A LONG WAY HOME: FIRST NATIONS ADOPTIONS AND REPATRIATIONS

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
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Ontario Institute for Studies in Education
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Abstract

This dissertation project explores a phenomenon known as the Sixties Scoop and some of its consequences as told by survivors through their own oral testimony. The Sixties Scoop was a period of aggressive adoption of Indigenous children in Canada and the United States in the 1960s. The Sixties Scoop did not happen in a vacuum; it was part of an ongoing attempt at genocide against Indigenous peoples of the Americas. This study is situated within the history in the eastern Maritimes of genocidal attempts towards the Wabanakis, the Indigenous peoples of the Maritimes. First hand accounts of sailors, traders, soldiers, missionaries and settlers describe observations, interactions and policies. The far-reaching effects of The Indian Act, passed in 1876, are also addressed. Survivors of the Sixties Scoop are interviewed in Toronto between 2012 and 2013. Much has been written about Indigenous Research Methodologies, which is discussed in the thesis. Although autoethnography is used in this study the thesis is only partly autoethnographic. Autoethnography was used as a tool to help Sixties Scoop survivors to speak more freely. The method of a scrapbook of memories relating to the adoptive experience (Arts-informed/Indigenous) was also used to help build a relationship with the
adoptees that are interviewed. These adoptees expressed many of the same symptoms described by Residential School survivors. These are the symptoms recognized as post-traumatic stress disorder. Some of the experiences these adoptees relate are long-term depression, recurring suicidal thoughts, a feeling of worthlessness and abandonment, chronic tiredness and a marked tendency to sabotage relationships. These experiences are coupled with a seeming irreparable sense of loss and broken relationships with both birth and adoptive families and communities. These adoptees feel their voices have not been heard and have difficulty finding a place to call their own.
Acknowledgements

One decade of my life has passed whilst writing this thesis. During this time I lost my father and my mother, two aunts, one uncle and a number of friends. It was not an easy time.

I thank my committee and supervisor for their unending patience. I thank First Nations House for their long-time and steady support. I also thank Lise Watson, Margaret Brennan, Tracey King and Shannon Simpson for doing everything in their power to help me financially and morally. And, not least of all, my editor for his kindness whilst working with a madman.

I thank my ancestors for visiting me and for giving me their strength. I thank the adoptees for so generously sharing their life-stories whilst spilling tears on my table over endless pots of tea. I thank the next Seven Generations for reminding why I needed to do this work; I am getting old now. It is not for me.

I would like to thank Nancy Steel and Rose Fine-Meyer for their sincere friendship and unrelenting support. I would also like thank the many other kind friends who supported me in this lengthy project, too numerous to mention here, but always remembered in my heart.

I thank my adoptive father and mother, and family, for giving me a beautiful life and for opening a world of opportunities for me. I have taken a great many twists and tumbles in this life, and expect to take a few more before I finish my time here. However, I always remember the incomparable grace and gentle intensity of spirit of my adoptive parents. I am grateful for their almost unbelievable love and scope of
reading. If it was in print in the past three hundred years one of them had most likely read and remembered it. Their knowledge was never for show or selfish advancement. They loved it for its own dear sake, a rare quality indeed these days.

I acknowledge Mi’kmaqik, the land that created me.
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Introduction

Framing the Discussion

During a visit to Boston many years ago I recall slowly walking up a long, broken escalator. A workman who was repairing it called out to comment on my turtle pouch. I was wearing a beaded umbilical-cord holder in the form of a turtle around my neck. Surprised that he knew what it was, I paused. There was nobody behind me and I was not in a particular rush being quite early for an appointment. He did not appear to be distracted by his work at hand, so we began our conversation:

“How did you know about umbilical cord holders? It's unusual that someone knows one on sight,” I said cheerfully.
“Cause I'm Indian,” he said, drawing himself up proudly. “You an Indian too?”
“I am Native, yes, Mi'kmaq.”
“I'm Cree.”
“You are? From where?”
“From Boston,” he said proudly.
“But where is your home community?”
“Here. The Cree are from Boston originally. Then they moved away when the settlers came.”
I did not address this claim but I have many Cree friends who would have had quite a bit to say about it. I replied, “But what is your family name? What community do you come from?”
He adopted another tactic. “Oh, you're talkin' about a bloodline. I'm not talkin' about a bloodline. I'm talkin' about being an Indian. It's what's in your heart that makes you an Indian. You're talking like a White man!” And then he laughed. I sighed and continued on my way without another word.

What First Nations person has not shared many similar experiences? Traditionally, First Nations peoples locate themselves by way of introduction, an ancient custom. In one fell swoop this man, a perfect stranger, had dismissed me as acting like a White man and then laughed about it. I suppose his response to me was meant as a form of false-protection against his dubious story.
It is common for First Nations people to hear others challenge our Indigenous identity as well as make ill-founded implications about their Indigenous ancestry. Many First Nations peoples with whom I have spoken have shared stories that are similar to my own experience in Boston. Why do I find this encounter, and other comparable encounters, so provoking? I have found myself repeatedly coming back to this problem, in particular their relation to my own understanding of my First Nations identity: Who am I? Where do I come from? How much of my identity is made up of what others think of me and how mainstream society understands my place in it? Who and what am I allowed to be? How does the perception of others affect me as an individual? How much of what others believe about me do I act upon and permit to shape my being? These questions are vexing for any person who identifies as First Nations in a contemporary Western society. Moreover, as I will demonstrate throughout this project, they are especially problematic for the thousands of First Nations peoples in Canada who became victims of what has become known as the ‘Sixties Scoop’.

Patrick Johnson (1983) is credited with coining the term ‘Sixties Scoop’ in his seminal report *Native Children and the Child Welfare System*. He details the purposeful removal of First Nations children from their homes, in many cases without the knowledge or consent of their caretakers, in communities across Canada. The report argues that these adoptions were not necessary in any legal respect and that little or no effort was made to support the birth parents or to find culturally appropriate homes for the children. Records of these adoptions were
closed, or sealed and remain so today, although there is now a class action to open these records in process (Huck).

Sinclair (2007) notes that it is very important to keep in mind that the Sixties Scoop “was not a specific child welfare program or policy. It names one segment of a larger period in Aboriginal child welfare history where, because questionable apprehensions and adoptions figured prominently, a label was applied” (p. 65). For this reason there was not a specific policy or law to keep records closed. It must be surmised that closed, or sealed records, were the norm to prevent the adoptees from discovering their birth families. As a result of this offensive practice, the Indigenous communities affected suffered significant losses of their populations, birth families were devastated and left with no recourse, and adopted children were typically reared with no knowledge of their identity and sometimes even their nationality as some children were transported from Canada to the US:

Statistics from the Department of Indian Affairs reveal a total of 11,132 status Indian children adopted between the years of 1960 and 1990. It is believed, however, that the actual numbers are much higher than that. While Indian Affairs recorded adoptions of ‘status’ native children, many native children were not recorded as ‘status’ in adoption or foster care records. (Sinclair, n.d.)

In comparison, *The Globe and Mail* gives an estimate of 16,000 living Sixties Scoop survivors (Mehta, 2013). Ultimately, we cannot number what we cannot count; these are estimates.

Johnson included several recommendations to stop or considerably halt the removal of First Nations children from their homes and communities, and
ultimately prevent the severance of their cultural, spiritual and biological ties.

One of the few consequences of his report was the development of the *Native Child and Family Services Act* (1985), which states:

> Indian and Native people should be entitled to provide, wherever possible, their own child and family services, and that all services to Indian and Native children and families should be provided in a manner that recognizes their culture, heritage and traditions and the concept of the extended family.

However, unlike in the case of survivors of the Residential School system, no other forms of redress have been offered to adoptees. Both were deliberately destructive acts that caused irreparable harm to First Nations communities in Canada. Just as importantly, the gradual acknowledgment of the horrors of the Residential Schools system shows that it is possible for Canadians to come to terms with other crimes committed by their government as well. In my years of experience as an educator I encountered countless instances in which students would admit their complete ignorance of the conditions at Residential Schools. Nevertheless, the Residential School experience is a story that is, at long last, being told and, perhaps more significantly, *being heard*. The purpose of this project is, in part, to help document the experiences of adoptees so that their stories will also be understood.

This project sees or understands the Sixties Scoop as part of a wider genocide that has been visited upon the Aboriginal peoples of North America. What effects did this system have on those who were ‘scooped’ and do they serve as evidence of this genocide? How can those who experienced it begin to heal? My audience is primarily educators, but ideally this project is for everyone.
Everyone needs to know the collective histories of the country in which they live. In the Americas some histories are hidden; many non-Indigenous people do not know the languages, cultures, or spiritual beliefs of the Indigenous Nations surrounding them and on whose territories they currently reside. There are many ways to support Indigenous peoples. I have chosen education and it is my hope that my attempt to answer the questions above will also provide some support.

There is also a more personal dimension to this project, which will become more apparent throughout future chapters: I am myself a survivor of the Sixties Scoop. As a child I knew vaguely that I was First Nations, but my adoptive parents did not discuss this fact. My early insights into this could best be described as having an almost dream-like quality; I could neither literally nor figuratively grasp them. I sensed I had to keep this aspect of my identity secret and never disclose it to others. It was as if there was something fragile and fleeting about it. I would dream of my biological mother and wonder if I had any brothers or sisters. I imagined that my mother was searching for me. Some days when I walked home from school in the community in which I was reared, I would imagine that when I arrived home my birth-mother would have found me and would be waiting for me. This outcome never came to pass.

I was baptised into the Amish church, a circumstance that has had a lasting influence on my life. In Amish culture adoption was never discussed, nor were subjects like divorce, pregnancy or the process of giving birth. I do not mean that they could be whispered about discreetly amongst good friends; on the contrary, they were completely ignored and never discussed at all, even with
ones’ parents, siblings or companions. To make even a veiled reference to them would cause embarrassment and elicit contempt. It is probably difficult for someone who does not remember the era in which I grew up to comprehend the silence around adoption, but it is important to note that there was silence around many subjects at that time. I describe the Plain People and Plain Society at length in the following chapters because I have been shaped by this history. If a person’s identity is partly formed in relation to and through interaction with others, then this is who I was and to a great extent, who I still am. One is not merely outwardly Amish, or Plain more generally; before one can be baptized the Plain person must undergo a yearlong ‘proving’ period and be voted upon unanimously by his or her church community. That process creates strong bonds of identification among Plain people.

My adoptive family did not understand my need to connect with my birth family. Moreover, they felt hurt and betrayed by my decision to do so. My Amish friends also did not understand this need and told me, repeatedly, that I behaved ungratefully toward my adoptive family and the community that nurtured me; in my interviews with other First Nations adoptees I have found that these reactions are commonplace. My adoptive family responded to my attempts to learn more about my First Nations heritage with a mixture of annoyance and ambivalence. They did not participate in any substantive discussion about my adoption; for them, it had simply happened and was not something to talk about. I felt frustrated with this position because I was unable to explain to them that my desire to meet my birth family in no way represented my rejection of them, my
adoptive family. I was not looking for their replacement, but rather trying to address the fact that I did not feel whole. A part of my identity was missing and I had to find it.

Through my research on the Sixties Scoop I discovered many threads shared by adoptees. All those I have interviewed struggle with fear of abandonment and the difficulty of understanding our identities. We all have anxiety (often well-founded) about angering our adoptive families by searching out our birth families, which is compounded by our fear of losing their acceptance and love. Arguably, one factor in everyone’s identity is everyone’s idea of how secure we are with ourselves and within ourselves. To be secure we must know who we are; that is, we must be grounded. How can one be grounded if one does not know who one is? Who creates and administers this security? These concerns recurred throughout my interviews with other adoptees. In summary, this project represents an attempt to reconcile these dimensions of First Nations identity from the perspective of an individual who, as a consequence of the Sixties Scoop, has been forced to seek out answers.

**Introducing the Interviewees**

I began my search for adoptees to interview by activating the “moccasin telegraph”—a word-of-mouth notice—to say that I was looking to meet and interview First Nations adoptees reared in non-Native homes. I posted notices at several Indigenous organizations in Toronto, Ontario, including *Miziwe Biik*, *Anishnawbe Health*, *2-Spirited People of the First Nations*, and *Native Child and...*
Family Services. Twelve people initially contacted me. However, three felt that although they wanted to share their experiences they were not ready to do so. I interviewed the remaining nine persons, none of whom had previously shared their stories, between 2012 and 2013. Three of these individuals were not survivors of the Sixties Scoop, but had also been displaced from their birth communities; although they were Status Indians they had been reared away from their reserve and birth communities. Furthermore, one was put into foster care, a system that is not typically associated with the Sixties Scoop. Everyone requested varying degrees of privacy in exchange for giving testimony. Consequently, I cannot provide complete biographical information about them. However, I can share other details about the Sixties Scoop survivors in particular as they have agreed.

The terms adoptees and participants are not used as synonyms. Adoptee refers to one or more of the six adoptees; participant refers to one or more from the larger group of nine overall project participants. Although all these interviewees were contacted through the agencies listed in downtown Toronto, none were born or grew up in the city; they moved to Toronto as adults.

Denyse was removed from her Cree community in the James Bay region. Her reserve was flooded and the family moved to Timmins. John grew up in Parry Sound and Alliston, small towns in Ontario, also away from his reserve. Linda is a Status Indian from an Ontario reserve that was physically terminated but still has a small number of families belonging to it. As a result she also grew
up in a small town in southern Ontario and not connected with a First Nations community.

Five are in the 45-52 age range and one is in his early 30’s. They come from a wide range of Indigenous communities. Lisa is Dene and was reared in a genteel home in a western province. Tyler is Cree and was reared in Manitoba in a middle-class home. Judy and Jamie are Anishnawbe, both of whom were also reared in middle-class homes. Nolan is Haida (or possibly Tsimshian, he is not certain), reared in an upper-middle class home in British Columbia and then Newfoundland. Finally, Lauren is Mohawk who grew up in an upper-middle class home near Kingston, Ontario. It is important to emphasize the fact that none grew up in poor homes; working-class families tend to participate in the foster care system, whereas middle- or upper-class families tend to adopt. Foster families are paid to foster children while adoptive families must pay for the privilege of adoption. Therefore, in this context the adoptive family foots the bill for the assimilation of their Indigenous children. None of these individuals have returned to their communities for any length of time. One lives in a neighbouring First Nations community and is, for the moment, an active resident there. Finally, while they have all met members of their birth families, none maintains regular contact with either them or their adoptive families.

I found that the interview process was relatively drawn out: I would share a story and then, slowly, after some deliberation, the interviewee would respond with one of his or her own. I also used an ethnographic scrapbook of my personal life, which I describe in more detail in Chapter Four, to facilitate
discussion. There was an unspoken understanding that not all the cards in our
‘game’ would be shown at once. A bit of information would be matched with like
information. There were many tears shed and many occasions when we needed
to smudge and spend a few quiet, wordless moments. Yet all six of the adoptees
expressed interest in continuing to share their stories even beyond the
interviews. During this process I remembered many incidents that I had long
suppressed as well. I began to have recurring nightmares about being abducted.
I mentioned these dreams and emotions to my interviewees and discovered that
the six adoptees had also shared them. We talked about why these feelings of
fear and abandonment never went away. It was not until I finished with the
interviews and sat through a hearing in Toronto to open a class action legal case
for First Nations adoptees that it became clear that these issues had never been
addressed or fully acknowledged by the culture and society that had inflicted
them upon us; we had never been heard. We were expected to heal without
talking about it and without anyone having to say that they were sorry. We were
expected to bear the brunt of this and ‘move on’. Instead, I have embarked upon
this project.

Research and Methodology

Apart from Johnson’s initial report, the Sixties Scoop remains largely
absent from scholarly studies on relations among the First Nations and non-
Native communities. Much of the existing literature has been published within
the past two decades and consists of brief news articles that describe specific
cases of adoption and/or discuss the practice in general terms (e.g. Fournier & Crey, 1998; Philip, 2002; Fessler, 2006; Sinclair, 2007; Gregory, Farley & Auger, 2012), although there are a few notable earlier examples as well (CBC Radio, 1983; York 1989). Similarly, only a relatively small number of survivors have documented their own experiences. There are several reasons for the lack of published testimony in this regard, perhaps most importantly because the official records of the adoptions programs remain sealed and, therefore, many adoptees are unsure of their origins and may not even know that they are First Nations in the first place. Two examples of these kinds of survivor narratives are Alanis Obomsawin’s film *Richard Cardinal: Cry from the diary of a Metis child* (1986), which draws upon entries from the boy’s diary to describe his short life and subsequent suicide while in foster care, and Helen Deachman’s (1999) self-published account of her search for her biological mother.

My perspective as a First Nations person necessarily informs my research and analysis for this project. My own lived experience as an adoptee is an integral aspect of my research on the adoptions of Indigenous peoples in Canada. Wilson (2008) maintains that the “use of an Indigenous research paradigm when studying Indigenous peoples requires the holistic use and transformation of information” (p. 32). He explains that in such a project the information gathered must be “presented in a way that is more culturally appropriate for Indigenous people by taking the role of storyteller rather than researcher/author. Indigenous people in Canada recognize that it is important for storytellers to impart their own life and experience into the telling” (p. 32). In
keeping with this, there is a strong autoethnographic element in this research. autoethnographic in its approach. As Denzin, Lincoln, & Smith (2008) demonstrate, autoethnography is central to Indigenous research methodologies. More broadly, this approach has become more conventional within the humanities and social sciences (Mullan, Ficklen, & Rubin, 2006; Knowles & Cole, 2008; Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011).

Generally speaking, the term ‘auto-ethnography’ refers to studies in which researchers critically examine their own personal experiences with, and in relation to, the communities whom they engage. Whereas personal biases and ideologies of researchers are frequently obscured in traditional ethnography, auto-ethnography explicitly calls attention to them (and to the researcher himself) in order to better understand the subject at hand. According to Ellis, Adams, and Bochner (2010), “autoethnography is an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze (graphy) personal experience (auto) in order to understand cultural experience (ethno).” It is therefore outside the traditional academic canon (Spry 2001), which raises questions in some people’s minds as to its validity. Autoethnography “treats research as a political, socially-just and socially-conscious act” (Adams & Holman Jones, 2008). Therefore it is suited to some types of research which can be better explored, for example, through autobiographical story, and not suited, or even useful, to others. At the present time, a quantitative analysis is not appropriate for a study of the Sixties Scoop. This is because we lack the data necessary to frame or complete such a project. Until the Canadian government opens its records
accurate statistics are not possible. What we do have are first-hand, autobiographical accounts from adoptees to inform and guide later quantitative research.

One of the many benefits of the increasing acceptance of autoethnographic methodology has been the opportunity for researchers from marginalized communities to voice their own experiences and contexts, as well as familiarize readers to them (Hayano, 1979). As a survivor of the Sixties Scoop my own voice has been silenced at many institutions and in various ways. I have been taught, in academic contexts among other institutions, that my own voice was not worth hearing and the experiences of my fellow adoptees were just stories, and not real data. My work as an undergraduate and graduate student was undertaken at a time when scholars were generally expected to remove themselves from their work and to write in an unengaged, falsely neutral manner. We were taught to distance ourselves from our emotions, values and beliefs and to pretend they did not influence our research.

Yet my experience as a First Nations adoptee had shaped my entire life. My reality is that my research cannot be separated from my personal experience. I no longer want or expect it to be so. My lived experience helps me to speak with authority on this subject. The same is true for the First Nations people whom I interviewed. We experienced the Sixties Scoop first-hand and by relating our survival we are telling our own truths. We are all different, yet as I explain in future chapters our stories share many commonalities. My experience is not every adoptee’s experience, but it was my experience as a First Nations adoptee
during the Sixties Scoop. Unfortunately, no perfect research methodology exists. Until we have more hard data from the Canadian government’s closed archives, qualitative (and specifically autoethnographic) research is essential at this time.

