



Close to home: An Indigenist project of story gathering

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Abstract

This article describes an Indigenist re-search project where I gathered stories from my mother who went to the St. Johns Anglican Residential School. The re-search project was a personal, close to home project that took place from 2015 to 2017. This article articulates a personal, layered, wholistic and seasonally governed Indigenist methodology. It illustrates what makes a project Indigenist by way of its focus and process that is wholistic and guided by an *Anishinaabe* worldview calling attention to spirit, heart, mind and body. In this article, the term re-search versus research is applied to indicate an act of ‘looking again’ at how to re-search. My hyphenated re-search restores Indigeneity and Indigenous knowledge in how one comes to know (knowledge production). This article demonstrates a reworking of how I engage in research through an act of re-searching through memory and story sharing. The methodology presented herein illustrates a process of gathering stories, having conversations, making meaning of those stories, and reframing and representing them in multiple modes such as film, creative arts and text. My Indigeneity as well as my *Anishinaabe* teachings and knowledge are the foundation of how I searched and guided this wholistic process. Pivotal to this project is the relationship of daughter and mother and the restoring of both knowledge and relationship through re-search. This article articulates a methodology that is steeped in relational accountability, seasonally guided and restoring of Indigenous knowledge.

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By: Kathleen E. Absolon

Tap tap tap. I hear something.

“Who is that?” I ask.

Tap tap tap.

I hear it again.

Is it coming from within me?

I listen. *Tap tap tap...* I listen closer.

I want to come out whispers a tiny tiny soft voice from within ...
a deep memory channel clogged with dust and cob webs.

What are you? I ask.

I listen.

I am a memory, a story and another story. I live in you and I am the spirit of memory. Memory lights the way to knowing. We want to come out and light your way of knowing.

Alas I listen and I remember and re-member to knowing.

A journey begins.

A gathering of stories close to home.

Beginning with my sabbatical in the winter of 2015 through to the fall of 2017, I embarked upon a personal and decolonizing Indigenist search project close to home where I searched and gathered stories from my mother. This article is a continuation of my contribution toward articulating Indigenist research processes. Indigenist research methods have wholistic elements (Absolon, 2011). Conversational storying, helped me to articulate the interweaving of conversation and storying (Kovach, 2010). Through my own work in lifting up Indigenist methodologies, along with Wilson (2008) and Hart (2010), I continue to engage in projects that create pathways for Indigenous ways of knowing to lead how we search and gather. The methodologies held within *Kaandossiwin* (Absolon, 2011), *Indigenous Methodologies : Characteristics, Conversations, and Contexts* (Kovach, 2009), and *Research as Ceremony* (Wilson, 2008) provide a significant beginning for articulating Indigenist methodologies. However, the pathways continue to broaden and deepen with many other ingenious, courageous and innovative Indigenous re-searchers who bring their Indigeneity and Indigenous worldviews to their re-search projects.

My project occurred in 2015 and 2016 and this article describes *how* I carried out my search. It presents a personal layered wholistic and seasonally governed methodology. My re-search is Indigenist by way of its focus and process that is wholistic and guided by my *Anishinaabe* worldview calling attention to spirit, heart, mind and body. I use the term re-search versus research to indicate an act of ‘looking again’ at how I search. My hyphenated re-search restores my Indigeneity and Indigenous knowledge in how I come to

know and how I produce knowledge because now I am reworking how I engage in research through an act of re-searching. The methodology presented herein illustrates a process of gathering stories, having conversations, making meaning of those stories, and reframing and representing them in multiple modes such as film, creative arts and text. My Indigeneity as well as my *Anishinaabe* teachings and knowledge are the foundation of how I searched and guided this wholistic process. The genealogy of my knowledge is grounded in the many Elders and teachers who have informed how I search (Marden, 2005; Absolon, 2011). My personal close-to-home relationships central to this project generated a methodology steeped in relational accountability (Wilson, 2008).

My research goals were about restoring the role of memory and reframing stories of disobedience into stories of resiliency. Like many other survivors seeking social justice by truth sharing, my goal also was "... a process of transformation, of decolonization, of healing and of mobilization as peoples" (Smith, 2012, p. 120). This project was a healing reconciliation journey within self and family. It is this smaller research scope that differentiates my research project from those projects that are:

...of large scientific organizations or of various national research programmes. There are other elements, however, which are similar to any research programme which connects research to the 'good' of society. The elements that are different can be found in key words such as healing, decolonization, spiritual, recovery. (Smith, 2012, p. 122)

The genesis of my project is grounded in memory. I begin by describing the role of memory in relation to the emergence of my project. Within the self exists memory, a key portal to inner knowing and knowledge; this is the first section of my article. Following this, I move into how I did what I did using a wholistic framework that includes two separate sections: one on wholistic use of self and the other on how the seasons guided my timeframe and focus. I conclude with some final reflections.

