [showing me the pictures on the wall] This is chiefs and matriarchs I think, in ranking order. That’s my grandma’s mom’s brother [showing a photograph]. If you have any questions…

**Zoe:** I just love all the pictures. Is that one the same as what’s on the Big House?

**Steph:** I’m not sure. It looks similar though. I think a lot of them are pictures from old villages. That’s Pauline Alfred, Trish’s mom. They just re-did Gilford Island, I think. I wonder if it’s really different from when I was a kid. Yeah and these are origin stories of all the different places. This is Thomas’s grandpa.

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87 Faery is a “blanket term” for all Otherworldly nature-entities in Ireland. Elves are a type of Faery.
Zoe: [in response to seeing a stuffed eagle] That’s probably as close as I’ll ever get to one of those!  
Steph: They’re huge eh.
Zoe: Yeah! [laughter]
Steph: Oh, you haven’t seen Land of the Headhunters yet, have you?
Zoe: The bottom of the poster! “entire drama enacted by primitive Indians”.
Steph: Yeah, it’s crazy, the perspective…
Zoe: Yeah I was thinking of some of the old textbooks you all are using to make masks and drawings from. There is rich stuff in there but at the same time you probably have to wade through a bunch of crap.
Steph: Yeah you have to definitely take it with a grain of salt and remember that it was written a long time ago… This is the Potlatch collection that came back.
Zoe: Oh yeah, from the film that we watched!
[This is when we entered the main room after walking down the hallway leading to the Big House space]
Steph: I don’t know where to start!
Zoe: Me neither! I guess on the outside? [there were two circles in the room, one outer, one inner, constructed of different masks and sacred objects]
Steph: Those are cannibal birds. Part of the Baxbakwanukiwe ceremony, when a Hamat’sa is being initiated, the birds make the cannibals go wild. But in the song it mentions them [the birds] snapping skulls.
Zoe: Oh, I love this… “We believe in giants called”- how do you say this?
Steph: Children of the land?
Zoe: This one…
Steph: Dzunukwa and gănganganamis.
Zoe: So those are the little people and the giants… it’s like we have the exact same things! “This mask represents these mischievous elf like creatures who bring good fortune to those that see them.” That’s pretty awesome… This one at the top, eh? [Motioning to the mask]
Steph: Yeah. It’s crazy how we can connect similarities between different cultures. There’s so much distance between us!

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88 It was one of my first days there. I did not understand how many eagles there were. They woke me up every day and I said goodnight to them every evening; there was a big nest in sight from Natasha’s porch. Two even came and made a big racket as I was leaving, Tash and Steph both remarked they were saying goodbye.
89 Giant wild-woman of the forest
90 Little people or elves
Zoe: That's the thing! I think the Land has similar stories to tell, and so do the animals, and they speak the same things. And like Tash was saying the owl is associated with death and stuff, and misfortune- but “the wise one” [reading off of a description of an owl mask] that's definitely the same too.

Steph: I think it's pretty cool that you can see that these are Nuu-chah-nulth, these are Kwakwavka'wakw, and these are Coast Salish from down in Nanaimo. So you can see how intertwined we are.

Zoe: And the differences too. “Bagwis” what's this? Is it the same as what you were talking about before?

Steph: No it's something different, but it almost sounds similar. He's a very small hairy man and if you look into his eyes he can steal your soul. He digs for clams on the shore, so it's kind of creepy.

Zoe: It's neat that a female dancer does the weather dance stuff too…

Steph: Mm hmm, it's really pretty when they cross in the front they spin and it's to represent the winds and the change of tides and stuff.

Zoe: Oh another giant of the woods too…

Steph: Yeah, dzunukwa.

Zoe: Oh is that the one we were talking about, that white people call 'big foot' and stuff?

Steph: Yeah.

Zoe: It says in most legends they are female, interesting… And that she has a sack that she puts children in and carries them into the woods! That sounds like all the creepy German folktales about Sinter Claus and stuff! [laughing]

Steph: [laughing] Be good or Santa's going to steal you! Um, yeah that's the legend all the Elders would tell you to get you to not be outside after dark kinda thing. Ha, ha.

Zoe: I've gotta read this one out loud. “The dance tells the story of a boy who runs away from his abusive father to kill himself and in the forest he meets a supernatural mouse who takes him to another realm where he meets the forest spirits. He returns to his village and dances the dance of the forest spirits for his people.”

[pause]

Is this like what you have or is it different? The sisiyutl? [laughing]

Steph: The sisiyutl. It's like the Kwakwaka'wakw version of the sisiyutl.

Zoe: Yours is Nuu-chah-nulth right?

Steph: Yeah. [pause] Are you aware of the whole potlatch, like what happens?

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91 I was struck by the similarity of this to ancient Irish and Scottish tales of people being “spirited away by the faeries”. In Ireland, it is said that music was given to the Old people by someone going to the Faeryland and learning their ways.

92 Stephanie has an elaborate tattoo of the sisiyutl, which is a two-headed sea serpent that represents the duality of light and dark, good and bad.
Zoe: A little bit, like its different people who have um more power, they want to give away their stuff and give it to everybody else?

Steph: Yeah, it was our way of- it was an economy for us. But in the morning we have what’s called a mourning ceremony, we mourn all the people that have passed and then we turn to the red cedar bark ceremony. We wear red cedar bark to protect ourselves from the spirit of Baxbakwalanuksiwe who is the man-eater. We perform our dances and songs that represent our lineage, and our story and we ‘turn over’ into a peace dance which is where we can show more gifts and different masks. And then at the end, that’s when they give away everything. But every Potlatch goes this way. It’s to validate everything that has made us strong thus far, I think.

Zoe: It’s like a history, a living history. The mourning ceremony- in the documentary I remember them walking under an arch of red cedar, is this the same thing?

Steph: I think that was a cleansing ceremony. But we do believe that it lifts negative energies and that it’s able to cleanse our soul and Spirit and be able to proceed with what we need to do. That’s why when there are Potlatches it’s hung around all the doorways and behind the singers and, yeah. And when we take off our cedar bark... You’ll notice that none of the dances after we turn over have cedar bark. We believe that fire is the gateway between our world and the otherworld and that’s why it is in the centre in the Big House. That’s why we dance around it. When we enter the floor we always turn left to signify entering into the spirit world, and when we exit we do the same thing.93

Part of our friendship was solidified through this conversation, and through the following weeks of wandering and learning together. When we have the opportunity to compare our truths like Stephanie and I did here, in an altruistic and respectful way, there is no way to explain the connection that is re-built. It is an un-doing of all the false (or non-existent) histories of Indigenous peoples I learned my whole life. On a spiritual level, it underlined to me again the importance of valuing the knowledge various different groups of people have maintained about the Earth. I think anthropologists have tried (and often failed) to do this work in the past, and ended up comparing “primitive” civilizations to suggest their backwardness. I know that through friendship we can do this in a better way, and learn about how connected we all are. This conversation illustrates some of the knowledge that can be uncovered when we approach our connection to Spirit, the Land and our stories from a place of friendship and otherwise accountable relationships.