Knockwood’s acclaimed study *Out of the depths: The experiences of Mi’kmaw children at the Indian Residential School at Shubenacadie, Nova Scotia* (1992) serves as a useful model for autoethnographic research in a First Nations context. Knockwood combines her personal experiences in the Residential School system with stories that she gathered from other survivors. At first, I found the idea of autoethnography distasteful; it seemed to me to be a horribly self-indulgent, self-serving, and even arrogant manner of writing. However, Knockwood’s study has showed me that it can be useful for my own research. Indeed, I cannot separate my identity from the subject matter. Like Knockwood in her own context, my experience as a Sixties Scoop survivor completely positions me as a researcher, what Adler and Adler (1994) call a “complete membership role.” Rather than view it as a disadvantage, it has enabled me not only to provide a firsthand account of the adoption of First Nations children, but also more holistically engage as a researcher with other survivors whose accounts appear in this study.

My Methodology is an Indigenous methodology. It involves ceremony and local Indigenous protocol, including the building of relationships (Memmi, 1965; Smith, 1999; Wilson, 2008). Ceremony means asking the Ancestors for help, beginning all work with a smudge and prayer, and being willing to be guided by dreams and circumstances. It involves the honouring of guests in my house
(the interviewees) by receiving them warmly, serving them food, smudging with them, and being willing to let them talk. Too many direct questions intrude upon another’s personal life. These are only a part of local protocols which Smith (1999), and Wilson (2008) argue need to be observed when conducting work with Indigenous peoples.

The scrapbook best helped me interview without asking too many probing questions, which I believed strongly would not be respecting the tremendous stories being shared with me.

The adoptees words are strong and powerful and must be taken as they are. No amount of analyzing will strengthen what they said. They were all careful and thoughtful about what was shared and had many opportunities to read over and to talk about this work. Their words need to stand on their own. Motzafi-Haller (1997) argues this point. When told she must “support your argument with better ‘data’”(218), she believed that instead “their [the participants] reality, their poignancy is given, built into the very definition of a lived experience “(ibid).

So much remains lost for the adoptees. This work was meant to give them a voice and to have their own final words. I trust they all said what they meant, and they do not need me to explain or to analyse their words. I believe some integrity would be lost by this.

Chapter Summaries
Chapter One, “An Unmistakable Plan for Genocide,” names that word that causes reactions ranging from embarrassment to outright denial. In this chapter I argue that the Sixties Scoop needs to be understood in terms of a larger, long-term plan by British and Canadian administrators to eradicate First Nations people in Canada. The Sixties Scoop does not stand independent from other initiatives, such as the Residential School system and the disproportionately high numbers of Indigenous children in foster care. The Sixties Scoop merely continued a deliberate and still ongoing process, often paralleling other programmes of assimilation mentioned above. I feel strongly that an understanding of the historic genocide in the Americas is essential to understanding the Sixties Scoop. I focus on the northeastern seaboard where I was reared to exemplify the wider problem, and also to connect my analysis of conflicts between settler society and First Nations communities to my personal experiences bridging these two worlds.

Chapter Two, “The Scrapbook as a Form of Healing,” presents an artistic perspective created during my own process of reflection I used to help facilitate discussion with other adoptees: a scrapbook that depicts my own personal history as a survivor of the Sixties Scoop. Of course, each adoptee’s experiences are unique; the scrapbook is not meant to provide a definitive visual explanation in this regard. Neither should it be interpreted as a novelty; it is intrinsically part of the methodology of this study, both as a healing mechanism and a tool for interviewing. The decision to use a scrapbook for this research (rather than another artistic medium) is also carefully considered, for our lives are
like a scrapbook, which provide only glimpses of greater circumstances; in some cases, entire pages are missing. Finally, it serves as an example for other survivors. Each interviewee expressed interest in creating a similar text, which could give them, and Indigenous people generally, the chance to heal from similar trauma. Note that some of the pages in the scrapbook are not included here due to confidentiality concerns, but the integrity of the whole is otherwise preserved.

Chapter Three, “Identities, Real and Imagined,” addresses the confusion experienced by many First Nations peoples who were removed from their home communities through relocation, adoption or foster care. A circumstance common to all those interviewed for this project is that their families had not planned or chosen to willingly give up their children to adoption or foster care. This chapter focuses on the ways in which First Nations identities are determined, both legally and socially. Among the questions that I explore are how geographic location (away from one’s birth community and culture) contributes to the identities of adoptees and whether two competing aspects of an identity can co-exist within a single individual. Caughey (2006) describes how living with “partially contradictory cultural traditions” has become an inescapable part of living in today’s world (p. 13). I argue that these tensions are particularly intense for adoptees.

Chapter Four, “Surviving the Sixties’ Scoop,” elaborates upon the issues explored in the previous chapter, adding another layer of complexity to the project. Here the adoptees speak for themselves, describing their childhoods
growing up in adoptive family homes and their struggles to learn more about their First Nations identities. Common themes among their stories are feelings of loss, depression, battling with suicidal thoughts over long periods of years, an inability to trust others or to fully love, a desire to destroy personal relationships, emptiness, loneliness and bouts of overwhelming apathy. All those interviewed spoke about such struggles. I also discuss how repatriation is understood among them. While many of us have attempted to establish connections with our birth families and first communities, there are many differences in the value of the participants found in such efforts and the challenges that remain.

The closing chapter is called “Moving Forward” rather than “Conclusion” because, as I indicate throughout this project, the Canadian government has yet to properly account for the Sixties Scoop. As children all six of the adoptees were told not to talk with other people about their adoptions. This enforced silence created a sense of shame among us, as if we had done something wrong. This feeling has followed us throughout our lives. Not talking about our common experiences as Sixties Scoop survivors is not personally productive and, in fact, has been quite destructive. Our voices have been silenced for much of our lives and, as I explain in the final chapter of this project, the purpose of my research is to privilege these voices.

Ten years have passed since I started this project. When I began my research the Canadian government’s official apology to former students of Residential Schools had not happened, the Truth and Reconciliation Committee had not been instituted, and few had even heard of the Sixties Scoop. Since
then so much has changed! People *know* about the traumas inflicted upon Canada’s indigenous peoples and further action in this regard is being taken in schools, churches, and community organizations. For example, in February 2016 I was asked by the First Unitarian Church in Toronto to talk about the Sixties Scoop in the context of their sincere efforts to address the recommendations of the TRC. For me, the request was remarkable as an indication of the turning point in public awareness that has occurred since I first began my doctoral studies. The Province of Ontario has also begun to positively address and consider issues surrounding First Nations adoptions as part of a landmark case in 2015.

Ezra Kanagy, an Amish minister, used to explain the difference between a vain hope and a realistic hope. A vain hope, he explained, was akin to asking for rain in the desert during July; anything is possible, but this outcome will probably will not occur. In contrast, a realistic hope is expecting rain after observing all of the telltale signs in a fertile green country—-insects humming low, cattle lying down under trees, and the rising winds. I believe with the new change of government that now we, as Indigenous peoples, live in a fertile, green country and have a realistic hope of rain after many barren years.
Chapter 1: An Unmistakable Plan for Genocide

“The destruction of the Indians of the Americas was, far and away, the most massive act of genocide in the history of the world.”

(Stannard, 1992, page x)

Genocide or Merely Unfortunate Circumstances?

During my many years speaking about First Nations issues I have consistently been challenged (at times politely and at other times not so) by my audience as to my use of the word ‘genocide’ when describing the experience of First Nations peoples of the Americas. In particular, I have heard a number of especially disturbing beliefs expressed repeatedly over the years. One common example of these notions is that ‘what happened’ to First Nations people was an unfortunate circumstance, but by no means a genocide. I have witnessed settlers become nonplussed or even angry when hearing the word genocide to refer to the events that took place here on Turtle Island. Another belief that I have heard over many years, one that is meant to be sympathetic, is that what happened was sad, but also inevitable. My response to these statements is to ask settlers what, in fact, has happened? This question often results in a baffled look, but it is not meant to be rhetorical: any real understanding of the history of Turtle Island counters the opinions expressed by these people. The belief that the genocidal history of the Americas was inevitable is nothing more than a self-delusion. Why is there such
widespread resistance against the ownership of genocide against First Nations peoples?

The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2008) outlines how genocide is defined in Article 8. It is worth reproducing the relevant section in full before discussing it:

1. Indigenous peoples and individuals have the right not to be subjected to forced assimilation or destruction of their culture.

2. States shall provide effective mechanisms for prevention of, and redress for:

   (a) Any action which has the aim or effect of depriving them of their integrity as distinct peoples, or of their cultural values or ethnic identities;
   (b) Any action which has the aim or effect of dispossessing them of their lands, territories or resources;
   (c) Any form of forced population transfer which has the aim or effect of violating or undermining any of their rights;
   (d) Any form of forced assimilation or integration;
   (e) Any form of propaganda designed to promote or incite racial or ethnic discrimination directed against them.

It is no coincidence that Canada, Australia, New Zealand and the US were the countries that most actively resisted the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples when it was first presented in 2007 and were also the last to endorse it (Hearst, 2012, p. 174-175). These four countries were responsible for the displacement (including adoption) of large populations of Aboriginal peoples across racial and national boundaries, as well as threatening the survival and very existence of the Aboriginal peoples living within them (Hearst, p. 174). Even today, a disproportionately large percentage of Aboriginal peoples are still compelled into non-Aboriginal foster care or adoptions in these countries.
This refusal to come to terms with genocidal histories is evident in the foundational myths and many other stories that shape their national consciousness. These narratives take the place of ethno-nationalist creation stories among settler colonies such as those in the US, or are perhaps an extension and redefinition of them. Joseph Campbell (1988) posits the importance of myth as a foundation for what future generations of a community will believe, specifically national and founding myths. Whether every individual embraces these stories is not relevant; they form part of an ever-present national discourse. The national characters of Canada and the US are also influenced by stories about their respective origins, stories that encourage certain ways of thinking about First Nations peoples. One of the dearly held and cherished myths of Canada is that there were no Indian Wars of the kind that took place in the US, that Canada has never been responsible for the genocide of Indigenous peoples. However, this assertion simply is not true.

I was reared in the rural, wooded, hilly area of Central Massachusetts where the local First Nations peoples had long since been expelled or killed. This genocide and displacement remained in the memories of long-established local people, the majority of whom were settlers with roots that could be traced back to the 17th century. I knew no Black, Asian or Native people until I was well into my twenties, and to my knowledge none had lived in that area. Most people I knew growing up were well aware of the King Phillip’s War, which took place between 1675 to 1678; it was part of the local consciousness. Briefly, the King Phillip’s War was a resistance effort by First Nations peoples living in what we now call New England. The conflict resulted in an exceptionally high death rate among the settler community:
In terms of percentage of population killed, the English had suffered casualties that are difficult for us to comprehend today. During the forty-five months of World War II, the United States lost just under 1 percent of its adult male population; during the Civil War the casualty rate was somewhere between 4 and 5 percent; during the fourteen months of the King Phillip’s War, Plymouth Colony lost close to 8% of its men. (Philbrick, 2006, p. 332)

This figure is doubly significant because it encompasses only male casualties. Mary Rowlandson’s (2009) account published in 1682, which is held to be accurate, describes great numbers of women and children who were also killed or died of wounds inflicted by indigenes, as well as sickness and exposure to deadly weather. Her observations suggest that the true loss amounts to over 10 percent of the settler population. No wonder the War is so well remembered! Nevertheless, by comparison Philbrick estimates First Nations losses at an incredible 60 to 80 percent during this same period, with many more to follow, again due to exposure, sickness, and hunger (p. 332). These losses are astounding for a fourteen-month period.

We knew the sites of the old garrison houses, where some of the great war-councils were held, and the names of settlers killed or taken captive (and later ransomed). We knew of Redemption Rock, where Rowlandson was released from captivity and the locations where the early settler villages had stood. We did not learn about these places in school, some of which had no plaque nor sign to mark them. Much of this information was passed down as local lore and was verified by research I did in the area in much later years. The destruction of the local First Nations populations had fixed itself quite strongly in the memories of the settlers, enough to have been passed down for a number of generations in fairly accurate accounts. The descendants of the people who were responsible for this violence will
still express regret that these events happened, but they usually see them as having been inevitable.

Histories of the towns that are situated along the Eastern seaboard often deal with early relations with the First Nations peoples with whom settlers interacted. I used to collect these town histories during the 1980’s and 1990’s; they were easily discovered in the numerous secondhand bookshops for merely a few dollars. However, as many people from other parts of the country and the world move into the area the long-held memories of the King Phillip’s War have become obscure. The people who live there are increasingly disconnected with what happened in the past, and hold neither coin nor interest in it. The official markers erected to commemorate events during the war tend to be simplistic and vaguely worded. They often fail to describe the specific communities that were massacred. The three figures below are typical of these markers:

Figure 1. Indian Council Fires. ("Indian Council Fires").

This marker in Northfield, MA, reads as follows: “Two hundred and fifty yards
eastward are the sites of three large Indian council fires. The Beers Massacre of September 4, 1675, took place in a gorge one-quarter mile to the northeast.

Figure 2. Sudbury Fight. (“Sudbury Fight”).

This marker in Sudbury, MA, reads as follows: One-quarter mile north took place the Sudbury Fight with King Philip’s Indians on April 21, 1696. Captain Samuel Wadsworth fell with twenty-eight of his men; their monument stands in the burying ground.

Figure 3. Village of the Agawam Indians. (“Village of the Agawam Indians”).
This marker in Springfield, MA, reads as follows: “On the bluff just west of here stood a fortified village of the Agawam Indians[.] Deserted when they burned Springfield[,] October 5, 1675[,] during King Philip’s War.”

What ideas do markers like these convey? The implicit message to First Nations people who read them is clear: we are a thing of the past. Our histories are merely acknowledged in passing and the shocking loss of life that our ancestors suffered goes unacknowledged. Numerous scholars have explored memorials as sites of contested memory, particularly in the context of the war memorial (e.g. Mayo, 1988; Piehler, 1995; Savage, 1997; Choay, 2001). In this case, which is most significant is how meaning information is withheld from the observer: What of the enormous percentage of First Nations people who died and why is this figure not officially marked anywhere? How did these events happen? Whose stories are being told? The decision to commemorate these events in ways that obscure the experiences of Indigenous peoples is deliberate, but it is also relatively uncommon in comparison to how other domestic conflicts are publicly remembered. For example, Doss (2010) shows how numerous memorials to Confederate army soldiers—and even to the secessionist movement itself—have not only been erected since the end of the Civil War, but are even embraced by the government responsible for its demise (10-11). The markers shown above, which commemorate what were in fact massacres of peoples defending their homes and food sources, indicate that First Nations people do not seem to have a specific place in the national memory.

The Physical Genocide of Wabanakis
The Wabanaki people, or “People of the Dawn”, are a confederacy comprised of the Mi’kmaq, Maliseet, Penobscot and Passamaquoddy Nations. These communities reside in present-day Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, The Gaspe region of Quebec and Westward to Quebec City, and south to Maine, Vermont and New Hampshire. They are also affiliated with the now extinct Beothuk nation of Newfoundland and the term more broadly applies to Indigenous allies along the coasts of present-day Maine, New Hampshire and Massachusetts. The Wabanakis were the first Native peoples to meet European explorers in what are now the Atlantic Maritime provinces of Canada and northeastern New England in the US.

The earliest known recorded contact between Europeans and the Wabanakis occurred during the early 17th century. Gabriel Archer, an English adventurer who chronicled Bartholomew Gosnold’s journey to North America in 1602, describes a “Biscay shallop, with sail and oars, having eight [Micmac] persons in it whom we supposed at first to be Christians distressed … came boldly aboard us … one or two had a few things made by some Christians … (and) they spoke diverse Christian words” (1843, p. 73). Although these early encounters were friendly, Archer does not provide the names of the Indigenous visitors and offers maddeningly few details of these events. French writer and historian Marc Lescarbot began to make regular, detailed and personal observations of the Mi’kmaq from 1606 onward (Whitehead, 1991, pp. 21-22). Unlike Archer, he records individual names, family groups, and describes real people with distinct personalities and interests.

Governor William Bradford (1651) recounts the Plymouth Colony’s first encounter with First Nations people. He describes six First Nations persons who
were walking along the shore accompanied by a dog. Upon seeing the settlers, the First Nations people fled as fast as they could (p. 98). In fact, this reaction is reflective of many early encounters along the east coast. Almost all of the encounters between the two groups as recorded by Fardy (1988), Kelly (1974), and Howley (2000) indicate that the local First Nations peoples were wary of the newcomers. The reason for their suspicions appear to be well-founded: Fardy and Kelly both catalogue numerous examples of violent crime, kidnapping and murder against the Beothuk, drawing upon first-hand accounts recorded in letters and diaries of settlers. Paul (2006) also describes several well-documented kidnappings of the Beothuk, who were eventually driven to extinction.

Other documents from the time demonstrate that this violence was not only common and deliberate, but also advocated by religious leaders. Edward Winslow (1624) describes many early meetings between the settlers and the First Nations peoples in his tract *Good Newes from New England*. He conveys the unshakable belief that God had given the land to the settlers, and “visited sickness” upon First Nations peoples to this end. The Puritan minister John Cotton (1630) preached and later published in pamphlet form a sermon entitled, “God’s Promise to His Plantations” before the Puritans set sail to found Boston, their famed city on a hill in 1630. It was an enormously popular tract and widely circulated at the time. In this work, Cotton defends “lawfull warre” against the first inhabitants of lands in the New World for no other reason than for “God’s people” to take possession of them (pp. 4-7). He admits that such a course of action may be regarded as extreme, but that nevertheless it is permitted in some circumstances. This sermon and others like it
were delivered in church as a blessing on the settlers, one that encouraged them to seize possession of land in the Americas.

That these words were taken seriously is evidenced by the brutal Pequot War, which took place in 1637, only seven years after the city of Boston was founded. This conflict was fought between the settlers and the local Pequot community. Settlers wanted control over the Connecticut River Valley and were willing to exterminate their Indigenous neighbors to achieve this outcome. The Pequot village was surrounded by settlers and set afire; anyone trying to escape was shot and bayoneted. Governor Bradford “saw the devastation as the work of the Lord … [the First Nations people], however, saw nothing divine in the slaughter” (Philbrick, p. 178).

Prins (1996) documents six Anglo-Wabanaki wars between 1676 and 1760. With the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713, the French Crown surrendered most of Acadia to the British Crown. By this time, at least one-third of the Wabanaki population had died of violence, starvation and disease (p. 131). During this period of history, the United States was still a part of British North America. And if actions are proof of intentions, the aim of the British Crown was clearly to exterminate First Nations people. In 1749, General Cornwallis gave the following orders at Halifax:

For these causes we, by and with the advice and consent of His Majesty's Council, do hereby authorize and command all Officers Civil and Military, and all His Majesty’s Subjects or others, to annoy, distress, take or destroy the savages commonly called Mic-macks wherever they are found, and all such as are aiding or assisting them; and we further, by and with consent and advice of His Majesty’s Council do promise a reward of Ten Guineas for every Indian, Mic-Mack, taken or killed to be paid upon producing such savage taken or his scalp (as is the custom of America) if killed, to the officers commanding at Halifax, Annapolis Royal or Minas. Given at Halifax, the
second day of October, one thousand seven hundred and forty nine and in the twenty-third year of His Majesty’s Reign. (Whitehead, 1991, p. 117)

Likewise at a meeting with Cornwallis who was Governor of Nova Scotia at the time, Mr. Thomas Clapham was directed to raise a company of volunteers to “scour the country” and “take or destroy” the Mi’kmaq (Lanctot, 1933, pp. 281-282).