REMEMBERING AND RESTORING

Memory comes before knowledge and we often find in our memory our motives for why we do the types of searches we do (Hampton, 1995). I found myself journeying through my memories of the stories my mother told me as a child. They were stories of her experiences at the Indian Residential School and these memories are significant portals.

When I was a young girl, I wondered what school was like for my mother. How did she get through it all? She was always at home in the kitchen when we got off the bus and came scrambling in the door hungry and thirsty. The kitchen was where everything happened. While she was peeling potatoes for supper, I'd look up at her and ask her: "*What school was like for you mom?*" She told me she didn't come home from school, but stayed there. I really didn't understand what that meant. I had no idea her school days were at the Chapleau Indian Residential School. My childhood self was inquisitive and searching to see if my experiences were common. I wanted to know if I was the only one feeling anxious and fearful about going to school, though I never came out and said that. I quietly searched through my questions. My mother told me stories of what 'school' was like for her. I remember listening to her stories with open ears and a feeling of anticipation. She told me those stories and that felt like a little bond between us. She had good stories.

Over the years those stories hung around in my being and they gave me comfort, hope and encouragement. Some of them made me laugh. They soothed my own feelings of displacement as I thought about how my mom and the girls got along in the school she described. I would often ask her: "Tell me those stories of when you were in school." She told me her stories as a young girl and I kept them safely stored in my memory.

It was those stories I sought to capture in my close to home re-search project. An inner spirit tap taps from within me. Memories emerge. My inner spirit moves me to ask myself what will I do to restore and reconnect to these memories and how will they teach us what Creator wants us to know? These memories of my mother's stories of disobedience and defiance were her means of survival in the wretched conditions within the residential school. These stories tap tap from within and now I chose to focus on making the invisible visible (Absolon, 2011). For ten years my mother was in Chapleau Residential School! Undoubtedly, she carried multiple traumas from this forced imprisonment as a child. What else did she carry? The stories have answers to these questions. I often wondered how did I get to have tenacity, courage, resistance and resilience. Why did I survive and why am I not on the streets or dying with addictions because I know that could be me? I could be in jail or living in poverty or wanting to die. I have to take a look at my own resistance, defiance and resilience within my life. These memories have ignited a fire within to gather my mother's stories. Acknowledging the role of our memory as a portal of knowing is

critical to providing the background to what motivated my project. I now turn my focus to how I gathered my mothers' stories.

INDIGENIST METHODOLOGY: WHOLISTIC AND SEASONAL (see Figure 1)

In my Anishinaabe worldview, preparation precedes everything. My preparation started with an idea by exploring and sharing my ideas before any action or proposals can occur. Like Herman Michell (2009) describes, gathering from our people takes time with several visits and conversations. These are important places to begin. In these conversations I often ask people "What do you think?" and it's at this stage of 'what do you think?' where I explore my ideas and see if there is any interest to where my mind is travelling and the paths I plan on putting my footprints on. It is during this exploration phase that I will either trash an idea or continue moving forward. My 'what do you think?' stage began with conversations of ideas with my mother and father about my interest in their story and her stories of the residential schools. As I sought their level of interest and willingness to participate our conversations progressed. They genuinely seemed interested and expressed their willingness to share stories. We had several conversations about the possibility of sharing stories at which point they would begin to tell me what stories they could share. I decided to proceed with an ethics submission for research involving human subjects. Receiving research ethics board approval for my close to home project demonstrates, increased validation for re-search where familial and community relations exist with the searcher. Indigenist research projects have a tendency to be in our community and with our relations and relational accountability within kinship systems is an important ethic (Absolon, 2011).

What follows in Figure 1 is a layered wholistic diagram of *how* I implemented my Indigenist re-search wholistically. It is organized to break down the layers and processes to help the reader see the whole framework. I will begin with a brief overview from the inner circle of the diagram which illustrates the elements of self as re-searcher: The spirit, heart, mind and body. This article focuses on articulating the outer circles which represents my seasonal methodology. The seasons assisted me with timeframes and my focus within each seasonal timeframe. Articulating the multilayered cyclical process has been difficult,

and the diagram below provides a visual of my guiding frameworks. It is important to keep in mind that these are guides that in reality overlap and interconnect.