93 This reminded me of the protecting and cleansing fires of Brigid that Mary Condren describes.
Another Elder that both Stephanie and Natasha suggested I talk to was Donna Joseph, who is Stephanie’s gran. I have been forever changed by hearing her story. She is a survivor of St. Michaels residential school which was built on Alert Bay and remained open from 1929-1975. She was one of the 9200 children who were removed from their families and forced to attend this “school” (Cranmer, 2015). Donna is a strong woman who has overcome so much to be here today and be able to tell her story. Again, like the rest of the conversations, her story has been left in full because her story of her life and her survival does not require analysis. During this conversation with Donna, Stephanie, Natasha and I were all present.

**Donna:** Did you read this book babe? [to Natasha]

**Natasha:** no I haven’t.

**Donna:** Bob[^94] and I are in there. This was just done. I’ll show you. It’s all my nation.

**Zoe:** was that one at U’mista?

**Donna:** Yeah, yeah. I’ll show you. I couldn’t get over myself! I didn’t know I had aged like that.

**Zoe:** I like your music choice. It’s nice.

**Donna:** Yeah Lionel Hampton. My daughter she gave me this iPad and she put 365 songs on there... Louis Armstrong, Aretha Franklin, all those. All that awesome stuff, eh. Before I got sick I went to blues concerts and everything with my girlfriends in Victoria, none of us drank hey. Some have passed away.

   Grab everyone a ginger ale, honey! [to Steph]

   Because of Steph and Danisha, there are all kinds of nations in my family now- Thunder is from Kahnawake, Isha from Detroit, Steph is Nuu-chah-nulth. So our family just gets bigger and bigger that way. [Looking through the book] I can’t find me! [laughter] but Bob and I are in here, her Grandpa and me eh. And it just tells you about myself, that I am from the ’Namgis, I’m ’Yalis which is this area. And really I’m actually from Kingcome Inlet which is part of our nation eh. But my brother he owned this house and he passed away and nobody looked after it. Boy I was upset. It was my brother and my mother’s house. I think the Band was just gonna demolish it you know, and I started fixing it up and that’s why I’m up here, and because I’m up here it’s hard for me to go back home to Kingcome.

   [pause to read the page about Donna in the Elders book]

   **Zoe:** oh you had longer hair back then!

   **Donna:** [Laughing] yeah.

   **Natasha:** How do you say [points at book] that?

[^94]: Chief Bobby Joseph is Stephanie’s grandpa.
Donna: Guantila, it means “big lady from this area” and I got it from the Old Lady through our potlatch in ’81 in Gilford. That Old Lady gave it to me. So it’s a very honourable name. Yeah [laughing] I was just, I remember I was really shy back then in ’81, yeah. I’m from Kingcome Inlet and unfortunately we were taken away from our families for the residential school. And this is the sad part. My grandpa and I were really tight, and he used to sing Indian songs. And I feel really bad that we didn’t have tape recorders and that eh. I would have had all of his songs. But my father built him an en-suite on our house and I’d always go visit him in his little room in the back and one day he said to me, no he didn’t say he always just motioned eh, to go with him. And at home whenever we needed anything we’d either order it from Eatons, Sears or Army and Navy, there’s no stores up there eh. My grandpa brought me to his little room and opened the Sears catalogue, and he got to the suitcases and he always bought me anything, everything when he wanted to eh. And he asked me in Indian, what one did I want? And I pointed to a real pretty royal blue one and it had gold trimmings around it. I thought it was really pretty, I didn’t really say anything I just said “oh good I’ll have a suitcase.” Yeah. Waited, because it takes about three weeks to get to our home.

My suitcase came and uh, one day my grandpa said in Indian that we’re going to be travelling that I should pack all the clothes that I had, and I thought gee we’re going to be away long I guess. Because we always travelled with my dad and my grandpa when we went to Echo bay or other places to get things eh. So I packed my suitcase. And we came in the Gill-net boats, that’s the kind my grandpa had, and we came and landed on this wharf. This wharf was brand new in the ’60s. And I wondered why we were coming down this end because all the stores are down that end but I just listened to my grandpa. And he grabbed my suitcase and we came up the wharf. And somehow I could sense that my grandpa was sad. Nobody told me, nobody asked me. He brought me to St. Mikes and he went to the office with those people and a lady just came to get me. And my grandpa said I was going to school here. I ran upstairs because his boat was still there and I was looking at him from the third floor window and my grandpa was just, his head was just down hey. I could tell he was sad. Well not at that point but when I retell the story that’s how it was, hey. And my mom never said goodbye to me, my dad didn’t say goodbye to me, they didn’t tell me I was coming here, it was too hard for them to say that. We were taken away from our parents.

So, in St. Mikes it was so horrible. I was no longer Donna Marie Henry, I was 66X. A number. If they called 66X I had to run to wherever, whoever was calling me eh. For whatever, for laundry or chores or something like that. It was not Donna Henry it was 66X. And they were so mean to us in there. What’s sad is that the other first nations from other territories were um against us too. Some called us the people that made the stink grease. To dip our fish in? There’s a lot of hard work in that [making ooligan grease] and its gold to us today, eh. And this one lady kept saying that to me and I was getting madder and madder not being able to say anything eh. Because if I beat her up then the older people from her nation would come and beat me up. There were senior, intermediate and junior and those lady seniors were what? 18, 19 maybe. So that was really hard. And I was table captain for the junior girls which means I sat with them during breakfast and made sure they ate their cornflakes and watered down milk, eh. And this girl, I was in the line-up, and when we had cod liver oil they put it in the container you use to oil doors and stuff, and they would come and they would squirt it in your mouth. And we couldn’t throw it up or anything yeah it was so horrible.

I went into the dining room one day and this girl she walked by me, she was from North Masset, she said it again. “The stink-ooligan lady” she said to me as she walked by me in the dining room. I said ‘oooh’, I just got so upset. I’m so glad I didn’t hurt anybody. But I remember just flipping a table. I just lifted it up. And ah. All the staff came and they all beat me up. They beat me up so bad they hid me for 9 days in the infirmary. There was a sick bed in that infirmary on the second floor. So after that I just knew that all I could do was fight for my life, it was no longer like Kingcome. We were so happy up there. Drinking wasn’t anywhere near my people yet at that point.

So I got strapped for speaking my language, got strapped if we talked to our relatives on the other side which was the boy’s side. And we had relatives from Kingcome so we were talking behind the laundry room on this side of the building, which is gone now. Sure enough we got the strap. And we were late for supper one night we were just playing hide and seek up the hill, eh. Us girls from home. And we were late for supper. And our supervisor, her name was Ms. Jules. Really mean lady. She was so mean. She made us before we had supper she made us go out with her and they had those
big containers that oil comes in that manufacturing people put oil in there, and I think tugboats still
carry them to places eh. It was our incinerator now eh, and someone put a lid on it so we could burn
anything right behind the building. And before we had supper that lady made us -I can't remember
how many of us were all from home- maybe about five or four of us girls. She brought us outside and
she had a sack, like potatoes a long time ago came in a sack eh, and flour came in a cloth sack, stuff
like that. And I could see it moving. And I was going “I don’t know what this lady’s doing”... she
started the uh, incinerator. She built the fire. And when it was burning pretty good, and she had a big
long stick with a sharp end to it eh, she got into that sack and she brought out a big snake. And she
made us watch her burn it. Oh, I had nightmares after that eh. I couldn’t even eat. To this day if I see
it on TV I’ll still scream. I’m so afraid of them eh, because of that lady.