At its most extreme, physical violence against Wabanaki resulted in the extermination of whole communities, such as in the case of the Beothuk. Kelly identifies numerous accounts written by settlers of their purposeful, unprovoked killing of the Beothuk throughout the 18th and early 19th centuries (pp. 18, 20-21, 23-25, 28-33). He maintains that these killings were sometimes perpetrated for sport. One of the largest massacres involved the murder of about 350 Beothuk at Hants Harbour, Trinity Bay, Newfoundland. Kelly also records rumours of Beothuk children of both sexes being kidnapped and sold into slavery to ships ready to leave Newfoundland ports (p. 25). Settlers did not spare women and children during these incidents; “We kill the nits along with the lice!” they were reported to have said (p. 24). Shanawdithit was a Beothuk woman captured in 1823 by a furrier, William Cull. She was eventually handed over to John Peyton, Jr., with whom she lived until her death in 1829 of tuberculosis, at the age of 28. It is through her that we know most of what is known about the Beothuks today. Shanawdithit explained how her entire nation had been either hunted or starved to death, and that she had watched them dwindle to herself, the last Beothuk (Winter, 1975).

Conflict between Wabanaki and settler communities occurred for a number of reasons, but from the perspective of the First Nations peoples they were provoked by mass kidnappings and the constant breaking of promises, coupled with
encroachment upon First Nations lands. In a series of conferences held with Colonial officials in 1717 and again in 1726, Wabanaki chiefs were astounded that the British claimed lands they said the Wabanaki had gifted or sold to the settlers (American Friends Service Committee, 1989, pp. 162, 175). Loron and Wiwurna, the chiefs involved in these respective dialogues, reminded Colonial officials of the details of former agreements, specifically the 1713 Treaty of Portsmouth, which recognized Wabanaki sovereignty and included the promise not to settle on Wabanaki land (pp. 216-219). They were answered with repeated demands that they must be obedient to King George and stop claiming English land as their own. As they had not ceded lands at any time in the past, the First Nations peoples understood this situation very differently than did the settlers. Nevertheless, the settlers’ intentions are now evident and their actions resulted in the systematic appropriation of Indigenous land. The two maps below (figures four and five) illustrate the effects of the forced clearances of Eastern Maritime First Nations. Figure four demonstrates the locations of Wabanaki Nations and their allies at the approximate time of sustained settler contact, while the second map shows the large areas—most of present day New England—from which they were removed.
Figure 4. Native Territories in 1590. (American Friends Service Committee).
Not all of the devastation visited upon First Nations peoples in the Americas was planned. For instance, the spread of infectious disease was in many (but not all) cases unintended. Fenn (2001) describes the devastating consequences of smallpox as it quickly and comprehensively worked its way through First Nations populations in the Americas, which was the result of sustained contact with settler communities. He also notes that smallpox was not the only disease introduced from abroad that affected Indigenous peoples:

Smallpox may have been the most deadly of these plagues, but others too earned the respect and fear of America's Indigenous peoples. Measles, influenza, mumps, typhus, cholera, plague, malaria, yellow fever, scarlet fever, whooping cough, and diphtheria all wreaked havoc ... this Pandora's box of disease ... had decimated the natives of the Western Hemisphere.
many times over. (p. 6)

At the time of contact, Indigenous Americans possessed little diversity in their immune system antigens. Therefore, “this homogeneity may make Indigenous Americans more vulnerable when contagion strikes” (p. 26). Jesuit missionary Father Biard noted that First Nations peoples “often complain that since the French mingle with and carry on trade with them, they are dying fast and the population is thinning out” (as cited in Mancall and Merrell, 2000, p. 78). Grand Chief Membertou, who was baptized in 1610 at the age of about one hundred, complained that when he had been young the Mik’maw had been “as plentiful as hairs on his head,” but now they had greatly diminished (Paul, p. 45). Wesley-Esquimaux and Smolewski (2004) write that epidemics continued to strike First Nations peoples “every 7 to 14 years, leaving insufficient time frames in between for recovery” and estimates that the overall death rate is around 90 percent (p. 26).

Even if epidemics were not always purposefully incited they had a dramatically negative effect on Indigenous populations. This is true not only of their physical health, but also perceptions of them by the settler populations who saw their listlessness as a cultural shortcoming. Upton (1979) explains, “Endemic sickness is a tragic drain on a people’s energy, and whites, who characterized the Indians as lazy, never saw any connection between the two conditions” (p. 128). The characterization of Indigenous peoples as unwilling or unable to work was a form of propaganda at the time, one that corresponds to the contemporary UN definition of genocide, which condemns “Any form of propaganda designed to promote or incite racial or ethnic discrimination directed against them” (p. 5). This
stereotype remains lodged in the settler mind today and continues to be a common theme in settler media. For example, following protests by First Nations peoples in 2012 against the Canadian government’s disregard of treaty rights, which coalesced into the ‘Idle No More’ movement, the overwhelming majority of comments on Yahoo! Newsgroups articles on the topic ranged from negative to hateful. Accusations that First Nations peoples were lazy and unable to work were typical.

From the 17th to 19th centuries, First Nations peoples were subjected to many different forms of physical violence, from kidnappings and forced relocation to warfare and massacres. This is the sort of violence that is typically associated with genocide, and these actions certainly meet the UN definition. But it is also important to note that during the same period, First Nations peoples were also forced to abandon many traditional cultural practices, efforts that amount to cultural genocide. To use just one example, the Town of Sudbury, which was founded eight years after Boston in 1636, passed laws almost immediately prohibiting First Nations peoples to dance, powwow, grease themselves, lie, have more than one spouse, playing at their former games, and “howling” (Hudson, 1968, p. 20). Survivors of the hostilities, which culminated in the aforementioned King Phillip’s War, were gathered to starve on Deer Island off of the coast of Massachusetts. When sympathetic settlers attempted to relieve the miseries of the starving and sick they were threatened with death (Mandell, 2010, p. 102-105).

Major-General Daniel Gookin (1836), who documented relations between settlers and indigenes during the period of early contact, was a most unlikely defender of First Nations peoples. He was shocked by their poor treatment,
including peoples who belonged to politically neutral communities or ‘praying’ villages that had converted to Christianity. He was quite plain in acknowledging that settlers waged war to take land and resources from the original inhabitants. I often wondered why Gookin’s account is not more widely known in North America. I discovered through many personal conversations that people who are familiar with Bartolomé de Las Casas’ “In Defense of the Indians” (1550), which is a graphic and detailed account of Spanish atrocities perpetrated against the Native peoples of what would become Latin America, were unaware of its northern counterpart. Gookin’s account serves as testimony of both forms of genocide, physical and cultural, to which the Wabanaki were subjected during their encounters with settlers over several centuries.

Cultural Genocide through Residential and Mission Schools

By the twentieth century, the violent destruction of Wabanaki communities had largely ended. As with many other First Nations peoples, those who remained were consigned to reservations, which represented a small fraction of their ancestral lands. There were continued efforts to ‘manage’ Indigenous communities through rations programs, in which food would be withheld from people at the whim of the Indian Agent. Moreover, physical extermination and assimilation continued in the form of sterilization programs, residential and mission schools, and culminated in the Sixties Scoop. Article 8 of the UN Declaration of the Rights of Aboriginal Peoples states “Indigenous peoples and individuals have the right not to be subjected to
forced assimilation or destruction of their culture” (p. 5)—the explicit purpose their schools and adoption programs were designed for.

To trace the formation and extent of Residential Schools is far beyond the scope of this paper. Briefly, the purpose of these schools was the “elimination of Indians’ sense of identity as Aboriginal people and their integration into the general citizenry” as for many settlers “Indian culture was defective because it was different” (Miller, 1996, pp. 184-185). Sir John A. Macdonald offered an early justification for the program in a statement to the House of Commons in 1883:

When the school is on the reserve the child lives with its parents, who are savages; he is surrounded by savages, and though he may learn to read and write his habits, and training and mode of thought are Indian. He is simply a savage who can read and write. It has been strongly pressed on myself, as the head of the Department, that Indian children should be withdrawn as much as possible from the parental influence, and the only way to do that would be to put them in central training industrial schools where they will acquire the habits and modes of thought of white men. (as cited in Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015, p. 2)

At present there are 136 institutions recognized by the Indian Residential School Agreement, but this number is debated; there are most likely considerably more (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2012, p. 1). Because of this uncertainty, it can be difficult to identify the number of students who were involved. To date, it is known that at least 150,000 Aboriginal peoples attended these schools (p. 113). Accurate records were not always kept and some were also purposefully destroyed so the total number of affected children is probably higher than 150,000 (Knockwood, 2001, p. 137).

The Shubenacadie Residential School, established in 1929, remained in operation until 1967. However, this was not by any means the first attempt to set up
mission schools amongst the Wabanaki peoples. The Baptist missionary Silas Rand laboured for years to open a school for the Mi'kmaq, but in the end found no support for such an endeavour and counted only one person amongst his Mi’kmaq converts (Upton, p. 169). Other efforts were more successful as similar institutions were founded “with monotonous regularity; a good start followed by more or less rapid oblivion. In 1908 there were seventeen such schools operating in the Maritime provinces” (p. 175). Until the Canadian government used outright force to send children to the Shubenacadie Residential School, day and mission schools had little negative influence on Wabanaki well-being and cultural identity.

The disastrous effects of Residential Schools on Native communities were not unfortunate mistakes; these institutions were purposefully organized to destroy Aboriginal culture:

It was believed that if children were removed from the cultural influences, customs, language and practices of their parents, they would soon adopt mainstream (i.e., Euro-dominant) practices. This effort to assimilate Indigenous children involved their tragic removal from their parental homes at an early age. Many were never able to return home. (Wilson, 2008, p. 50)

Knockwood reports that in Boston, Mi’kmaq people who had attended the Shubenacadie Residential School tended to avoid each other in later life unless they were heavily drinking together (2001, p. 11). There was a ‘code of silence’ practiced by all who had attended the school. So great was the fear and shame instilled in the children who attended this particular school that even as adults they could not openly speak about their experiences.

As a way of trying to deal with their Residential School experiences many First Nations people took up a circular journey, seemingly in search of what they had
lost. Over many years I discovered a tendency for Mi’kmaq people to follow what I call the “Mi’kmaq Triangle,” making extended trips from Mi’kmaqik to ‘Bostonik’ to Toronto. I would meet individuals at the North American Indian Center of Boston who had just lately arrived from the Maritimes, only to see them again in Toronto a few weeks later. Later, I would hear that they had travelled on to Mikmaqik to begin the Mi’kmaq Triangle adventure anew. These travelers were Wabanaki people who had attended Residential School, their children, those who had been foster children, and those who had been adopted and had made some connection with their Birth Families when they became adults. They all shared a similar fate of looking for something but never seeming to find it, and never feeling able to settle wherever they were at present.

In 2008 the Canadian government formally apologized for the harm caused by residential and mission school programs in a statement delivered by Prime Minister Stephen Harper in the House of Commons. This apology was not initiated by Harper, but rather inherited by him through the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement (2006). However, not all are satisfied with the government’s apology. Knockwood (2010) contends, “It made no real difference that government officials and some representatives of the Catholic Church apologized to Native people for the schools. Those individuals who directly caused our suffering never admitted their wrongdoing and were never called to account for their actions,” and that “it will be many years before the damage inflicted can be healed” (p. 160).

During the past few decades, Canadians have become more familiar with the residential and mission schools programs and the harm that they have caused to
First Nations peoples. However, the Canadian government’s forced and coerced adoption program remains virtually uninterrogated. The total number of children who were taken is unknown, due to the fact that the Canadian government refuses to open the records for examination. Crey and Fournier (1998) write that for this reason estimates are ultimately based on guesswork. They maintain that the number is at least 20,000, a huge figure given that the total number of status Indians is under 500,000.

Adoption and foster care could be argued to be the most benign weapons of assimilation and genocide, perhaps because they appear on the surface to be helpful. I do want to stress here that I do not hold at fault those adoptive or foster parents who wanted only to give a loving home to a child. However, it should also be noted that there are many memoirs that describe the experiences of Aboriginal children whose foster or adoptive parents were abusive. Even those of us who were fortunate enough to have been reared in comfortable, caring environments face a very long journey in our minds and hearts as we attempt to understand what happened to us and reconcile our adoptive and First Nations identities.

I grew up believing that my parents, as well as the Canadian government, whose agencies I eventually learned were responsible for depriving me of my birth family, community and country could do no wrong. I knew individuals had faults and failings, but did not we all? It did not occur to me that the government would purposefully adopt an immoral and unethical course of action. In hindsight, I realize that such a belief was naïve, but it was a way of thinking common to most people at that time in small towns in North America. We presumed that the government
always acted in our best interest and always with the best of intentions. But as I started to learn more about my own people and what had happened I slowly came to realize that there was a steady, continued pattern since the time of earliest contact between settlers and First Nations people, and it was not reflected in the foundation myths that I had been told during my youth. Wars, forced removals, diseases, aggressive adoptions, Residential Schools, the purposeful destruction of traditional food systems and the creation of a welfare-dependent people—these events were no accident. They took planning and organizing over long periods of time. For a long time I resisted the idea that settlers had wanted our land and resources and were quite willing to see the demise of us, as First Nations peoples, to gain this end. For these reasons, I have been a most unlikely candidate to speak for First Nations peoples generally and especially Sixties’ Scoop children. I almost fell victim to the aim of the adoptions program: to defend the system that tried to destroy our families, communities, and ourselves.

I grew up having no contact with other First Nations peoples. Though I always knew that at least part of my identity was ‘Native’ as I had heard my parents tell close friends, we did not openly talk about my past. At that time people were not comfortable publicly discussing adoptions. To the best of my knowledge, at the time there was no negative reaction to the fact that I was ‘partially Native’ within my local community. Only in my twenties did I hear the first negative stereotype about First Nations peoples from a friend, who claimed that we “were lazy. Everybody knew that.”
The North American Indian Center of Boston (NAICOB) was an important contributor to my self-discovery. I did not travel to Boston, which was far away for us, and therefore had no way of knowing about this organization for many years. It was not until the 1990s that I visited NAICOB, which was located in what was a not very safe area of Boston. It was there that I discovered I had Indigenous relatives—my biological brothers had visited the center and had even travelled within a few miles of where I had been living. I also learned that the Mi’kmaw people had a long history in Boston, which includes articles of peace and friendship that date to the 18th century, and participated in continuous trade and social relationships with settler communities.

My adoptive parents and my grandparents both regularly supported charitable endeavors to First Nations reservations in the US, but they never spoke about these efforts, just as they were not vocal about any of their charity work. I was unaware of most of it until after they had died. My adoptive family tried to give me a safe home in which to live and had only the best of intentions for me. Equally important, while the purpose of the adoption program was to dissociate Native children from their cultural heritages, some of us were able to maintain our connection to our people. I remember once when I was about nine years old my adoptive parents left a new book for me on a table in a downstairs room: the National Geographic Society’s The World of the American Indian (1974). In their wisdom, rather than forcing books upon us they casually left them on tables, in our bedrooms, and so on, at which point our natural curiosity would draw us to them. I remember later in the morning my father saw me with the book. He asked what I thought of it and, after I told him I
liked it very much, replied, “That book is for you, if you fancy it.” Again at Christmas they gave me books about Native people and Native history. The goal of my adoptive parents was not to assimilate a First Nations child, though assimilation was inevitably a partial effect of my upbringing. They simply wanted to raise a family; they could not have children and desperately wanted them, so they ended up adopting four of us instead. In the end, I was not assimilated in the way that the Canadian government intended with its policy.

Neu and Thierrien (2003) make explicit the association between physical and cultural genocide, writing that the main distinction between them is their respective timeframes. They ask,

Which is worse—the murdering of millions of human beings over a short period of time, or slowly dissolving their existence through dehumanization and disease and coercion over several generations? How can we account for suffering? How do we measure human misery? Regardless of rationalizations, however, the end result of the two methods of extermination [is] similar. (p. 23)

Some in the settler communities might speak passively about the crimes perpetrated against First Nations people, such as the “sad” and “unfortunate,” but “inevitable” death of up to 90 percent of the Indigenous population after centuries of sustained contact. In actual truth, this physical and cultural genocide was purposefully planned and deliberately executed. It is a testimony to our collective strength and that of our ancestors that we, who first met the Europeans when they arrived on our shores, sick with scurvy and desperate for food, are still here. Our very presence serves as a rebuke, and a reminder, of these crimes.
Conclusion: Looking Toward the Future

It would be wrong to say that all settlers purposefully and actively desired the extermination of First Nations peoples. People immigrated to the Americas for a wide range of reasons and continue to do so without seeing or understanding that they are complicit, directly or indirectly, in a genocide that continues today. The priest and missionary Chrestien LeClercq (1910), acting as translator for an unnamed Mi’kmaq elder, recorded in 1677 that the elder knew settlers did not risk their lives coming to Turtle Island for nothing. He noted that they travelled in dangerous conditions for weeks across the ocean. He astutely observed that Europe could not have been the earthly paradise that the settlers represented, if they were so eager to leave the place (pp. 104-106). For their part, some settlers recognized that their relative comfort in North America came at the expense of First Peoples. Mary Rowlandson was unsympathetic to the plight of the indigenes, but even she admitted throughout her entire captivity account that the King Phillip’s War had been God’s justice exacerbated by English Puritan greed and sin. Major-General Gookin and Minister John Eliot both received death threats for insisting that the war, as well as the treatment of First Nations people more generally, were morally wrong (Mandell, p. 104).

I was at First Nations House at the University of Toronto when Harper’s truly historic apology was broadcast on the television. Every person present was silent as the apology was broadcast. At the risk of sounding trite, I never thought I would have lived to see that day. It was an overwhelming and emotional time for me, having had so many relatives pass through that system. The Truth and
Reconciliation Commission of Canada’s *Calls to Action* (2015) document lists clear findings to address the legacy of colonialism and the lasting damage wrought through Residential Schools. This accessible, straightforward report is indeed another victory and milestone for Canada’s Aboriginal peoples. During my own lifetime I have had the privilege of seeing things start to shift to recognize the need to address wrongdoings and harm caused to Aboriginal peoples. In my experience as a university instructor, I have met several thousand students with whom I have discussed the issues described in this paper. As with any large group of people, they hold a diversity of opinions about Harper’s apology. I have observed a shift amongst my students from the belief that it represented the *conclusion* of redress efforts to the recognition that the apology is the *beginning* of something much more. These revelations have not occurred under my pressure of them, but rather from their own discussions and participation in reading groups, as well as their own independent research and study. With this development the future looks hopeful.
Chapter 2: The Scrapbook as a Form of Healing

The Scrapbook as a Tool for Interviewing

When I was a boy attending an Amish-Mennonite grade school, we were expected to make or bring store-bought copybooks to class, according to our abilities and circumstances. These objects exhibited different appearances and showed distinct ‘personalities’. Some had covers made of thin boards wrapped with glove-leather and were hand-bound. Others were made in the soft-bound style with cloth-covered cardboard. A few had paper-white muslin covers with potato-stamping designs on them. We ruled the pages carefully by hand as a classroom exercise. The process was seen as very important; the lines needed to be light and neat. The books were handed in to the teacher at the end of every week to be reviewed and our grade was partly determined according to their neatness and the regularity of the lines we drew. We used the copybooks as a type of scrapbook—they were supposed to be filled with poems, maxims, and morals that we had painstakingly inscribed. We sometimes pasted into them reward cards that were given for perfect grades, faultless recitation, or general self-improvement (see figure 6). We treasured these cards.