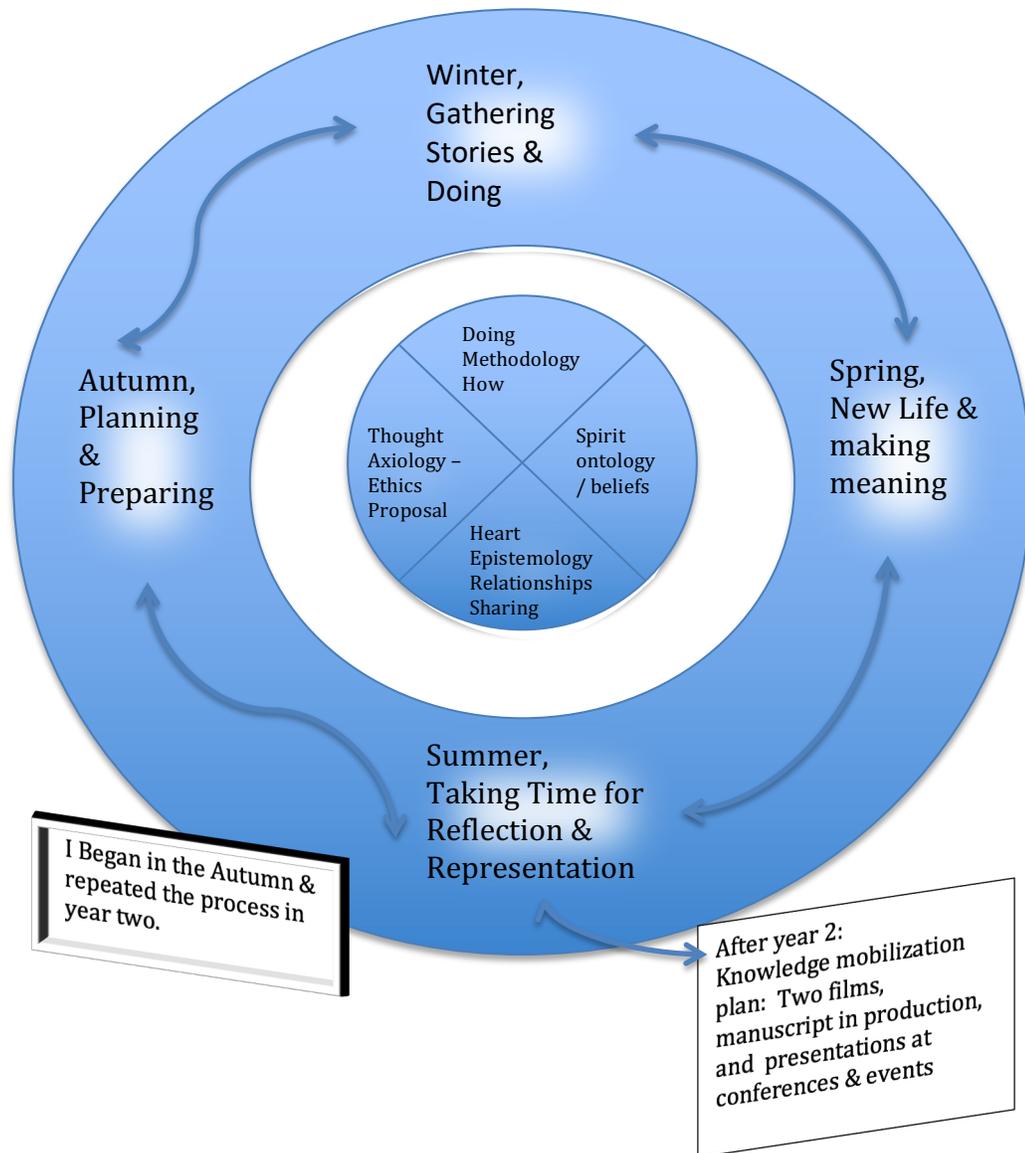


Fig. 1: A Wholistic and Seasonal Methodology

THE INNER WHOLE CIRCLE: SPIRIT, HEART, THOUGHT, DOING

The inner circle of the illustration above describes my wholistic re-search paradigm. It begins with my spirit driven and spirited reciprocal relationship which is the ontology of my paradigm. The ontology is what I believe is real in the world and what influences what I see as real (Hart, 2010; Wilson, 2008). The heart element refers to my

close feelings with my project and how I honoured the way in which knowledge is passed on from one generation to the next in my family; a way of sharing and knowing. This is my epistemology. The element of thought describes my axiology; my thinking in relation to the ethics that guide my search which are connected to my ethics submission and planning. Gathering stories is the doing element and speaks to my methodology of how I gathered. I summarize some aspects of how I valued each element in my search:

- I valued the **spirit** of my re-search through tobacco offerings (Michell, 1999). I grew my own tobacco, harvested it and wrapped it in cloth to represent an ethic of respectful and sacred consent. These offerings honoured the spirit of my mothers' knowledge, and the knowledge that emerged through this project. I also valued my re-search through the use of other medicines and ceremony, and acting with love and humility as I sought feedback, guidance and direction. In my work natural tobacco is the medicine offering that comes first when seeking knowledge (Wilson & Restoule, 2010). In the acceptance of this offering, my parents indicated consent to share their stories and I in turn agreed to treat their knowledge, teachings and stories with the utmost integrity and respect by following the protocols set forth herein. Each storytelling session began with a smudging ceremony to clear the space and prepare both storyteller and listener for the stories travelling from memory into the world.
- I valued the **heart** of my re-search journey by acting with respect; honouring the truthful sharing of stories; acknowledging my relationship with my mother; and honouring my mother in this project. I presented my mother with blueberry jam from the blueberries I picked in the summer. I shared this jam as a reciprocal gesture of gratitude for the sharing, time and stories that will be offered to me. The blueberries represented the life that comes from our mother earth and the new life through new understanding and new knowing that comes with this search (Michell, 2009). I wanted to give them something I made, something that came from my hard work. I wanted to show them that I would treat their stories with respect and would represent their stories with the same care that I picked and prepared the blueberries. Our relationships are instrumental in how we come to know. First of all, how we learn and acquire knowledge is connected to who we are and who we are related to