I left St. Mikes in June of 1960. And unfortunately liquor started to be allowed and now our people
were allowed to buy it and drinking started. But in the 60s my mom and sister were in Alert Bay and
they were just drinking, everybody was just drinking, doing nothing anymore eh. So I knew my
grandfather and I had to look after my 13 brothers and sisters eh. Because they weren’t there, I had
to wash, and cook, everything. That was in June, we lost my dad, he drowned in June. But they still
wanted me to go to school in the Fraser valley. They brought me to Fraser valley and by then I had
shut down I just said nothing to nobody. I just kept my mouth shut. I guess, I’m no good, you know?
Because that’s what they said to us. Those tapes played all the time… I wasn’t worth anything, I
wasn’t going to become anything, we were stupid, we were dirty, and we practiced evil dancing. Our
sacred potlatch. Our dances. They didn’t understand it they just thought it was evil, that it was some
evil thing to do hey. Oh it was awful.

I got to the Fraser valley and I was so upset because I knew my mom and my older sister were
here [in Alert Bay] and not doing well, and that there were all my other brothers and sisters in
Kingcome. And in the Fraser valley they put me in these stupid homes where they didn’t even know
where I came from. I went to this Italian couples’ place, he was an Anglican minister. Oh, it was awful
in there...

OH, in St. Mikes, before I get there [to Fraser valley], there was a dentist that came up and he
was just a really ugly looking tall guy, a student. And he would pull out all our two front teeth. A lot of
us intermediates, a lot of us had our missing two front teeth. So he did that to me. I tried to tell him it
wasn’t frozen he said it was. And I was just grabbing onto the chair for dear life. So today I’m scared
of dentists too, hey. Horrible. And years later a dentist in Vancouver found out there was two pieces
left up in here. He didn’t do it right. He must have just broke it. I remember being sick from it for a
long time. So that was part of my shut-down because I didn’t like my two missing front teeth.

When I went to the Jovetti’s –that was their name- in Surrey, they were telling me everything like
this is rice, this is a radio. And I had rice! I had a radio! I don’t know where they thought I came from.
And she said “this is a bed” you know, on and on like that. And I just never said anything. And they
were really quite horrible for Anglican people. They drank and they fought. They fought. That lady
would be rolling around on the floor, I remember seeing her bloomers eh. [laughing] and I said to
myself “this is nuts” eh. So the next day, or during the night when I knew they were asleep I quietly
packed my suitcase because they always went out during the day time to do whatever they were
doing in Surrey eh, go to church, go bowling or whatever. And when they were gone I went in after
school and grabbed my suitcase and went downtown. I don’t know how I got downtown, but there
was a Ferry that went from Vancouver to here and I remember I was just going to make it on that
Ferry with my suitcase and here comes the police. And I tried to throw my suitcase over the thing so
I could get on the ferry. Nope. They brought me back to the Italian family again. Geez I was so upset.
So I never said anything.

So the next day they put me in another place. And these people smoked til their curtains and
everything were brown. They were smokers. So they never let us know what was going to go on
when they put us down there hey, and when you’re shut down you just feel worse than ever. I was
now just feeling so awful. Twice I tried to run away from the school in the lower mainland, which was
under the department of Indian affairs. And they were the ones that wanted us to go to the city and
learn something. As if we didn’t learn anything at home, you know? We were such hands-on people.
We picked berries, caught fish, we canned, we had gardens we had potatoes... Everything, you
name it, we had it. But no- we were stupid. We had to go learn something in Vancouver. And again
I shut down eh.
And I remember it was a holiday and I could come home for a while eh. All of us, they sent us home on holidays at least. But everything had fallen apart in my own home. My mom, I told you she was here just drinking eh. In the mean time they took all my brothers and sisters away. And now they were everywhere all over Alert Bay. So I went home, and I remember my grandpa… We were so close, he wasn’t a drunk, he wasn’t an abuser he was a really healthy cultural man eh. He was gentle, he was kind, and he and I really got along. When I got to the house my mom wasn’t even there, she was up the road, drinking had started among my people. And my grandpa just shook his head, he acknowledged the sad, eh. After that, us girls all of our families at home all started drinking eh. And when I think back to it I think they were just all broken because we were all just taken away anyways and they didn’t know how to stop it. I know at one point before we came to the residential school I guess my grandpa went and hid my dad way up the river where we went to Coho Inlet in the fall. So he was never made to go to the Indian day schools that were running from here eh. There were some that were able to sneak away from the process, eh. And unfortunately that’s all everybody and anybody did at Kingcome was drink. So my girlfriends and I, we started. We came to an event here that everyone came to from all around the territory eh. And us girls, I can’t remember who got us um beer [laughing] I think it was Lucky Lager or something. And I didn’t know what it was supposed to do to you because nobody taught us how to drink- I don’t know if there’s such a thing as learning how to drink [laughing] and there was so many of us that none of us felt nothing! We didn’t have enough beer to do anything [laughing]

**Natasha, Zoe, Steph:** [Laughing]

**Donna:** So we were really quite disgusted [laughing]. I can’t remember how much that case was, there was 12 to a case eh. And we managed to share some but it didn’t work out hey, so that was my first attempt at drinking. And because of all the anger and the sorrow you know, my dad drowned, my mom and sister weren’t there anymore, I just became this angry young First Nations girl or whatever. And I learned to get drunk. Because that’s what everybody did. It was a really sad time in my life. For 15 years I tried to, I dunno how many times I tried to commit suicide during those 15 years. I was helpless, hopeless. It was awful just watching my people fall apart. No more fishing, picking berries… They just all fell apart. And I know it was because of that place, eh [St. Mikes]. They had no say in our coming there. And imagine that hey… What they must have felt? So that was really sad. I drank hard-core for 15 years.

And it was my kids in Nanaimo, it was Karen….36 years ago. I am now 36 years of sobriety. I came out of my bedroom and she was in the hallway. And my poor kids, my girlfriend looked after them when I was misbehaving. And all along my walls was little pictures of Jesus and “God loves you” and things like that. She took them to church my younger kids. So I was coming out of August of ’77, August 27th. I came downstairs I had been on one big tear. I was now sick and tired of being sick and tired. I now knew that the way I was living wasn’t right anymore. And Karen, she was about 9 then. She’s always had nice big eyes eh. And she just came and she just hugged me, she didn’t say anything. And I just felt really really low at that point. And I said to her, “you must really hate me now, hey g’hun” and g’hun means endearment for a daughter. And she said “no, mom. I love you and God does too.” Boy. That had a major impact on me. I couldn’t sleep that night. And in the morning I said to my daughter because they were really close to the minister it was Jesus Christ Church, it wasn’t Anglican and all that other stuff.

