EXPLORING THE PERCEPTION GAPS OF "DOING GOOD"
THROUGH CRITICAL AUTOETHNOGRAPHY


by


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# Abstract

Aspects of social entrepreneurship that are given considerable attention in the literature include personality traits, motivation, stories of resilience, factors for success, and design of initiatives and enterprise. Relatively little attention is given to understanding how social entrepreneurs have become oriented to this vocation and how they develop their understanding of what it means to "do good" in the world. Even less prominent is research examining the motivations of social entrepreneurs through a critical lens that considers whether social entrepreneurs contribute to the injustices they wish to address in the world, especially as it relates to colonialism, despite their intent to do good. Filling this identified gap, this research inquiry uses critical autoethnography to explore one White social entrepreneur's journey of making, un-making, re-making, and stop-making herself as she reflects on her relationship with her Indigenous sisters and work within First Nations communities. This study asserts that, unless social change efforts are decolonial, they are philanthropic life support propping up the colonial system. As such, a framework for uncolonizing the settler is presented as a lens through which to ponder the type and scope of personal change required of those who wish to be accomplices for decolonial, systemic change. It concludes with 11 primers that can prepare students to address systemic change from a decolonial perspective, a critical exploration of the notion of doing good, and 21 recommendations for social entrepreneurs, educators, and other skilled professionals equipping the next generation of social change leaders.

# Preface

This dissertation is the original, unpublished, independent work by the author, Erin J. Horvath.

This study was approved by the Research Ethics Board, Office of Research Services, Nipissing University (File No: 102543).      `

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# Chapter 1: Introduction

## Background and Rationale

I consider myself to be a social entrepreneur and a change leader: someone who has made a vocation out of her intent to "do good" (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). By social entrepreneur, I mean someone who "offers innovative approaches to tackling and solving complex social needs" (Rhodes & Donnelly-Cox, 2008, p. 36). This research emerged from a challenge issued by a young First Nations friend who asked me to help him learn how to lead transformative social change. While he and I have explored some avenues for which this could happen over the years, his invitation has prompted a multi-year self-exploration to understand what I do, why I do it, and how I came to be this way. This study is timely as many people around the world are urgently addressing the breakdown of the system due to the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly within the context of disturbing displays of systemic racial and economic inequalities that make People of Colour, Indigenous, and others take to the streets demanding a new system that is greater than simply recycling the values, racial biases, colonial mindsets, and consciousness that got us here. Cries of injustice tell us that, collectively, we are not yet ethical enough, conscious enough, or willing enough to co-create local and global communities that are sustainable and equitable (e.g., Black Lives Matter (CBC News, 2021), Justice for Workers (Pratte & Turcotte, 2021), Climate Justice (Rankin, 2019), Indigenous Justice (Feith, 2021; Wolf, 2021).

I believe that the choice to be a positive catalyst in the world is a noble pursuit that fundamentally requires consideration of personal motivation and intention alongside critical interrogation of the beliefs that drive the system. Without radical honesty, firm compassion, and heightened consciousness, those who choose to do good risk creating yet another version of injustice. This critical autoethnographic study, therefore, traces my learning journey, ethical development, and perception gaps as a social entrepreneur and change leader.

**Overview of the Dissertation**

Inspired by storytelling scholars Brené Brown and Parker Palmer, and memoirist Glennon Doyle who offer their life experiences as a mirror for others to explore complex issues, I offer my storied experiences as a social entrepreneur within the current cultural and social landscape with the intent of inviting deep reflection on the process of making, unmaking, remaking, and stop-making oneself; the process and challenges of conscious co-creating; and the perception gaps that might exist when people set out to do good. Seeing a void and opportunity in social entrepreneurship education, I aim to create, through this research, a resource for others wishing to adopt a more profound sense of critical awareness in their practice and for those teaching social entrepreneurship and similar vocations. Articulating a process for settler uncolonizing, I fill a gap in the literature and offer a tool that can take decolonial work to the next level across multiple disciplines.

In this opening chapter, I offer key terms, self-location that includes my upbringing and orientation to Indigenous perspectives, an overview of the social-political-colonial context within which the inquiry takes place, a complete listing of my research questions and contributions, and an in-depth discussion of my theoretical framework that includes critical Indigenous pedagogy (CIP), social constructivism and complexity science, métissage, conscientization through experience, and the zone of human confusion.

In Chapter 2, I offer the backstory, which includes the foundation of theory upon which I build this research and the perspectives I bring into this inquiry. I provide the reader with a context for social entrepreneurship, colonization, decolonization, uncolonization, grief, conscious co-creating, and intuition.

Chapter 3 outlines my methodology and the tools I have employed in this research. I locate my inquiry within critical autoethnography, Indigenous methodologies, arts-based research, and storytelling. I outline the IMPACT Arts process I have followed and my choice to organize my stories in the form of a memoir.

In Chapter 4, I offer my memoir outlining the four phases of my uncolonizing journey thus far. In the "Making" section, I share stories about my domestication into the system within a middle-class, caucasian, Christian/Catholic family. In the "Un-Making" section, I share my experiences of learning that the system exists and questioning my own domestication after being exposed to information that contradicts my domestication. The stories in the "Re-Making" section explore my experience of expanding my worldview and my understanding of self as a privileged settler on colonized Land and within the colonial system. The stories within the "Stop-Making" section illustrate my experience of coming to understand there is something more powerful than the colonial system.

In Chapter 5, I deconstruct my memoir, distilling the process and learnings into eleven key primers, five perception gaps, and five ways the notion of goodness is used to disguise another intention; these are shared within the context of the settlers' uncolonizing journey, a process not yet articulated in the literature.

In Chapter 6, I offer recommendations to allied educators and healers preparing the next generation of social change leaders to be truly transformative and decolonial in their approaches to systematic change.

## Key Terms

For mutual understanding, I offer a glossary of key terms that will be further explored in the literature review and encountered throughout this research inquiry.

**Do-Good**, according to Merriam-Webster (n.d.), is a colloquial reference to philanthropy, the practice of giving money and time to improve the lives of those deemed less fortunate by the giver; it implies an added level of energy and intention; further, it may be "designed or disposed sometimes impracticably and too zealously toward bettering the conditions under which others live."

**Perception Gap** refers to the space between how a person thinks about something or their impression of it and what is actually occurring (More in Common, 2023). It happens when a person's conditioning prevents them from recognizing things or causes them to misinterpret things that do not fit within their mental framework. Thus, how we see ourselves may differ from how others see us

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(Management Mirror, 2023). More specific to this study, the cultural teachings about what it means to

be a good person and do good in the world may obstruct a person from recognizing how their actions

cause harm to those around them (Collins, n.d.). I use this term instead of the ableist term, *blindspot,* to

refer to the phenomenon of failing to perceive something that is happening.

**The System** is "a powerful government or social organization that controls people's lives"

(Merriam-Webster, n.d.). It includes education, health care, economy, religion, media, justice, and

policing.

**Social Entrepreneurship** (SE) refers to "the construction and pursuit of opportunities for

transformative social change through innovative activities occurring within or across economic

communities in a historical and cultural context" (Tapsell & Woods, 2010, p. 539).

**Social Enterprise** is a revenue-generating business with two goals: to achieve social, cultural,

community economic, and/or environmental outcomes; and to earn revenue (bc centre for social

enterprise, n.d.).

**Settler** refers to "non-Indigenous Peoples, communities, states, and governments" (Lowman &

Barker, 2015, p. 1) living on land occupied by Canada. It does not include enslaved people and others

relocated against their will.

**White Settler** refers to "the non-Indigenous peoples living in Canada who form the

European-descended socio-political majority" (apihtawikosisan, 2022).

**Non-Indigenous** refers to those who are of any ethnicity besides Indigenous.

**Indigenous-Settler Context** refers to the current relationship between the Indigenous Peoples

and the Canadian settler society.

**Reconciliation** is used by the Government of Canada to describe "an ongoing process through

which Indigenous Peoples and the Crown work cooperatively to establish and maintain a mutually

respectful framework for living together, with a view to fostering strong, healthy, and sustainable

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Indigenous nations within a strong Canada." The government asserts that reconciliation is "a fundamental purpose of section 35 of the *Constitution Act, 1982"* (Department of Justice Canada, 2018).

**Colonization** refers to the taking over of lands of another nation and imposing colonial governments and society on them. In the case of this research, I am specifically referring to the takeover of the land now called Canada from the Indigenous nations that have been here since time immemorial.

**Decolonization** is "a massive revolution to remove all people not native to stolen land, back to their land of origin, and returning government control, community control, resources, processes, and sovereignty to Indigenous peoples" (Rosa, 2020, para. 21).

**Uncolonization** refers to the internal work that non-Indigenous settlers can do to distance themselves from the colonial worldview they have been domesticated into and begin to live a life that is not dictated by the colonial system(Rosa, 2020).

**Domestication** refers to the process by which children are raised to conform to the culture of their family and society (Ruiz, 1997).

**Co-Creation** refers to the process of people creating together something that they would not be able to create on their own. It is done collaboratively with the intent to include multiple perspectives. In some cases, co-creators may create a subculture or rules of engagement that differ from the dominant culture (Wong, n.d.).

**Conscious Co-Creation** refers to the awareness of people that they are always co-creating the world they inhabit, first through their thoughts and then through their actions, and the degree of accountability they are willing to accept. Conscious co-creation emerges within a person or collective of people and the Universe, Higher Self, God, Spirit, or other Divine Force (Myss, 2002b).

**Guest Mentality** refers to the mindset and actions that non-Indigenous peoples can adopt to live into Indigenous sovereignty. It expresses a commitment to decolonization (Koleszar-Green, 2018).

**Immigrant Mentality** refers to the mindset and actions that non-Indigenous people can adopt to show that they recognize that Indigenous ways are valid, predate the arrival of settlers, and must be respected. This mentality could be considered a step away from having contempt towards Indigenous Peoples and a step towards adopting a guest mentality.

## Self-Location

Given that critical autoethnography leaves no buffer between researcher and subject, understanding my internal world and familial upbringing is as relevant as the political and social contexts in which my life is situated. In Chapter 4, I will delve into details of my life through stories; in this section, I offer an overview to locate myself in the research and explain how I came to my research questions.

Graveline (1998) asserts that knowing is a process of "self-in-relation" (p. 52). Absolon (2022) places self as central; she advises that researchers "know [their] location on the journey of self-discovery of: who [they] are, what [they] know, and where [they] are from" (p. 315). Dewey (1938; 1934), philosopher, psychologist, and educational reformer, saw experience as social, meaning that a person is never an individual isolated from their context (Clandinin & Connelly, 1990). Knowledge, therefore, is not an individual entity but a relational and reciprocal phenomenon (Wilson, 2001), one that is relational and reciprocal, fluid and concrete, subjective and objective, rigorous and adaptable (Absolon, 2022). Grounded in relationship, the researcher is not an objective or neutral person in the process of gathering knowledge, especially in the case of autoethnography, and what is learned is not necessarily meant to be generalizable (Kovach, 2009; Wilson, 2001). Rather, through our subjective relationships with others, ourselves, and Spirit, knowledge gains its relevance (Kovach, 2009). By describing who I am in relation to others, I aim to demonstrate an understanding that who I am has been shaped by those who came before me, those who have surrounded me throughout my life, and those who have been invested in my development. I also consider the significance of my relationships with my Indigenous sisters and over twenty-five years of working and/or living within Indigenous communities.

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**My Ancestry**

I am a White woman of Hungarian and Scottish descent sprinkled with a bit of Pennsylvania Dutch and Swiss German. My mother's side of the family has lived on Canadian soil for a few hundred years; her lineage traces back to Switzerland on one side and Scotland and England on the other. Her ancestors, the Fischers and Hallmans, are said to have immigrated first to Pennsylvania, later moving to the Kitchener, ON area where Indigenous land was sold for a low price to White settlers. They set up their homestead near what is now called Fischer-Hallman Road. The other side of her family immigrated from Switzerland to a place called Punkydoodles Corners near New Hamburg, ON. Once again, they set up a homestead on cheap land, appropriated from the neighbouring Indigenous Nations, and then sold to settlers. My maternal grandfather fought in World War II as part of the air force, loading planes with supplies; when the war ended, he became a janitor for a college, a job he was immensely proud of and held until his retirement. My grandmother's mother, a nurse, immigrated from Scotland to marry an English farmer, homesteading in St. Catharines, ON. My grandmother was a feisty and intelligent woman who put herself through seamstress school and became the business-minded one of the family, starting a Bed and Breakfast and dabbling in real estate.