- (family, ancestors and Creation). Also, who we are is often informed by our life stage and life path. We are story makers and live out our life stories. The doorway to stories is a metaphor for entering into a space where stories are told, shared and listened to. Gathering stories and having the story unfold is a conscious process. A process of working with story is one that Stó:lō scholar Jo-anne Archibald (2008) has articulated and calls *Indigenous storywork*. I have tried to prepare myself to receive stories and prepared my mom to tell stories knowing and anticipating that stories and their meaning are waiting at their doorway to enter. From there they enter into my place of hearing, being and knowing.
- I valued the **intellect** of this project by working with a critical consciousness; utilizing a decolonizing framework; reframing of stories to emphasize the strengths; co-collaborating with my mother throughout the process of making meaning; situating the colonial context from which these stories bore life; and ensuring my representation of the work is accurate and authentic. This situating means I included the history of my Grandparents and the forced removal of their children (my mother, aunts and uncles) from each other. The history of Indian residential schools and the aggressive policies of assimilation have had huge ramifications in our lives and in the lives of the children and generations who are directly impacted by these acts of genocide. The truth of this context implies that I am seeking ongoing understanding of the impacts of racism, residential schools and the Indian Act policies on our families and in our lives. I am also seeking for strength, spirit and knowledge contained within our stories.
 - I valued the **physical elements** through acts of doing: I travelled and did not burden my mother with travel; I did chores and was useful and helpful to my parents during the re-search visits; I carried wood and cleaned; I made tea and served snacks; I listened and was directed; I was inclusive and sought feedback; and I mobilized this knowledge in the manner and methods that she agreed to. Searching became embodied through creativity, art, song, and photography (Absolon, 2011; Hart, 2010). I travelled five hours north from where I live. I visited my parents at their home (while I stayed in the rustic cottage beside their home on our land). I made myself available for story gathering. Our visits were open-ended, unstructured and

geared toward their availability and ability. Her physical well-being guided our process and it was important to not let my agenda over shadow her ability, energy and I felt very privileged to be receiving such powerful stories. I recall feeling moved and captivated by her incredible stories.

The ultimate value I placed in this project was in my mother's inner strength and survival in the residential school. I knew that she carried within her incredible resiliency. Anishinaabe scholar, Theresa Turmel (2013), in her unpublished doctoral dissertation gathered 13 stories from survivors of Indian residential schools. Her abstract succinctly describes resiliency as a life force and she states:

Guided by traditional Anishinaabe teachings and using an Anishinaabe methodology, I interviewed thirteen survivors and considered their life stories within the context of the traditional Anishinaabe life cycle. In their descriptions of resiliency, what became clear to me was that they were describing life force energy. This life force energy is innate and holistic, and can be found within each of us. It manifests within all of our relations: land, animals, plants, ancestors and other people. The life force energy cannot be extinguished but can be severely dampened as was evident in the attempt to assimilate residential school students. From their accounts, we learn that students found ways to nurture their life force energy through relationships and acts of resistance. As they have continued on their life path, they have reclaimed their spirit and today, they are telling their stories and keeping this history alive for the benefit of future generations. (pp ii-iii)

The life force within the children is what I believe emerges in the stories shared by my mother. This life force existed as a child at the time she experienced being imprisoned at the residential school and it emerged through the telling of the stories. Attending to this life force in the sharing of stories had to be thoughtful.

THE OUTER CIRCLE: SEASONAL GUIDANCE

The seasons provided guidance for my project timelines (see Figure 1). In this manner I wanted my re-search project to align with Creation's life giving cycle. The mini-sections that follow describe how my re-search aligned with the seasons. Each section includes a short explanation of how I understand each season, how it guided me and what aspect of my project I focused on. I begin with the autumn.

AUTUMN: PLANNING & PREPARATION

I begin with autumn because that was the time when I was very busy planning and when my preparations began. Our teachings say life begins in the spring, however, with my project it was in the autumn that I began contemplating and preparing. The autumn is naturally a time when mother earth is preparing to rest and the plants are preparing to lie down. It is traditionally a time of harvesting, preparing, storing food and stocking up for the winter. During this time I harvested my tobacco, dried it and put it into storage. The blueberries I gathered in the summer were turned into blueberry jam. I contemplated my search process, articulated my proposal and made my ethics submission in the fall. This project received approval by the Wilfrid Laurier University Ethics Review Board in December just before winter set in. I was set to begin.