And I said to her call Mr. Savage, I think his name was David Savage. I guess he was the minister. And she said “oh how come” and I said “I want to talk to him.” And he came right away, I was really shocked eh. And I said to him “I’m sick and tired of being sick and tired, I want to gather in my living room with my kids and I ask you to say a prayer for me and I have to believe what you say” I said to him. And I remember he prayed that I be relieved from my alcoholism and sure enough from that day on I never drank. And that’s 37 years now this year. So I sobered up. That was so I think it was a major breakthrough for me because I was just shut down from these guys eh. We had the 12 step program, so I did that. And I still wasn’t drinking but I still went to the treatment I didn’t know me. I was nothing. Those tapes played forever, eh. And in those treatment centres they taught me how to pray because I thought if god really cared for me he would have looked after me and he didn’t. But I

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95 I was unable to confirm the correct spelling for this term.
didn’t know it didn’t work like that. I just didn’t know anything way back then eh. I didn’t know me. And I had to write down every bad thing that happened to me during my drinking days. And I said to my sponsor at the house that I couldn’t remember anything, and he pulled his glasses down and he said “once you start writing dear, you will know” he said to me.

It took me three days to write down my history. And when I came out all the ladies said I looked green and grey and everything, I was just so distraught hey. Oh it was a big chore. I had to finally share the real me. So that was that part of my life. My sobriety is very important to me. I was now aware of my culture, my tradition, my dance, my song, my longhouse. And its spiritual connections for me as a First Nations woman was very powerful. Having finally coming to understand everything when in fact my grandpa was already doing it for me like through singing and stuff like that. And so I now became somebody. I was now this First Nations woman who came from Kingcome who had to be proud because of all my historical background- the culture, the dance, the song. My name. Our potlatches, and everything. So that was really rewarding.

And then, I ended up I didn’t know I was just so eager to do anything and everything eh. I travelled across Canada, literally. Operating safe homes for First Nations women caught in the cycle of violence or the misuse and abuse of alcohol I actually ran the one in Vancouver and I ran the one in Campbell River. And the one in Winnipeg, a lady, her name was Jacqui Lavallée. She was Cree. What a special lady. I went to volunteer in a safe house for women caught in the cycle of violence and she was going to go on a holiday and I just enjoyed the company, you know. The stories were so the same, you know? And I was so proud of them for leaving those horrible scenarios eh. And Jacqui was going on a holiday and she said to me “Donna, I need to talk to you in the office” she came to get me out of the dining room eh. I was talking to some of the ladies out there. I went to the office and she said to me “you know I’m going on a holiday” and I said “yes and why do I need to know” [laughing] and she said “before I leave, what I’m going to do with you for the next few days is show you how to operate this place and when I leave you’re going to look after this place.”

So that lady made me fly. Like I was now worth something. Gee that was a big opening chapter for me in my life. It was rewarding. I was so happy to be a part of other women’s lives caught in the cycle eh, who had no one to talk to. Came home and did that here too. And it was really my older sister that encouraged my sobriety too, she passed away from rheumatoid arthritis and diabetes, she really died a horrible death. So did my mom. My dad drowned, my grandfather died in a house fire… Just horrible. I don’t know why I’m still here today because they were very traumatic for me and I had to carry them alone, there was nobody else to share it with, eh. And now I came home and now I’m really strong now eh. And now um...

Zoe: I think I knew that from the first second I met you, you can feel it.

Donna: Yeah [laughing]. It was something. But my sister gave me wings. She believed in me. She said “Donna you can do it” when I told her I don’t think I can ever sober up. She was sober before me but she fell after, eh. I never fell again. The Creator really did relieve my craving for alcohol. What a powerful prayer. We were all in a circle in my front room when we did that. So my sobriety was there. My culture was firm and strong, and I became healthy. I now worked anywhere and everywhere. I was so proud of myself.

My favourite work in Victoria, I worked with my First Nations people caught in the legal system. I knew prosecutors, lawyers and judges… Sheriffs and all my clients…From across the country! There’s 9 different bands in Victoria so I dealt with some of those too. Some really horrible lifestyles that they were still stuck in, hey. So I was really glad for them being able to talk to me, and because I was so strong I wasn’t even scared to go talk to a judge. People were scared of this one judge but he was just really awesome! And they were all scared of him, hey. I went to visit him in his office [laughing] I became really close to them. And for me that was my way of um how do you say it? I knew I had to work with the white people now.

I had a really awesome lady in my life her name was Mary Frank Audi. And she lived in Comox. This Old Lady never drank, never smoked, and she owned two longhouses. One in Comox and one up in Bella Bella I think. She was a really powerful old lady. I learned lots from her eh. And she had white friends! And I was sort of…because they were all white in there [St. Mikes] and I said to her in Indian “how did you make it this far? And how did you make friends with the white people?” and she said to me, “we have to enter their world. Times have changed” she’s talking in Indian, eh. “And you
have to learn to work with them, and a lot of them are willing to and some won’t but don’t get upset.” She told me to never stop wanting to learn, she told me to be always teachable. Always willing to learn anything. Willing to try everything. She was a really healthy elder for me during my journey, eh.

So lots of nice things like that happened after, those were my big rewards. And now as I sit here unfortunately I have become ill. Today’s not a bad day but I now have 6 grandchildren. And I vowed that I would play with them, I vowed I would love them no conditions. And now I had to realize that every individual, you, me, Steph…. We all have our own make up, we’re all different but we’re all still living and must work together. So that’s something that was really good for me hey. And I actually, that’s why Victoria Court House was just massive for me. I was now able to work with all the Judges and that now. They really liked me and I really liked them. I ended up in the paper twice in Victoria and that was pretty good. And when I talk to all my kids, whether it’s my children or my grandchildren, I always have to remember that they’re different from me and that times have changed I have to accept them but at appropriate times tell them some lessons in the world, how I have learned them, hey? So I think I am a really, I like to think I’m a really good grandmother. They’ve never seen me drunk [laughter]. So that’s a bonus.

And my kids, it took me quite a few years to get my kids to really love me, and trust me and understand what happened to me, hey? Because some of them were mad at me. They wouldn’t say it but I knew they were. And that really made me sad but I didn’t blame them I understood why they were doing that, eh. And I came up here, I moved up here when my mom was dying so my sister and I took turns coming up here with my mom because she wouldn’t be around much longer. And during that journey, my son here, Frank- he’s two doors down. All my anger through the years, I realized it way after, that I always took it out on my son. I’d yell at him, I would punish him. And when I moved up here in the late ’90s I think it was I asked him to come, I was running a safe home for the kids that were apprehended here. I was running a safe home for them up the hill. And I asked my son to come visit me that afternoon. He came and I apologized for all the wrong things I did to him. And he never said anything. And today we’re really close, he comes to visit. And today we’re able to say we love one another.

Those are the rewards of my sobriety; that I have this awesome relationship with my children and my grandchildren. So despite my ills, I am rich in so many ways. Stephanie is from Nuu-chah-nulth, we had to go learn their dance, their song. She’s got a really nice dance, her dad’s dad’s.

Money doesn’t really count. It’s how rich you are in your own family, your own relatives, eh? It reminds me I have to continue on my journey whether I want to or not. Because there has been days with my sick, and Steph knows this, I just wanted to give up. There were days, and I didn’t even know I did this, I was so distraught- the medical people were just trying everything and anything on me. And I was really upset because I felt that nobody could get it right. It wasn’t until a doctor in North Vancouver, Dr. Brassfield- he was really good for me. And two years ago I finally dealt with my sex abuse from the residential school. It took me five days to write it all down. Like, every scenario and every part of that abuse. Where it happened, what she looked like, how she sounded, how she worked, like… So I had a really rough time with that one eh, but I’m thankful that Bob was there, and Steph was there, and her mom. One day I would really like to tell my story properly, yeah. Because it’s so, so deep. It was the biggest wound in my whole life. And I’m here, I’m still alive. And I was able to tell it, and I think I’m better than yesterday you know what I mean?