The Hungarian side of my family arrived in Canada in 1951. My paternal grandfather, a country boy with an elementary-level education, was recruited into the war before he turned 18. He was a tank driver, sometimes fighting with Hitler and sometimes against, depending on who was in charge of Hungary then. When I was in my early 20s, he and I were walking the streets of Budapest when he suddenly stopped walking and stood frozen on the sidewalk, eyes glazed over. When I asked him what was happening, he said that the place we stood held the remains of people, a little-known fact. He recalled the horror of the city being bombed during World War II killing many civilians. He was ordered to bury the dead in the craters the bombs left on the streets, in the exact place where we stood. Just as he and the other soldiers finished burying them, they were bombed again, and the body parts were

strewn about. Once again, he was ordered to fill the craters with the body parts of his fellow Hungarians. Many memories of the war, similar to this one, haunted him until the day he died. When the war was over, he fled the country in search of anywhere that was not Hungary. My paternal grandmother, a descendant of nobility and a stylish and cultured woman, grew up with the rare privilege of higher education. Tired of living with the war crimes happening all around, she and a few friends planned to leave Hungary. Her friends turned back, but she continued by herself, crawling her way to the Austrian border to avoid being detected. My grandparents, a country boy and a posh city girl, met at a carpet factory in France where they were both working; they decided to get married, ultimately having a child who would be my father. They travelled to Quebec City on the Anna Salen ship in October 1951 when my father was almost two years old. Upon arriving in Canada, my grandfather started his own construction business, something he did until he retired. By any standard, my grandparents arrived in Canada very poor, starting over with absolutely nothing but a hammer and saw my grandfather brought on the boat with him. My grandfather spent a considerable amount of time working on housing crews in the Northwest Territories, where he developed a respect for the Indigenous people and their language as someone who spoke four languages himself.

I grew up hearing my family talk about the old country, often comparing things in Hungary and things in Canada, which continuously reminded me that my family is not native to this land. I share these details to emphasize that I, like many other settlers, have a family history of trauma that has shaped me and that I now bring into this research. Gilio-Whitaker (2018) called this the "settler wound." While I only know of the trauma history on one side of my family, I suspect it exists on my other side as well, even though the stories have long been forgotten. Like Gilio-Whitaker, I wonder how these psychological settler wounds have shaped me, my family, and our society.

**My Upbringing and Connection to Indigenous Issues**

I grew up in a little town called Pefferlaw in rural Ontario in a house built by my father and grandfather. My mother was an early childhood educator and entrepreneur, and my father was a police officer who later became the head of security for a large transit company. My family was composed of working-class people and people of faith: my father was an immigrant Hungarian Catholic, and my mother was a Protestant whose family had been in Canada for several generations. My parents were dedicated to their faith, so I practised both.

Before I was born, during the Sixties Scoop era, a time in history when it was common for social workers to place Indigenous children with White families, my parents adopted Diane, an 11-year-old girl. While Diane's older biological sister spent time with us, she was not adopted. At the time, my parents were told that she was not available to be adopted because she had developed bonds with another family. Diane's sister has more recently told me that social workers believed that Diane would integrate better into her new family if they were separated. When I was four years old, Diane was around 16 years old. I was very close to her and loved her dearly; I was heartbroken when she left home. While she would return to visit, many months often passed between visits, and my parents would constantly worry that something had happened to her. As my self-study inquiry proceeded, I discovered that these early attachment relationships with Diane significantly impacted my life journey, personally and professionally.

Although I am not of First Nations lineage, I have been deeply involved with the Anishnawbek of Northwestern Ontario. One community, in particular, has been instrumental in shaping my identity over a 27-year relationship. I have lived in their community for extended periods, developed reciprocal relationships, and worked on various community initiatives. In order to safeguard anonymity and confidentiality, they are not named in this paper. The young man who inspired this research is a member of this First Nation. My involvement with this community has, and continues to, shape how I understand myself as a White settler, the world, and the cosmos. I have come to believe that the survival of

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Indigenous Peoples is intertwined with my own, and so I choose to allocate my energy, whether in leadership, academics, entrepreneurship, art, or politics, to further their causes. Acknowledging the profound impact of colonization on all aspects of Indigenous identity and culture requires that I fully accept the depth of their collective pain, strive to understand my own direct or indirect role in creating it, how I have been shaped by it, and how I am sustaining it.

Because my life was intertwined with that of my two Indigenous sisters, I witnessed firsthand the effects of oppressive colonial policies and systems. While I was not aware that Diane and her sister were Indigenous until I was 20 years old. From that point onward, I began to interpret their life experiences through a colonial lens. I began to see the connection between being apprehended through the Sixties Scoop era, being raised within abusive foster homes, and the developmental impact of childhood trauma. I pieced together the connection between their trauma, the development of mental health conditions, and the use of substances to cope with life. I watched how these created a level of dis-ease that made it difficult to trust people, complete school, and maintain employment. I started understanding why Diane ran away from home as a teenager and became involved in a high-risk lifestyle. I have seen the cycle continue as Diane's son was exposed to alcohol prenatally, lost his parents young due to drug and alcohol-related accidents, and experienced difficulties with schooling, an unstable home life, addictions, frequent stays in jail, and now a lack of involvement in his child's life. While I do not know the specifics of their biological family, I have learned enough to know that their Indigenous ancestors experienced attempted genocide, which includes removal from the Land, separation of families, and residential schooling. Witnessing all of this has left an imprint on my life.

This being said, I acknowledge my role as an accomplice with Indigenous Peoples, a border worker (Haig-Brown, 2010), and a critical White theorist (Nicoll, 2004). Nonetheless, because of my ethnicity, I am still in a position of power and privilege.

## Social-Political-Colonial Context

The social-political-colonial landscape of the land we now call Canada is the cultural backdrop for this research and an integral character in my narrative exploration, representing the collective mindset of Canadian settlers, governments, and agencies. As a nation, we believe we are peacekeepers and a safe haven of inclusivity where diversity can thrive. One needs only consider government-sponsored media, marketing strategies, political propaganda, and school curriculum to see how effectively the societal echo chamber reinforces this perception (e.g., Canadian Armed Forces, 2020; United Nations, 2022). The Black Lives Matter (Black Lives Matter, 2022), Every Child Matters (Orange Shirt Day, 2022), and Idle No More (Idle No More, 2022) movements, along with the Truth and Reconciliation report (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015) and the Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls ("National Inquiry," 2019a; 2019b) are a few examples of the pushback to counter this historically dominant narrative.

Canada has yet to acknowledge Indigenous Nations as sovereign, which is evident in the ongoing creation of systems, laws, and genocidal policies that favour the colonial establishment (e.g., Gobby et al., 2021; Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996; Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015). Non-Indigenous peoples and settler governments are just beginning to grapple with the reality of genocide committed against Indigenous Peoples after identifying hundreds of unmarked graves of children who died in residential schools (Dickson & Watson, 2021). This discovery laid bare the truth that what we have been told about what it means to be Canadian does not match the reality of Canada we have co-created. While public revelations of past wrongs are a step in the right direction, they have yet to change behaviour in the present, as evidenced by the ongoing court battles between the Federal government and Indigenous foster children (e.g., Stefanivich, 2021), the exclusion of Indigenous Nations at decision-making tables (e.g., Gobby et al., 2021), the overrepresentation of Indigenous Peoples in foster care and prisons (e.g., Clark, 2019; Goffin, 2021), the contaminated water on many reserves (e.g.,

Isai, 2021), the government-owned pipeline built through Indigenous Lands des-scale protest (e.g., The Council of Canadians, 2021), and the methyl mercury poisoning that provincial and federal governments refuse to address many decades later (LaFortune, 2020). These are but a few high-profile cases of contemporary genocidal and colonial practices that are not recognized as such.

Creating change within a biased and racist system is complex. So often, social entrepreneurs and others challenge injustice with the intent of doing good but unknowingly bring to their practice an incomplete understanding of the foundation of injustice upon which this country is built and the mechanisms that sustain it. Without this depth of critical awareness, I believe that change leaders can cause more harm than good despite their desire to change the world for the better. This is a message I share in the work that I do as I educate settlers, many of whom are social entrepreneurs, social workers, activists, environmentalists, missionaries, educators, counsellors/therapists, and others engaged in helping professions. I have discovered that my most powerful tool to bring about a change of perspective and heart is the stories I tell of my experiences, not just of what I have witnessed but my internal experiences of learning, grieving, and changing my mind.

## Research Questions and Contributions

Through a critical examination of self, I explored my learning journey, perspectives, beliefs, pivotal moments, sense of spirituality, personal transformation, privileges, culture of upbringing, biases, and subjectivities to understand how I became oriented toward creating social good, how I developed my understanding of what doing good means, and my perception gaps in doing good. A key area of focus was my ongoing work to uncolonize my life, beliefs, and assumptions related to my Indigenous sisters and work within First Nations communities. I considered the implications of my research findings on social entrepreneurship education and the development of ethics and consciousness related to race, power, colonialism, and privilege.

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Specific questions that guided this exploration included:

1. What pivotal moments have made me–personally and professionally?

2. How have I learned to be the way I am in the world?

3. What perception gaps do I have, or have I had, in understanding the role my privilege, unconscious biases, and subjectivities have had in shaping my understanding of self, the world, and my approach to doing good?

4. In what ways might I need to be unmade and remade? (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Martin & Parr, 2020).

Before this research, I could not find studies or readily available secular examples of social entrepreneurs engaging in a critical self-reflexive practice, which I found ironic considering that the explicit goal of social entrepreneurship is to better the world. I would have thought that a crucial component of social entrepreneurship would be understanding one's own beliefs, biases, privileges, and assumptions as they accompany the practitioner, shaping all aspects of their life and work. It is for this reason, as well as my personal experience, that I turned to critical qualitative research with an uncolonizing lens that calls on social change leaders to understand our place, perspectives, power, and privilege within the system lest our solutions recreate and perpetuate power imbalances by filling gaps in racist and unjust systems, allowing the system itself to carry on unchallenged.

This research is timely given the calls for racial justice, systems reform, and climate justice that have become our present anthems, resulting in streets around the world filled with people willing to risk their health and safety to ensure their voices are heard and that meaningful change happens.

This research, presented as a memoir (Boylorn, 2008), critically explores the intersectionality between my inner world, family of origin, societal place and privilege, colonial history and culture, occupation as a social entrepreneur, and place within the cosmos. I intend for the writing to be engaging, accessible, and encountered by those who share a desire to do good from a place of increased

self-awareness, as well as an educational tool for inspired educators who want to introduce student social entrepreneurs to reflexive practice.

## Theoretical Framework: Unearthing the Story

Given that this research is self-study using critical autoethnography, I share my theoretical framework as it relates to understanding myself as a social change catalyst, myself in the context of the world I inhabit, and my context for identity and transformation. Additionally, I share how I view my practice of collaborative social entrepreneurship because it provides context for how I experience it as a co-creative venture. Finally, given that I am sharing this process of critical self-inquiry as an essential educational tool for social entrepreneurs, I am also including my framework for understanding teaching and learning.

Collaborative social entrepreneurship (SE) is a form of creative expression that flows from my sense of self within a complex, interrelated web of relationships. I greatly respect the traditional Anishnawbe paradigm and view the world through a mystical lens that acknowledges the many layers of existence and the eternal nature of our spirits. I believe that we come to this world with lessons our soul wants to learn and things we are meant to teach (Myss, 1996, 2002; Tolle, 2004, 2005). Besides providing a framework for life, these beliefs guide my practice, which is paradoxical. While I work for change within society, I do not seek to initiate change outside myself, as society is simply a reflection of our collective internal worlds (Tolle, 2005):

> If you looked in the mirror and did not like what you saw, you would have to be mad to attack the image in the mirror…if you accept the image, no matter what it is... it cannot *not* become friendly toward you. This is how you change the world. (Tolle, 2004, p. 218)

I resist the urge to declare things broken, or to rescue people, instead seeking to understand and accept why a situation is as it is (Tolle, 2004) and my points of interconnection.

**Critical Indigenous Pedagogy**

      I reach for critical Indigenous pedagogy (CIP) as it merges critical theory (Freire, 1990) and

Indigenous pedagogies (Kovach, 2009; Tuhiwai Smith, 2021), informing my understanding of how an

oppressor society structures itself to maintain dominance. The fact that SE intends to challenge social

inequality on a systemic level makes critical Indigenous pedagogy a natural entry point when discussing

grounding theories for this research. Freire (1990) contends that "the oppressed are not *marginals*, are

not men living *outside* society" but rather pawns living "inside the structure which made them *beings for*

*others*" (p. 61). He challenges the notion that people become disadvantaged simply because of some

inherent defect and asserts that success is a socially defined and controlled experience. Freire contends

that mainstream education serves the interests of the oppressors, who care neither to have the world

revealed nor to see it transformed" (p. 60) and that the goal of an oppressor government is to maintain

its position of privilege. Unlike Freire, however, I do not see the world in dualistic terms: oppressed and

oppressor. Nor have I witnessed all oppression being deliberate maliciousness. Often, I have

experienced, even in myself, a sense of being both the oppressor and the oppressed within a system that

has gained momentum, becoming an entity in and of itself.

      Critical Indigenous pedagogy (CIP) (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Tuhiwai Smith, 2021) positions

research in the realm of politics and morality where the many iterations of de/colonization are examined

and Western norms questioned (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). Critical Indigenous qualitative research is

"ethical, performative, healing, transformative, decolonizing and participatory" and committed to

"dialogue, community, self-determination and cultural autonomy (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 2); it begins

with the concerns and worldviews of Indigenous Peoples and is dedicated to the goals of equity and

justice.