During the fall I planned visits with my parents and started working out my own timeframes in relationship to my goals. I had to plan to be prepared for actually recording and documenting the stories I gathered. I realized that in order to record the stories visually I would have to learn to use my computer as my recorder. I began learning about visual recording, the use of photographs, and how to create my own film. I accessed unlimited training in relation to making movies, using photography in film, and making soundtracks. My goal was to visually document the stories on digital media and create a visual representation of my mother sharing her stories.

WINTER: STORYTELLING & GATHERING TIME

Winter is the season where Anishinaabe people gather and tell stories. It is a time for taking care of self, entering into warm spaces and a time for healing. The days are shorter, the earth is sleeping and Creation is at rest. When Creation rests, it can heal. My Elders have taught us that when Creation is at rest we tell stories to not offend the land or spirits of Creation. Winter was the time that families shared stories and these stories were passed from one generation to the next transmitting stories filled with knowledge, teachings, values, principles, lessons and life experiences. The knowledge embedded in these stories are valuable sources of Indigenous peoples way of knowing in life (Simpson, 2011). This section articulates how I gathered stories, what I did, my role as re-researcher and the healing moments in the gathering.

In the winter I travelled to my parents' home and helped out with wood, cleaning and doing whatever needed doing. They always have a list of tasks and chores to do. Like Herman Michell (2009) in his approach with visiting Elders, being of service when visiting means to do what needs to be done before any gathering can occur. I wanted to help out in whatever manner they needed and I gladly did. Often wood needs to be piled or brought in, snow needs shoveling, furniture needs moving and the list can get quite long. However, when a window of quietness presented itself, I would ask either my mother or father if they felt like sharing a story. In the asking, I also had to ensure that my equipment was ready and prepared. It was my mother who was available to share her stories and for the first year, her stories became the focus of my gathering. My father's health prevented him from really sharing and this was completely acceptable. There were no repercussions whatsoever if either one did not feel like not sharing.

When my mother was ready to share her stories I would set up my computer and iPhone to record the stories. I did testing to ensure voice and visuals were recording properly. I would spend some time chatting with the camera rolling to facilitate comfort. I would keep the digital recorder going and allow as much time as needed for her story to



unfold. As the story began my mother was quite comfortable with the camera on. We would take breaks as needed and stop whenever requested. There were times when I had to request a story be retold because the camera turned off and the story did not get recorded or if we were sitting outside on a warmer winter day, the wind altered the voice recording and created too much wind static. One time, we sat outside having hot tea in the sunny winter afternoon. This photo is my mom on the deck that sunny winter day (Photo by Kathy Absolon, 2015). It seemed perfect setting for a story and it was except that I did not anticipate the wind or another sound in the background interfering. On that day my mom told me wonderful stories and we laughed and shared moments about her family and our relatives. Unfortunately, there was a plastic bag that the wind was knocking around in the background. The microphone picked up that bag noise and it wasn't until I reviewed the story and heard the interference that I knew

this recording would not work. I tried to minimize the sound, but some sounds you can't erase like the sound of the wind on a plastic bag. It had to be redone.

Reviewing stories shortly after they are recorded was important to check on for the accuracy and quality of the recording. I reviewed them with my mother within a few days of their original recording. The stories that had too much interference were redone within a visit or at another time during the winter.

At times my parents came to my area and I had opportunities to sit and gather stories in the comfort of my home. At any of these times, I ensured that my mother was comfortable, had a cup of tea and snack. We took regular breaks and if she or I had something else to tend to we would pause until next time. Time for sharing and gathering stories naturally presented itself. Sometimes a storytelling session would begin and then get interrupted by a visitor. Sometimes we would start but then my mom would realize she had to go to town so off we'd go to town. Gathering stories from Elders is a process and takes patience and action. Quite often getting the chores done first make story gathering much more relaxing and the story telling forthcoming. Reciprocity, respect and consideration are all significant in the act of gathering stories.

Throughout the process my mother was involved and I shared everything with her about how I was making meaning of the stories. What I mean by making meaning is how I worked to understand the power, impact and meaning of the stories and their significance to others. Making meaning begins as soon as the gathering begins and necessarily so. As soon as gathering commences there is meaning emerging and conversations about these meanings emerged collaboratively. In the following season, the springtime, I delve into more detail about my process of making meaning from the stories. Participant engagement is central in that during the gathering of stories and filming her telling stories, I showed my mother early versions of the film I was creating and sought her input along the way. Because meaning making simultaneously and intuitively can begin at the time of gathering, winter was also a time with a steep learning curve of working with multi-media, creating art and sound for the film. Self reflective commentaries and journaling was important to documenting my journey. I made commentaries and reflections of the process. My commentaries were in front of the camera, on the land and after stories I had heard. I have taped myself making meaning during the gathering phase. The winter was a blending of

simultaneously gathering and making meaning. I shared my own critical reflections of the process of being an insider researcher and what I was experiencing while gathering the stories from my mother.