I hope that I am honouring Donna by sharing her story as part of the tapestry of stories that have inspired me to work for decolonizing change (Smith 1999, 28). As she said, she wants to tell her story properly. Although this is only a piece of all the wisdom she has to impart on listeners, I believe that her story will help a lot of different people heal, challenge themselves, and
work for change in a good way. She is a survivor who has become a great teacher, and has healed so many women and other Indigenous people with her work.

iv. Talking to Emily Cranmer-Calma

Emily is one of the last people that I spoke to while in ’Yalis, and someone that from the first day there, Natasha was adamant that I hear from. Emily is Marcus’s wife and a very close friend and “sister” to Natasha. Here is a condensed version of our talk from that day.

**Zoe:** Can you tell me a bit about yourself?

**Emily:** My name is Emily Cranmer-Calma, my dad is Mark Calma and my mom is Laura Cranmer. I am the youngest, their fourth child. Well, the youngest of their marriage. And my life revolves around my kids. I’m a recovering addict alcoholic and I’ll own that.

**Zoe:** Have you always lived in Alert Bay?

**Emily:** No I come from Qualicum. When I was a teenager I’d come up and spend the summers with my Granny who was my grandpa’s oldest sister. But we don’t say great-aunt we say granny. So I was here pretty much every summer, or half the summer. And then I moved home when I was about 19, 20. And I started learning about chilkat blankets and I worked on one that was completed maybe.... Ten years ago now? Um I’ve got one that’s still on the go, but it’s not the traditional form, it was stitched. So now that my pregnancies are out of the way it’s time for me to get weaving!

**Zoe:** So what was it like when you met Natasha for the first time?

**Emily:** [to Natasha] You were walking! No! I picked you up with Kimberly!

**Natasha:** Yes!

**Emily:** That was the first time... I was driving down the road with my cousin Kimberly and we picked her up, and on our five minute car ride we figured out how we were connected and my Great grandmother Agnes is her great grandfather Kenneth’s little sister. So from there that’s our Hunt connection. And then ever since then I just randomly pick you up!

**Natasha:** [Laughing]

**Emily:** [to Natasha] Because you were up for a Potlatch right?

**Natasha:** Yeah I was up here last January for five weeks

**Emily:** Yeah! And you were doing dancing with Pewi and weaving and… You were just all over the grid and I’d randomly find you! So that was our first meeting. And then you moved here. Then yeah it’s just a small town! [Laughter] But that was our first connection. And your Auntie Rosita! So the Residential school got torn down, and I met your Auntie and it was really cool because every time I had my grandpa with me and my grandpa’s going through Alzheimer’s, like dementia, but he remembers sixty years ago like nothing. So he’s like right away, your dad… Who would Kenneth Hunt be to Rosita?

**Natasha:** Her grandpa.
Emily: Okay so he’s like “your grandpa’s my uncle” like straight out. He just remembered her right away.

Natasha: So wait. My great-grandpa would have been his Uncle? [pause] Oh okay… There’s so many [laughing] trying to figure out how we’re all connected!

Emily: So… let’s go back seven generations. For me, and for you too. So, Mary Ebbots married Robert Hunt and she was —this is from the matrilineal like of the Tlingit- from the Raven house in Alaska and they moved down here to Fort Rupert. And they had something like eight or nine kids? So their older child was George…

[Pause]

Emily: So Mary Ebbots married Robert Hunt who was the head of the fur traders for the HBC in that area. And they had a lot of kids and Mary was very smart, she married all of her sons to high-ranking women so that they had positions among the Kwakwək̓a’wakw so her and Robert’s oldest son was named George. His oldest son was David. David had I think like 5 kids. So Tash’s great-grandpa is Kenneth who is David’s oldest son, and my grandmother is Agnes who was David’s daughter. So that’s our connection. And there’s a lot of branches from each line… but that’s four generations ago for us? But that’s where we get the right to wear chilkat blankets and yeah.

[Pause – phone call]

Emily: So the hard part about talking about colonialism is that they did it to themselves first. White people did it to themselves first. Um, there’s stories of Russian women protecting their kids- they were super large women and they would take off their clothes when the authorities would try to take their kids. And I don’t know how you’d say that… The authorities would just turn and walk away!

Zoe: I guess they were just so offended by it?

Emily: Yeah! They were. We were the last to be colonized. So basically even though people showed up on our coast they weren’t welcome on the shores. But the way they got to us was through the East. And the Mi’kmāq they still have their language. I remember being at a language conference in Hawaii and a woman spoke a speech to us and she said “I challenge all of you to go home and learn your language. We [Mi’kmāq] were the first to be colonized and that’s no excuse.” And I think we’d find a lot of strength in that. Because there’s a certain amount of identity that comes with it, with knowing your own language. And even having that promoted in schools is really important because that’s where that pride comes from, and it’s not so much pride but a…

Zoe: A different way of knowing?

Emily: Yeah, and it’s a feeling. And if that was promoted more I think we’d be a lot stronger. We’ve got maybe a handful of fluent speakers right now and there’s a different way of speaking from in the Big House to speaking one on one… And it’s being lost. And it’s really hard because people have been so used in the past that they don’t feel open to sharing, they don’t take people seriously. They’ve had classes where maybe 20 people show up at the beginning of the week and by the end of the week there’s only two. And that’s, I dunno if it’s because of technology or because our lives became too busy, but it needs to be made a priority. And that was the first part of colonization was to stop the language, so.

Natasha: I like that you are very active with keeping your language too, like with the boys you always say like Kwak’wala words, like I learn when I sit with you and the boys because you’ll say Kwak’wala words and speak to them in Kwak’wala on a regular basis. And that’s something that’s really important too, that they just hear that.
Emily: Yeah

Natasha: They dance around and play with their masks and like culture is very involved with them and that’s really cool to see.

Emily: Yeah and that’s something that I really want to work on with myself is that like any word that I learn I want to teach them.