**Social Constructivism and Complexity Science**

Social constructivism (Vygotsky, 1978) and complexity science (Prigogine, 1980; Westley et al., 2006) inform my understanding of how people collaborate to change oppressive structures. Moving critical inquiry into the space of systemic change requires focussing on how we are connected to each other and a system that is non-linear, complex, and multi-dimensional (Prigogine, 1980). While it may seem easier to polarize issues, in reality, we are all "beings of the system" (Westley et al., 2006, p. 35), interconnected within a web of relationships (Bateson, 1972/2000; Gergen, 1996; Hornstrup, 2014). As Westley et al. (2006) explain, "We don't stand outside the complex system we are trying to change: when it changes, we do; when we change, it does" (p. 46). While we may disagree with the system, we each play a role in sustaining it until we feel called to change it (Bateson, 1972/2000; Gergen, 1996; Hornstrup, 2014). When we connect "to the world, even in the smallest ways, we engage its complexity, and we begin to shift the pattern around us as we ourselves begin to shift" (Westley et al., 2006, p. 19). The seasoned social entrepreneur approaches the system looking for the attractors that hold the current pattern in place and seeks to introduce a "strange attractor" (Westley et al., 2006, p. 37) to propel the system into a new pattern (Goldstein et al., 2008; Westley et al., 2006). Within the SE literature, a discussion is emerging about how people can collaboratively engage in SE to harness their power to influence the system (Kania & Kramer, 2013; Wren Montgomery et al., 2012). From this interconnected perspective, I promote choice as a person's greatest power (Myss, 2002). While we may not choose what happens to us, we choose how we respond. Within this view, the locus of control is rooted firmly within oneself, a perspective that may be resisted by those who see themselves as inconsequential or victims.

**Métissage**

Because I have spent 27 years immersed in an Anishnawbe paradigm, I am drawn to it; I do not, however, ascribe exclusively to an Anishnawbe perspective, nor any other single perspective. Discovering métissage (Chambers et al., 2008) has helped me to articulate my hybrid identity and blended approach

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to art, research, education, politics, and social entrepreneurship. Meaning mixed, métissage "carries the ability to transform and, through its properties of mixing, opposes transparency and has the power to undo logic" (Chambers et al., 2008, p. 141). This blended, non-categorical, norm-resisting way of approaching the world describes my identity on many levels. I invite others to co-create with me in this blended world where we may gain a more profound sense of our humanity and begin to envision innovative paths forward. I know that the birth of a new innovation often causes something else to die; for some, this may be considered a destructive path forward. Similarly, métissage may be experienced as a force that distorts and destroys. While I intend to create good, there is always a possibility that I could cause harm (Nicoll, 2004). As a result, I approach SE with a sense of sacred responsibility not only for what is created but for what is destroyed. I work collaboratively and only upon invitation, sharing responsibility for decision-making with those impacted by an initiative.

### Collectivism, Self-Efficacy, Identity, and Critical Consciousness

Unlike Western approaches that promote individualistic SE, I see collective SE (Kania & Kramer, 2013; Wren Montgomery et al., 2012) as essential for success, not only for catalyzing social change but for shaping people's self-efficacy (Bandura, 1982), identity, and critical consciousness. Within a collective perspective, no single person must have all the skills to succeed independently or have the breadth of lived experience to navigate confidently within all social, cultural, ethnic, religious, or other contexts. Instead, they contribute their unique skills and perspectives to the group and innovate together, integrating the strengths of others. The diversity of skills within a community of innovation (Coakes & Smith, 2007) increases the variety of social capital (Hanifan, 1916; Putnam, 1993; 1995) that each member can access and harness to further social change (Putnam,1993). While a collective approach to SE does not shelter people from the challenging nature of this vocation, the group support and network of allies provide a supportive framework in which members can develop their identities as social entrepreneurs and belief in their capability to succeed together. Furthermore, a collective with diverse

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perspectives and lived experiences can challenge one another to become more conscious of their

privileges, power, ego, un/conscious biases, colonial conditioning, self-defeating practices, and areas for

personal growth and healing.

**Conscientization Through Experience**

I walk with people through the disorientation (Mezirow, 1990; 1991; Mezirow & Cranton, 2012)

associated with deconstructing and reconstructing their understanding of reality and their place within

it. By deconstructing, I mean the process of conscientization (Freire, 1990), where we come to recognize

there is a dominant paradigm and that this paradigm has shaped who we are, how we see ourselves, and

the world (Freire, 1990; Mezirow & Cranton, 2012). We learn that, within the dominant paradigm, each

person is assigned certain degrees of unearned social and economic privileges or disadvantages

(McIntosh, 1989). Conscientization involves letting go of familiar knowledge schemes (Piaget, 1973) to

embrace a different understanding of ourselves as self-determining individuals who, consciously or

unconsciously, co-create the world. I recognize an element of grief connected with this as people grapple

with larger questions about who they are and how they fit into the world. Prigogine and Stengers' (1984)

theory of becoming provides a model for exploring the learning journey of emerging social

entrepreneurs by exploring people's development, critical learning incidents, sense of

equilibrium-disequilibrium-(re)equilibrium, and transformational journey.

I am deeply rooted in Dewey's (1916; 1938; 1964) view of learning through experience

(continuity and interaction), as well as the work of Brookfield (1983; 1986; 1991; 1995; 2008), Mezirow

(1990; 1991), Knowles (1975; 1984a; 1984b), Kolb (1984), and Fenwick (2001; 2003) whose perspectives

are rooted within a Deweyan perspective. I also look to Vygotsky's (1978; 1980) notion that sociocultural

interactions shape experiences and Doll's (1986; 1993) transformative curriculum that positions these

experiences within a "complex, self-organizing, and non-predictable" (Doll, 1986, p. 12) society.

While this study employs critical autoethnography, I carry with me a framework of learning that views aspects of this study as an experience that I am having as both the subject and the researcher, learner and teacher. Like Dewey (1916; 1938; 1964), I see learning, experience, reflection, and life as tightly interwoven to the extent that they are indistinguishable. My cyclical perception of time results in the experience of the past, present, and imagined future being inextricably linked, one moment building on the other, regardless of whether the mind can consciously recall the content of each contributing moment (Dewey, 1934). Each moment of life leaves its signature upon us like etches of calligraphy within our body, mind, spirit, and emotions. It is this continuity (Dewey, 1938) that acts as the thread between otherwise disjointed and disconnected moments, creating a cohesiveness: thus, "a person is, at once, then, engaged in living, telling, retelling, and reliving stories" (Clandidin & Connelly, 1991, p. 265).

The Anishnawbe teachings of the medicine wheel that I have received over the years have reinforced that in each age and season of life, there is an area of focus depending on its direction in the wheel. Like the seasons, we revisit the different directions at different life stages, often experiencing the pull of that direction yet again. Given that I see the world through a spiritual-mystical lens, my sense of time includes the belief that time did not start ticking at the moment of conception or when we took our first breath but includes the possibility that much more than the happenings of this singular embodied life are etched within us when we come into this lifetime, which then influences how we experience it.

For this inquiry, I reflected on and re-storied lived experiences that occurred organically throughout my life; I recognize that writing through them is an experience in and of itself, both of which are followed by meaningful reflection (Fenwick, 2001; 2003). In addition to being the researcher and subject, I was keenly aware that I designed my own learning experience, which makes andragogy (Knowles, 1975; 1984a; 1984b) a complementary framework for this study, especially when paired with Brookfield's (1983; 1986; 1991; 1995; 2008) understanding of self-directed learning and Mezirow's (1990; 1991) transformational learning and critical reflection. Additionally, I looked to Kolb's (1984)

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experiential learning cycle, which includes concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract

conceptualization, and active experimentation supplemented with Fenwick's (2001) alternate

conceptions in the areas Kolb's model is limited; these include the 1) emotional experience of the

learner; 2) participation of a learner in a situation; 3) cultural aspects of self-development (socio-political

perspective); and 4) reflection on experience through the process of interaction.

**Zone of Human Confusion**

As an experiential educator, I strive to create experiences that scaffold learning within the zone

of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978), allowing participants to build skills and self-efficacy in a

controlled environment. In the case of the learning that occurred in this critical autoethnographic study, I

leaned into the zone of confusion (Doll, 1986) to discover what I didn't know that I didn't know. I

practiced orienting myself within an ever-changing, multi-dimensional, multi-logics, non-linear reality

that rarely scaffolds learning. While the initial questions were based on my rational analysis of my

research goals, follow-up questions flowed from my curiosity at that moment. They created a sense of

disequilibrium to assist me in uncovering perspectives, biases, assumptions, privileges, and other factors

that may not have become apparent without some self-interrogation. One intention of this study was to

create a process that could be replicated in a teaching environment where students in SE or related

professions could be introduced to reflexive practice in a way that supports the development of a critical

lens, the asking of challenging self-reflective questions, and an ability to orient themselves within their

internal chaos that often precedes personal expansion. I suspect some of the reported difficulties

students experience when becoming practising social entrepreneurs (Kickul et al., 2012) may be due to

the lack of preparation in adapting to the complex realities of why various injustices continue to thrive

within systems that often claim to eliminate them.

My focus on understanding the subjective learning experiences of myself as the participant

(Maslow, 1943; 1968; Rogers, 1959) and my experience of becoming (Prigogine, 1983) a social

entrepreneur, along with my critical focus on the social-cultural learning environment (Vygotsky, 1978; 1980) align well within humanism, which is concerned with how people perceive and interpret events (Maslow, 1943; 1968; Rogers, 1946; 1959). Humanism's attention to agency (Rogers, 1946; 1959) and the assumption that people have an innate desire to better themselves and the world, to overcome hardships, and to self-actualize (Maslow, 1943; Rogers, 1946; 1959) made it a natural fit for this inquiry. For myself as a learner and any future learners inspired to try this process, I hope that promoting a learning environment that is genuine (open and allows for self-disclosure), accepting (unconditional positive regard), and empathic (Rogers, 1946; 1959) provides the safety and support participants need to reflect on their own lives and the systemic causes of injustice, especially as it relates to how their lives intersect with colonialism and the attempted genocide of Indigenous Peoples.

## Concluding Remarks

In this introductory chapter, I provided context that demonstrates why my life offered fertile ground for a critical autoethnographic study. My ongoing work in First Nations communities and my family history of having Indigenous sisters embeds me within Indigenous-settler dynamics. The fact that part of my family immigrated to Canada in recent years resulted in my identification with a White settler experience, which positions me to inquire into the challenges of educating White settlers. Being raised Protestant and Catholic gives me insider status on the power dynamics involving religion and colonialism. Sharing my theoretical framework in this chapter, which includes my mystical lens and view of how people co-construct our realities, I prepare readers to expect themes of spirituality, agency, and freedom throughout this study. As I move into Chapter 2, I will further contextualize my study in the literature and experiences that provide the backstory to this research.

# Chapter 2: The Backstory

To reach a state of critical consciousness regarding our cultural perspectives and how they shape our understanding of doing good within colonial Canada, I assert that social entrepreneurs, and other change leaders, must engage in a courageous inventory of life and soul to assess whether our actions help or hinder the cause of decolonization. To set the stage, I offer an examination of five aspects of my life journey that intersect and provide the backstory to this inquiry: (a) my vocation in social entrepreneurship and other forms of change leadership; (b) my involvement with uncolonization and decolonization; (c) my understanding of grief; (d) my understanding of conscious co-creating; and (v) my experience of intuition. I looked for overlaps and gaps between these five aspects of my life as I know this is where my life experience exists and where my inquiry would begin. Given that I could find no cohesive body of literature that incorporated all five of these aspects, I embraced the notion that I was consciously creating it as I wrote my way through this chapter and this research.

As I asked myself questions to understand my journey into social entrepreneurship, I sought to locate myself within the larger trends of social entrepreneurship and decolonization, which are ever-evolving within the Canadian landscape. In particular, I sought to understand the philosophical underpinnings of social entrepreneurship and how these impact my vocation's approach to doing good. I was also interested in understanding how social entrepreneurship education currently takes place and the areas of research that inform our understanding of who social entrepreneurs are.

Examining literature on colonization and decolonization, I endeavoured to understand how each manifests historically and in the present. I wanted to contextualize how doing good could be understood from a decolonization perspective, specifically focusing on the role of settlers.

To this inquiry, I brought extensive experience with grief and mourning, both in a personal context and as it relates to uncolonizing myself and supporting the decolonization of Indigenous Peoples and the Land. The inquiry led me to a deeper examination of grief's role when it overlaps with the intent

to do good and the realities of uncolonizing/ decolonizing.

As I glanced back, I came to appreciate the times I engaged in interactions that felt distinctly different from ways of working together: roles, societal norms, and established hierarchies seemed less prominent. While the term co-creating is emerging in a variety of circles, I recognize the need to be clear about what I mean when I use this term and why I present it as an alternative to attempting to change the system through social entrepreneurship and other forms of agitating, organizing, or advocating for social change. To differentiate my use of the term from generic forms of co-creation, I refer to it as conscious co-creation.

I conclude by exploring my understanding and context for intuition, which is critical to my way of knowing and being in life.