Throughout the winter I continued to learn and educate myself on technology of making a film. I learned how to edit film, impose photos, art and drawings into film to enhance the stories. Arts based means of making meaning affords another language for meaning to be expressed (Victor et al., 2016). I learned about sound and creating a sound track while working on my storyboard. Guitars and hand drums created original sound tracks for the film. I invited other Anishinaabe kwe to sing hand drum songs for the background to the film. I created a variety of sound tracks to add another layer to creating the film of stories. While I was gathering the stories I simultaneously would create drawings that each story inspired. Accompanying each story, a drawing or several drawings emerged. Each drawing depicts a childhood version of my mother and the other children at the residential school. Each drawing conveys another dimension of the story and the spirit of resistance and resilience is contained within each drawing. Winter was a time of turning inward and I became very creative during this time. To me creating art was a method of embodying the stories I was hearing while witnessing the process of my mother telling her stories. Creating art became another method of working with the stories. As I was inspired to sketch representations inspired by the stories, my mother had further conversations about what I had drawn and what the drawings depicted. I sought her approval and support for how her stories were depicted and how she was represented in the drawings and through the art.

My role as re-researcher was being a facilitator and story gatherer, I strived to be as inclusive with my mom as possible. I facilitated space to ensure her involvement regarding representation of the stories. Ethically ensuring that she agreed with the footage and films was very important. Her involvement as co-creator of how I represented her stories was essential. She did not get involved in the technical nature of working with film or art, but her consent at each stage and after each filming of a story meant that my role was to factor in time to review material with her and to seek her feedback, reactions and thoughts along the process of gathering.

Additionally, as re-researcher I was witness to not only the moments of sharing poignant memories and stories, but witness to the power and healing of what happened when I re-played recorded footage for her to screen. She watched footage after footage of version upon version of footage of the stories she shared. I watched her watching herself and witnessed healing and recovery of herself throughout this process. It was truly beautiful to witness moments of resilience within being imprisoned as a child. I witnessed her watching herself tell a story where she called herself a liar and thief and I saw her healing as this story, through our conversations, became reframed by me, the re-researcher, into a story of intelligence and resilience. She laughed at her abilities to outsmart the matrons at the residential school. She smiled at the memories of her girlfriends and brothers from the school and her eyes sparkled as she watched herself re-tell and remember her strength. This part of how re-search is healing is difficult to articulate; yet it happened. I witnessed her healing moments and experienced those healing moments with her through this re-search of gathering stories. We experienced healing moments as we unpacked the impact of the trauma of the residential schools and her resistance to being brainwashed. What I mean by healing moments are those moments where in the telling of the stories my mother owns her stories, takes her power back and her absolute glee at recounting how she and the other children 'stuck it to the matrons' and got away with it. Telling the stories opened memory channels for my mother and I saw her gaze go far back into her childhood experiences. During the moments her eyes were cast far off into a time and place and her face reflected contemplative expressions. She would pause, cast her eyes to the upper right searching her memory. Her thumbs would rest intertwined in her hands and a quietness would emerge. Then a story would begin and it seemed like her mind was back there and she was again in her story and away we'd go. I loved travelling this journey with her and as re-researcher I too felt witness with being a part of a story where I also experienced the power of memory and reconnecting with oneself through remembering. I felt healing within myself with each opportunity to reclaim her power and my power. Remembering is re-remembering and remembering is reconnecting her present to her past and to our future and this in itself is such a powerful method that honours our past, present and future (Absolon, 2011). My role as facilitator of space for verification, input and feedback coupled with my role as witness

and now teller of the healing power of re-connecting and re-membering through our stories punctuates the essence of this project.

In summary the winter was the culmination of activity, travelling, gathering, facilitating, witnessing and making meaning. It was a time of travelling north to gather stories, doing chores and tasks to be helpful, being flexible and adaptable, being respectful and patient. I gathered a lot of stories in the winter. I also briefly addressed my role as researcher in facilitating inclusivity, authentic involvement and paying witness to the impact of the gathering process. Finally, winter is a time for healing and restoring oneself. Facilitating the telling of those stories, hearing them and sharing about them was definitely a time for restoring and healing. I believe the moments I shared with my mother were healing moments individually and collectively. I felt privileged to be the recipient of such powerful stories and the connections that being a story gatherer facilitated. This was a process with many interconnections and overlapping processes between winter and spring.

SPRING: MAKING MEANING

On the first day of spring I recall being at the cabin and knowing the time had come for gathering stories to cease. The snow was melting off the cabin, there was renewal in the air and the water was breaking on the river. Spring was here. New life is coming, I thought. It was March 21st and I was standing beside a maple tree with my tobacco offering in my hand offering prayers of gratitude for the gifts of stories from the season that was passing. In my offering I gave thanks for my mother, father and the life we have received. I felt both grateful and sad at the same time. In my heart I wanted to continue hearing stories, but I honoured the changing of the seasons. The argument within me had to be resolved and I quieted my inquisitive self and ushered in the self that now needed to move forward, sort out, birth and re-present what was gathered. Spring was really a season of making meaning and it was during this time that I further immersed myself into drawing, photography and painting. The act of creating art enabled me to find meaning through various mediums, particularly pencil, paint and photography. Making meaning through art helped me create space as an insider re-searcher and to work with stories from a critical lens. I was able to re-create story through art and bring out the truth of what the stories

represented. The art that emerged from the stories gifted me with time, reflection and interpretative expression of meanings.