The modern scrapbook, as we know it today, became extremely popular during the Victorian era with the rise of a leisured middle-class. This was true especially amongst middle-class women; scrapbooks served as an alternative to committing long passages of prose and poetry to memory to combat idleness (Flanders, 2003, p. 181). Pasting items into scrapbooks and then hand decorating a border around the page was understood as a respectable manner in which to fill up
long evenings, and even recommended as such in the ladies’ magazines (p. 161). The popularity of albums and scrapbooks was helped with the advent of cheap yet bright dyes and cheap paper. Coupled with the development of mass production, inexpensive, brightly coloured sheets of printed designs of all sorts were widely available (Goodman, 2002, pp. 359-60). They were created expressly for the purpose of scrapbooking and were extremely popular.

I returned to this medium for this project when conducting interviews with survivors of the Sixties Scoop. In fact, the scrapbook I created for this purpose has become an integral part of the work itself. As I explain in the Introduction, many of the First Nations people whom I interviewed were initially reluctant to share the
details of their traumatic experiences, even though they also knew more generally that they wanted others to know their stories. They all stated that the scrapbook, which became a conduit for sharing, helped them to talk about their own lives more freely. Making the scrapbook was a multi-faceted experience for me. On the one hand, I knew it could be a useful tool. However, it also forced me to reflect upon my own experiences as an adoptee. I remembered happy times with my adoptive family. But I felt pain, sadness, loss, and frustration as well. I remembered the difficulties that my siblings also experienced growing up, including one brother who eventually become estranged from the rest of our family. I remembered many incidents long forgotten, early traumas in which other children teased and bullied me for having been adopted. And I actually began to have nightmares again about being kidnapped. The creation and presentation of this scrapbook was, in some ways, very difficult for me.

Barrington (2004) argues that only two domains of intelligence are typically valued in the academy: verbal/linguistic and logical/mathematical. These traditional discourses do not give validity to traditional Indigenous manners of knowledge, which tend to be transmitted through what many might recognize as an arts-informed methodology. Whebi (2014) broadly defines this method of research as “interventions [in] research and teaching that … use art as a tool to question, challenge and engage” (p. 47). More specifically, Cole and Knowles (2008) explain that its purpose is “to enhance understanding of the human condition through alternative (to conventional) processes and representational forms of inquiry, and to reach multiple audiences by making scholarship more accessible” (59). My inclusion
of this scrapbook in this project reflects these aims. One of the primary reasons for this study is to educate readers about the Sixties Scoop and also demonstrate the trauma it has caused—the scrapbook is one medium in which I can do so using my own experiences as an example. However, it is also important to note that another function of the scrapbook was to encourage other survivors to share their own stories. It was a research tool to help facilitate participation among the participants in my study. In summary, the scrapbook serves a dual role for this project.

Over several years of presenting the scrapbook I have occasionally rearranged some of the pages for special emphasis. Whitehead (1991) equates this repositioning of elements within a story as akin to stringing beads; this is a traditional device used by Mi’kmaq storytellers:

To the Old Ones of the People, Creation itself was fluid, in a continuous state of transformation. Reality was not rigid, set forever into form… the intent… of the teller was the string onto which episodes, actions, characters and messages were threaded like beads. Such ‘beads’ could change their colour and form as well, so each retelling of a story, even by the same person, might be different (p. 2).

The pages are presented here, with some small changes, according to my first arrangement of them. This scrapbook does not have numbered pages and, in true scrapbook fashion, there is little written information given therein. I used commercially tanned suede goat-hide to cover the particleboard covers of my scrapbook. I had Native deer hide available to me, but wanted the goat hide to be symbolic of the Adoptees cross-cultural experience. I hot glued the leather and left the edges rough. At first, I made a cover of particleboard lined with red silk paper and carefully fitted corners. However, after spending quite a while making it, I did
not feel that it evoked the same emotion (at least for me) as did the more raw and rough cover. The pages are not numbered in keeping with the spirit of the form.

Presenting the Scrapbook to Others

Figure 7: The dedication of the scrapbook.

The dedication for my scrapbook is taken from the inscription in Victor Hugo’s 1866 novel Toiler’s of the Sea. The Mi’kmaq are maritime people and therefore have always had a special affinity with the sea. This special bond seems to be founded in my blood memory, or innate collective consciousness, which I describe in the introduction. As I began the creation of my scrapbook I kept a certain question in
mind, which I took from Luciani’s observation: “To stand still and listen to Purpose, to what I truly want to do, and ask, ‘What is my truth? ... How do you wish to be revealed, communicated and hidden?’” (2004, p. 41).

Figure 8: Snapshots missing from childhood.

A page of snapshot mounts with no images. This is intended to convey the loss of familial connections. I had hoped that this page would be startling, especially in the mainstream society where pictures, videos and posts of personal thoughts has become normalized. This page in the scrapbook also reflects upon the condition in which many adoptees do not have baby photographs or other mementos from blood
family members. The intention for this presentation is also to invite observers to place themselves in a world where they have no cell-phone and no ability to text or post on Facebook, Twitter, and other social media sites. I reiterate this invitation at various stages (and on various pages) throughout the scrapbook, though I acknowledge it can be difficult for some readers to do so.

For example, once years ago when I was dismounting from my Amish carriage in a small town in southern Indiana I heard the all-too-familiar request by a tourist, "May I take your picture, please?"

I responded with my stock reply, "I'd rather you didn't please."

"Oh, please, come on! I'll give you a couple of dollars."

"Please, no thank you. It is not allowed. Thanks for understanding."

Then the camera snapped anyway and the tourist ran away gleefully with his coveted, ill-gotten photograph.

The Amish and other Plain people discourage or even forbid photographs, depending upon church district standards. This prohibition exists because the practice is believed to be prideful; it has nothing to do with stealing the soul, which is a commonly repeated misconception. The first page in the album notes the absence of photographs in the life of a Plain person. North American society has become dependent upon electronics of all sorts. It is almost a right that one may take pictures of every person and place. Many people willingly document and commit the minutest aspects of their lives to a public domain, the Internet. While the Plain person chooses not to participate in such activities and therefore their childhoods spent among relatives are rarely documented through images, adoptees have no
say in the matter.

Figure 9: The Martyr’s Mirror.

Included in the scrapbook is a fold-out section of woodcuts from Die Maytyn Spiege (The Martyr’s Mirror), the Book of Martyrs found in every Amish home. I chose to use this method to hopefully engage the observer. This was one of the few books that Plain people are permitted to read on Sunday, which is meant to be a time to seriously focus on spiritual affairs. Included here are only a few of the many woodcuts in the work (see figures 10-13). In my scrapbook I chose to highlight the images with coloured pencil for emphasis.
Figure 10: Hendrick Pruyt burned in a boat.

Figure 11: Drowning of Hendrick Sumer and Jacob Mandel.
Figure 12: George Wanger in the dungeon.

Figure 13: Dirk Willems saving his captor’s life.
The last woodcut (figure 13) represents a story known to all Plain people from early childhood. The text below the woodcut describes how Willems, an Anabaptist, was pursued across the ice on account of his faith. He heard the thief-catcher crying for help behind him as the man fell through the ice. Willems was moved to compassion and helped him to shore, however the thief-catcher delivered him into the hands of his captors nevertheless, who ultimately burned him to death at the stake (pp. 741-742).

Numbering at 1,512 pages in length and measuring 8.5 x 13.5 before having been bound, The Martyr's Mirror was the largest known book published in colonial America (Luthy, 2013, p. 15). Originally published by Tieleman Jansz van Braght in 1660, the text was translated into both German and English in Ephrata, Pennsylvania in 1744 at the Ephrata Cloister (p. 16). The Martyr's Mirror helps mould Amish identity as a separate people, although Plain dress, the old Swiss Alpine dialect, lack of electricity and pre-industrial modes of transportation also serve as clear markers of identity (Hostetler, 1993, pp. 9-10). The book reminds Plain People of the price that their ancestors paid to maintain their faith and way of life.

An important part of Plain life, which makes Anabaptism distinct from Catholic and Protestant groups, for example, is the precept of nonresistance and the nonbearing of arms. The Book of Martyrs depicts this requirement within its pages, but its publication history in the US is also symbolic of it. Hearing about some 500 copies of the book at a Plain printing shop, US revolutionary soldiers seized the books for wadding to shoot at the British army. Luthy observes the irony of this incident: “The volume which had been laboriously translated and printed on purpose
to strengthen the teaching of nonresistance was desecrated; its pages bearing the testimonies of martyrs were made into cartridges to kill British soldiers” (p. 22). This is a story that Plain people would know and hear about during childhood.

The *Martyr’s Mirror* forms a strong part of Plain identity. It helps explain the tension between “the World” (non-Plain people) and Plain communities. Kennedy (2013, p. 481) notes that the pictures and drawings produced by a society are equally as important as written histories. For a people who do permit photographs, the woodcuts in the *Martyr’s Mirror* make a strong statement. When I shared the woodcuts with the adoptees they made little or no comment. This is not surprising as the woodcuts have no history with them. The *Martyr’s Mirror* had become a part of my identity, but it was not a part of their identities.

![Figure 14: The author as a young man in Virginia.](image)
This is a photograph taken of me, age 26, while visiting a neighbouring district in Virginia. The Amish Virginia churches were, in those days, extremely fragmented and there was a very large difference amongst the congregations in church discipline.

Figure 15: The author in a summer kitchen in Virginia.

Summer kitchens, which are separated from the family home, are used to minimize heat during the warmer months. A kitchen needs to have a fire going fairly consistently throughout the day and as a consequence the dwelling house becomes quite hot; a summer kitchen helps to not add this excessive and unwanted heat to the family home. A non-Plain neighbour took this photograph of me (figure 10). Although I am glad now that he did so, at the time we had mixed feelings about the photography session and I rather abruptly put it to a stop.
This is a photograph of a poor, but typical farm in a poor New York settlement. Notice that the carriage has an open front, offering no protection from the elements. This carriage has no slow moving vehicle triangle, lights, or reflective tape as found in many communities. However, these communities are not without their benefits. William McGonegal was one of four children left orphans at a very young age. A very conservative Order of Amish adopted his sister, Rosanna, but her siblings were fortunate enough to locate her. William’s first night in his sister’s adoptive community is described as follows:

When William went to bed that night, he noticed that there was no carpet on the floor, no pictures on the walls, no curtains on the windows, and no wash-bowl in the room. Everything was severely plain, but immaculate. The bed was high, and the mattress was filled with finely cut straw... Again and again,
the words ‘quiet simplicity, peace and contentment’ floated through his mind. What a supper! What cleanliness! (Yoder, 1940, p. 71).

Figure 17: The othering of the Plain People.

This image demonstrates the “othering” or exoticization of Plain People for the benefit of curious outsiders. The person who sketched this drawing had clearly never attended a Plain Meeting and has incorrectly represented almost all aspects of dress and worship (Morse, 1980, 165-66). So, what, exactly can such a sketch be based upon? The importance of this image to my scrapbook is that it represents a view of Plain People that is widely held within our society—that we are oddities. At
the same time there is a ready market for selling the Plain people, who do not wish to be commoditized (Nolt, 2013; Weaver-Zercher, 2012).

Another example of willful misrepresentation appears in the writings of Charles Dickens, who visited a Plain community while touring the US (Andrews, 1953, p. 221). The famed writer and philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson (1960) said of Dickens’ visit to the Plain community, “Truth is not his object for a single minute.” Dickens was told that a Sunday worship meeting was closed to the public and, in high indignation, purchased rounds of drinks in a nearby tavern in return for stories about the Plain community (Morse, 1980, pp. 184-187). He then wrote his story about them without ever having spent more than literally a few minutes in the community, and perhaps needless to say the story was neither accurate nor flattering (Horgan, 1987, p. 102). The following passage is representative of his work:

We walked into a grim room, where several grim hats were hanging on grim pegs, and the time was told by a grim clock, which uttered every tick with a kind of struggle, as if it broke the grim silence reluctantly, and under protest. Ranged against the wall were six or eight stiff high-backed chairs, and they partook so strongly of the general grimness, that one would much rather have sat on the floor than incurred the smallest obligation to any of them….In all matters they hold their own course quietly, live in their gloomy silent commonwealth, and show little desire to interfere with other people (Morse, 1980, pp. 184-87).

First Nations people and communities experience similar kinds of negative misrepresentation of their cultures. Berkhofer (1978) shows how White explorers reduced the wide range of Aboriginal peoples across North America to a set of archetypical images under the generalized term ‘Indian’ or ‘savage’. These images might be favorable or hostile to the communities they supposedly described, but in
any case provided the European colonizers with the justifications they needed to subjugate them and seize their lands. In particular, Francis (1992) demonstrates how these often-contradictory stereotypes have been central to Canadian cultural understandings of its own Aboriginal communities.

Figure 18: Northern El Salvador during the civil war.

These images are of a coffee farm to which I was connected in El Salvador, Central America. We were going to plant coffee and lead such a beautiful life, but the civil war came and shattered those hopes—and my fortunes—to bits. Ultimately,
we were lucky to escape the country with our lives. If you want to make God laugh, tell that Being your plans!

Figure 19: Promotional flyer for event at Hart House, University of Toronto.

This image is of a small advertisement for what I thought would be a meeting to discuss ‘antiracism initiatives’, on which my name appears misspelled. The event turned out to be an attack on White people and a quite pronounced argument between members of two religious denominations. After a rather heated two-hour session, I was called upon to speak for the final ten minutes of the event. Rather
dumb-founded, I articulated something like, “I wanted to speak tonight about strides we have made with the help of our allies and dear friends of every colour, including our esteemed White friends. I am so sorry; I cannot speak to ancient feuds in far-away continents that, I believe, have no place here or in this discussion. If I’d known this was going to be a war, I would not have come. I am so sorry. I have nothing to contribute to a discussion on hate.” I think my words inspired the hatred of all who were present, for the room fell completely silent and I felt my face burning. I wondered to myself, ‘Did I say that out loud? How do I get out of here as quickly as I can?’
Figure 20: Interactive examples of a letter with wax seals and a calling card.

Without the use of telephones or the Internet, Amish folk rely on letters. Not all of this personal correspondence goes through the official mail system, although it is used extensively. There is quite a system for the circulation of letters in Amish
society; several established networks within each community are used to quickly relay notes or information. This image shows an example of a sealed letter that would be passed along one such network. A wax seal closes the letter. This particular example is of a letter that I wrote to my niece, which consists mostly of formalities and platitudes.

Below the letter is a sealed calling card. I included this feature to encourage the reader to open the letters and envelope. I wanted the reader to unfold and read the note, to feel the paper and see a wax seal. My goal is, in part, to remind the reader that among Plain people contact with others is either verbal or via hand-written notes and letters. There is no instant gratification of a text coming back within minutes or an email being answered the same afternoon. Note that Amish spelling in the Swiss Alpine tongue is not standardized, though lately there have been efforts to do so.

While they may seem strange (and perhaps pointless) to a mainstream North American today, calling cards do serve a social purpose in Amish society. Hand-written cards are perfectly proper in their presentation. A calling card bears simply the name of the individual. No titles are ever used, which would be seen as vulgar. A seal, which may or may not be personal, is used to close the small card-envelope. A business card is never left at any social occasion.
Church services are held every second Sunday. The church lunch, which is served after the three-hour service, is not regarded as a time to be creative in the kitchen, but rather is organized according to a standard from which the cook is not expected to deviate. There are no church houses, so meetings and services are conducted in the members’ houses and barns. Backless wooden benches are put on trestles to form tables (covered with white cloths, which also serve as napkins) in the same area where the church service has been held.

The setting pictured here is for four people. Inside the white tureen is white bean soup flavoured with chicken broth, butter, cream, nutmeg and black pepper.
The four diners eat the soup directly from the bowl, but a strict etiquette is observed; one eats only from his or her own area of the bowl and dips the spoon along the edge of that same area. Bread and butter, cheddar and Swiss cheese, sweet pickles, pickled beets and eggs, summer sausage and scnitz (dried apple) pie are also served. The pitchers are filled with water and coffee and, like the tureen, are shared by all. Dishes are silently and quickly replenished as they are emptied. Diners are meant to eat the two pretzels left at each place later in the day, perhaps on the carriage or buggy ride home. Notice that there are no forks on the table. Knives are used to spear and eat food, according to 17th and 18th century customs (Hostetler, 1963, p. 112; Yoder, 1940, 197).
This is a drawing of a Tree of Life in the style of the *fraktur*, a form of illustration used in the Amish community. I composed this picture, but it is nothing extraordinary. My version replicates the established, customary designs that can be found in many Plain and rural communities.
Figure 23: A drawn representation of a mourning dove.

The dove has symbolic, Biblical connotations of being a messenger, an intermediary, and as representative of hope.
This document included in the scrapbook contains a few selections from the *Lieder Sammlung*, which is sometimes referred to as *The Small Book* despite its 342 pages. However, it is small in length in comparison to the *Ausbund*, the larger Amish hymnal, which numbers 722 pages. These are the two hymnals used in all Amish communities and some other Plain communities. Plain people who were awaiting their deaths in prison, a consequence of religious persecution, wrote many of these songs (Hostetler, 1993, p. 113-129). Along with *Die Matyr Spiegel*, probably no other book forms as much of the Amish identity as the *Ausbund*. The importance of these two books to Amish life cannot be overstated.
Figure 25: Copy of a Letter From a Mi'kmaq Ancestor.

I wanted to inspire curiosity in the reader and therefore included an envelope and letter on this page, which can be removed and read. I tucked the correspondence itself into an envelope with a Mi'kmaq four directions symbol on the reverse side. Although I have transcribed it below, the letter is purposely not transcribed in the scrapbook to further engage the participant and to help create a greater sense of contact with this once living individual and his situation.

Chief Paussamigh Pemmeenauweet wrote this letter to Queen Victoria in a desperate effort to be heard by the colonial government. The home office received
Pemmeenauweet’s letter, which is noted by the official stamp visible on the first page: “Received January 25, 1841” (figure 26). The Queen was very interested in the plight of the Micmac and appointed Lord Falkland to personally review the situation, but despite his apparently sincere best efforts, the provincial and local governments in the Maritimes, as well as the colonists who lived there, showed indifference, resistance, bigotry and outright refusal to help him (Upton, 89-90). A transcription of the letter follows the images of each page.

Figure 26: Pages 1 and 2 of Chief Pemmeewnauweet’s letter.
Figure 27: Pages 3, 4, and 5 of Chief Pemmeenauweet’s letter.

“To the Queen,

Madam,

I am Paussamigh Pemmeenauweet, and I am called by the White Man Louis Benjamin Pemminout.

I am the Chief of my People the Micmac Tribe of Indians in your Province of Nova Scotia and I was recognized and declared to be the Chief by our good Friend Sir John Cope Sherbrooke in the White Man’s fashion Twenty Five Years ago; I have got the Paper which he gave me.

Sorry to hear that the King is dead. Am glad to hear that we have a good Queen whose Father I saw in this Country. He loved the Indians.

I cannot cross the great Lake to talk with you for my Canoe is too small, and I am old and weak. I cannot look upon you for my eyes not see so far. You cannot hear my voice across the Great Waters. I therefore send this Wampum and paper talk to tell the Queen I am in trouble. I have seen upwards of a Thousand Moons. When I was young I had plenty; now I am old and sickly too. My people are poor. No Hunting Grounds – No Beaver – no Otter – no nothing. Indians poor – poor forever. No Store – no Chest – no Clothes. All these Woods once ours. Our Indians possessed them all. Now we cannot cut a Tree to warm our Wigwams in Winter unless the White Man allow. The Indians now receive no presents, but one small Blanket for a whole family. The Governor is a good man but he cannot help us now. We look to you the Queen. The White Wampum tells that we hope in you. Pity your poor Indians in Nova Scotia.
White Man has taken all that was ours. We had plenty of everything here. But we are told that the White Man has sent to you for more. No wonder that I should speak for myself and my people.