## A Context for Social Entrepreneurship

In the last decade, social entrepreneurship (SE) has found its way into not-for-profit, academic, social service, and business circles (Witkamp et al., 2011). SE was first used in the literature by Bowen in 1953, and today, there is still no consensus about what it means or how to teach it as it may be practised differently within and across disciplines (Fayolle, 2008; Kickul et al., 2012; Pache & Chowdhury, 2012; Plaskoff, 2012; Sastre-Castillo et al., 2015). Broadly defined for this inquiry, SE is a practice that "offers innovative approaches to tackling and solving complex social needs" (Rhodes & Donnelly-Cox, 2008, p. 36). Within Canada, SE is commonly thought to use entrepreneurial activities (Austin et al., 2006; Cukier et al., 2011; Martin & Osberg, 2007; Zahra et al., 2009) to address social and environmental concerns. It is important to note that there are regions within Canada (e.g., Atlantic and Western) and across the globe that place less emphasis on enterprise development and more focus on connection to place, innovations of social service delivery, and overcoming colonial-induced poverty (McMurtry & Brouard, 2015). The structure of a social enterprise is varied and includes cooperatives, community

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development/interest organizations, nonprofit organizations, Indigenous businesses, and businesses with a social mission (McMurtry & Brouard, 2015).

**Social Entrepreneurship Streams of Thought**

Compensatory social entrepreneurship (CSE) describes pragmatic approaches that ease social tensions caused by market failures while allowing the prevailing system and ideology to stay in place (Newey, 2018). Social entrepreneurs are defined by their drive to generate revenue while obtaining tangible social results (Boschee, 2006); they develop and grow companies to create social value by generating opportunities, innovating, and assuming risk (Mort et al., 2003; Sastre-Castillo et al., 2015).

Transformative social entrepreneurship (TSE) seeks to transform the global capitalist system (Newey, 2018). More ideological, it emphasizes the social entrepreneur's mission to create large-scale societal transformation (Chell, 2007; Light, 2006) with a focused discourse on power and equity.

There is a small subset of literature that positions Indigenous entrepreneurship at the convergence of social and economic entrepreneurship, rooted within historical and cultural contexts (Loney, 2016; Tapsell & Woods, 2010) and linked to self-determination and challenging the capitalistic colonial system (Newey, 2018; Steyaert & Hjorth, 2008), however, TSE does not generally require non-Indigenous practitioners to be explicitly decolonizing in their approaches.

TSE is particularly well-suited for Indigenous communities because of its collective, resurgence-centred (Simpson, 2011) perspective that positions Indigenous entrepreneurship at the convergence of social and economic entrepreneurship, rooted within a historical and cultural context (Tapsell & Woods, 2010) and linked to self-determination and challenging the capitalistic colonial system (Newey, 2018; Steyaert & Hjorth, 2008). The key differentiating factor between Indigenous social enterprise and other forms of social enterprise is the integral role of culture within Indigenous social enterprises (Sengupta et al., 2015). Furthermore, Indigenous social enterprises must be committed to social change rather than maintaining current power relations (Steyaert & Hjorth, 2008). This approach

honours collective forms of ownership that have been a part of Indigenous communities since time

immemorial and acknowledges that social, economic, environmental, and cultural goals are integral to

each other (Sengupta et al., 2015). Led by Indigenous Peoples, the approach focuses on using existing

assets within their communities and traditional knowledge rather than a neo-colonial deficit-based

approach (Sengupta et al., 2015).

In the context of this research, these distinctions are significant as they demonstrate three

schools of thought concerning the goal of social entrepreneurship. The goal of compensatory SE is to

make up for a failure of the system. Transformative SE aims to transform systems to ensure a more

equitable distribution of colonial power and resources among all people who call Canada home.

Indigenous SE aims to decolonize Indigenous lives and the Land. It recognizes that the rights of

Indigenous Peoples and nations are distinctly different from those of settler peoples. It is not adversarial

to the rights of marginalized settlers; however, it is clear that its goal is to co-create a way of being that is

something other than colonial (Lowman & Barker, 2015), not just transform the colonial system to

ensure everyone gets a fair slice of the colonial pie (Tuck & Yang, 2012).

**Paradigm Building**

Kuhn (1962) observed that resources are largely withheld while a practice is in a

pre-paradigmatic state. Currently, there is a contest within the field for "control of the legitimating

discourses that will determine the final shape of the social entrepreneurial paradigm" (Nicholls, 2010, p.

611). While many practise SE, only a few dominant, heavily-resourced actors are engaged in paradigm

building. Very little of this is happening with a critical lens conscious of power, privilege, and the impacts

of colonialism (Nicholls, 2010). Their discourses and models have generally evolved from Western values

and commercial logic and favour hero narratives (Nicholls, 2010). Those with fewer resources (e.g.,

grassroots, collective, systems-based change) and those critical of the colonial establishment are

underrepresented in the discourse (Nicholls, 2010). This biased narrative influences government policy,

directs funding, and shapes postsecondary curricula. Ironically, this could legitimize a Western brand of SE that further compounds the marginalization of Indigenous, People of Color, LGBTQ2S+, and others already lacking privilege within the current colonial system.

**Traits and Characteristics of Social Entrepreneurs**

Social entrepreneurs are frequently portrayed as devoted, almost heroic, figures who persevere against all odds bringing about change for the benefit of society (Bornstein, 2004; Drayton, 2002; Light, 2009). While there is pushback to these portrayals within the institutional entrepreneurship literature calling for "no heroes, no far-sighted visionaries, and no feckless fools" (Aldrich, 2011, p. 2; see also Battilana et al., 2009; Hardy & Maguire, 2008), the SE literature remains thick with hero imagery. Efforts to characterize the social entrepreneur have been largely based on conceptual arguments or a limited number of cases depicting successful social entrepreneurs (Borstein, 2004; Claudet, 2010; Mair & Marti, 2009; Marshall, 2011; Weerawardena & Mort, 2006). Sastre-Castillo et al. (2015) compiled a list of key characteristics identified by various researchers (See Table 1). They built on this literature using an empirical study exploring characteristics that determine the social nature of the entrepreneurial attitude.

Sastre-Castillo et al. (2015) found that social entrepreneurial orientation has a strong negative correlation to self-enhancement and is positively related to the values of self-transcendence and conservation (accepting others' ideas). Bacq, Hartog, and Hoogendoorn (2016) suggest that a frail entrepreneurial profile, as shown by a lack of confidence in an entrepreneur's ability to start and manage a business, may generate ethical issues for social entrepreneurs who often work with vulnerable populations. These studies attempt to isolate the qualities that make a social entrepreneur successful in creating an enterprise, a very limited and compensatory view of social entrepreneurship. While qualities are interesting, they do not explain how a social entrepreneur becomes oriented as they do, nor do they question the assumed goodness of that orientation.

**Table 1**

*Social Entrepreneur Characteristics according to the Specialized Literature* (Sastre-Castillo et al., 2015)

| Study | Highlighted Characteristics |
|---|---|
| Thomson, Alvy, and Lees (2000) | • High level of commitment<br>• Strength in the face of adversity<br>• Capacity to assume risks<br>• Capacity to generate trust and credibility in third parties |
| Sullivan, Weerawardena, and Carnegie (2003) | • Creativity<br>• Courage and strength in the face of difficulties<br>• High degree of commitment<br>• Capacity to assume risks |
| Martin and Osberg (2007) | • Sensitivity to exclusion, marginalization, or suffering of those who lack financial means or political influence |
| Koe and Shamuganathan (2010) | • Kindness<br>• Open to ideas<br>• Self-demanding at work |
| Jiao (2011) | • Charisma<br>• Unshakeable faith in the project |

**Social Entrepreneurship Education**

While there is growing interest in social entrepreneurship (SE) as a vehicle for societal change, and progressive educational models are emerging (Elmes et al., 2012; Parris & McInnis-Bowers, 2017; Zhu et al., 2016), there is not yet a consensus on how to define it or the best way to teach it to ensure that students go on to become practising social entrepreneurs (Fayolle, 2008; Kickul et al., 2012; Pache & Chowdhury, 2012; Plaskoff, 2012).

First taught by Dees at Harvard in 1994 (Parris & McInnis-Bowers, 2017), SE education is generally taught within a classroom as a stand-alone course related to commercial entrepreneurship; SE programs are delivered from a Western paradigm, framed within commercial logic, and focused on an individual entrepreneur. Little attention is given to cultural and historical context (Sengupta et al., 2015),

the importance of place (Elmes et al., 2012), collective entrepreneurship (Hindle & Lansdowne, 2005; Nettra et al., 2019), or critical praxis (Steyaert & Dey, 2010). Even less attention is given to the significance of Indigenous worldviews and the ongoing impacts of colonialism (Tapsell & Woods, 2010), a glaring oversight given the justice focus that drives SE. Despite its reported importance, few teach how to build social capital (Scheiber, 2012) in an ethical way, conscious of power and privilege. Even the term social capital implies a view of people as commodities. Little attention is given to how strategic co-creating partnerships are used to make a collective impact, and when considered, collective impact is rarely discussed in the context of citizen-led SE (Wren Montgomery et al., 2012).

Conventional approaches fail to immerse students within the various logics (commercial, public, social welfare) they need to excel in this vocation and often do not include a cultural-historical logic that is explicit about how colonialism, capitalism, and imperialism work together to create so many of the social, economic, political, and environmental challenges that SE seeks to address (Pache & Chowdhury, 2012).

**Program Design**

Despite the lack of consensus on the best way to teach social entrepreneurship (Fayolle, 2008; Kuratko, 2005), recommendations are developing in the literature (See Table 2). Most studies are American or British (Borgaza & Defourny, 2001; Dees, 1998; Paton, 2003) and are typically postsecondary courses offered within business schools. To date, there are no studies that explore educational design as it relates to SE programs within a Canadian context; Table 2 provides a summary of recommendations that exist within the broader literature.

**Table 2**

*Summary of Recommendations for Social Entrepreneurship Education*

| Article | Recommendations |
|---------|-----------------|
| Tracey and Phillips (2007) | • Factor in the complex nature of identity development due to its hybrid nature.<br>• Weave social entrepreneurship into traditional courses.<br>• Develop social entrepreneurship speakers series.<br>• Have students develop teaching cases based on real social enterprises.<br>• Introduce social enterprise business plan assignment.<br>• Teach experientially by introducing social enterprise consulting projects.<br>• Provide opportunities for social enterprise internships (p. 269). |
| Kickul et al. (2012) | • Blend both social and economic value creation.<br>• Use a situated learning approach.<br>• Multidisciplinary.<br>• Measure student self-efficacy as an indication of the program's effectiveness. |
| Plaskoff (2012) | • Develop both the heart (increase passion) and the mind (expand thinking).<br>• Teach students to think like entrepreneurs (see interconnections, take smart risks, scale).<br>• Teach non-traditional problem-solving.<br>• Teach how to converge business practices with social impact.<br>• Teach students how to do quality control on both finances and social impact.<br>• Create opportunities to learn from experience, exposure, and observation.<br>• Teach students to identify the drivers within a successful initiative. |
| Pache and Chowdhury (2012) | • Educate "about" and "for" social entrepreneurship by combining formal and experiential learning.<br>• Socialize students so they acquire skills to bridge social welfare, commercial and public-sector logics and combine these multiple models when taking action.<br>• Tailor programs to the background of participants so in the end, they are balanced in all three logics.<br>• Provide opportunities for students to initiate projects and reflect on results.<br>• Address identify challenges that accompany working across logics.<br>• Ensure instructors are socialized in the three logics mentioned above. |
| Smith and Woodworth (2012) | • Build social identity through active engagement; student-initiated and implemented projects.<br>• Build self-efficacy through mastery experiences–past success and observable social impact from a project are key. |
| Hockerts (2018) | • Use group work and experiential learning–specifically studio teaching, including interviews, interactions with beneficiaries and investors, and visits with social enterprises and innovation camps.<br>• Ensure small class sizes, more room, and organizational resources. |

Recommendations for SE education show the following emerging trends: 1) a movement

towards multidisciplinary teaching to reflect the various logics involved in complex social change (social

welfare, commercial, public); 2) an emphasis on experiential learning opportunities, including studio

teaching (Lackney, 1999); 3) attention to identity and self-efficacy development in addition to skill

development; and 4) explicit attention to how to build social capital and use it to catalyze complex

change (Scheiber, 2012). While systems thinking exists within the frameworks of some programs,

building social capital is not explicitly referred to in any of the educational programs reviewed to date.

The lack of reference to building connections between people suggests that SE education typically

focuses on individuals instead of the connections between people. Two additional recommendations are

not reflected in this body of literature but enhance this discussion. First, there is a need to challenge the

Western paradigm, which will allow projects to find context within an informed sense of Indigenous

history and culture, something that social entrepreneurship education is lacking (Tapsell & Woods,

2010), and within a more general critical analysis of systemic racism and privilege. Second, Pache and

Chowdhury (2012) call for instructors and students to engage in a three-logic system (social welfare,

commercial, public). This will need to expand to include cultural-historical logic to understand better the

colonial influences that have created poverty and injustice for Indigenous (and other) peoples and

systemic privilege for people with white skin (Berkes & Adhikari, 2006; Loppie Reading & Wein, 2009).