Emily found the words to say what I have struggled until that time to express: *White people colonized themselves first.* This is what those pictures of the Picts and the Weroans was saying to me, and what my research into the Lands where my family came from has continued to teach me. Our conversation helped me approach my family story research with this truth as guidance. As well, it was important to have this conversation because it made real to me the struggle of regaining a language. Her little boys exemplify a resurgence. As Natasha said, they are so lucky to be able to have a mother like Emily who has been able to immerse their lives in culture, and to teach them Kwak’wala. Spending time with Emily and her children also reminded me of the wide and diverse network of support that Natasha has. Young and old, her family is around her to love her, teach her, and remind her of all the beauty that is her Nation.
V. Closing Remarks

There is no way to summarize my learning in Alert Bay. Each time I think about my time there, reflect on the conversations we had, or even talk to Natasha on the phone, new understandings of the importance of relationships and stories is underlined to me. I hope that this is only the first time I will speak with all of her family, and that I will be able to travel back to Alert Bay often. It was difficult to say goodbye to Natasha when she left Ontario more than a year ago now. I know from going there that it is the only decision she could have ever made, because Spirit helped her. Now in my heart having one of my best friends leave doesn’t feel like a loss, it just feels like distance. I know that we will continue to grow and learn so much from our friendship.\textsuperscript{96}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{Figure17.png}
\caption{View of Alert Bay from the ferry.}
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My intention with sharing these stories and conversations in full is to honour the knowledge that they hold; knowledge which will be imparted on anyone who reads them. My learning through stories has changed me, and I hope that by reading the stories and connecting to

\textsuperscript{96} Figure 17, photo by author.
them, others will also be changed and driven to action. Too often in academia Indigenous voices are used as a tokenizing gesture to “prove” the legitimacy of whatever point the author is trying to make. My friendship with Natasha has changed me and challenged me to be a better Treaty person. I shared her stories as completely as possible—as I shared mine—so that I could show the importance of gaining “parallel” understandings through relationships. In the concluding reflection, where we are going, I will pull together some of the “parallel” learning in the ways that I have experienced so far, and consider the decolonizing applicability of some of the actions that I have taken or learned about through my friendship with Natasha.
PART III- Where We Are Going: Rebuilding and Re-Righting

The stories that we tell of our pasts, and of our relative present, construct how we move forward together into the future. Decolonization, as I have mentioned, requires reflection on all parts of this Triad. The stories I have selected demonstrate particular examples of how my learning around decolonization has happened so far. I have focused in part on the stories of my ancestors, and also on the stories shared with me by anam-cara97 or the soul-friendship I hold with Natasha. Decolonization must begin in our hearts and minds, but it must also extend from there and begin to support incommensurability in all relationships and communities within settler-colonial states.

This project has been part of my effort to “listen to the sparkle” described in The Original Instructions, by Nelson quoting “the eminent Tewa Indian educator Gregory Cajete [who] asks us to “ignite the sparkle” of our own learning; follow our passion and listen to the deeper meanings within a story or watch for the hidden pattern that connects seemingly disparate things” (Nelson 2008, 5). In the following pages, I will conclude the storying of my learning around decolonization by providing a summary in the form of decolonizing practices that I have either tested or created. The idea of using decolonizing practices as a method of summary for this project is inspired by Linda Tuhiwai’s Smith’s list of “Twenty-Five Indigenous Projects” at the end of her book, Decolonizing Methodologies: Researchers an Indigenous Peoples (1999) and Ana Oian Amets’ “Practical Steps” for decolonization from her blog, Awakening the Horse People (2016). By explaining and summarizing learning in this way, information can be “brought with us”, and thus

97 The anam cara is often seen as a Christianization of the Irish pre-Christian understanding of a “soul friend”. Brigid famously had a soul friend in Darlughdach. Mary Condren taught me that people without a soul friend are “like a body without a head, a poisoned lake no good for eating from or washing in.” She urges us to “choose the person who calls you to integrity- because we all need critical support to be pulled to consciousness.” I can think of few people who have “pulled me to consciousness” the way Natasha has.
most easily replicated and used in decolonizing action - in the academy, in communities, in homes. The stories I have told provide one contextual example for how these decolonizing practices can be uncovered or tested in other individual and community struggles towards decolonization.

It is somewhat contradictory and challenging for a number of reasons to conclude a personal story of decolonization. There is no conclusion to these stories. Once embarked upon, decolonization work must continue until lasting effects – societal transformations - are actualized. And for myself, this work – encouraging searches for ancestral place, my support of efforts for Indigenous sovereignty, my learning from relationships, the Land and Spirit – is a life-long process.

Throughout, I have highlighted historical “pieces” that have been largely left out, removed, or distorted in the schooling environments I’ve experienced because of their potential to communicate to others about personal processes of learning about colonization, resistance and (hopefully) decolonization. I attempted to balance the stories that were “left out” from my schooling, my family, and the past more generally with the stories I learned while visiting Natasha after her repatriation to ʻYalis. I shared Natasha’s story because she inspired me to take on a critical engagement with the past by trying to learn where I’m from. I also share her story and the stories of her relatives to show how Indigenous resistance has been, and is happening right now. While I have learned much from the research and writing of others on colonialism, I have found that this is not the site where transformation happened for me; it is not how I learned most deeply about the constancy of colonial violence in Canada, or how to resist it. I learned about colonialism, resistance and survival from my conversations and relationships with my Indigenous friends. I hope that by sharing Natasha’s story in particular, and the stories I learned in conversation with her and her relatives, that I have communicated how some of this learning has happened for me, but also to
highlight Kwakw̱ak̓a’wakw survival and resistance. I also hope that sharing her story may help other Indigenous adoptees find inspiration like that which has burned in Natasha to bring her home, to help her u’mista.

As I move forward, whether I am teaching other settlers about what I’ve learned, supporting Indigenous efforts for land repatriation and sovereignty, or anything in-between, the ancient words of the Cailleach hold true. She says that “I’ve done what I can, but I can’t do everything!” Decolonization requires all of our efforts, all of our skills. Those committed to decolonizing social transformation each bring to the table a unique and important addition to the discussion and actions working for decolonization in each particular context. We must heed Her words, and realize that more can be done together.

I. Decolonizing Practices for Incommensurability

Decolonization to me means big changes. Changes that some of us crave, and others (who benefit daily from colonialism) fear deeply. The more I have learned about how colonialism in the past has harmed all people who revere the Land, the more I have been able to challenge my fears and turn them into productive actions. This project has been a story of stories meant to highlight some of the accounts, experiences and memories that have changed and challenged me. As Tuck and Yang say, we must acknowledge that “decolonization will require a change in the order of the world [...] a break, not a compromise” in the system of domination we are all part of (Tuck and Yang 2012, 2). There is too much that comes with re-ordering the world for anyone to create a step by step approach to it. When we start to do this re-ordering on an intimate level (within ourselves, within our families, within our communities) real change can begin to ripple out. Think of the shape that the ancient peoples of Ireland carved into New Grange and other barrows; the

98 Mary Condren, public lecture, May 2015 at Brescia College.
triskele spiral. Three ripples stemming from the same place of inspiration. We all need to do our spiralling work in each of our particular contexts while remaining aware of our connection and reliance on one another – while learning and sharing together. The following sections present the main principles of practice I found in the decolonizing learning I have shared in my research journey.

i. Engage critically with where you are from.

This looks different for each person. For me, this practice was inspired by learning that I have the choice (and really, the responsibility) to struggle to learn where I came from because of my friendship with Natasha. Natasha did not have a choice but to ask where she was from. Repatriation is an active step in decolonization because – as Natasha has shown me – it begins to heal and rebuild communities and individuals. I was inspired because I realized that I may be able to uncover stories about my family’s history that was unknown to my relatives, and that could teach me more about my family’s historical relationship with colonialism in Canada. I began this process by talking to my living family members about what they understood about our family story. I had to delve deeper than these stories because they did not teach me the “who, what, why, when and where” of my ancestors leaving Europe to settle in Canada in most cases. Alongside this research, I compared the learning I was doing about my ancestors and the Lands they were connected to with mainstream histories as well as subdued stories of the past to see what “truths” I could uncover (Smith 1999, 149). This has helped me engage with stories of colonization from various places, time periods and people. It has challenged me to see both differences and similarities between the colonization(s) that Europeans have done to themselves, and how colonization was enacted on Indigenous peoples in Canada. Learning about the past in this way also has encouraged me to see colonialism as a patriarchally rooted and continuing force of
destruction that needs to be (and is being) resisted in Canada and elsewhere. I shared my story of how this learning has happened, and have also had the honour to share aspects of Natasha’s journey and U’mista. These are examples of how engaging with whence we came provide decolonizing inspiration and encourage action.

ii. Commit to protecting languages at risk.