The man that takes this talk over the Great Water will tell you what we want to be done for us. Let us not perish. Your Indian Children love you, and will fight for you against all your enemies.

My Head and my Heart shall go to One above for you.

Paussamigh Pemmeenauweet – Chief of the Micmac Tribe of Indians in Nova Scotia, His Mark

Figure 28: My Status Card and the poem “Uncertain Admission” by Frances A. Katasse.

The status card, both loved and hated by First Nations’ peoples, a document that gives and takes away so much. This confers certain negotiated legal rights
such as medical and educational benefits, tax relief, the right to work in the US or Canada, the right to live on a reserve, and so on. Certainly, any rights that we have are recognized through this card (a physical reminder of the Indian Act that Status Indians carry daily) are inherent. However, at present a Status Indian must use this card to claim these rights. It is a constant reminder that we are legally wards of the Crown, but it also recognizes our place in a particular Indigenous community. As an adoptee, it served as an important tie to my people and nation when, for many years, I had no other immediate connections. The poem shown underneath the status card is by Frances A. Katasse, which took first prize at a contest in Scottsdale, Arizona for best poem written by someone under the age of 16 (Gooderham, 1969, p. xi).
The small booklet in my scrapbook contains only a small part of the Indian Act, which was originally passed in 1876 and amended several times since. This excerpt is commonly distributed freely by The Department of Aboriginal Affairs and is the section most likely to appear in Internet searches. The entire legislation and amendments are much more extensive and complex. I have not yet discovered the rationale for the widespread availability of this small section in particular.
“One little, two little, three little Indians…” If this children’s rhyme were sung about any other ethnic group or race today there would be lawsuits brewing and grievances filed. The degree to which racism against First Nations people, even if expressed in seemingly innocuous ways such as in this song, certainly appears to exceed prejudices against other communities in Canada.
I purposefully chose the word 'Indian' here rather than terms that I prefer for myself—“Mi’kmaq”, “First Nations”, and “Native”, in that order. My adoptive and original birth certificates both say “Red” under the field for race. To be disconnected from one’s family, community, country, race and religion is devastating for the adoptive child as he or she grows into adulthood. It can also be difficult for the parents who adopt the child.
During my childhood, a well-meaning neighbour visited Switzerland, Germany and Austria and came back full of admiring chatter about the scenery, food, and markets. She handed my siblings and me wrapped boxes and told us not to open them until she had left. When she handed the box to me she said, “I saw these and it reminded me exactly of you and how you dress.” After opening the boxes, all of which contained similar gifts, we were stunned at their contents. Finally my grandmother said, “Well, you know, it is the thought that counts.” My mother answered, “That is whatterrifies me. What was she thinking?”
This image shows notecards made by non-Plain people for the tourist trade. Near the larger Plain communities in the US waystations and ‘tourist traps’ can be found along the highways selling cheap, inauthentic goods: so-called Amish dolls, Amish napkins, Amish ashtrays, Amish towels, Amish seasonings and pre-packaged baking mixes, Amish t-shirts and baseball caps, and so on. In truth, Plain churches are forbidden from using their names to sell or advertise goods for sale. Nineteen million tourists visit Amish communities every year in search of a nostalgic and “Victorian” experience (Nolt, 2013).

Notice the exaggerated hat brim and the woman wearing a bonnet to churn butter. There is a new “Amish” romance novel published almost weekly, written by non-Amish people for the tourist trade (Weaver-Zercher, 2012).
This pair of Georgian saltcellars was part of a wedding gift given to my adoptive ancestors in 1764. A mid-twentieth century salt spoon, dating from about the year of my birth, balances between the two. After I moved away from home I treasured these items. Adoptees are reared within a worldview and collective consciousness not their own, which they often embrace. These adopted perspectives are influential insofar as, according to the Tewa anthropologist Ortiz, they instill “a distinctive set of values, an identity, a feeling of rootedness, of belonging to a time and place, and a felt sense of continuity with a tradition which transcends the experience of a single lifetime, a tradition which may be said to transcend even time” (as cited in Beck, Walters, and Francisco, 1977, p. 91).
Figure 35: A typical copybook used in the Amish schoolroom.

Copybooks contain blank pages to which users can affix merit cards and copy down proverbs. A Plain person’s copybook is treasured throughout life and often serves as a form of journal or diary. The proverbs and maxims are carefully copied down from the blackboard and have a strong influence over the schoolchildren, who will typically take them to heart and continue to use and live by them throughout their lives. This book is meant to be seen by others. The idea of a copybook or scrapbook meant to be on display started to become extremely popular in nineteenth century America (Christensen, 2011,176).
This image shows my personal set of McGuffey’s textbooks. I was taught from these books and also used them to teach when I had my own school. The stories they contained taught us that as long as we obeyed our parents, the Church, and the government, loved God, and always did the right thing; then no harm would come to us. Virtue is always rewarded in the McGuffey’s series; disobedient, misbehaving, and proud people in their stories always come to dramatic, disastrous bad ends. For many years I shared these beliefs. It took me most of my life to realise plenty of people who are genuinely not nice are rewarded, while plenty of good people suffer.
Figure 37: An example of a family quiz.

All the adopted First Nations people to whom I presented this scrapbook spoke of the pain and emptiness of not knowing the most ordinary things about their families. This scrapbook reflects that view. I found pictures and other items to paste into the pages, but ultimately very few of them are my personal possessions. Similarly, adoptees know relatively little about ourselves. We have no knowledge of our medical histories or which family members we take after physically. We do not know our birth stories or anecdotes about growing up, which parents often take great joy in recounting. The stories we hear from our adopted families do not really belong to us. We have no blood connection with them and do not share their blood
memory. Much of our lives are like the scrapbook cuttings from other people’s memories.
Chapter 3: Identities, Real and Imagined

Dimensions of First Nations Identities

The sky looks down on me in aimless blues
The sun glares at me with a questioning light
The mountains tower over me with uncertain shadows
The trees sway in the bewildered breeze
The deer dance in perplexed rhythms
The ants crawl around me in untrusting circles
The birds soar above me with doubtful dips and dives
They all, in their own way, ask the question
Who are you, who are you?

I have to admit to them – to myself
I am an Indian.

(Katasse, as cited in Gooderman, 1969, p. xi)

I am a Two-Spirited First Nations Mi'kmaq man adopted during the most aggressive era of the Sixties’ Scoop. I grew up in a conservative, rural, religious Amish community in the eastern United States. My adoptive parents were genteel, well travelled, and extremely well read people. They were also liked and respected among their peers. However, they could not have children, which was expected in
their community, so they chose to adopt children instead. Although my parents were quite strict and wanted their rules obeyed, they were genuinely kind-hearted as well. The adopted children in my family were indulged with books and gifted with a true love for reading. I never recall being refused any book, so long it was not a comic book or another such format. Our house was large and comfortable, filled with books and good things to eat and drink.

I grew up in an area where people were consciously and deeply involved with the past. The old settlers there knew about the King's Phillip's War, which changed the Northeastern US forever as the local Aboriginal population were killed, chased out of their communities, or sold into slavery. We grew up hearing romanticized stories about the King Phillip's War that presented Aboriginal people as noble savages against whom atrocities were committed and who committed atrocities themselves. As I indicate in the first chapter of this project, there are numerous markers and monuments erected in memorial of the conflict. I grew up however not seeing, knowing, or interacting with other Aboriginal peoples.

Wandering through the woods near our home as a child I once stumbled upon an eighteenth-century grave. Its slate stone was as tall as me and carved with a winged skeleton-head at eye-level, which stared back at me. The inscription told of the mortal body succumbing to smallpox and leaving a disconsolate widow and her grieving children in a far-away coastal city. I felt sorry for this man who, for whatever reason, travelled so far from home and was now lying alone in the forest here. Would this be my fate too, someday, I wondered, to be far away from my home and eventually buried far away from my birth family? I used to talk out loud to the
deceased, and I promised him I would not forget his grave. I would come back to visit, which I later did.

As a young person I always wondered about my personal identity. I knew that I had a place in the local school and Amish community. Yet I also knew that I was not like my adoptive parents or the other adopted children. People would regularly tell me, “You don’t look like your parents,” which is a common and frustrating experience among Aboriginal adoptees. Some of the people in my community were visibly puzzled with these differences and obviously compared me to the various members of my family. I remember people asking me if I was a friend of my brothers and sisters, how I knew them, what I was doing in the community, and so on. They would ask me to explain my background and family history; indeed, strangers often seemed to feel that they had a right to know about my personal circumstances, how I fit in to the local community and my adoptive family. This experience of constantly being compared and questioned heightens the precarious uncertainty of identity in adopted children. I did not always feel like sharing my personal experiences with either strangers or acquaintances for that matter, especially because at that time I could hardly articulate them.

Sometimes I felt that I had lost everything. I felt as if I had nothing to hold on to, that I was completely alone in the world. I needed to know who I was and the people from whence I came. Here I was, adopted and living far away from home and nobody could give me the barest details about myself, except that I was Mi’kmaq. This information mattered greatly to me, but I had to learn to hold it inside as other people did not believe me. I would secretly succumb to fits of crying. I
never wanted anyone to know how I felt about my situation because I knew that my adoptive family treated me very well. LaCapra (1999) writes that among traumatized people, “When loss is converted into absence, one faces the impasse of endless melancholy, impossible mourning and interminable aporia in which any process of working through the past and its historical losses is foreclosed or prematurely aborted” (p. 2). How can a problem such as personal identity be worked through when there is no foreseeable goal at the end? How can a child do so without the necessary resources? At the time, I did not know who was responsible for my predicament, nor was there anyone to whom I might appeal for help to resolve my over-whelming feelings. Someone had written “Red” under the entry for ‘race’ on my birth certificate, but as our records were closed (and remain so even today) there was no way for me to investigate further, even if I knew how to do so. For their part, my adoptive parents truly had no specific information about my past. All of the adoptees I have interviewed shared similar stories and their parents were also ignorant of the personal backgrounds of their adoptive children.

At the age of 18 I was baptized into the Amish-Mennonite church. At the time, it was the happiest day of my life. The Amish, like their Mennonite and Hutterite cousins, practice voluntary adult baptism (Hostetler, 1993, p. 77). The Amish baptismal vow forms an identity for the Amish person and the day, although solemn, is also quietly joyous. The baptismal vow “embodies the spiritual meaning of becoming an Amish person, an acceptance of absolute values…quite independent of any external reward” (p. 77). Even though they are probably similar to other mainstream Christian vows, “what is significant is the promise to abide by
[many] implied rules not exactly stated in the vow” (p. 81-82). These injunctions cover every area of one’s life, from personal grooming to behaviour. The baptized person learns these rules from seeing them obeyed every day by their peers.

The Amish also have a way of understanding the world and their place within it—in other words, their sense of identity—that, according to Hostetler, “differs from classic dualism” (p. 73). They view themselves as caretakers of something that God made; in other words, the world does not belong to them. Although Hostetler does not mention this relation specifically, I myself believe that the idea is connected to the Amish understanding of salvation. Kraybill and Bowman (2001) explain, “Like the modern understandings of love … [Amish] salvation is something that can grow stronger or weaker, be fallen into and out of” (p. 208). This is, of course, in contrast to the ideas espoused by evangelicals and fundamentalist Christians. Amish faith “is remarkably relational. Salvation has as much to do with social relationships as with a vertical encounter with the divine” (p. 207). Therefore, even though the baptized Amish person is guided by various rules, his or her identity (like his or her faith) can also change.

Within the community one hardly thinks about these matters, or at least I did not. However, when I travelled I was exposed to staring and occasional comments by outsiders, which especially affected me as a self-conscious teenager. I had never before been accosted by someone I did not know. I could not fathom the reason for the constant, bold staring. Plett (2006) describes her own experience as a Mennonite in a non-Mennonite school, which reflects what many people in my community also felt: “As I faced the volley of verbal and physical abuse from my new
non-Mennonite classmates, I was rendered immobile. I could not talk. I could not act. I passed through the next few years in a fog, blocking out the insults” (p. 77). Because of these experiences, I began to understand myself in relationship to the complex process of being ‘Othered’ (LaRocque, 2010). My sense of identity took shape in relation to how others perceived me, and that self-image had nothing to do with being a First Nations Mi’kmaq person, insofar as at the time other people did not and/or refused to recognize me as a Mi’kmaq.

I do not remember when I first knew that I was First Nations, but it was always a part of my knowledge of myself; I just did not really know any specific details about this aspect of my identity. My adoptive parents wanted me to know more, but admitted that they knew little of my personal history. They gave us all books, appropriate to our ages, about First Nations people. Their manner in doing so was unobtrusive: these texts were placed on a table or sideboard in a place where we would most likely stumble across them. An early example was a book of large, colourful stamps that were arranged in the front of the book. One matched up the stamp with the corresponding black and white outline and title. There was a short story about each particular picture on the stamp. I was just learning to read when I received this book as a gift. When I was ten years old my parents gave me a hardcover copy of The World of the American Indian (1974), which was published by the National Geographic Society.

As I started attending community college and then university, I began to have a more generally pleasant experience with ‘English’ people, the term used by the Amish to refer to non-Plain people. At this time I had not told many others about my
First Nations identity. When I began to do so during the first semester of college, I was met with disbelief, likely because of my identifiably Amish appearance. Occasionally, I heard counter-claims in which a classmate had said that they were also First Nations, almost always Cherokee. Consequently, I decided that this was a part of my identity I could not openly discuss; I did not wish to be constantly doubted and countered with disbelief when I talked about my birth mother and community of origin. It was not until I had met my birth family and moved back to Canada that I began to feel more comfortable telling others that I was First Nations. Even now I am sometimes met with disbelief or challenged. I am often asked what part or percentage of me is First Nations. Sometimes I am asked how I know that I am First Nations, and I regularly hear people respond, “You don’t look like an Indian! And I know what Indians look like!”

Weaver (2001) addresses the complexity of Native identity, discussing self-identification, community identification, and external identification. There is also a bureaucratic aspect of Indigenous identity in North America. For example, the Mi’kmaq are one of several First Nations communities that include citizens living on both sides of the US-Canada border. As a First Nations Canadian reared in the US who travels using a US passport, serious-faced border guards will still sometimes ask me about my blood quantum—the legal basis for determining whether a person belongs to a particular Native community—when I enter the US from Canada. I suppose they must be puzzled when handed a US passport with a Canadian Indian Status Card by a bearded man in Amish garb and I cannot help my momentary sense of childish glee at their confusion. Indian status is a complex phenomenon;
explaining it to non-Native people in a class or lecture-type setting always takes much longer than the time allotted to do so permits, and rightly so! Garroutte (2001) notes that conditions become even more complicated as the criteria for Indian status have changed drastically over time in the US for First Nations peoples (pp. 224-239).

The Sixties Scoop

I was adopted during a particularly aggressive period of what is now called the ‘Sixties Scoop’. Johnston (1983) coined this term in his report *Native Children and the Child Welfare System*, which describes this policy as a systematic attempt at cultural genocide across Canada. It refers to the mass removal of Aboriginal children from their families into the child welfare system, in most cases without the consent of their families or bands. According to Johnston, his inspiration for the term came from a conversation with a social worker from British Columbia, who explained that “it was common practice in B.C. in the mid-sixties to ‘scoop’ from their mothers on reserves almost all newly born children” (as cited in Sinclair, 2007, p. 66). It has later become apparent that this practice occurred throughout Canada.

The Sixties’ Scoop was a continuation of the Residential School system, which Johnston (1983), Knockwood (2001), Wesley-Esquimaux and Smoleski (2004), Fournier and Crey (1998), and Milloy (1999) have all described in greater detail. Under the careful watch of Duncan Campbell Scott, the particularly heavy-handed Superintendent of the Department of Indian Affairs during the early 20th century, “Education [in Residential Schools] was to be nothing less than an instrument of cultural annihilation, which would at once transform the Indian into an
unskilled or semi-skilled workforce while forcing them into the mold of Anglo-Canadian identity” (Titley, 1986, p. 93). These objectives were partly (though not entirely) accomplished through the stamping out of ‘pagan superstitions’ among resident children and forbidding their use of Aboriginal languages. Johnson has noted in his report that as Residential Schools across Canada closed, aggressive adoptions increased. Like the Residential Schools system, the purpose of adoptions was to separate Aboriginal children from their homes, families, and communities in order to weaken their associations with their cultural heritage. Not only was adoption a particularly effective means of doing so, but also the adoptive family assumed the cost of feeding and housing these Native children. And unlike in the case of the Residential Schools, official government records of the adoptions programs have remained sealed to this day, which makes it even more difficult for victims to learn more about their origins.

**Acceptance and Rejection Among Adoptees**

My experiences as an adoptee have been mixed. On the one hand, my adoptive mother’s family was very kind to me as a child and treated me well. However, my adoptive father’s family was not so kind and as I grew older they increasingly commented upon my having been adopted. Other adoptees I have interviewed also note that some of their adoptive family members would make similarly negative remarks. My father’s brother would say, “At least my children are my own. They are not somebody else’s children,” as if it were somehow my fault that I had been adopted. He and other relatives were careful to not say these things
when my father was present, but accidentally did so a few times within my mother’s hearing. My father’s siblings became more vocal as I grew older and after a number of incidents my mother stopped speaking with them, ultimately for the remainder of their lives. My mother told them she could not continue to associate with them as long as they felt so negatively about her children.

My mother was well liked and respected in our extended family and a long-suffering individual; her rejection of my father’s siblings had a noticeable effect upon them, but two of the four were inordinately proud and could not, apparently, find it within themselves to consider the problematic nature of their speech. Two other siblings of my father asked my parents for forgiveness and made recognizable efforts to include us in their lives. My father attempted to speak with his recalcitrant brother and sister, but also eventually abandoned contact with them for the remainder of their lives as they harboured resentment, jealousy, and racist feelings toward me. He died without speaking to them further. I learned later that my mother absented herself from his funeral so that various nieces and nephews could attend and make their peace. That was so much like her, always thinking of others and their needs above her own.

My own adoptive relatives made me feel that to be adopted was something bad—that I was unwanted, that my birth families both did not want me, and that even if they did they could not take care of me. My birth mother was characterized as a woman of loose-morals. They would say, “Who knows what she did, how she lived? She could have been a drug addict or alcoholic, or both. You have no idea what she was like. See how very lucky you are to be with this nice family?” As we all lived in
close proximity to each other and visited frequently, my family members often shared these views. Other members of the community would express similar sentiments. For example, I remember one occasion when I was about twenty years old in which a man from town gave me a ride. I had never spoken with him before, but recognized him and knew his family. He told me he knew my father and mother, whom he held in high esteem, and explained that I was very lucky to be in my position: “You really fell into a tub of butter being adopted by your parents. I hope you appreciate it. I can’t give my own kids all the things I wish I could, and they are my own children!” Incidents like this one were relatively common.

Other adoptees I have interviewed share these experiences. As children they faced the constant expectation of gratitude from their adoptive family and others in their communities, which was often expressed through a negative comparison to their birth parents. Lisa explains, “[They] would tell me that my birth parents couldn’t take care of me. It affected me negatively, and I resented my birth mother. I became the inadequate birth mother inside. You take on all those bad things people say about your birth family and community.” Judy, one of the few First Nations adoptees to be adopted with her biological brother, shares similar feelings of inadequacy:

I was always told I was not thankful enough to be in the home where I was. My brother was always called an ungrateful brat by our adoptive family. Finally, he ran away when he was about 16. When we behaved just like children—just laughing and running around, having fun as all children do—they told us to not behave like ‘wild Indians’. They told us that our parents couldn’t take care of us and that they had a lot of problems. Think what that does to a child. That keeps repeating in your head, your whole life. It becomes a part of you. You can’t just turn it off. It becomes, ‘I am unwanted; my parents couldn’t take care of me. My parents were bad people. My people are alcoholics, prostitutes and drug-addicts. Did my birth put too much stress on my birth-parents? I am ungrateful. I am selfish. I don’t deserve these things I have in White society. I don’t deserve to have a relationship. Nobody
wants me. All my relationships will end.’ That’s what keeps going on in your mind, and it’s all been created by other people who’ve brain-washed you into believing it all.