Gupta, Chauhan, Paul, and Jaiswal (2020) undertook a meta-analysis of 188 peer-reviewed social

entrepreneurship (SE) studies conducted over the past decade, identified six main areas of focus: SE

phenomenon, entrepreneur orientation, innovation and SE, human resources in SE, business strategy

and value creation, and challenges faced by SE. No studies were reported related to understanding how

social entrepreneurs learn, presumably because studies on this topic do not exist or did not meet the

selection criteria for this study. The study acknowledged that it is unclear how social entrepreneurs

accomplish the knowledge and skills needed to take a leadership role. Yet, some researchers suspect

formal education may play a role (Krstic et al., 2017). To date, little attention has been given to the inner

learning journey of social entrepreneurs and the philosophical perspectives that underlie this discipline.

Additionally, none reported a focus on the learning of critical consciousness or anything to do with

decolonization. While the studies cited in this meta-analysis are interesting, they leave me questioning

the assumption inherent in these studies: that individual traits, seemingly autonomous and void of

context, are a determining factor in the success or failure of an initiative. Additionally, this meta-analysis

highlights the reality that the dominant paradigm for SE is firmly rooted within the Western,

commercialized framework of individual entrepreneurship (Berkes & Adhikari, 2006), and research has

predominantly reinforced this perspective.

**Indigenous Social Entrepreneurship**

Despite considerable research on Indigenous populations, the relationship between Indigenous

communities and social entrepreneurship within the broader social economy needs more research

(McLean, 2009; Wuttunee, 2009). The small and internationally focused body of literature that exists

focuses primarily on differentiating Indigenous social entrepreneurship (ISE) from Indigenous

entrepreneurship and other forms of SE (Dana, 2007; Hindle & Moroz, 2010; McMurtry & Brouard, 2015;

Sengupta et al., 2015; Vakkayil, 2017); quantifying characteristics, prevalence, challenges, and models

(Banerjee & Tedmanson, 2010; Bouchard et al., 2015; Vakkayil, 2017; Wuttunee, 2010); exploring the

phenomenon through theoretical lenses (Peredo et al., 2004); and examining the significance of context

when determining of governance models for Indigenous social enterprises (Overall et al., 2010).

**Indigenous Social Enterprise in Canada**

In recent years, research has emerged that provides an overview of Indigenous social enterprise

within Canada, emphasizing the role that geographical location and experiences with colonization have

on how Indigenous social enterprise is approached in each province (Brouard et al., 2015; Lionais, 2015;

McMurtry & Brouard, 2015; Sengupta et al., 2015). This work builds upon a vast body of literature about

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Indigenous entrepreneurship in Canada (Anderson, 1999; 2002; Anderson et al., 2006; Anderson et al., 2004). Sengupta, Vieta, and McMurtry (2015) compiled the results of various provincial studies that surveyed social enterprises serving Indigenous communities and compared these results to the percentage of Indigenous people in each province. The results indicate "a pattern of engagement between Indigenous communities and social enterprise in Canada that is proportionally much greater than the Indigenous population" (Sengupta et al., 2015, p. 107), with Alberta having the most significant percentage of social enterprises serving Indigenous communities (37%), followed by British Columbia (33%), Manitoba (29%), New Brunswick (28%), Ontario (22%), and Nova Scotia (16%) (p. 107). They speculate this relationship may exist because social enterprises generally serve marginalized populations, and Indigenous Peoples face multiple layers of marginalization in Canada (Sengupta et al., 2015). Another Canadian study used data collected from the Social Economy Research Network of Northern Canada to examine social and economic development levels in the Yukon, Northwest Territories, and Nunavut (McLean, 2009).

More broadly, a conversation is happening around whether Indigenous Peoples and Nations should join the global economy. Some feel it is necessary to combat poverty and dependency and move toward Indigenous empowerment and self-government (e.g., Henlin, 2006; Hilton, 2019; Kelly & Woods, 2021). Others caution that the 'join em and win' philosophy may result in more assimilation (Friesen, 2007). Hilton (2019) asserts that "Indigenomics is the collective economic response to the lasting legacy of the systematic exclusion of Indigenous Peoples in Canada's development. It is this economic displacement that has shaped the polarization of the Indigenous relationship across time." (Para 1). Consequently, economic inclusion is considered the solution, or at least a big part of it. Kelly and Woods (2021) link the integration of Indigenous knowledge to the feeling of freedom: "Indigenous economic knowledge centred on relationship, reciprocity, and interconnectedness fosters Indigenous economic freedom." (p. 1). Widdowson and Howard (2002 ) argue that there is no clear understanding of what

traditional knowledge is and, out of fear of being labelled racist, it is not being properly interrogated to

determine if its inclusion in modern ways of doing and being is effective. Questioning the Aboriginal

Industry supporting land claims and self-governance, they assert that Indigenous populations are better

served by colonial governments providing up-to-standard services rather than substandard services

under the guise of self-governance (Widdowson & Howard, 2002). The issue of Indigenous participation

in the global economy segways to examining colonization, decolonization, and uncolonization.

## A Context of Colonization, Decolonization, and Uncolonization

In this inquiry, I distinguish the inner work engaged in by Settlers from the inner work engaged in

by Indigenous Peoples, and the outer work we all engage in to reverse the impacts of colonialism. An

exploration of *decolonization* and *uncolonization* will add clarity to this differentiation.

### Decolonization

Decolonization has become a buzzword for collective liberation (Opara, 2021; Rodriguez, 2020).

One does not have to look far to find websites, conferences, articles, and books calling for the

decolonizing of anything and everything, including healthcare (e.g., Opara, 2021), education (e.g.,

Battiste, 2013), social work (e.g., Absolon, 2019), love (e.g., Liu, 2014), sex (e.g., Tallbear, 2022), gender

(e.g., Diallo, 2020), religion (e.g., Fontaine, 2016), social enterprise (e.g., Santos & Banerjee, 2019), and

business (e.g. Twumasi et al., 2020). Decolonization has become a synonym for pushing back on

oppressive ideologies and has become mistakenly conflated with any social justice endeavour involving

diversity, inclusion, and equity. Tuck and Yang (2012) elaborate,

> Decolonization, which we assert is a distinct project from other civil and human rights-based
>
> social justice projects, is far too often subsumed into the directives of these projects, with no
>
> regard for how decolonization wants something different than those forms of justice. (p. 2)

Decolonization is the rematriation of tradition and culture and the repatriation of land and sovereignty

to Indigenous Peoples (Rosa, 2020; Tuck & Yang, 2012). It is distinctly different from any other social

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justice initiative where settlers of one kind or another fight for what they feel is their fair share of the colonial pie. Decolonizing is not about justice for different types of settlers. It focuses solely on reversing the impacts of countries taking over Indigenous lands, establishing their governments, and attempting to eradicate Indigenous Peoples (Manuel, 2017; Tuck & Yang, 2012).

**Uncolonization**

Indigenous activist Rosa (2020) suggests the term *uncolonize* to describe the inner work settlers can do to voluntarily distance and detach from colonial beliefs, worldviews, norms, and structures. The inner work of uncolonizing settlers makes space for decolonizing efforts led by Indigenous Peoples, which is "a massive revolution to remove all people not native to stolen land, back to their land of origin, and returning government control, community control, resources, processes, and sovereignty to Indigenous peoples'' (Rosa, 2020, para. 21), an initiative most settlers would have a difficult time with as it would require them to "give up their land, privilege, and identity, in favour of uprooting themself and their families back to their land of origin" (Rosa, 2020, para. 20). As uncomfortable as this reality may feel to a settler, this is what decolonization means in its truest sense of the word.

Rosa (2020) gives several examples of how settlers can correct our use of the word decolonization so the intent better matches what we are trying to accomplish. She asserts that a settler cannot decolonize their mind, time, yoga, spirit, spaces, futures, themselves, social justice, creativity, business, healing, change, or leadership. The word *liberate* could be used instead. Similarly, settlers can use the word *uncolonize*, instead of *decolonize*, to talk about a settler's experience of learning about colonialism, their unearned privilege, White supremacy culture characteristics (Okun, 2021), and their grief as they process what this means to them personally and collectively.

For clarity, and following Rosa's (2020) promptings, I will be using *uncolonizing* throughout to refer to the internal work of settlers and *decolonizing* to refer to the inner work of Indigenous Peoples and the act of returning stolen land and living into Indigenous sovereignty.

**Uncolonizing/Decolonizing the Person**

  The inner work of separating from colonial ideals, conditioning, and impositions requires a fundamental disruption of a person's belief system (Absolon, 2019; Adams, 1989; Aquash, 2013; Battiste, 2013). It is similar to detoxing the body except that in this case, it is clearing out and detoxifying the colonizing knowledge and practices that have been ingested and adopted, perhaps without realizing it (Absolon, 2019). It must be wholistic and include our spirits, hearts, minds, and bodies (Absolon, 2016). An un/decolonizing mind recognizes that colonizing policies continue to unfold daily, translating into practices of assimilation and cultural genocide (Absolon, 2019; Adams, 1989; Alfred, 2009; Battiste, 2013; Fanon, 1963; Wesley-Esquimaux & Smolewski, 2004), and seeks to understand the mechanics of how we perpetuate this within people and society. Absolon (2019) draws a connection between the personal and political: "The personal is political and the political impacts our personal lives spiritually, socially, politically, and economically. Decolonizing from internalized colonialism is not easy, tidy, or comfortable" (p. 17).

  With or without conscious awareness, this interrelated relationship between the personal and the political continues to animate colonial agendas, with the system shaping people as the people shape the system. To un/decolonize is an active process of simultaneously dismantling the internal domestication received as a being of the colonial system and dismantling the many expressions of colonial dominance that manifest as a result of colonialism. Figure 1 outlines examples of such change. This list, while not exhaustive, gives a sense of how all-encompassing the notion of uncolonization and decolonization is. While there is a body of literature growing about the importance of settlers learning to challenge these things within themselves (Absolon, 2019; Lowman & Barker, 2015; Mackey, 2016; Mawhinney, 1998; Tuck & Yang, 2012), the majority of the focus has been on decolonization as it related to Indigenous Peoples and land, and on settler-Indigenous relations, thus my focus on the White settler experience within this research.

**Figure 1**

*Examples of Decolonial Change*

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"... a return to a relational accountability to the land and the water" (Absolon, 2019, p. 24).

Critically analyzing the knowledge, representation, theory, content, and methods used in education (Absolon, 2019; Battiste, 2013; Cote-Meek, 2014).

Identifying colonial knowledge and detoxifying it to learn Indigenous ways and knowledge (Absolon, 2019; Graveline, 1998).

Restoration of respect for Mother Earth, water, and all sources of human and non-human life (Absolon, 2019).

Rejecting the carrier role of Eurocentric dominance through whatever roles one plays in their family, community, workplace, and society (Absolon, 2019; Alfred, 2009; Aquash, 2013).

Restore wholistic and humane ways of teaching and learning about the truth of genocide and colonization (Absolon, 2019).

Restoration of Indigenous self-government (Tuck & Yang, 2012).

Return of stolen land to Indigenous nations (Tuck & Yang, 2012).

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**Understanding Myself as Settler**

***What is a settler?***

The past decade has seen an increase in attention given to various aspects of settler colonialism, including settler identity (e.g., Lowman & Barker, 2015), colonial mindsets (e.g., Mackey, 2016; Lucas, 2013; Regan, 2010), the disconnect between stated intentions and decolonial action (e.g., Lowman & Barker, 2015; Manuel & Derrickson, 2017; Regan, 2010), guidebooks for settler decolonization (e.g., Rosa, 2020; Strutt, 2021), settler fragility (e.g., Gilio-Whitaker, 2018c), settler privileges (e.g., Gilio-Whitaker, 2018b), settler grief (e.g., Gilio-Whitaker, 2018a), White harm reduction models (e.g., Jacobs, 2009), and settler ways of coping with feeling guilty (e.g., Gilio-Whitaker, 2018b; 2018c; Lowman & Barker, 2015; Mackey, 2016; Tuck & Yang, 2012). While becoming more frequent, there are still

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relatively few storied accounts of settlers' experiences grappling with the truths about colonialism and genocide in Canada. Some I have encountered include a Canadian settler politician writing about his experience within the Oka Crisis (Ciaccia, 2000), a woman telling her family's immigration story/ becoming colonizers (Freeman, 2002), and a couple's account of their time operating St. Michael's Residential School (Dyson & Rubenstein, 2021). The accounts that exist have varying degrees of critical analysis, with some presenting more of a storied account of what took place in the context of that time in history and less of a reflexive analysis of one's own internal experience as a settler moving toward responsibility and accountability on a personal and collective level.

Of particular relevance to this study is the recent work of Strutt (2021) to conceptualize settler responsibilities in decolonization, Tuck and Yang's (2012) conceptualization of *settler moves to innocence,* Gilio-Whitaker's articulation of settler privileges (2018b), settler fragility (2018c), and settler grief (2018a), and Koleszar-Green's (2018) conceptualization of guest.