Actively working to reclaim languages lost by force is a decolonizing practice. This idea has been powerfully argued by Linda Tuhiwai Smith and other Indigenous scholars who write about decolonization (Smith 1999, 147). Colonization has worked to destroy languages as a method of control and genocide. We can support the protection of Indigenous languages at risk in many ways. We can learn the languages that are connected to us that are at risk of loss. In my case, this is Gaelic. For Natasha, it is Kwak’wala. People in positions of economic and other privilege can commit to supporting those who are doing the work of learning and revitalizing their languages. By learning languages that have been -and are being- harmed by colonialism, we can actively resist and heal some of the harm through reconnecting with the teachings that Indigenous languages (and Old languages) inherently hold. Learning language helps reconnect different generations of Indigenous communities together. The Indigenous Language Institute99, the First Peoples Cultural Council100 and First Voices101 are some examples of this work already underway in Canada. Settlers can support Indigenous language revitalization efforts in a number of ways. I would suggest enquiring from language support initiatives in communities near you if there is support that can be provided by non-language speakers. Some online sound dictionaries of Indigenous languages have begun to be made. This is a way learning the language can be made.

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99 An online data-base of language revitalization resources, found at http://www.ilianative.org/
100 http://www.fpcc.ca/language/
easier for those who are not surrounded by any fluent speakers. A diverse range of skills can be useful in support of language revitalization. I share this example because it is focused on knowledge sharing and support through building and re-righting relationships. It was also highlighted to me during my time in 'Yālis and from my friendship with Natasha.

iii. Work to re-right your relationships.

This is how I have come to express Linda Tuhiwai Smith’s concept of connecting after beginning to experience aspects of it myself (Smith 1999, 148). She speaks about connection to each other, the Land and cultural practices, and notes that “to be connected is to be whole” (Smith 1999, 148). Natasha has done this difficult work of connecting by searching out and returning to her home in 'Yālis. Friendships that are altruistic and accountable, and occur across “difference”, can also re-right our relationships and rebuild (in some cases, begin) supportive connections. We must not only re-right our relationships to each other, but also to our stories of the past, to the Land, and to Spirit. I have no complete answers as to how this happens, because it is different for everyone. One way that I found is the important learning from the “parallel” truths found in the “old-growth cultures” (Ausubel 2008, xxi). I think, as Means, Gunn Allen, and many matriarchal-feminist scholars suggest, we need to find life-giving ways forward, or “feminine models”. Paula Gunn Allen says that she also calls these systems gynocratic, and that

> Feminine principles mean organizing ourselves around the idea of interactive communities. Now, those communities are plant communities and critter communities and spirit communities and super natural communities and human communities. One of the problems with the Western world, in all of its aspects today, right now in white folk’s time, is that we don’t understand the Spirits. We don’t understand the supernaturals. We don’t understand that right here standing with us are multiple worlds coexisting, cohabiting, and occupying the same space with us. (Gunn Allen 2008, 140)

She emphasizes how gynocratic or feminine principles can help us re-right our relationships, and to allow for further conceptualization of a world that is deeply interconnected;
where plants, people, animals and Spirit are all interwoven and humbly interdependent. From what I’ve learned, this is a central part of the Indigenous worldviews I’ve been exposed to on Turtle Island, and also runs “parallel” to the beliefs of my Irish and Scottish ancestors.

The piece about re-righting a relationship with Spirit is difficult to discuss apart from my personal experiences. One thing that is necessary to note is that re-righting a relationship to Spirit is not a green-light for settlers to appropriate, steal or alter Indigenous spiritualities. In quoting Smith (1999), Rhee reiterates this point. She says that Smith “argues how the Indigenous aspect of spirituality is a space where Westerners cannot I (and should not) know fully what Indigenous ways of being and knowing are” (Rhee 2014, 350). What I advocate is re-igniting sparks in all people to search for a connection to their respective Old Growth cultures. These cultures exist in every place but are stronger in some places than others. Smith also “writes that spirituality is a domain that marks a fundamental difference between Indigenous and dominant ways of being and knowing and that “it is one of the few parts of ourselves which the West cannot decipher, cannot understand, and cannot control … yet” (Smith qtd in Rhee 2014, 350). Searching out the Old ways could allow for settlers and other Dominant people to question their worldviews and hopefully re-right their relationships (with the land, each other, Spirit) as a result. As Land says, we need to find “parallel” pathways because “non-Indigenous people [should see] their interests as linked to those of Indigenous people, though not in a way which appropriates Indigeneity” (Land 2015, 110). Rhee says that the “transformative possibilities of spiritualities” can allow for insight into how various “othered” cultures have been demonized by the West (Rhee 2014, 341). I think this can be further explored and utilized –from a heart place- to connect various Old Growth cultures and beliefs and assist our work to re-right our relationships with each other, the Land and Spirit.

102 Even when some of those cultures are located in the “West”.

149
This decolonizing potential of transformative spiritualities is summed up best by Rhee, who says “spirituality is engaged to serve political, cultural, epistemological, and ontological emancipatory goals (Rhee 2014, 351).”

To re-write our relationships to each other, we must search for what Diane LeResche calls *sacred justice* (qtd in Walker 2004, 541). For this to flourish “the importance of restoring understanding and the balance to relationships has [to be] acknowledged. It almost always includes apologies and forgiveness. It is people working together, looking for mutual benefits for all in their widest circle” (LeResche qtd in Walker 2004, 541). One way this can be actualized is when “non-Indigenous people and Indigenous people come together in pro-Indigenous, pro-land rights political spaces [where] they are establishing a relationship based on a critique of colonialism” (Land 2015, 84). The importance of encouraging the use of Indigenous approaches to conflict resolution in transforming the relationship between Indigenous peoples and settler populations could be explored further in both academic and community approaches to decolonization (Walker 2004, 528).

iv. Learn stories\(^{103}\) of and support protection efforts for the Land that you live on.

I began to learn more deeply about Kitchener-Waterloo’s past by incorporating an anti-colonial lens. I approached this process similarly to how I approached learning about *where I am from*. I started because I realized that what I was told by my family, by “history” and by Indigenous peoples did not match. I learned about broken Treaties that made the land my ancestors settled on *stolen land*. I have continued to learn about how land in Ontario continues to be taken without consent and used in anything from housing projects to destructive mining. By seeking out stories

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\(^{103}\) Meant to emphasize the importance of perspectives found outside of mainstream accounts (specifically nationalistic and imperialist narratives) of different Lands, like those taught by Indigenous scholars, anti-colonial historians and Indigenous stories of the past more generally.
of the Land that challenge colonialism and *death-centric* world views we can acquire knowledge that assists in undoing the false stories of the Land we have been taught in “schools”, in our homes, and elsewhere. As well as using the research of Indigenous and anti-colonial scholars, we can do this by reading between the lines of stories written over the traditional understandings of the Land. I did this by engaging with the writings of Gerald of Wales and Ezra Eby.