Kirk related to me that he was made to feel that he ought to be grateful that he was being reared in a white family, yet they never told him that he was loved. When he left at age eighteen they did not exchange any fond or caring words. He is careful to say that his adopted parents were not hostile or mean toward him, but rather that his adoption was nothing more than a business arrangement with Children’s Aid, the organization tasked with placing him in a non-Native home. His foster family neglected to tell him about First Nations people, including his community of origin, the Cree, which with they were familiar. Tyler also grew up among constant admonitions from his adoptive parents that he should be grateful. One of his first experiences in this regard occurred when the family happened to pass through a Native community. His adoptive parents told him, “You know, we rescued you from this, so you didn’t have to grow up like this.” My impression was, ‘Thank God I didn’t grow up like this.’” Tyler admits that his upbringing has negatively affected his ability to relate with other members of the First Nations community: “I am more comfortable, more at ease with non-Native people.”

**Negative Consequences of Adoption**

The adoptive families described here could not have known the exact circumstances in their adoptive children’s lives prior to adoption, which as I indicate throughout this project, was undertaken against the will of their biological parents. However, the common claim that birth mothers were either unwilling or unable to
care for their children has had a lasting negative impact. Most adoptees have told me that as children and adolescents they hoped that their biological mothers or other family members would one day take them home; biological fathers were less likely to figure in these dreams, though many said that they wanted to know and live with both biological parents. It is possible that this yearning serves as a subconscious attempt to forgive or redeem in the minds of young children who were told that they were unwanted.

Isabelle Knockwood (2001) identifies a similar thought pattern common among Residential School survivors, which she refers to as “magical thinking” (p. 158). These hopes are, in effect, the polar opposite of suicidal behaviour and serve as a coping strategy for individuals who have no other way to resolve trauma—the magical thinker sincerely believes that she or he will be suddenly rescued at any moment, that everything wrong will be made right through no effort of their own. I have also fallen victim to this line of thinking, but I now recognize it as such. Magical thinking is not necessarily unique to First Nations people, of course. After meeting my birth family, I was speaking with a non-Native friend who was adopted about the same time as I was. She confided to me that she used to dream that she had been born a princess when she was a young girl. When I suggested that she meet her birth mother she responded that her situation was different. She said that I had been born into a ‘community’ (by which she meant the Amish) while she had not. I reminded her that we are all born to individual mothers, families, and communities. However, for the adopted person, no matter their origin, it may be difficult to recognize this fact.
I have sat around a comforting pot of tea and listened to (sometimes writing and sometimes tape-recording) my fellow First Nations adoptees whilst they talked away afternoons and evenings. Most have never seen each other and many had never spoke openly before or at any length about their experience. And yet all of the individuals I interviewed have told me their life-long struggles with feelings of inadequacy, low-self esteem, long-term and severe depression, and probably above all the overwhelming feeling of loss and abandonment. Is all of this really any wonder? As Judy said, echoing the thoughts of the others, “You never get over the hurt. You keep trying to heal. It’s like someone smashed this huge house made out of glass and you have to somehow put all of the pieces together, with no help or direction. Every time you manage to get part of it up, another part falls down.”

The constant fear of abandonment, in particular, has wide-ranging effects on the lives of many First Nations adoptees. Most notably, this includes an inability to make decisions (sometimes even minor ones), which often results in complete inaction, sudden desire to withdraw from the world, the purposeful sabotaging of platonic and romantic relationships, and the contradictory need for guardianship. These feelings of abandonment, worthlessness and self-doubt do not appear to lessen or go away. My mind can reason them away, sometimes for moments and even days at a time, but my heart cannot do so. My disbelief in good personal or romantic relations causes me to do things to make the other irritated and to leave. When this happens I reason to myself, “Good. I knew they would leave sooner or later.” As the writer Dorothy Parker (1976) once said, “I loved them until they loved me” (p. 105).
Some of these issues may be pervasive among all adopted persons, which stem from the trauma of not quite knowing who you are. Lyons (2010) writes, “Indians want to keep their communally constructed, intersubjective identities for the same reasons other people do. Identity orients you in space and time, connects you to the past, helps you develop a vision for the future, and provides you with a story” (p. 39). But because First Nations peoples occupy such a marginal or liminal space within North American society, it can be especially difficult for us to reconstruct our stories. For example, central to our feelings of loss is the loss of our Indigenous languages. Adoptee Lisa states, “I’m going to be 50 years old soon. I’m never going to learn my language now. Maybe a few words.” One of the central theses of Sable and Francis (2010) in The Language of This Land, Mi’kma’ki is that our connections to our cultures, communities, traditional knowledge of spirituality, ceremony, and the land are all transmitted through our Aboriginal languages. The loss of language, especially when it occurs through circumstances like the adoptions program, is a trauma equivalent to the loss of spirituality, kinship ties, and community ties (Mussell, 2005, p. 73). Any one of these absences can be considered traumatic in and of themselves, but the adoptee must carry all of them all in one basket.

The Many Identities of First Nations People

Poliandri (2011) describes several different ways that Mi’kmaw define themselves, not only as First Nations people in general, but also specifically as Mi’kmaw (p. 102):
“It is Native spirituality, traditional spirituality.”
“It is the Mi’kmaw, and only the Mi’kmaw ceremonies.”
“It is a mixture of imported elements from other Native groups.”
“It is the Mi’kmaw language.”
“It is the values that we live by: respect for the Elders, respect for the land, and so forth.”
“It is things like drumming, some songs, the game of wåltës (a traditional game).”
“It is a way of life.”
“It is non-Catholic.”
“It is the Catholic church.”

These varied (and sometimes contradictory) responses demonstrate that identity, even among a particular shared community like the Mi’kmaw, is complex, varied, and not necessarily obvious to the outside observer. The question of Aboriginal identities has been of particular interest to Native peoples in the present-day, which is evidenced, for example, by the thematic similarities of films presented during the annual Toronto-based imagineNative Film Festival. It becomes clear after paging through recent programmes that many focus on identity: What is it? Who gives it? How is it claimed? The answers as presented in these films are as varied as the responses catalogued by Poliandri. One especially complicated issue is addressed in Tracey Deer’s (2008) film Club Native. It follows several individuals affiliated with the Kahnawake Reserve in the province of Quebec as they pursue their status within the community, which is determined by both the Indian Act and a council of elders and traditional teachers. What the film makes clear is that this decision is often arbitrary and relies on whether the individual in question conforms to certain stereotypes of Indigenous peoples, foremost among them whether they ‘look Native enough.’
Linda Croall, an Anishnawbe woman whose status is with the now non-existent Sucker Lake community, has worked in the First Nations community for over 23 years. She was the programme coordinator for the First Nations Adult Education and Career Counselling Planning Programme, as well as a founding member and teacher for the First Nations Adult Education Project of Toronto. She shared her experience with me as a lighter-skinned First Nations person that illustrates some of the problems that are inherent in the reliance on visual stereotypes:

There seems to be, often, a group of non-Native people in control of things. They act as gatekeepers to decide who does what, and they decide who will make the decisions. I don’t understand why they feel this need to have the last word about who can do what. I have been teaching in the Native community for over 20 years and I am liked by my students. My evaluations are always good. I have seen many people come and go, some who have created themselves as First Nations people. For some reason these people who assume Native identities gather a following and are listened to. Why do people believe their constructed identities, but not our own?

I myself have seen my share of people over the years who have assumed First Nations identities. Some have made a comfortable living from it, such as Jamake Highwater, Grey Owl, and more recently Ward Churchill. I have witnessed the transformation of a number of people before they became “Indians”, and followed their changes and witnessed their stories as they reinvented themselves. Why do such people gain followings? Such people cause damage to those of us who are First Nations; it is an identity theft. My constant question to such persons is, “How has being born a First Nations person impacted your life?” Assuming a First Nations identity through a fabled great-grandparent, or re-creating oneself as a First Nations person, is harmful to First Nations people. It steals from us and sets up the counterfeit for the genuine.

John, who was born to an Anishnawbe mother and a German father, shares similar experiences. His mother lost her Indian Status by marrying a non-Native man. John grew up in the town of Parry Sound, Ontario until the age of 15 and for the next six years in Alliston, Ontario, away from his home reserve of Wikwemikong. He explains that First Nations people are often subjected to a double standard with
respect to how they identify themselves and how others interact with them on this basis:

These things run very, very deep inside. Most people do not understand. I’ve had people say to me, “Oh, come on, my ancestors are from Scotland, but I don’t go around wearing a kilt.” Well, some Scots people do wear kilts, actually. If that individual doesn’t, that is his choice. But he had a choice, and that’s what’s necessary to remember. We as Native people did not, and do not have that choice.

Often when people learn I am Native they say, “Oh, but you must be mixed.” People never think about how this makes you feel. What are they? I don’t say, ‘Well, you say you are English, but are you also Danish, French, Spanish, and so on?’ They expect to be taken at their word. They don’t even think about being challenged. Imagine what it’s like to live in a world where you are constantly challenged for stating who and what you are. Add that to the inter-generational trauma of being Native, and all the rest of the package.

Loewe (2010) describes the confusing and sometimes arbitrary nature of Native identity, indicating that the process by which a First Nations person is identified as such (and who gets to make these decisions) is often inexplicably complex. We have grown accustomed to associating certain groups, like Native peoples, with darker skin tones, often without acknowledging that this standard does not necessarily correspond to reality.

Another dimension of this multifaceted issue is gender identity. Among Indigenous communities in North America, the term ‘two-spirited person’ refers to those individuals whose gender and sexual identity is fluid rather than fixed (Walters et al., 2006). Although some First Nations people who identify as lesbian, gay bisexual, transgendered, or queer also describe themselves as two-spirited, it is important to note that ‘two-spirited’ and ‘LGBTQ’ are not equivalent terms; the former is particular to the experiences and cultures of First Nations peoples. I have been asked many times by First Nations students if two-spirited people existed before
settlers arrived in North America. In one class, which consisted of seven men and five women, the former all insisted that homosexuality never existed in their various Nations and reserves and that two-spiritedness was brought by the settlers. In contrast, the women openly laughed at this suggestion. These disputes are common among First Nations peoples.

Some leaders in the First Nations community express support for two-spirited people. For example, the Assembly of First Nations, a national advocacy organization in Canada, states in its HIV/AIDS Action Plan (2001) that it is necessary “to educate people [about] the traditionally respected role that Two-Spirit First Nations peoples played in most communities, and to thus remove the stigma that has been associated with this group” (p. 4). However, this viewpoint is not universally shared. A respected chief and the director of a well-known Toronto-based First Nations social agency once both asked me whether I believed that two-spirited people existed before settlers had arrived. Neither of them believed so and both were firm in their denunciation of homosexuality; they have told me that two-spirited people ‘made them sick.’ These sentiments are troubling, but even more so because both this young, university educated, popular chief and this director of a popular Toronto social agency will influence other First Nations people. Both individuals are genuinely well-liked and respected among many in the community.

Two of the adoptees I interviewed for this article are two-spirited people. Both have said that this aspect of their identities created an extra dimension of frustration during their formative and younger years, which was a result of how others spoke and interacted with them on this basis. Nolan admits, “I kind of suppressed and
denied that part of myself. Then I realized, ‘You know what? I am what I am. People can suck it up.’ It took a long time, but I realized there is no shame to being who I am and I embrace it whole-heartedly.” He also notes that the experience of having been adopted added to the difficulty of self-acceptance: “When you are raised in White society you start taking on so many of their beliefs and prejudices … And it does destroy some Two-Spirited people. They take on so much shame and so many of the non-Native beliefs against two-spirits that they can’t make their peace with it.”

Two spirited people were viewed as an “abomination” by Western society (Stimson, 2006), and that sexuality in general was somehow evil – “sexuality equaled death” (Ibid). Mander (1978) explains in *Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television* that new electronic technology and the media are not neutral, although many people are not ordinarily cognizant of this in their day to day lives. Mander argues the media is used to inform our knowledge of the world around us. Indigenous peoples are not normalized in the media, and certainly not Two spirited peoples. Stimson further relates, “The absence of representations of Two spirited people from contemporary popular culture is equally embedded in hegemonic practices of colonization” (ibid), and “that the colonial project takes place on many levels and that sex and sexuality are a preoccupation”(ibid). This state of being outside of the sexual norm has caused aggression and violence towards all non-heterosexual peoples (Herek, 1989; 1990), but Two spirited peoples combat a dual struggle against racism and hetero-normalcy (Walters, K. L., Horwath, P. F., & Simoni, J. M., 2001).

**Conclusion: Coping and Healing**
There are many different coping mechanisms that Sixties Scoop survivors draw upon for support. For example, Lisa explained that connecting with her birth parents helped her start her own healing process. In contrast, Nolan has found solace through Native spirituality:

Yes. Native spirituality. We can use it to heal ourselves when it comes to our own personal views, and what we’ve been taught to think about ourselves as adoptees and as First Nations peoples. To me, it’s a system and a way to heal. And to begin to love my life and those around me. But it’s ongoing, right? I always knew and I always used the power of the moon and the water to heal myself. Also just walking and being part of the nature around me helped me a lot growing up, to get through those tough years. They were all pretty tough until I left home, and even for quite awhile afterwards. So, through Native spirituality I began to understand what I needed to do, and that I could have a happy life. That’s how I began to heal myself and that’s how I became invigorated and broke the cycle of my depression and all those feelings I had as a Native adopted person. I always felt a special connection with nature and when things got really bad I would go to the water and the trees for some time, and then I’d get strength to return home again. I did the same thing with the moon. I would go outside to where I could be alone, and felt that the moon was protecting me.

And there’s a lot of talk, and study, about how people use their spirituality and Native healing to get through everyday. My touchstone about being adopted is how my family dealt me the abuse; physical, emotional, sexual, and the miracle of how I survived it. The moon and water—two of the most powerful elements. It’s really amazing how it works. People don’t even realize the power that’s there, and what it can do. But you have to be willing to be honest with yourself and to always be working on yourself. It’s not something that’s going to happen in two weeks or a month.

Kirk was not formally adopted, but reared in a white, middle-class Manitoba home. For him, simply re-discovering his Indigenous roots serves as a form of rehabilitation after spending much of his life in relative ignorance about his birth culture and customs:

When I turned 18 I left. They [the foster family] didn’t say anything, and I didn’t either. I knew that the monthly payments to keep me would stop when I was 18, so I decided to leave then. There was really nothing for me there in Manitoba. I bought a ticket to Toronto. I had never been there before, and I
didn’t know anyone, and I didn’t have any money after I bought the ticket, but it sounded like as good a place as any. They never kept in touch with me. They know where I am if they wanted to. I don’t contact them either though. Does seem a bit strange to live with someone for 14 or 15 years and they never even send a birthday card or anything.

It was in Toronto where I started to learn about my Native heritage. I’m still learning, but it’s here where things really began happening in my life. I started my own healing path here and got a lot of things straightened out.

Kirk has found ways to heal his own trauma, an ever-continuing process that is unique to each survivor. For example, sometimes I am fine for months and then I suddenly come crashing down, especially when I see a new born baby and loving mother. I think that I have made progress. I know that life is very short and that being happy is one of the few personal choices we can make. I choose to be happy. However, it has not always been this way. I was suicidal for many years and suffered severe depression. I learned to gradually discover what I could do for myself. It was necessary for me to make a connection with my birth family (as disastrous as this experience was) and also my birth community. I can hardly stress the importance of this decision for me. At the time it seemed like a mistake, but it was not. I came to gradually understand, as a wise old elder once told me, that I did not need anything to be a Mi’kmaq. She explained, “You were born a Mi’kmaq; you are a Mi’kmaq. You do not need to do anything or impress anyone. You do not have to prove anything or be anything.” Gradually I came to understand the meaning of these words: I am Mi’kmaq. I am First Nations.

It is necessary for every adoptee to discover and follow his or her own path to recovery from the various consequences of the adoption program in North America, from the improvement of their psychological and emotional health to meaningful
participation in the life of their birth communities. So much of our experience is rooted in not knowing who we are. If we, as adoptees, allow ourselves to fall prey to the negative effects discussed in this essay, then we have allowed the settler's cruel plans of assimilation and cultural genocide to succeed. However, rehabilitation is not a solitary process to be undertaken by the victims of state-sponsored policies. Settlers must also recognize their complicity, indirectly or even directly, in the continued degradation of Indigenous communities on Turtle Island.

I and many other First Nations peoples agree with the declaration issued by Chrisjohn, Young and Maraun (2006), who challenge non-Native Canadians and the Canadian government “to deal squarely and effectively with [Canada’s] past, and admit the utter immorality of what it has done and what it continues to do” (p. 78). The official apology delivered by Prime Minister Stephen Harper in 2008 to the victims of the Residential Schools program is a welcome step in this regard, but only one in the many that must be taken. There are many possible reasons for why the Canadian government has not made additional efforts to redress the many crimes committed against Canada’s Indigenous peoples: a desire to save money, fear of the potential political consequences, a misplaced sense of pride, an unshakable belief that no real wrong has been committed and no harm has been done, and so on. No matter the reasons, it is clear that Canada’s own imagined self-identity as a peaceful, just, and tolerant nation runs counter to its real identity, which is formed through its origins in the exploitation of Indigenous people who lived here and their continued ill-treatment through the centuries. Canada too must find a way to account for itself.
Chapter 4: Surviving the Sixties Scoop

Two Traumas: Residential Schools and Adoptions

Knockwood (2001) begins her moving account of the Residential School at Shubenacadie, with her reason for writing it:

I have been talking about the Indian Residential School in Shubenacadie for many years, and I still don’t understand why the hurt and shame of seeing and hearing the cries of abused Mi’kmaw children, many of them orphans, does not go away or heal. I hope that the act of writing it down will help me and others to come up with some answers. (p. 7)

First Nations peoples have long recognized the healing power of talking and being allowed and encouraged to have a voice. This was the reason for the development and use of the talking circle. A simple stick of any size, sometimes elaborately carved, but often just a simple wooden stick, was used by each speaker in the talking circle as a sort of place-marker. The person holding the stick had the complete attention of the others in the circle. Knockwood explains, “Our Mi’kmaw ancestors used the Talking Stick to guarantee that everyone who wanted to speak would have a chance to be heard … without fear of being interrupted with questions, criticisms, lectures or scoldings, or even of being presented with solutions to their problems (p. 7). I am symbolically holding the talking stick as I begin here.

Not long ago many settlers knew little or nothing about the Residential School system in Canada. When I began speaking with teacher candidates about the subject in 2012 as part of the Deepening Knowledge Project—a program at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education that incorporates Aboriginal knowledges into Canada’s school curriculums—only three or four persons in each class could explain what a Residential School was. Fortunately, by the 2013-2014 academic
year the majority of teacher candidates at the university had some knowledge of the schools and what went on within their walls. Although a large number of them still seemed surprised when presented with the details, they knew that Residential Schools were an institution used to assimilate First Nations peoples into the dominant settler society. They knew that many children attended against their parents’ wishes; they knew that children could not speak their language and they knew that living conditions were generally grim.