### *Decolonization (for Settlers) Mandala*

Strutt (2021), a settler teacher who worked within First Nations, presents a pedagogical framework for enacting settler responsibilities in decolonization in the form of a mandala to capture the dynamic process which occurs across multiple scales simultaneously. Rooted in Land and place identity, her decolonizing (for settlers) mandala outlines four areas of focus: spiritual, systemic, personal, and collective. Within these four directions of focus, there are four areas of action: building and being in relationship, taking action grounded in love and relationality, living unsettled, and repositioning the self to shift perspective. These are rooted in Land and place identity.

Strutt's (2021) comprehensive guide outlines critical questions and considerations for settlers who are serious about becoming accomplices and allies with Indigenous Peoples on the decolonizing journey. Like other writing I have encountered about settler uncolonization (e.g., Lowman & Barker, 2015; MacKey, 2016), there is a compelling description of the change in mindset and action required but

barely any description of the journey itself or the emotional experience; it does, however, provide a

comprehensive framework that includes spirituality and points to the need to consider underlying issues

of settler loss, which feels relevant to me, yet is rarely spoken about within the context of settler

un/decolonization.

### *Settler Moves to Innocence*

Building on the work of Mawhinney (1998), Tuck and Yang (2012) define *settler moves to*

*innocence* as "those strategies or positionings that attempt to relieve the settler of feelings of guilt or

responsibility without giving up land or power or privilege, without having to change much at all" (p. 10).

The six settler moves to innocence described by Tuck and Yang (2012) in Figure 2 act as a searchlight for

my inquiry, challenging me to avoid common settler mindtraps and dig more deeply into perspectives

that Indigenous Peoples may have about my choices, experiences, perceptions, and goals. They are a

solid call to action for settler social entrepreneurs who want to create systemic change. They are carried

forward into the deconstruction portion of this research, including recommendations for educators and

SE practitioners.

**Figure 2**

*Six Settler Moves to Innocence, Tuck and Yang (2012)*

---

Settler Nativism: claims of having distant Indigenous ancestors, therefore believing they are not colonizers.

Fantasizing Adoption: "desire to *become without becoming* [Indian]" (p. 14). Can include adoption of practices, knowledge, customs, fantasies of inheriting land, etc.

Colonial Equivocation: asserting that we have all been colonized and describing all struggles against imperialism as decolonizing.

Conscientization: the belief that decolonization will occur if settlers free their mind and become aware of colonization and settler privileges.

At risk-ing / Asterisk-ing Indigenous Peoples: describing Indigenous Peoples as "on the verge of extinction, culturally and economically bereft, engaged or soon-to-be engaged in self-destructive behaviors which can interrupt their school careers and seamless absorption into the economy" (p. 22).

Re-occupation and urban homesteading: advocacy for marginalized settler subgroups to receive a fairer slice of the colonial pie even though settlers are not entitled to any Indigenous lands.

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**Settler Fragility, Privileges, and Grief**

Gilio-Whitaker (2018a; 2018b; 2018c) explores the settler experience by weaving together concepts related to settler fragility, privileges, and grief. Building on McIntosh's (1989) now classic essay, *White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack*, and Diangelos's (2018) *White Fragility* (p. 2), Gilio-Whitaker presents a similar knapsack using colonialism as the starting point for recognizing how non-Indigenous settlers benefit from unearned settler privilege, thus differentiating racism and colonialism and suggesting that Indigenous rights are not simply another social justice cause. Furthering the work of DiAngelo (2018), Gilio-Whitaker (2018c) asserts, "Like white fragility, settler fragility is the inability to talk about unearned privilege—in this case, the privilege of living on lands that were taken in the name of democracy through profound violence and injustice" (para. 4). This subtle yet powerful nuance brings the focus back to the Land, which is vital given that the occupation of Indigenous lands is at the heart of colonization, rather

than solely focusing on how White people interact with Indigenous Peoples. Figure 3 outlines ten

common responses settlers may give when challenged. Like *settler moves to innocence*, I embed settler

fragility in my self-inquiry and recommendations for educators, healers, and others who work with

settlers.

**Figure 3**

*Ten Common Settler Responses,* (Gilio-Whitaker, 2018c)

| Settler Responses |
| --- |
| "I love Indians and Indian culture. I believe I have Native ancestry somewhere in my family tree" (I have been oppressed, too, even though I'm White). |
| "Even though the Indians didn't deserve what we did to them, the damage is done and there is nothing we can do to right the wrongs that have been done to them" |
| "We are all one people now" (The settler state and all its attendant privileges must prevail). |
| "I am a person of color and am subject to racism, so I don't have settler privilege" (I have no reason to be accountable to settler colonialism since I am oppressed, too). |
| "Since I am poor and don't own any land, I don't have settler privilege." |
| "Neither I nor my ancestors killed anyone to be here" (my people are not to blame). |
| "We can't apply the standards of today to the behavior of our (European) ancestors" (evasion of accountability). |
| "Most Native American people have White ancestry" (that means they are complicit in settler colonialism, too; if everyone is to blame, then no one is to blame). |
| "Indians were all killing each other anyway when Europeans got here" (they were uncivilized savages anyway). |
| "I'm a 'native' American because I was born here" (American Indian history is irrelevant, and the settler state prevails). |

This challenge to settlers' sense of entitlement to place can result in settler grief (Gilio-Whitaker,

2018a) as people grapple with a profound sense of loss, not knowing where they belong and potentially

not knowing where they came from if that was effectively erased during the leaving of their ancestral

homeland. While settler grief should not become the primary focus of decolonizing work, Gilio-Whitaker

(2018a) poses some critical questions that are particularly relevant for this study which is White

settler-focused and looking closely at a life journey which includes moving towards accountability in

regards to decolonization:

> If we recognize colonialism as a structure from which everyone needs healing, how might it
>
> change the conversations between indigenous and settler? Do the psychological wounds of
>
> settlers contribute to the system of abuse they have created? Recognizing that we all have to live
>
> together, is it possible to create a space of mutual compassion that might inform a more just
>
> future for indigenous peoples and more harmonious relationships between settler and
>
> indigenous? (Gilio-Whitaker, 2018a, para. 11)

Like the work of Strutt (2021), these questions may open avenues for a deeper inquiry into the

underlying causes of the egregious behaviours of colonizers. As with any offence towards another being,

it takes a level of fundamental disconnect and dis-ease to inflict that degree of harm without

demonstrating remorse. As McCaslin and Breton (2008) so pointedly state, "What is destructive and

catastrophic to the well-being of one cannot be good for the other. To dehumanize others can only

dehumanize the dehumanizers..." (p. 513). Opening the door of inquiry to consider the wound of the

settler may bring a layer of understanding that, if addressed differently, may help settlers move more

quickly toward accountability in decolonization.

### Becoming A Guest

Koleszar-Green's (2018) definition of *guest* encapsulates the teachings I have received from

various sources over the past twenty-five years regarding the stance that social entrepreneurs and other

concerned settlers should be taking:

> A Guest is an individual that is in relationship to the Land in a way that supports stewardship and
>
> not ownership. A Guest is an individual who is in relationship with Onkwehonwe communities
>
> and who respects reciprocal engagement. The rights that go along with being a Guest are to be

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on the territory, and the responsibilities of being a Guest are to support Onkwehonwe nations by

centring and supporting the traditional (precontact) and contemporary (post contact) treaties.

(p. 175)

Through interviews with several Indigenous Elders, Koleszar-Green (2018) expands on the

responsibilities of such guests:

- Learn the history and current story of the land. Politicize that understanding.

- Know the colonial stories and support the leadership of Indigenous Peoples' resistance

  to continuing colonial projects.

- Offer more than words to acknowledge the land. Offer actions that support the

  sovereign nations whose territories you are guests on.

- Learn about rematriation of the land, including that stewardship and possession are

  foundational to environmental revitalization.

- "Listen to and learn protocols which do not appropriate but unsettle the privilege of

  Ignorance" (Koleszar-Green, 2018, p. 174).

- Recognize and use their privilege in a way that does not centre

  themselves but the community.

- Actively engage Indigenous Peoples with "a reciprocal process of Peace, Friendships and

  Mutual Respect" (p. 175).

When I use the term guest, I will refer to Koleszar-Green's (2018) conceptualization of

what our behaviour and mindset should be like as non-Indigenous social entrepreneurs.  I am

not implying that all non-Indigenous peoples are on this Land by invitation of Indigenous Peoples

or that the tone of Indigenous-settler relations is friendly.

**Colonialism in Canada**

The cultural-historical context of colonialism in Canada sets the stage for my life as a White

settler social entrepreneur who works alongside Indigenous communities and has Indigenous sisters.

Manuel (2017) explains, "colonialism has three components: dispossession, dependence, and

oppression" (p. 19). Explicitly examining these components grounds my assertion that colonialism is not

a historical event but an ongoing structure and that the colonial system has been intentionally designed

to oppress Indigenous Peoples and privilege White settlers.

*Land Dispossession*

Dispossessing Indigenous Peoples from their lands has always been the primary goal of

colonization (Absolon, 2019; Alfred, 2017; Longboat, 2013; Lowman & Barker, 2015; Mackey, 2016;

Manuel, 2017; Wilson Danard, 2013) as colonizers seek to expand personal and national empires, gaining

wealth from its rich resources. The possession of lands is an essential reference point for determining

when decolonization has occurred. Canadians commonly assume that the country of Canada acquired

title to the landmass that is now called Canada when formed in 1867 under the British North America

Act (Alfred, 2017; Venne, 2017). The fact that Canada is still in court with First Nations to sort out

Aboriginal title shows this is not the case, even within the framework of colonial laws (Newman, 2017;

Venne, 2017). In the absence of land title, colonial governments have, according to the Assembly of

Manitoba Chiefs, created "legal fictions" (Nepinak, 2016). The Doctrine of Discovery, one such legal

fiction, was a process agreed upon by European countries to give explorers moral and legal justification

to acquire property rights in Indigenous lands on behalf of their monarchs and gain governmental,

political, and commercial rights without the Indigenous inhabitants' knowledge or consent (Miller, 2011).

It was "created and justified by religious, racial, and ethnocentric ideas of European and Christian

superiority over other peoples and religions" (Miller, 2011, p. 849). England and France colonized the

land we now call Canada and developed another legal fiction called *terra nullius*, meaning "vacant

lands," which allowed early colonizers to feel morally and legally absolved while claiming to discover a new land already fully occupied. Even within British law, colonizers could not ignore the complex Indigenous societies already occupying the land and, in acknowledgement of this, created the *Royal Proclamation of 1763* that laid out how colonial settlers had to interact with Indigenous Nations. There were three key points: an agreement or treaty was needed to access Indigenous lands and territories, White settlers on Indigenous lands without a treaty agreement needed to be removed by the Crown, and the creation of treaties needed to be desired by Indigenous nations and could not be forced (Venne, 2018).

### *Dependence*

Creating dependence by eliminating Indigenous Nations as distinct social and political entities, and assimilating them, was the next step in the colonization agenda. This was accomplished mainly through the creation of The Indian Act in 1876, which in Manuel's (2017) words:

> began with dispossession: our lands were stolen out from underneath us. The next step was to ensure that we are made entirely dependent on the interlopers so they can control every aspect of our lives and ensure we are not able to rise up to seize back our lands. To do this, they strip us of our ability to provide for ourselves. This was done by trying to cut us off from access to our land…. We were suddenly corralled onto reserves under the authority of an Indian agent and given a few gardening tools for sustenance…Indigenous peoples managed to generate small surpluses and tried to sell them, local white farmers complained about the competition and laws were passed forbidding us from selling our produce…our poverty is not a by-product of domination but an essential element of it. (p. 17)

Welfare was introduced later as a colonial pacification tool (Manuel, 2017). Manuel (2017) laments, "Our dependency was not some accident of history. It is at the heart of the colonial system…today our poverty and misery are actually administered by our own people…. this system is

even called by some "self-government" (p. 21). In some cases, the level of dependence is so extreme

that people know no other way of life, "leading to complete and utter despair" (Manuel, 2017, p.21) with

youth suicide rates that are among the highest in the world the goal to absorb, thereby eliminating

Indigenous Peoples, was declared by Deputy Superintendent General Duncan Cambell Scott in 1920:

> I want to get rid of the Indian problem. I do not think, as a matter of fact, that this country ought
>
> to continuously protect a class of people who are able to stand alone… Our object is to continue
>
> until there is not a single Indian in Canada that has not been absorbed into the body politic and
>
> there is no Indian question, and no Indian Department. (National Archives of Canada, 1920, pp.
>
> 55/63)

In 1969, about a hundred years after the *Indian Act* was adopted, the *White Paper* on Indian

Policy argued that assimilation had largely been achieved. Special Indian rights were a problem, and

equity under the law was the solution (Diabo, 2017). It proposed complete assimilation: eliminate Indian

status, abolish the Indian Act, remove section 91.24 in the British North America Act, dissolve the

Department of Indian Affairs, transfer responsibility for Indian Affairs to the provincial government

where they would receive the same services as other Canadians, convert Reserve land to private

property that could be sold, and terminate treaties (Diabo, 2017). These proposed changes were met

with uproarious opposition, prompting response papers like the Red Paper (Indian Chiefs of Alberta,

2011) and the Brown Paper (Union of B.C. Indian Chiefs, 1970). These uprisings sparked the birth of the

modern Indigenous rights movement. They prompted the Pierre Trudeau government to backtrack

publicly while privately strategizing about implementing aspects of it without inflaming the unrest. David

Munro, assistant deputy minister of Indian Affairs, made the following recommendation to Jean Chretien

and Pierre Trudeau in a memo dated April 1, 1970:

> We can still believe with just as much strength and sincerity that the [White Paper]
>
> policies we propose are the right ones…The final [White Paper] proposal, which is for

the elimination of special status in legislation, must be relegated far into the future…We

should put varying degrees of emphasis on its several components and we should try to

discuss it in terms of its components rather than as a whole…We should adopt

somewhat different tactics in relation to the [White Paper] policy, but…we should not

depart from its essential content. (cited in Diabo, 2017, p.25)

To reassert control, the government of Canada changed the terms and conditions for funding

Aboriginal Representative Organizations (AROs), requiring them to write proposals for their activities

(Diabo, 2017). Consequently, you rarely see National/Regional/Territorial Chiefs or leaders initiating

protests; they do not want to risk their funding from the colonial government (Diabo, 2017). This

strategy of controlling the pace of de/colonization by controlling which initiatives are funded is vital for

change seekers to recognize. As long as a branch of the Canadian government is involved, Indigenous

initiatives will be vetted to ensure they do not conflict with the colonial agenda (Diabo, 2017). They may

appear to be Indigenous-led but are ultimately government-controlled.