During the springtime I also followed the seasons teaching of new birth and life and set my goals on moving from gathering to analysis. It was time to focus on make meaning with a goal of sharing what I had learnt in a reframed decolonized manner. It was the time to create new life out of the stories I was gathering. In the spring I continued to review the stories I had gathered, began sorting through them, and moved toward making meaning. In the making meaning stage of moving raw data into a meaningful representation, I wanted to maintain the stories intact and extract their teachings of resilience, power and strength; that nuance of spirit and life force energy that children carry. And throughout the process I sought her input and feedback to verify accurate and authentic representation

Searching for flow and melodies to create meaning from the stories seemed to be a natural way to generate organization. As I reviewed and further searched for thematic melodies I began to see emergent threads. Storied threads that emerged involved individual acts of resistance and resilience, stories that reflected group acts and strategies, and stories of friendships and bonds of courage and bravery. Also, there were staff of the residential schools implicated in the stories. These stories offered a glimpse into those who worked at the schools and who supported the children in their own acts of defiance and disobedience against the establishment. There were acts of defiance so children could experience human compassion and care. In the making meaning phase, I must admit these indirect themes surprised me as I did not anticipate hearing about how some of the matrons lied and defied the rules to be humane with the children.

In summary, making meaning was facilitated by engaging in processes that allowed me to work with the stories. Making meaning was a multi faceted process interfacing a variety of activities such as filmmaking, sound track making, art making and sharing. Filmmaking afforded me a channel to re-listen to the stories and watch the story teller. Working with sound allowed me the opportunity to contemplate the impact of storytelling to listeners. It attuned me to audience and how stories are received. It helped me attend to the auditory, visual, experiential and engagement of making meaning through story. Art really became intuitive and components of each story generated images that I wanted to

capture through paintings and sketches. Creating art facilitated time and space to capture glimpses of the stories meaning, strength and spirit in images. Making meaning through the channels of creating film, sound and art is significant to understanding how creative processes open channels in the mind and intelligence to derive knowledge, understanding and teachings. These means of making meaning were absolutely crucial to me in working wholistically with what I gathered.

All of the stories are worth of inclusion and all stories carry knowledge. As a result I have created several short films with each film containing anywhere from four to seven stories. I chose not to edit the story per se. However, I did edit such matters coughing, interfering noises, or apparent digressions from the intended stories. I present in the films short stories as told by the storyteller in conversation with me. The majority of the storytelling is not my voice; it is my moms' voice. This is different than a process that takes her stories and reinterprets them using my voice. I did not do this. Her presence remains in tack and prominent. During the process of making meaning I would continue to have conversations with my mother about the films and share with her all aspects of the process often asking 'so what do you think'? My mom was included throughout the entire process, right to the final version of the first film.

In terms of knowledge mobilization, I was invited to share a version of one of the films at an Ontario provincial native child welfare conference in Sarnia, Ontario in June 2016. I asked my mom to come with me. She accompanied me and joined me in the presentation. The audience applauded her! It was another moving and healing moment to empower her and all the survivors there. My goal is to give voice to the storyteller. I am her helper and facilitator with a main objective to represent the stories in a decolonizing and indigenizing framework that moved her story forward from one of disobedience and deception to another one of resistance and resilience.

While the gathering phase officially ended in the Spring of 2016, the making meaning continued over the initial two years of the project and is continuing. In the spring of 2015 and 2016, I completed my film training and began the long and tedious process of working through the stories and editing film. This method of gathering stories on digital media can ensure accuracy. If the stories are presented in fullness they are shared, they become accurate representations of stories because the storyteller is telling their story. I

still have unused stories to sort through, but to date I have created two films from ten stories. This is an ongoing process and will continue over the next few years as time allows.

SUMMER: A TIME TO REFLECT

Summer is usually a time when school is out, people go on holidays, and academic work slows down. The days are longer, the temperatures hotter and there is more time to be outside. It is a time for gatherings, pow wows, cultural festivities and time away from the academy. During my project, the summer was a time to put aside my project as I was became busy with other activities such as family events, walking, hiking, camping, fishing, medicine picking, blueberry picking, pow wows and ceremony and I tend to spend more time on the land and water. Time on the land and water is a contemplative and reflective time for me. Fishing is a contemplative time on the Georgian Bay. I love walking the land conversing with Creation. Relative to his project and my own work cycle, I pushed the pause button in the summer. During the summer I spent more time in reflection and contemplation mode and less on being active in doing or preparing or making meaning. My spirit could not be indoors working on editing films. For me, the summer time seemed a natural time to relax from the project and let what had been accomplished marinate.