When it was recently revealed that experiments were performed on children in some Residential Schools, Shubenacadie was among those named. The Shubenacadie Residential School opened in 1929 and was unique in that the building was actually on official reserve land. It was not one of the longer running Residential Schools, but while Shubenacadie had a comparatively short operating life, it still accomplished much damage before closing in 1967 (Miller, 1996; Milloy, 1999). Several of my own relatives were compelled to attend against their will. At a healing ceremony in 1995 for victims of the school, a settler who grew up nearby stated that he had no idea what took place there. I did not know whether to believe him and was reminded that people living near concentration camps during World War Two also made this extraordinary claim. Yet other people living near the Residential School have also protested their ignorance of conditions at Shubenacadie, saying, “We thought you kids had it made” (Knockwood, 2001, p. 146). Few records from the Shubenacadie Residential School survived; most were destroyed when a White man was bribed by officials with rum to burn them (p. 137). Although this incident is sadly ironic, insofar as it evokes one of the favourite settler
stereotypes of the drunken Indian, it also illustrates how difficult it has been to document these abuses. Almost the only records we have are from the survivors, some newspaper articles, and a few documents in Ottawa (pp. 143-156).

On 11 June 2008, Prime Minister Stephen Harper delivered an official apology to the victims of the Residential Schools program. Among the admissions of wrongdoing, Harper acknowledges on behalf of the Canadian government “that the consequences of the Indian Residential Schools policy were profoundly negative and that this policy has had a lasting and damaging impact on Aboriginal culture, heritage and language” (Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, 2008). In order to address some of these issues the government also established an Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement and Indian Residential Schools Truth and Reconciliation Commission, both of which were tasked with increasing public awareness of the traumatic events.

Yet some Canadians still refuse to acknowledge the lasting negative effects of the Residential Schools or many other crimes visited upon First Nations peoples. For example, negative comments frequently appear on online news articles about Indigenous communities, such as on the Yahoo! Newsgroups forums. As a colleague once pointed out to me in conversation, First Nations people also read these articles and the publicly posted comments. If the articles were about any other race of people, would the publisher permit so many hateful comments? I have repeatedly noted this point on forums when I see so many negative comments, and so far my replies have always been fairly quickly removed. What would be the
reason for this censorship when hurtful comments blaming the victim are permitted to remain?

Although the Canadian government has finally apologized to First Nations peoples about the Residential Schools program, they have remained silent on the matter of government-sponsored adoption, popularly known as the Sixties Scoop. This system aimed to finish what the Residential Schools program could not: the purpose of both was to assimilate First Nations children. This scheme, and the adoptions program that followed, were not simply a regrettable phenomenon that took place in the distant past. The Manitoba-based Aboriginal Justice Implementation Commission (1999) reports that the “intrusion by state-run child welfare programs into the lives of Aboriginal children and families did not come about until quite recently … The modern child welfare system, for the most part, is a post-Second World War phenomenon.”

How many children were removed from their homes as part of the Sixties Scoop? Estimates differ greatly, and until there is an official reckoning by the Canadian government there is hardly any way of knowing for certain. The *Globe and Mail* (2002) has published a tentative estimate of 20,000 Aboriginal children forcibly adopted (Philip, p. F4). Fournier and Crey (1997) write that “every day, Aboriginal adolescents cast off from indifferent foster care or failed adoptions flocked into the UNN [United Native Nations] offices, seeking federal Indian Status, their names, their birth families and their identities. It seemed there were enough missing Aboriginal children to populate a small city” (pp. 9-10). Ultimately, because the official records remain sealed the exact numbers can only be hypothesised. The
questions that the Canadian government and others involved in these adoptions have yet to address are why these records are unavailable and when will they be opened?

While this information is sorely lacking, other research has made clear that the adoption of Native children by non-Native families can be fraught with difficulty for both parties. Adams (2002) studied five such arrangements, all of which eventually broke down. She states that in all of the cases the mothers initiated these adoptions, while their partners agreed with varying degrees of enthusiasm. In one instance, a father did not want to adopt a Native child, but agreed to do so because of his wife’s insistence (pp. 100-101). She explains that “although he fully supported the adoption, he was always more skeptical about their ability to make it work” (p. 102). One family even describes their Native adoptee as “damaged goods” (p. 74). Admittedly, with this attitude in mind the adoption is at a serious disadvantage from its beginning. If one undertook the rearing of any human being, no matter their cultural origins, with such a fixed skepticism it is difficult to imagine how the relationship would ultimately succeed. Our attitudes dictate and shape how we act and interact with other people.

Adams documents a number of other problems faced by Native children and their non-Native parents as well. Relatives and friends of the respective families often expressed skepticism that the arrangement could be successful and did not treat the Native child in the same way that they treated the parents’ biological or other adopted children. One mother recalls:

‘I remember seeing my father shaking his head when I told him we were going to adopt a native toddler: “You can’t make a whiteman out of an Indian.”
I deliberately chose to downplay this warning, not because I believed he was necessarily wrong, but because I had faith in the current belief that the environment was more important in the upbringing of all children. His comments still haunt me today.’ When one family we interviewed approached their priest for a reference they needed for the adoption, he refused because he was of the opinion that the white-couples-adopting-native-children scenario never worked out (p. 104).

Frankly, the dialogue regarding the impossibility of turning a First Nation’s child into a “Whiteman” is disturbing and enraging. If such was the goal of adoptive parents, it is no wonder that their child rebelled. An unspoken yet unmistakable cultural bias insidiously threads its way throughout the opinions expressed in Adams’ study. This very manner of thinking is responsible for the creation of the Residential School, the snatching away of Indigenous children by Children’s Aid, and their subsequent adoptions.

By these remarks I do not mean to make less of what adoptive parents and birth mothers, who were also participants in the adoptions program, must have experienced. However, they likely knew who they were and were already part of a community. Broadly speaking, their struggles were different; they did not experience the fears and other emotions that frequently became part of their children’s psyches. Adams maintains that all Native children should be regarded as ‘special needs’ children, because while “care and love can mitigate some of the negative effects of the child’s early history, love in itself is not enough. Parents need to know this” (p. 172). Perhaps she is correct that love is not enough. Unconditional acceptance, which some children did not receive, would also have benefited them greatly. Moreover, the trauma of having been taken from your birth family, your home, and your culture, cannot be completely mitigated by any positive treatment afterward.
Shawndra Spears, an Ojibway adoptee, reminds us that it “is convenient to imagine that a parent’s love can erase history and political conflict—but children grow up and the conflict remains” (as cited in Cannon & Sunseri, 2011, p. 28).

**Some Oral Testimonies of the Adoptees**

Again, because of the lack of access to documents related to the Sixties Scoop, one of the few sources of information that we have comes from the testimony of victims of the program. I have collected a number of their stories for this project. Wilson (2008) explains in depth his experience as an Aboriginal person doing research and speaks of the need to build the relationship between self and subject as well as amongst self-subject-research participants (pp. 77-79). How was I going to build a relationship and also inspire other First Nations adoptees to share their personal stories? How could I make the sharing of their story—often for the first time—easier in any way? It did not take long for me to discover that the more I shared about my own past, the more likely the participant was to also do so. I also determined that I would need to employ a methodology that permits my First Nations participants to speak freely in a system akin to the Talking Stick as I describe above. They would need to be given a way to tell their story in a way that made sense to them and to do so in a manner that was as non-threatening as possible.

I have reproduced portions of these discussions below (preserving the words and idioms of the participants) to illustrate some of the consequences of adoptions. In Lynda Shortens study, *Without Reserve: Stories of Urban Natives* (1991), the interviewees introduce themselves and are permitted to tell their own stories on their
own terms. I have attempted to follow this example during my interviews and in recording them here. For more information about the individual adoptees I interviewed please refer to the introduction of this document.

The First Nations children who were involved in this program have been affected in a number of differing ways as they mature into adulthood. One of the most common effects is the reluctance (or inability) to form lasting relationships with others. I have also experienced this, and it seems as though a strong, unshakable force takes over my actions. I often purposefully do not return phone calls or emails. A sense of relief passes over me when a person whom I know decides that we do not have a good friendship or relationship and ends it. The shared feeling amongst most adoptees is that we do not expect relationships to last, even though we usually hope that they would and even desperately want them to work. We all believe that our friends will leave or betray us so, paradoxically, we make it easy for them to do so in order not to be surprised by abandonment.

Lisa is Dene and was reared in a genteel home in a western province by strict Dutch Reformed parents. Adoptee Lisa shares her story, which ends with her observations on how feelings of abandonment have negatively influenced her life:

My mother was underage and gave me up without even asking my father, who was 21. My father was away working and came back periodically and usually on weekends. Once when he came back he asked where I was and was told I gone. I was born in Edmonton. My mother was White Irish Catholic. She grew up in a very poor, working-class family. Her family was large, violent and abusive. My father was Dene. I cannot remember when I knew I was adopted. I always had that consciousness that I was. I had four adoptive siblings who were all the natural children of my adoptive parents. There were twin girls, and another sister and a brother. The next youngest to me was 8 years older. We got along, I guess, but we were never close. They were all closer in age and when I came along they really never bonded with me. It wasn’t anyone’s fault; I was just so much younger than them all.
We looked very different from each other. They were all very fair and I was very Indian looking. My adoptive mother was English and my father Dutch. Most of my adoptive mother’s and father’s families were killed during World War II, so I didn’t have any cousins or relatives. I had a grandmother in Holland, whom I met only once. She was very kind to me.

I knew I was adopted but I also knew I was wanted. I knew my adoptive parents cared for me. My family was quite well off. It was a loving home, and we had all the material comforts you could want. I had a privileged upbringing. We travelled everywhere and I went to good schools and had every advantage, materially. I want to recognize that. But my parents would tell me that my birthparents couldn’t take care of me. That kind of thing just destroys your self-confidence. You think, ‘Was it my fault? Did I destroy my birth mother’s life?’ You start thinking about why she gave you up, and you never, ever stop thinking about it. It becomes a big part of who you are, and on top of that it’s not something you talk about with other people. But you feel it every day and keep returning to those feelings.

Another part of the [adoptive] experience is you know that you don’t belong where you are. You see old photographs and people tell you, “That’s your great-grandmother, and this is your great-uncle,” and you don’t say anything, but you look and know those people have no connection with you at all. This makes you wonder more about yourself. Your whole life becomes consumed with ‘Who am I?’

This affected me negatively, and I resented my birth mother. I wanted to see her to confront her about why she gave me up.

My birth mother contacted me when I was 36. I had to process a lot of anger with her. I know I’ve said this before, but I need to say it again because of the effect it had on me for so many years. I started to look for her when I turned 18. Part of my anger was, ‘Why did you wait so long to find me?’ Really! I was 36 years old.

I found my father the same time, a couple of weeks after I first met my birth mother. I did this by going through the white pages and I calling every man with my father’s name. My mother had a common Irish name so it was impossible. I looked for a moment and saw there were so many people with her name. Also, I didn’t know where she was living or if she had married and had changed her name. I didn’t know anything about them at that time, before I had met them.

When I first met my father, I learned that I had had a sister who had died 2 weeks previously. She was a crack addict and died in a fire, leaving behind 3 children. I looked very much like my sister, so it was strange and difficult for
my father. Apparently, from what others say, I was the proverbial spitting image of my sister. It’s funny, how people perceive things. My mother had told me all sorts of horrible things about my father. I think she was projecting, at least in part, her own life at the time. They weren’t married. She and her family were uneducated and poor.

After I was born she had become a Hare Krishna and took her Master’s Degree at Harvard. She’s a PhD student now, also at Harvard. Her thesis was on gays and lesbians within the Hare Krishna movement. She now travels all over the world. So when I met her I thought, ‘Thanks for making the first 36 years of my life like hell. Thanks for never trying to find me, and keeping me wondering why you had given me up.’ My adoptive family was loving, but very physically and verbally abusive. I always wondered what it would have been like growing up with my birth mother, or with my birth father. The physical abuse was pretty bad, bad enough so when I left I never went back again.

Every personal relationship I have is handled with such desperation, and I always drive the other person away. I am sad and relieved at the same time. Sad, because I want the relationship, but relieved because in my mind I am sure the other person will leave me. I am always worried about being abandoned. I have ruined every important relationship in my life because of my fear of abandonment. I couldn’t even be a mother to my daughter. I am an effective parent now; my daughter is 22 and my daughter has the same issues with abandonment that I have.

There was nothing good about being adopted. It ruined my life for the first 36 years. I live with a constant fear of being abandoned, and I destroy every relationship I am in. I still live with it every day. I’ve worked through most of it, but it does come back now and again. It probably always will, but I try to fight it now and to deal with it, and not let it take root.

Jamie is Anishnawbe from Ontario and was reared in a middle-class home. He shares a number of common experiences with Lisa, especially around abandonment and not having a feeling of security. Although he is on a healing path and appears grounded, serious and calm, he stated that he also lives with a fear of abandonment but also an avoidance of developing strong personal relationships. When he did have a strong personal relationship with someone he found that he would try to do things to cause the other person to end it. In his own words:
My relationship with my adoptive family has always been strange. I have always felt not a part of my adoptive family, and I left home at a young age. I have always felt like an outsider with them. When I went looking for my birth family, at first they really didn’t understand what I was doing. I think they really didn’t want me to do so for some reason. Maybe they thought I would choose my birth family over them. I really don’t know what they think anymore.

I noticed throughout my life, I would consistently push those that got close away. I’ve purposefully ‘split up’ relationships; I’ve pushed people away in various ways. Even so, I feel as though I need to get approval. I over-extend myself to make sure that I am liked by others, even though I know I will push them away if they get too close. I still want to have close relationships in my life, but it’s really difficult to get past how being adopted makes me feel. I always manage to feel by myself. I always feel alone. I always feel abandoned. I always feel as if I am missing out on something. I have a hard time trusting those I care about; something inside always says not to trust them.

I always felt weird inside. Questions such as, ‘Why was I left behind?’, or, ‘What did I do to deserve this?’, ‘Am I different?’

I saw my birth mother a few months ago. I am still very weirded out by her. I wonder if she really knows what she put me through. I actually forgave her for her actions, but it’s something that keeps coming back, these feelings and emotions.

I am also very thankful for my life, because I wonder where I could have ended up if I wasn’t adopted. Would I even be in University? I just don’t know. I could have ended up in jail like most of my birth family ... Life unfolds in strange ways and I am appreciative of how it has for me.

Judy is Anishnawbe from Ontario. She is unusual in that she was adopted along with her brother. This was unusual as the purpose of Sixties Scoop adoptions was to destroy family and community ties. Both live in Toronto but do not see each other often. The parents who adopted Judy and her brother thought that they could not have children. Her adoptive parents were solidly middle class, but had some financial reversals while Judy was still a child. She describes her experiences in her adoptive home:
The earliest photo I have of myself is as a little girl—I think I was five or six then—and I’m wearing this dress. I look so unhappy and out-of-place. The family who adopted us was alright, but always trying to make us something we were not. They were always fussing at us, and criticizing us. The mother was nice, and used to argue with the father to stop always yelling at us and slapping us all the time. She left and we moved to a very small house. Our adoptive father started drinking and seemed to let the house go. We seemed to be getting poorer and poorer. He got a new girlfriend and she didn’t like us very much. We knew nothing about being Native. He never talked about that with us. We felt like we were an embarrassment to him. He started to argue all the time with my brother. One day he beat my brother pretty bad and my brother ran away from home. He didn’t have any place to go or really any money. He finally hitchhiked to Toronto. I wanted to get out of that house too. Every day was miserable. As soon as I turned eighteen I left and never went back. They never contacted me, even though they had my contact information, and I never contacted them. I think of that time as hopeless and sad. Nobody ever talked about my future or what I would do when I was eighteen. They thought I’d just get a job at McDonald’s or something like that. There was no discussion about my plans, what I wanted to do with my life.

Judy states that she also lives with this fear of abandonment, and it affects all her relationships:

I can never shake it. It’s something that doesn’t go away, no matter how much you try. Every relationship I have seems to be defined by this adoption lens. I am aware of it and try to not let it take control. I think only another adopted First Nations person understands these feelings. You can’t really explain them to other people, and you don’t want to keep talking about it, either. Some other Native people are jealous and say, “You had it so good growing up!” A few material things and some cash don’t take the place of having a family, and knowing who you are and where you came from. Nothing can replace or make up for that.

It is perhaps not strange that this fear of abandonment—which does not dissipate with healing, age, or time—results in a desire to terminate stable romantic and platonic relationships.

Of course, there have been other negative consequences felt by adoptees as well. Depression is a common problem. Solomon’s (2001) monumental study of depression outlines the many forms, symptoms, causes and classifications of this
illness. Most notably here, he notes that depressed children often go on to become depressed adults: “A huge number make suicide attempts (with 4% committing suicide), and they have high rates of almost every social-adjustment problem” (p. 187). Most of the adoptees I interviewed shared that they struggled with suicidal thoughts from a young age, even though most also have said that their adoptive families loved them and cared for them. All had material benefits they would not have otherwise had if they remained with their birth families or communities, yet they still suffered from emotional distress.

One way of understanding this trauma is to relate it to what Duran and Duran (1995) refer to as the “soul wound,” which they describe in both spiritual and emotional terms:

If one accepts the terms soul, psyche, myth, dream and culture as part of the same continuum that makes people’s experience of being in the world their particular reality, then one can begin to understand the soul wound. The notion of soul wound is one which is at the core of much of the suffering that Indigenous peoples have undergone for centuries (p. 24).

Wesley-Esquimaux and Smolewski (2004) identify the same phenomena, but use the more familiar Western term ‘post-traumatic stress disorder’ (p. 1), which Duran and Duran also acknowledge in a specifically intergenerational context (p. 30-31). These two descriptions compliment each other. The notion that what is done to the body will also have spiritual, emotional, and psychological consequences for the affected person is now conventional wisdom. Consequently, I am always surprised that settlers expect Aboriginal peoples to simply ‘get over’ many generations of uninterrupted colonial violence without any redress or accountability for what has happened.
Innate Connections with Our Pasts

Wesley-Esquimaux and Smoleski explain, “[P]sychologists, psychiatrists and anthropologists all agree that victims of intense trauma, as well as their offspring, show the same emotional responses” (p. 55). For example, even when a First Nations person does not experience historical traumas first-hand, such as the destruction of an ancestral community, they may still manifest the same psychic repercussions as did their parents and ancestors. This connection stems from what she describes as “an innate collective consciousness” that is intrinsic to Aboriginal peoples. She maintains that there appears to be certain knowledge with which First Nations peoples are born (personal communication, January 30, 2008). One dimension of this shared experience is negative, of course, insofar as First Nations peoples have been the victims of considerable violence since first contact with European settlers centuries ago. Nevertheless, there is a more positive element as well, which manifested in the adoptees I interviewed as certain impulses or feelings towards aspects of First Nations culture and spirituality in spite of having no conscious memory of such practices.

Of course, not everyone shared the same experiences. For example, I had an urge during the summer months (especially during late summer) to collect and dry roots and berries. These I kept in a box lined with dried grass. I used to collect and dry the grass, and then store it away so that nobody else would find it. I twisted it together and would light it occasionally when I was alone. I did not know that this was smudging; indeed, I knew nothing about this cultural practice until many years
later. Was this a case of my mind-spirit-body desperately trying to remember something of my ancestors and the place from where I had come?

Denyse was not an adoptee, but her family and other Cree community members were all removed from her reserve at a very young age during the James Bay Flooding Project, in which the entire community of Winisk was purposefully flooded. They subsequently moved, against their will, to the town of Timmons, Ontario. She recalls a similar example of innate knowledge:

My parents took us camping for some reason and were out on the lake fishing, I think. I could see high, black thunderclouds rolling in and knew there was going to be a storm. I tried to look for my parents, but couldn’t see them anywhere on the water. I was the oldest, and I gathered my brothers and sisters and told them to find branches and bring them to me as quickly as they could. I quickly built a little wigawam. The rain had started to fall and my parents came rushing back to us, just then. My parents, especially my Mother, kept asking me how I knew how to build the wigawam. She asked if someone else had come by and helped us. I remember I said, ‘well, the bears didn’t build it for us!’ and my Mother laughed. She kept asking me, though, how I knew as I had never seen one built and never remember being in or around a real one. I was about 11 years old. I had forgotten about this for a long time.