***Oppression***

In addition to the oppression woven throughout the previous two aspects of colonization, other

tactics are used to separate Indigenous Peoples, undermine kinship ties, and make it challenging to

develop a sense of collective identity and power (Diabo, 2017; Manuel, 2017). Children have been the

focus of many of these tactics, and colonial schooling/parenting is the method. Removing Indigenous

children from their families prevents Indigenous culture and identity from being passed on and inflicts

incredible psychological pain on children and families (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada,

2015). When separated from each other and psychologically distressed, they are less equipped to

challenge the continual onslaughts to dispossess them from their land.

In 2016, the Canadian government reported that 52.2% of the children in care are Indigenous,

even though they account for only 7.7% of the overall population of children in Canada (Government of

Canada, 2022; Somos, 2021). The Federal government has spent years in court opposing the Canadian

Human Rights Tribunal's 2016 ruling that child welfare services for Indigenous children were

"underfunded, flawed, and discriminatory" (Bogart & Madan, 2021, n.p.).

This phase of oppression was preceded by the Sixties Scoop (Johnston, 1983) when between

16,000 and 20,000 Indigenous children were removed from their homes with the specific intent to adopt

them into White settler families (Dart, n.d.). Growing up without their culture and family, many of these

children became adults who felt separated from their Indigeneity, the goal of assimilation (Royal

Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996; Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015).

Before this (1831 to 1996), the government, in partnership with Catholic and Protestant

denominations, operated Residential schools that removed Indigenous children as young as three years

old from their families and took them to institutions, often many kilometres away, where they were

forbidden to speak their language, forced to practise Christianity, were exposed to harsh living

conditions, including forced labour, non-consensual medical procedures, and various types of abuse,

including sexual assault (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996; Truth and Reconciliation

Commission of Canada, 2015). Many died or were murdered at these schools, and the bodies were

buried without families knowing (Dickson & Watson, 2021; Miller, 2012).

Another strategy has been using law enforcement and the penal system to suppress uprisings or

protests from Indigenous Peoples and nations. Whether the proposed development is mining, forestry,

hydro dams, roads, fisheries, pipelines, or some other colonial project, the response to any Indigenous

uprising is arrest, regardless if it is in their territories (e.g., Amnesty International, 2021; Prokopchuk,

2019). Even when not related to protests, police and court biases against Indigenous people are well

documented. Indigenous people represent 32% of the Federally incarcerated population despite

accounting for less than 5% of the total population of the land we call Canada (Major, 2021). Indigenous

women account for 48% of the population in women's prisons (Major, 2021). The Missing and Murdered

Indigenous Women and Girls report blames racism within policing for failing to respond when an

Indigenous woman or girl goes missing (National Inquiry, 2022).

A key takeaway in considering these three components of colonization is the reality that this is

an ongoing structural process, and while Canadian society is waking up to historical expressions, we are

missing how it is expressed in the present day.  I share this within the context of the backstory to firmly

establish why I see the colonial system as inherently unjust and why I assert that social entrepreneurship

is only genuinely transformative if it is seeking to decolonize this system.

### *Reconciliation is Not Decolonization*

In recent years, Canadians have been grappling with the atrocities of residential schools brought

to the attention of mainstream society when the bodies of 215 Indigenous children were found in 2021

at the sight of a former residential school in British Columbia (e.g., Dickson & Watson, 2021; Truth and

Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015). With these revelations, Canadian media was inundated

with calls for reconciliation. Within these contexts, reconciliation is commonly perceived as a means to

uncover the histories of the colonized (Opara, 2021) and hold people responsible, as though colonization

is a threat from the past, not an ongoing reality. This conceptualization of reconciliation is devoid of a

critical analysis of power, history, capitalism, and colonialism. It addresses colonizer guilt without

impacting colonizer privileges, as is common in counterfeit decolonization (Lowman & Barker, 2015;

Mackey, 2016; Opara, 2021). This lack of critical thought results in pitiful attempts to dismantle the

colonial system using the same tools that created it. As Lorde (1984) so poignantly stated, "the master's

tools will never dismantle the master's house," yet for most Canadians, the master's tools are the only

ones we have. So we use the tool of the media to uncover the stories of the colonized and present them

to mainstream Canadian society. We use the tool of the education system to inject bits of historical facts

into students' minds. We use the tool of certifying bodies that train professionals to insist that cultural

sensitivity be introduced into the mandatory training received. Throughout the master's house we call

Canada, people of various ethnicities challenge the capitalistic colonial system from within, chipping away at it with any tools they can find. This is not, however, the same as dismantling or decolonizing it. It is essential to understand the process of colonialism and the tools used to animate colonialism if we are serious about dismantling it and having right relations with the Land and Indigenous Peoples.

**The Process of Colonization and Decolonization**

Understanding Indigenous views of colonization and decolonization grounds my reflection on my process of settler uncolonization. Hawaiian decolonization activist, Laenui (2000), describes the beliefs and interpersonal dynamics of the five phases of colonization and corresponding phases of decolonization, summarized in Table 3. Phases may occur separately or simultaneously and overlap in various combinations (Laenui, 2000, p. 1).

**Table 3**

*The Fives Steps of Colonization and Decolonization, Laenui (2000)*

| Colonization | Decolonization |
| --- | --- |
| 1. Denial and Withdrawal | 1. Rediscovery and Recovery |
| 2. Destruction/Eradication | 2. Mourning |
| 3. Denigration/Belittlement/Insult | 3. Dreaming |
| 4. Surface Accommodation/Tokenism | 4. Commitment |
| 5. Transformation/Exploitation | 5. Action |

*Colonization (Laeunui, 2000)*

In the first step, the colonial people deny that the Indigenous people have any culture, morals, or values with any merit. Indigenous Peoples, especially those that develop a closer relationship, gradually withdraw from their cultural practices and beliefs and join the colonizers in theirs. They may believe their ways are less evolved, evil, or simply do not exist and join in the effort to remove their

peoples from their ways of life and land. In the second step, colonists and some Indigenous Peoples

destroy and attempt to eradicate all physical representations of Indigenous cultures, including art,

teachings, divine images, ceremonies, medicines, and sacred sites. In the third step, colonial systems are

established within Indigenous societies, such as churches, schools, health care, legal institutions, and

colonially endorsed governance will insult, denigrate, belittle, and punish any practise of Indigenous

culture. In step four, any remnants of Indigenous culture that have survived will be given surface

accommodation and tokenized for their folkloric and nostalgic qualities. Canadian society has gone so far

as to publicly embrace symbols such as regalia, inukshuks, medicine wheels, feathers, dream catchers,

and pow-wow dancing as evidence of our celebration of multiculturalism. In the fifth step, any aspects of

the Indigenous culture which have not been eradicated are transformed into the culture of the now

dominant colonial society. This could include colonial schools hiring Indigenous teachers, colonial

governments allowing Indigenous communities to administer their welfare system, or churches allowing

an Indigenous person to be a minister and speak in their language, incorporating Indigenous instruments

and sound into modern music, Indigenous symbols into fashion, Indigenous teachings into mainstream

spiritualism, Indigenous cultural elements into the curriculum taught at colonial schools, the singing of

the national anthem in an Indigenous language, and Indigenous language into naming places, buildings,

and initiatives. This exploitation may be committed by Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples.

      Colonization has both internal and external impacts and manifestations. Internal impacts include

beliefs, worldviews, and identities, individually and collectively. External impacts include land,

governance, and societal functioning. Consequently, decolonization has at least two sites: the person and

the Land .

### Decolonization (Laeunui, 2000)

      The Rediscovery and Recovery stage involves those who have suffered rediscovering their history

and cultures anew, recognizing that they are not inferior to the colonizers. The Mourning stage involves

the colonized lamenting their victimization and all that has been lost due to colonization. Laenui (2000)

asserts that the Dreaming phase is crucial for decolonization as the full panorama of possibilities is here

that are considered, debated, discussed and imagined. In this phase, the colonized can explore their own

cultures and aspirations for the future, how they will govern and create social order, and build from

where they are. Through this process, "they will be able to wade through the cult of personalities, family

histories, and release themselves from shackles of colonial patriotism" (Laenui, 2000, p. 5). In the

Commitment phase, the dreamers come to a consensus and culminate in a clear statement of direction.

The final stage, Action, ideally occurs after consensus is reached and is motivated by what brings joy to

the Indigenous dreamers rather than motivated by the need for survival in response to the colonizers'

onslaught.

**Decolonization and Social Entrepreneurship**

I have not encountered the concept of social entrepreneurship as a decolonizing tool in the

literature. However, living in opposition to governments is as old as time, especially concerning

Indigenous Peoples' persistent resistance to colonialism in all its manifestations. However, conversations

about how to decolonize social enterprise (e.g., Lucas dos Santos & Banerjee, 2019), business schools

(e.g., Woods et al., 2022), social innovation (e.g., Ignite Institute, 2018), community economic

development and entrepreneurship (e.g., Bhattacharyya et al., 2022), and innovation policy as it relates

to Indigenous entrepreneurship (e.g., Tamtik, 2020) are beginning to appear within academia and social

change circles. Critics call for examining persistent power imbalances between those who plan and run a

social enterprise and those considered beneficiaries. Included is a critical examination of

decision-making processes and hierarchies based on social, racial, and gender (dos Santos & Banerjee,

2019). There is also a call for practitioners to challenge colonial mentality (e.g., Ignite Institute, 2018) and

heal deeply ingrained social justice beliefs to create more awareness, connection, vision, and presence

(e.g., Ginwright, 2022). Maia (in Ignite Institute, 2018) challenges social innovators to think differently and to do good differently:

> If the colonial mindset is: expand wide and big and at all costs, we might think of decolonial innovators as those who expand deeper into the needs of a particular community. If colonial innovators operate under the logic of competition and the survival of the fittest, decolonial innovators will think with the logic of collaboration and partnership. If colonial innovators think that the earth is a resource to be explored, decolonial innovators will think of the planet as a living reality to be nurtured. If colonial mindsets operate from the top down, we might move from the bottom up. If colonial innovators build wealth and prestige under the backs of marginalized communities, decolonial innovators will derive wisdom and insight from these marginalized communities themselves.

Much of what I encountered in the small body of literature calls for resistance to colonialism but does not necessarily use decolonization to mean dismantling colonial systems, living into Indigenous sovereignty, and returning stolen land. In this way, many are making it metaphorical (Tuck & Yang, 2012). Practitioners are urged to un/decolonize their thinking; however, little direction is provided on how to do that or what that experience is like for a settler. I intend to fill that gap with my research and contribute to this small yet meaningful body of literature. I can appreciate the natural aversion to applying a decolonizing lens to this vocation, as working toward decolonization means working toward the end of settler privileges. Nevertheless, my life circumstance of having Indigenous sisters has uniquely positioned me to witness and feel the catastrophic consequences of my colonial privilege. I embrace this research in all its complexities and uncertainties, seeking to reconcile SE and decolonization within myself and the world.

**A Context for Grief**

Uncolonization and decolonization requires settlers to challenge unearned privilege and ultimately lose something for Indigenous Peoples to regain what has been unjustly taken. Those involved experience grief, and if they engage in mourning, it may give rise to an opportunity to create something new. However, we cannot move on until we acknowledge what is lost (and whether it was ours to begin with). Grief, therefore, is an essential component of this inquiry and something I brought into this research due to my many personal experiences.