As indicated in my discussion above of *re-righting our relationships*, settler Euro-Canadian culture continues to have a damaging relationship to the Land. The denial of Indigenous land rights is one aspect of this ongoing violence. The active destruction of ecosystems in the interests of profits is another. Robbie Thorpe makes this point in an interview with Clare Land;

> *It is only when non-Indigenous people realize that our system, while bringing certain material benefits to us, is ultimately imperilling our survival because it is attended by ‘ecocide’ (destruction of the environment) that we will begin to act and to turn to Indigenous peoples as a resource to value and to learn something from* (Thorpe qtd in Land 2015, 216).

Engaging critically with *where we are* has decolonizing potential because we can change our understandings of the past, and our goals for the future, by learning about Indigenous understandings of the Land. We should remember though, that we are not restoring or *protecting* the Land per-se, and that “she is restoring us” (Gunn Allen 2008, 139). I am not expressing *protection* of the Land as a hierarchical form of ownership and stewardship that disguises ongoing colonial control of the Land, but as a way to recognize that the destruction that is being dealt out to ecosystems by corporate and Government hands needs to be continually resisted. Gunn Allen’s words are important though, and part of learning about the Land we are on is knowing we can learn *from* the Land we are on- that the Land itself holds knowledge and lessons for us, and that connecting with the Land in this way *restores*. Kovach notes “many non-Indigenous young people are attracted to Indigenous approaches as well because, I believe, it has to do with a generation
seeking ways to understand the world without harming it” (Kovach 2009, 11). Approaching learning about the land as a settler must be grounded in humility, and the honesty that comes with knowing that we do not know. As Eva reminded me when I was in Alert Bay, it is most often Indigenous peoples who have the knowledge and learning to instruct non-Indigenous people on how to move forward in ways that respect our interdependence with the Land.

v. Share your learning.

This principle seems easy compared to the others, but it can often prove to be extremely difficult. Sharing my learning with my family and friends has not been easy, but the struggle has moved people to change by transforming aspects of their worldviews. Sharing learning is already being done in Indigenous communities across Canada as a way to resist ongoing colonialism, and as a way to protect traditional knowledge. Settlers must work to recommit to the “two-row” and start to work on all the learning and change we have to do alongside the work that has already been set out for us by Indigenous peoples. I think by learning about where we come from and where we are, individuals can be moved to share what they have uncovered with others. The more we learn and share with one-another, the more we will be driven to make change and contribute to healing the wrongs of the past and resist those occurring in the present.

For non-Indigenous people who belong to privileged groups in society, “involvement in or supporting struggles for justice [can begin] to reconstruct their subjectivity. This can be permanent, such that a new sense of self makes it impossible not to remain committed to supporting struggles for justice” (Land 2015, 223). So sharing learning is an active thing. It is not just about talking, but about encouraging personal and relational involvement in Indigenous-led movements for sovereignty, education, land protection and justice. Change can begin by talking, but must extend to other actions as well. Focusing on Indigenous and “regional counter-hegemonic
education” can encourage the creation of “critical consciousness and liberation” (Freire 1973, quoted in Chan-Tiberghien 2004, 196).

II. Closing Remarks

This project has been a story about my learning. It is incomplete and unending because decolonization is not yet actualized, and I continue to learn more about the ideas I have presented here. I have attempted to show the decolonizing potential of learning about ourselves, the past, and ways forward by re-righting our relationships to each other, the Land and Spirit. I interrogated my past by researching my family story, which I began to do from a “blank slate” as very few people in my family have held this interest before. I critically engaged with my self-story by reading it against the mainstream Western narratives about the past and those stories that have been maligned by mainstream accounts. After this preparation I undertook the main formal data gathering for this thesis in relationship with my close friend Natasha Pittman. I presented our stories and learning journeys as Part I: From Whence I Came and Part II: Where We Are as a way to honour that although there is great connection with our learning, our stories are different and demand their own specific attention and space. Drawing on all these elements of my research I have uncovered critical principles of decolonizing learning –and action- which I hope can assist individuals and communities committed to this path.

We have to reinstate a politics of friendship. Clare Land says that the “politics of friendship in a settler colonial context is possible where Aboriginal people continue to assert radical title and continue to express concern for the rights of all people. This generosity, this ethic of unconditional love is evident and humbling for those who will see it” (Land 2015, 189). I have felt the power of expressing unconditional love, generosity, and respect for one another. Reconciliation and decolonization require it.
Post-Script

At the end of August, 2016, Marcus Alfred was found dead in a park in Vancouver after a salmon protest. As I write this, the news is still sinking in. I grieve with his family- I am so sorry for the loss that so many in ‘Yalis are feeling right now. Marcus was such an important community leader, a teacher, an artist, a husband, a father and a son.
Appendix A: Names, Places and Relationships

i. **William Dawson Breen**: my paternal grandmother’s grandfather (through her mother’s side)

ii. **Elizabeth Ann Rosborough**: my paternal grandmother’s grandmother (through her mother’s side)

iii. **Jacob Bock**: my maternal grandmother’s great-grandfather, through her grandfather Addison Bock’s side.

iv. **John Shupe**: my maternal grandmother’s great-grandfather, through her grandfather Addison Bock’s side. John Shupe’s daughter Catherine Shupe married Jacob Bock.

v. **Alert Bay**: an island off of the northern tip of Vancouver Island, also known as ‘Yələsq. Natasha’s birth community.

vi. **Stephanie Joseph**: Natasha’s partner and close friend.

vii. **Marion**: Natasha’s birth mother.

viii. **Kwakwaka’wakw**: means “Kwak’wala speaking people”, including but not limited to the Kwagu’l, Mamalilikula, ’Namgis, Ławit’sis, Ma’antagila, Də’naxda’xw, Dzawada’enuxw, Gwa’a’enuxw, ‘Nak’waxda’, Gwa’sala, Tlatla’iskwala, and Gwat’sinuxw tribes.

ix. **St. Michaels/ St. Mikes**: The residential school built and operated on Alert Bay by the Anglican Church from 1929-1975.

x. **Andrea Cranmer**: One of the first people Natasha connected with when returning home, she knew Marion when she was a girl.

xi. **Eva Dick**: Elder, Auntie to Natasha.

xii. **Vera Newman**: Elder, Auntie to Natasha, knew Natasha’s mom when she was young.

xiii. **Wayne Alfred**: master carver, teacher, knew Marion.

xiv. **Marcus Alfred**: master carver, teacher, Wayne’s son, knew Marion as a boy.

xv. **Emily Cranmer-Calma**: Married to Marcus, a close friend of Natasha.

xvi. **Alan Hunt**: Young carver.

xvii. **Donna Joseph**: Stephanie’s gran.

xviii. **Robert Hunt**: Worked for the Hudson’s Bay Company, married to Mary Ebbots or Anisalaga, Natasha’s 4th great-grandfather.

xix. **Mary Ebbots/ Anisalaga**: Wife of Robert Hunt, Natasha’s 4th great-grandmother.


xxii. **Lelaxa**: Wife of David Hunt.

Works Cited