Science is always saying that we are animals. Yet, these same people will dismiss what we sometimes call intuition. Maybe it’s really instinct. We accept that all other animals are born with instinct. Salmon know where to return, we don’t debate about it. That’s just one example. So if we accept that the rest of the animal kingdom is born with knowledge, instinct—whatever it is you want to call it—blood memory—why are we surprised that humans have it? I believe we are all born with a memory: plants, humans, animals … everything knows what it’s supposed to do.

Nolan is a two-spirited First Nations adoptee from British Columbia, but reared in Newfoundland. He related that an elder told him that his desire to know more about First Nations peoples and ceremonies was because it was innate within him as a First Nations man. Nolan was reared in a White family in a small rural town, far away from other reserves or First Nations peoples. He had no connection
to or knowledge of First Nations traditions or spiritual practices. Growing up did not even know the name of his nation, and had no memory whatsoever of his birth family or community. Yet he felt a constant desire to seek this information out. He has since discovered that he is either Haida or Tsimshian.

Deachman (1999), whose writing I mention in the introduction, did not search for her birth mother until after her adoptive mother’s death. She travelled to her birth mother’s home to spend time with her and members of the community, where she discovered that the woman had already died. Her disappointment at the outcome is expressed in a detached way through her third-person narration of the experience: “The child she [Deachman’s birth mother] bore twenty years earlier appears on the scene searching for her, most likely convinced that only her birth-Mother can give her the love she craves, certain that her birth-Mother has grieved the loss of her child for all these years” (p. 77). Although Deachman met her birth mother’s very best friends, she learned that the woman took the secret of her birth and adoption to her grave.

My own birth mother had not told many people about my adoption, including her own husband and my two younger brothers, as well as quite a number of other family members. People in my birth community who did know about my birth and adoption remained completely silent about my existence. When I met my birth family they noted that I had certain mannerisms and habits that could not have been learned and remembered from before my adoption at such a young age, and certainly not learned from my adoptive family. Where did they come from? I am
inclined to believe, as I have argued throughout this chapter, that they are an innate part of my First Nations identity.

**Available and Impure**

Smith (2011) argues that Indigenous bodies have historically been perceived as available and also impure; it is therefore not a crime to rape or mutilate them (252-253). “It is a realization that the colonial project takes place on many levels and that sex and sexuality are a preoccupation” (Stimson, 2006).

This legacy carries on today with the as yet numberless missing and murdered Indigenous women. Participant John explained that whilst growing up in rural Ontario, Settler males often talked about going into the Native section of town to find “a woman”. He said this talk was ordinary weekend discussion. Settler males bragged about and laughed about their (real or imagined) conquests of Native women and girls. Apparently consent or an age of consent did not matter with Indigenous women; indeed, it was perceived as a mark of maleness to violate these norms of consent and appropriate age. There is a value system at hand, and Indigenous females are very low on the value scale. As Cherokee writer Smith (2011) notes, the (ongoing) mass rapes of Indigenous women in Chiapas and Guatemala pass next to unnoticed, while the rapes of women in Bosnia sparked outrage (pp.257-258). The product of rape, it must be remembered, is often children. How are these children valued?

US military couples stationed in the Marshall Islands continue today to adopt Marshallese children in a very relaxed manner; with almost no accountability and under some questionable circumstances. It is not known how many Marshallese
children have been “adopted” (Roby et al, 2005). Although these are clear human rights violations (human trafficking, lack of parental consent, coercion, cash rewards for “finding” babies, intimidation, being lied to, limited consent and not understanding the legal ramifications of adoption) very little to nothing has been done to restitute Indigenous adoptees (Roby et al, 2009).

Although high numbers of Status Indians have been adopted into non-Indigenous families and thereby almost always losing their status (Nuttgens, 2013; Fournier & Crey, 1997; Johnston, 1983; Ward, 1984; York, 1990), scant literature exists about this (Nuttgens, 1). The Qualitative Report (2016) found that “the study of Aboriginal transracial adoption, which remains under-research despite the immense number of adoptions that occurred through the second half of the twentieth century and continue to occur”. We are guessing at numbers at best, and will continue to do so as long as records remain sealed. This does not happen in North America for any other race of people.

**Some Commonalities**

All six of the adoptees reported feelings of abandonment, inadequacy and worthlessness. All related bouts of ongoing deep depression and suicidal thoughts. All six stated that they fear intimacy and at times purposefully sabotage relationships. All felt that love was conditional with their adoptive families, which influenced all later relationships. Purposeful withdrawal for periods of time in healthy relationships was also the norm for all of the adoptees (this may be a first step towards sabotaging a relationship). All six also shared the creation of an imaginary
happy world where they would be joyfully reunited with their birth families, and a tendency to withdraw into this created world; this became a strong coping mechanism.

The Question of Repatriation or Integration

All of the adoptees I interviewed shared stories about strained or even severed relationships with their adoptive parents after they began seeking out their birth families. They were told by relatives, friends and sometimes casual acquaintances that they were lucky to have been adopted and should be grateful to their adoptive parents. One adoptee never spoke or had any further contact with her adoptive parents again after looking for her birth mother. Others explain that even though their adoptive families were initially supportive of their attempts in this regard, their relationships eventually suffered. Two adoptees expressed the same sentiment, feeling as though their adoptive families were punishing them. Perhaps unsurprisingly, many adoptees have experienced difficult conditions after reaching adulthood. All of the adoptees I spoke with have at some time in their lives required social assistance or even become homeless and all experienced periods of extreme depression.

At the same time, for many adoptees it has been difficult to fully integrate into First Nations communities. Every one of the participants in this project has expressed frustration at being unfairly judged by others in Toronto’s Aboriginal community because of how they were reared. They did not merely imagine this discriminatory behavior; each person gave multiple examples over extended periods
of time that evidenced this problem. They spoke of being excluded from planning meetings and steering committees within the organizations they joined. They were passed over for job opportunities in favor of candidates who were “more Indian”. In some cases they were called “spoiled,” “rich Indians”, or “half-breeds,” even those whose birth parents were both Aboriginal. Some explained that they were thought to have access to their adoptive family’s money or property. Yet they were also quick to identify Aboriginal individuals who had supported them and made clear that they were not painting the entire community with one brush stroke. They all shared stories of persons who cared about them, were understanding of their unique histories, and acknowledged what the government had done to them and other adoptees.

Perhaps one of the most intriguing findings of my research is that despite their desire for acceptance among First Nations peoples, none of the Sixties Scoop survivors whom I interviewed have decided to return to their birth communities after learning about them. The term commonly used for this process is ‘repatriation’ and yet its definition seems limiting. The Concise Canadian Oxford Dictionary defines the term as “to restore (a person) to his or her native land; return to one’s own native land” (p. 1139). Of course, this definition implies that the repatriated person has been removed from his or her land, which in our case is only true in the general sense. In fact, most of our lands were taken from us and in the Americas these efforts constitute just one aspect of the systemic violence perpetrated against its Indigenous populations. Yet even if we define the term in this context to mean the
return of an adoptee to his or her birth community, it has become clear during my interviews that their own understandings of this idea vary widely.

Several of the adoptees expressed a desire to meaningfully reconnect with their communities, but they also had doubts. Each one expressed different ideas about how people might “meaningfully re-connect” with their birth communities. Five of the adoptees I interviewed also felt concerned about the emotional aspect of such an act and whether or not their birth communities would unanimously support such an undertaking. These same people said that they would like such a welcome, but perhaps not immediately. Moreover, five of those who did visit their birth communities indicated that both they and their blood relatives felt disappointment (and even disillusionment) when they meet for the first time. In my own case, because I had been reared in ways that were so incredibly different from my birth family we found it very difficult to reach any sense of commonality. We were complete strangers to each other. We all seemed to feel that we had been cheated by not having had the opportunity to know each other earlier. How might I tell them about what had transpired over the past 25 years of my life? How would they learn to know me as a parent should know their child? For both me and my birth family this estrangement transformed into despair, then coldness and a distance that was ultimately never bridged. Shortly after meeting my birth family all communication ceased and we have not spoken since.

These experiences are not unusual for adoptees, but neither are they an inevitable outcome. Isabelle Knockwood, previously mentioned writer of Out of the Depths (2002), explained to me in a private interview that she believes some form of
repatriation should be an option for adoptees. What she meant is a ceremony in which Nations formally welcome and accept the adoptees back into their community. Among the interviewees, repatriation seems to mean recognition of one’s identity as a First Nations person. It seems to be an emotional, mental and spiritual process, not necessarily a physical reunion. When I began my research I firmly believed that it was imperative for adopted First Nations children to return to their birth communities in order to make themselves whole again. I still believe this, but my interviews have considerably broadened my understanding of repatriation—that is, returning to the community of origin. Through my research with First Nations adoptees I now know that the idea of repatriation means something different to every individual and some are adamant that they will not return to their birth families and communities. I personally do not know how one can reconcile that sense of not knowing who one is without making contact with one’s birth family or community. However, I have come to recognize that others feel and act differently.

**Conclusion: Walk in Our Moccasins**

These anecdotes suggest a resilience that persists in spite of deliberate attempts by the Canadian government to commit cultural genocide. However, they should not be taken to suggest that the traumas First Nations people suffered as a consequence of the adoptions and Residential Schools programs have somehow been transcended. Can this trauma ever be resolved? Knockwood’s expression of resentment toward those people who removed her from her birth family applies equally to those affected by the Sixties Scoop:
It makes me angry that the people who almost destroyed me got away with it … I cannot confront those who lied to me about myself and about my people and withheld knowledge from me which could have allowed me to live up to my fullest potential … Those individuals who directly caused our suffering never admitted their wrongdoing and were never called to account for their actions (p. 160).

This is in keeping with Wesley-Esquimaux and Smoleski’s (2004) observation that “unresolved historic trauma will continue to impact individuals, families and communities until the trauma has been addressed mentally, emotionally, physically and spiritually” (p. 3). Kennedy (2013) notes that colonial histories create a “stranglehold” (475). Other ways of understanding Indigenous histories must come from sources other than the histories written by the voice of Empire. Kennedy also observes that “oral traditions and interviews” are one way in which cognizant researchers are releasing this stranglehold over “truth” (481).

Spears even argues that it may be impossible to fully address these issues: “We can hold state and civic institutions responsible for their genocidal practices, but that will not ultimately help our distress” (Cannon & Sunseri, p. 133).

First Nations adoptees must work through multiple concerns related not only to emotional health, but also understandings of race, class, and nationality. Two-spirited adoptees have yet another complex dimension of their identities to contend with. Lyons (2010) writes, “Identity orients you in space and time, connects you to the past, helps you develop a vision for the future, and provides you with a story” (p. 39). But what does one do when one is systematically prevented from learning one’s story, as in the case of so many First Nations adoptees? Our elders tell us that when we speak with non-Natives we should help them to walk in our moccasins
so that hopefully they can understand our issues and concerns. I will lead you now on such an exercise.

The adoptees I have interviewed here have all expressed these sentiments: Imagine not knowing, and never having met (or at least as far as one remembers), anyone related to you by blood. Or imagine always knowing about your origins, but never really being able to speak about them or relate to the people with whom you live as a family. Imagine being taunted by other children who have learned from their parents that you were adopted. Imagine hearing others tell you on a regular basis that your birth mother could not take care of you; perhaps she was a drunk or used drugs, they might say. Imagine lying in bed as a child, and later as a young adult, wondering if your birth had somehow ruined her life.

Imagine hoping that someday your birth mother or father would come and get you, to take you home with them, in a room they had always kept for you. Imagine that they never come in spite of your hope, year after year, that they will do so. You wonder if you have any brothers or sisters. You wonder what your birth mother’s favourite colour is. You wonder what your birth father likes to eat. Imagine being told to be thankful you were adopted and how much better off you are now than having been reared who-knows where. How would you know, as you had nothing to which to compare your situation? Imagine the wanting to know who you are, a feeling that consumes you, but which you can never tell anyone about lest they chastise you for being ungrateful. This desire to know who you are never leaves you. Worst of all, imagine that never-ending, nagging question that never leaves your head: ‘Why did my family give me up? Why don’t they look for me?’
If one wishes to understand the situation of First Nations adoptees, these questions are a good place to start. How would you feel? How would you begin to heal? How would you put the pieces of your life together? Would you find the nearly overwhelming task to be too much to accomplish, as many First Nations adoptees do? There are so many aspects of this complex situation that must be addressed and it is necessary for settler society to do so in a meaningful way.

I remember very well watching, and then later reading, the Residential School Apology with a group of other First Nations students at The University of Toronto's First Nations House. I remember being literally moved to tears hearing the apology whilst thinking of my many relatives who had attended the notorious Shubenacadie Residential School. How glad I was that an apology was at last made. In my experience teaching and presenting, many non-Native people felt that the apology finished something, but to many First Nations people, this was the beginning of a dialogue.

Yet it is also important to note that the Canadian government, churches, and various social agencies that had a hand in the adoptions program have not yet apologized or otherwise been held to account for their responsibility in this equally devastating attempt at cultural genocide.

In Mi'kmaw we say, “Aq teluey ni’n nkamlamunk.” This means, “I speak from my heart/mind,” which indicates that the heart and mind are inseparable in the Mi'kmaw way of thinking. Similarly, I remember the Biblical admonition given to me before I was baptized into the Amish-Mennonite church that I must speak the truth in love (Eph. 4:15, Geneva Translation). I was told that this meant I should not use
honesty as a cloak for maliciousness or to say otherwise hurtful things, such as in that bitter phrase ‘I was only telling the truth!’ That said, no matter how kind one wishes to be, there are some truths that cannot be softened. I want someone to be accountable for what they have done to First Nations adoptees, what they had done to me and others like me. I do not want my voice silenced. This account of our experiences is an expression of our collective voices.
In 2008, the Deepening Knowledge Project began at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto, Canada. The purpose of this initiative is to provide future educators in the country with information about Aboriginal cultures, histories, and lived experiences. I was graciously invited to join the Deepening Knowledge team in 2013 and, with the project manager, Dr. Angela Nardozi, made presentations to teacher candidates about the varied conditions of Indigenous peoples in North America today and why they should know about them. We explained the historical reasons behind contemporary issues and we welcomed questions during any part of the presentation; in total, we presented to over 7,000 future educators. Time and again we were asked why the Canadian government acted maliciously toward First Nations peoples, such as through the Residential Schools programs, the Sixties Scoop, reserve systems, broken treaties, and so on. Many students expressed shock and disbelief when we described these injustices and wondered why they were allowed to take place. We would turn the question back towards the students: “We would like you to think about it. Could you tell us why?”

As well as finding it extremely difficult to believe that the Canadian government and civic organizations conspired on such genocidal measures many students found it difficult to use a word like ‘genocide’ to describe these policies. Yet as I demonstrate in the first chapter, the Sixties Scoop is just a recent iteration of
efforts to assimilate, and thereby culturally exterminate, Aboriginal peoples. Teacher candidates have asked on a number of occasions whether assimilation is necessarily destructive. Neu and Therrien (2003) observe that “the term ‘assimilation’ can almost sound like a peaceful process, implying a certain lassitude in the inductee, if not actual collaboration” (p. 23). But, of course, that is rarely the case. We recognize in North America that children are not able to make informed decisions that would resemble consent. More importantly in this context, neither First Nations children nor their families were ever consulted when the children were taken from their birth communities. And adoptions of this kind are intended to ultimately change the social class, and consequently the worldview, of the adopted child.

Adoption is not alien to First Nations culture, but rather has a long and functional history (Carriere, 2010, p. 37). Whitehead (1988) states that adoption has been integral to Mi’kmaq life, as people “sought alliances on every level; they adopted, married and bonded, creating reciprocities within the web of the world” (p. 15). The difference between these arrangements and non-Native adoptions is that the former were entered into willingly. They were formed to strengthen the community, whereas the latter destroyed family and community relationships, as well as obliterated a holistic sense of identity among adoptees. Milloy’s (1999) observations about the consequences of the Residential Schools program are equally relevant to adoptions: the purposeful removal of children from their birth communities to a controlled, alien environment was the best way to assimilate them from those communities. And Bird’s (1998) remarks about adoptions in Australia
also hold true in this case: “How must it be to be … stripped of culture, language, rights and dignity? To be such children who grow to be adults within the very society that has visited these crimes upon them” (p. 4).

I was once asked after a speaking engagement why I used the term ‘survivors’ to describe First Nations adoptees, which is also used by Indigenous people who attended Residential Schools. The latter have adopted this label in part because, as Miller (1996) indicates, the mortality rates in some Residential Schools were as high as fifty percent. We have no comparable figures on the physical, psychological, and spiritual health of adoptees, as these details are still unknown (Fournier and Crey, 1998). Yet as my interviews with adoptees demonstrates, they have experienced similar forms (and degrees) of trauma. Therefore, the term seems appropriate and has come into common use amongst adoptees.

Survivors of the Sixties Scoop have often faced hostility from an early age. Most of the persons I interview describe moments during their childhoods when they were hurtfully teased and taunted about having been adopted, as well as being excluded at school and in their home neighbourhoods. Many adoptees explain that their adoptive parents and teachers expressed low expectations of them. The fact that the adoptees came from First Nations families was often common knowledge, though many knew little else about their personal heritage. One person whom I interviewed explains that his adoptive mother told him that he is Mohawk, only to discover later that his birth family is actually Anishnawbe; moreover, neither she nor his father made any additional efforts to talk about his birth culture or encourage him to learn more about it. Many adoptees have had to embark on a search for their
birth families on their own.

Some of those interviewed have participated in this project from the very beginning until this point; I cannot express how grateful I am for their having done so. Others have decided at various stages along this path that they did not want to delve into their past further. I wish them the strength they need to get through difficult times and to find happiness too. This has been a long and moving process for me as well. I have lost both of my adoptive parents and a number of aunts, uncles, and relatives since I began my own journey. I have been unable to attend funerals and weddings for lack of time and ability. I have missed seeing my nieces and nephews attain honourable adulthood. I have lived on little more than hope for stretches at a time and have even wanted to give up at times—I believe that every honest person does. When I have felt discouraged I remember the voices of those who cannot speak. I think of my strong Mi’kmaq ancestors, the first to have met the settlers and who still have title to their lands. I remember all of the children who were removed from their homes and communities whether by force or cajoling, and who today do not know where they are.

This thesis is necessarily an early step in a much longer research process. Further studies on the Sixties Scoop face unique challenges. As I explain in the introduction, the Canadian government would need to open its records in order for scholars to conduct a more thorough quantitative study. Doing so would also be of enormous benefit to individuals who were affected by the adoptions program. For example, it is still not possible for Sixties’ Scoop children to obtain a long-form birth certificate, which is often required for certain identification purposes. More broadly,
many may not know about their Indigenous origins. They may be unaware that they could be Band members and could therefore receive some benefits recognized under various treaties or agreements. They may also be entitled to Canadian citizenship. Once survivors have a greater understanding of who they are and what happened to them we can begin to gather more stories from them about their experiences, as has been done with Residential School survivors, to strengthen our research on the phenomenon. Until this happens, while we can collect more testimony through social and Indigenous agencies, not much more can be done to locate other survivors. And none of us are getting younger.

That said, all of the participants in this study said they wanted to continue telling their stories. They embraced the scrapbook as a way to prompt conversation and reflect on their experiences. It may be possible to create a space where adoptees record their stories through this or other artistic mediums and share their stories with the public. Such an effort would help to increase general awareness of the Sixties Scoop. At the very least, it is my hope that this project will also help the adoptees on their healing journey.

However, until our records are opened this story has no end.
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