As a result of this project and insights gained, I am now drawing connections between the strength and hope I inherited with another legacy. I am connecting to a legacy of resistance, resilience, strength and hope we inherit from the survivors in our families. I am realizing that I too have inherited not only the negative impacts of residential school and colonial trauma but also the spirit of resistance, resilience, strength and hope that, like many other people, my mother encompasses. Without a doubt I can see our beauty, strength, resilience and intelligence. The stories I have gathered and reframed are stories of a girl who is strategic, intellectual, analytical, and courageous. They are stories of survival through resistance and resilience from ten years of childhood imprisonment in one of the most insidious and aggressive examples of assimilation and cultural genocide in Canada. The stories I have gathered are the other side of the trauma and this too is the truth of legacies of hope. The stories helped me see that there are two sides of the legacy of the Indian residential schools. There is a legacy of trauma and a legacy of resilience. In our

healing from the colonial aftermath, out of necessity, we have had to focus on the legacy's pain, wounds and trauma and heal so we could see our own beauty, resiliency and strength.

My epiphany, in that summer was this: My mother's resiliency is my resiliency and my strength is rooted in her strength. The time for reflection and to marinate all my experiences, feelings and thoughts was in the summer. I reached an important understanding that coincides with the work of Turmel (2013) linking children's spirit to life force and to resiliency. In reaching this understanding that resistance, resilience and strength emerge from spirits within even in harsh and brutal conditions where beautiful spirited children are forced into confinement that they will resist oppression and dehumanization. Their acts of resistance will be seen by those in power as acts of disobedience and defiance and the children will internalize their oppressors messages and view themselves as liars and thieves (Freire 1996) where in truth, it is their spirit's resistance, resilience and strength. The dual contexts of colonial and cultural history as well as contemporary movements of the resurgence, reclamation and revitalization of Indigenous knowledge, traditions, languages and worldviews are significant landscapes within which resistance and resilience occurred. The time during the summer gifted with these insights. I had honoured the Indian residential school legacy from trauma to resilience, strength and hope.

IN REFLECTION OF THE WHOLE JOURNEY

I provide a brief summary of how each season guided my re-search process. The seasons also guided me in relationship with the inner circle of spirit, heart, thought and doing. The inner and outer circles are interrelated and interconnected in my re-search process.

- Autumn: My method of gathering was with digital recording and filming of storytelling. Therefore I needed training. My iMovie training sessions began in the fall so that when it came time to gather I would be prepared and know how to film. I believe that I was one of a few people at the iMovie training sessions who was in the process of doing re-search toward creating a documentary short film. I knew that in the fall all I had to focus on was planning and preparing and to not jump ahead to gathering stories (although I was tempted).

- Winter: I was a gatherer and listener of stories. I travelled, I cooked, and was busy doing. I filmed the stories using my iPhone and my apple computer. Both were sufficient means of recording. Through the stories I was inspired to draw sketched of my mother in the stories. I painted and learned to digitally work with archival photos. I knew that when I was in the season of the winter that I would not worry about making meaning, but that I would engage with the stories through art and creative expression.
- Spring: Gathering ended on the first day of spring and new life emerged as the gathering stopped. Making meaning of the stories overlapped with the art making and sketching that began in the winter. In the spring I was not preoccupied with preparing for the next year, but focused on working with and staying grounded in the stories.
- Summer: A time for reflection and representation. An active pause. I knew that I would take time away from my project to be on land and water and this space would regenerate my whole being and insights would emerge.

I have represented my process wholistically and visually knowing that visual illustrations and photos help readers see what guided my ways of coming to gather stories and have conversations with my mom. I presented a diagram depicting an inner wholistic circle and an outer seasonal circle: all of which have guided my re-search journey in how I did what I did. I also knew that I had to attend to the governance of the seasons to my timeframes as the seasons helped me to focus. Each seasons teaching offered me the gifts of focus knowing if I honoured each seasons cycle I would eventual fulfill a wholistic process.

My hope is that this article offers readers another example of what an Indigenist re-search project encompasses. I encourage readers to explore, engage wholistically and find pathways of searching that are congruent with who you are. I hope to inspire and encourage those coming down the path to draw from those living spirited teachers in Creation that Creator blesses us with in our life. Our natural teachers such as the seasons carry teachings that move us toward life and toward restoration of a whole and good life, *mino-bimaadsiwin*. After all, this why we do what we do: To restore who we are, where we

come from and what we know (Absolon, 2011). An Indigenist re-search paradigm attends to spirit, heart, mind and body and does so in multilayered, multidimensional, and interconnected ways inclusive our Indigenous history, traditions, knowledge and place in Creation. This was interesting, creative and challenging to do, and difficult to articulate. I am forever grateful to Creator for blessing my mom with a long life and any mistake in my articulation is my own error.

The tap tap tapping has subsided.

At this time, the spirit of memory has been honoured.

Memory guided stories, very important stories.

Their spirits are satisfied.

They have been heard and listened to.

The spirit of memory is a powerful one.

Miigwech and all my relations.

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