Given that my lived experience, and the focus of this research, is the experience of settler social entrepreneurs, I am focusing this discussion of grief on the settler experience. As part of creating the overall context for grief, I start by acknowledging the body of literature that articulates how grief permeates the individual and collective experiences of Indigenous Peoples (e.g., Brave Heart et al., 1998; Caldwell et al., 2005; Doxtater, 2011; Grant, 1996; Maldonado Moore & Doxtater, 2020; Morelli et al., 2013; Park, 2015; Spiwak, 2012; Timpson et al., 1998; Tuhawai-Smith, 1999). Indigenous understandings of grief link it to the cumulative historical traumas that Indigenous Peoples have and continue to endure as part of colonialism (e.g., Brave Heart et al., 1998; Spiwak et al., 2012). Historical trauma is the cumulative trauma in which emotional, psychological, spiritual, cultural, and mental trauma compound over a lifespan and across multiple generations (e.g., Brave Heart et al., 1998; Doxtater, 2011; Spiwak et al., 2012). It is a complicated grief with many layers and expressions (e.g., Brave Heart et al., 1998; Spiwak et al., 2012). While helping settlers navigate grief is essential in reducing their resistance to decolonial change, settler grief is nowhere near the magnitude of the grief experienced by Indigenous Peoples due to the countless losses from the traumas of colonialism. Loss of land, culture, faith, safety, kinship ties, language, freedom, life, and health are a few types of loss continually experienced. Grief work has been identified as essential in any form of community development, participatory action research, social entrepreneurship, and healing work within an Indigenous context (e.g., Doxtater, 2011;

Maldonado Moore & Doxtater, 2020) and will be addressed further in the recommendations offered in the final chapter.

**The Anatomy of Loss**

Grief researcher, Maddrell (2016) explains how bereavement, grief, and mourning represent different aspects of loss and recovery:

> to be bereaved is to be robbed or dispossessed, usually of some immaterial thing, such as a relation to someone, which leaves one desolate, hence bereft; grief is a deep felt or violent sorrow or keen regret, the experience of which is referred to as grieving and mourning refers to the signs and practices associated with the sorrow and regret associated with a dead person, or other form of loss or misfortune. (p. 168)

While most commonly associated with death, humans grieve many different losses. Figure 4 describes additional losses that are a part of the human experience, especially regarding uncolonization and decolonization. Revisiting life experiences through this self-study and experiencing loss that has triggered each of these types of grief, I have found that in some instances, society was responsive to me, and in other cases, not.

My curiosity peaked, and I found myself further exploring the politics of grief and how it is experienced in many different contexts.

**Figure 4**

*Types of Losses*

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Relational Loss (e.g., the person does not die, but the relationship ends, such as business partner(s), romantic partner(s), parenthood, childhood)

Loss of Security (e.g., home, land, nation, family, job, finances, business)

Loss of Power (e.g., freedom, agency, voting)

Embodied Health-Related Losses (e.g., mobility, fertility, hearing, memory, cognitive ability, and sight).

Loss of Recognition (e.g., status, privilege, identity, being good)

Existential Loss (e.g., meaning, faith, hope, purpose)

Loss of Place (e.g., sense of belonging to the Land, cosmos, family, community, culture)

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**The Politics of Grief**

It is widely understood that *how* people express grief varies between cultures. *Who* and *what* people grieve, and "the intensity of grief" (Seale, 1998, p. 199) is socially constructed and politically influenced. To quote Madrell (2016), "questions of whom or what is deemed 'grievable' in any society is both discursively framed and inherently political" (p. 171; supported by Butler, 2009; Wells, 2012). The political implications of grievability are rarely acknowledged yet are integral to understanding the experiences of uncolonization and decolonization (Park, 2015).

***Ungrievable Lives***

The colonial settler story is predicated on the takeover of occupied lands, which was forbidden by the international laws of the time (Manuel, 2017). Indigenous Peoples were declared non-human, and with this fiction, settlers felt absolved of wrongdoing. The intent has always been to eliminate Indigenous Peoples, removing any evidence of human life before the colonialist's arrival (Wolfe, 2006). As Park (2015) remarks, "Under settler colonialism, the deaths of Indigenous peoples are not slated for grief" (p. 286) because they have always been intended to be eliminated, one way or another. While Butler (2004)

writes about grievability as it relates to war, the perspective is just as relevant to the colonial settler logic

of elimination:

> If violence is done against those who are unreal, then, from the perspective of violence, it fails to
>
> injure or negate those lives since those lives are already negated. But they have a strange way of
>
> remaining animated and so must be negated again (and again). They cannot be mourned
>
> because they are always already lost, or rather, never 'were', and they must be killed, since they
>
> seem to live on, stubbornly, in this state of deadness. Violence renews itself in the face of the
>
> apparent inexhaustibility of its object. The derealisation of the 'Other' means that it is neither
>
> alive nor dead, but interminably spectral. (pp. 33–34)

The truth of the colonial settler story has been replaced with a fictional version passed down

from generation to generation, producing a society that functions without any significant grief regarding

the treatment of Indigenous Peoples and the Lands. Butler (2009) uses the term precarity to name the

"politically induced condition in which certain populations … become differentially exposed to injury,

violence and death" through social, environmental, and economic conditions meant to bring about their

destruction. Such is the case for Indigenous lives which are willfully underfunded, under-resourced, and

neglected "precisely because they are framed as being already lost or forfeited" ( p. 31). This level of

dehumanizing is a poison to the human spirit for all involved, those colonizing and those resisting. As

McCaslin and Breton (2008) so powerfully stated:

> What is destructive and catastrophic to the well-being of one cannot be good for the other. To
>
> dehumanize others can only dehumanize the dehumanizers, the controllers, the ones who treat
>
> others as objects and benefit materially from doing so. Not only that, but colonizers almost
>
> immediately start treating themselves as objects as well–objects that are judged successful or
>
> not, objects that command high or low salaries, objects that hold high or low positions in
>
> hierarchical societies. (p. 513)

***Colonial Domestication***

The structure that is Canadian colonization uses every one of its systems (e.g., economy, education, health care, social work, welfare, religion, media, economy, law enforcement, and legal) to enact a false and dehumanizing version of reality that relieves settlers of the responsibility for facing the truth that we are building our capitalistic society on stolen lands. It allows colonization to go unnamed instead of being brought front and centre as the root cause of all harm perpetuated on this land (McCaslin & Breton, 2008). From this biased vantage point, the system teaches its citizens that certain things are expected to be seen as good, desired, and valued. Gainful employment, a home, food, health and vitality, freedom, education, and a mono-hetero-normative nuclear family are among the things regarded as desirable, and the loss of these things is broadly understood to be grievable. Once domesticated within the colonial mindset, it can be very challenging for someone to deviate from this domestication, even when new information challenges or disproves. For instance, while discussing Indigenous residential schools with an older friend who grew up in Britain, I explained that children were taken by force from their families and made to attend these schools, often far from their families, undermining kinship ties. He looked perplexed and explained that, as a child growing up in Britain, attending a boarding school was seen as a sign of privilege and was something that his family paid for him to experience, even though it took a toll on the family's finances, and resulted in him being separated from family during his formative years. If, as a child, he openly acknowledged his grief over the loss of family connection that came with this privilege, he would risk being declared ungrateful, even selfish. For him to acknowledge how Residential schooling was traumatic for Indigenous children, their families, communities, and culture, he would first have to address the grief he suppressed in himself and interrogate the societal belief he adopted that said attending a residential school was a privilege.

*Settler Experiences of Ambiguous Loss*

A settler grappling with the destructive truth of the colonial dream and the resulting treatment of Indigenous Peoples, nations, and land, will meet resistance from a society still functioning under the premise that Indigenous lives are not valuable or grievable. The grief associated with awakening to discover themselves to be a colonizer within a colonial dream will be even more incomprehensible to mainstream Canadian society that already lacks teachings, customs, and mourning protocols for intangible bereavement. Grief researcher Boss (2009) coined the term *ambiguous loss*, to describe an "event or situation of unclear loss that has no closure" (2016, p. 279). It is typically referenced in the context of family theories to describe situations such as the loss experienced when someone is physically absent but psychologically present (e.g., missing persons, a child is adopted, divorce, military deployment) and physically present but psychologically absent (e.g., dementia, coma, chronic mental illness, addictions) (Boss, 2009). For this research, I will extend Boss' notion (2009, 2016) to account for losses that are not interpersonal yet still ambiguous and without definite closure, such as the loss of meaning, recognition, identity, and sense of place/belonging experienced by many settlers who disrupt their domestic programming and challenge the unearned privilege their life was built upon.

## A Context for Conscious Co-Creating

**A Metaphor for Conscious Co-Creating**

Life is the dancer, you are the dance (Tolle, 2005).

When I think about conscious co-creating, I envision a dance. Contact improvisation is a highly connected form of contemporary dance where two or more people rely on a shared and ever-changing point of contact to create movement that seems like finely crafted choreography. With experience, participants learn to sense the various layers working simultaneously, begin to respond creatively to the unexpected, and, in consciously creating together, become the dance. While each person is significant in the unfolding of that dance, no one person is the dancer as the group becomes an entity in and of itself,

animated by the energy of that dance, unique to that combination of people in that particular context and time. Similarly, I see the world as dynamic, energy-filled, multi-dimensional, nonlinear, and complex (Benham-Hutchins & Clancy, 2010), with beings of all kinds converging to co-create their reality at a distinct point in history. The degree of consciousness and sovereignty people embody determines the nature of the dance.

**Co-Creating**

The term co-creating refers to a group of people coming together to create something they could not have created on their own by combining their skills, perspectives, or ideas (Merriam-Webster, n.d.; Wong, n.d.). The notion of co-creating is common in various industries, including business (e.g., Tynan et al., 2010), tourism (e.g., Sugathan & Ranjan, 2019), therapy (e.g. Frederickson, 2013), technology (e.g., Parsons et al., 2020), marketing (e.g.,  Foroudi et al., 2020), health care (e.g., Kunneman et al., 2022), education (e.g., Bovil, 2020), urban planning (e.g., Gutiérrez et al., 2016) and artistic endeavours (e.g., Mantas & Schwind, 2014). While similar in concept, the reasons for engaging co-creatively differ. Commercial enterprises intend to increase revenues. Personal development endeavours intend to create expansive experiences. Artistic endeavors intend to cultivate provocative and novel expressions. Community development initiatives intend to discover solutions to complex problems. Education intends to bring greater equity and engagement to the teaching and learning experience. In this research, I use the term co-creating to describe initiatives with a defined scope that attract people who believe in their ability to influence the outcome of a particular project. These initiatives generally operate within the framework of the colonial system; however, participants may carve out a space where people can interact in more collaborative, non-conforming, and equitable ways. I find these scope-defined co-creative endeavours useful tools in helping people recognize their agency and ability to orchestrate a vision of their choosing and use them to frontload teaching toward concious co-creation which I describe below.

**What Co-Creating is Not**

As I practise it, co-creation is not the same as the creative process someone might engage in on their own, as co-creating involves intentionally merging the creative energies of those involved. It may, however, contain aspects of each person's creative processes. It is not to be confused with the utilitarian view of teamwork, where one or more visionaries orchestrate a team to work together to materialize the vision. In that case, there is a power differential between the visionaries and the rest of the team and a different level of personal investment. For teamwork to be effective, it is not essential for all involved to feel inspired, as they could make meaningful contributions by sharing their energy and expertise in exchange for money, status, security, belonging or some other thing of transactional value to them.

Co-creating is not consensus decision-making, although it could include it, as it is not about finding a compromise for all involved or including all points of view, but about people coming together to honour the tensions that exist because of their uniquenesses (in perspectives, talents, giftings, ways so being) and using this as a carefully sharpened tool in which to carve out of the limitless possibilities, something that is unique to who they are together. They will ultimately make choices that will cause the vision to take shape much like carvers would when approaching a large tree that holds within its vastness an infinite number of possibilities. Co-creating, as I experience it, involves a commitment between those involved to offer their differences in service to the process and express themselves fully, trusting their co-creators to honour the unique gift each person brings through their participation. From a place of complete security each in themselves and in who they are together, the co-creative partnership can lean wholly into the process, knowing there is safety in their mutual commitment to the journey together.

I experienced a dynamic early on in life when working with two others I considered co-creators. In a metaphorical sense, I was committed to holding one end of a double-handled saw, and the other was held by someone equally passionate and committed. We trusted each other to continue to engage in back-and-forth exchanges productively. At the same time, our third member steadied the

metaphorical saw and ensured our abundant energy was focused and productive. This dynamic took

complete trust in ourselves and each other. Not only did we choose to bring our unique offering to the

co-creative dynamic, but we were also committed to not throwing up our hands, even when things were

challenging, as doing so would mean severe imbalance and potential harm to each other and what we

were co-creating together. The result was a not-for-profit organization dedicated to educating Canadian

post-secondary students about the impact of colonial and imperialist worldviews on the planet and

Indigenous Peoples worldwide. Having an inaugural experience of this potency while still a teenager was

foundational in setting the tone for how I would approach so much of my life moving forward, as it

helped shape a perspective that the world is full of trustworthy, passionate creators.

Differentiating co-creating from individual creating, teamwork, and consensus decision-making is

not meant to minimize them, each has its place. The contrast exists as a way to emphasize five critical

characteristics of co-creating: (a) each person brings to the creative process essential components; (b)

the group culture reinforces that each member is irreplaceable and deeply respected; (c) the diversity of

members is a celebrated asset because the differences in perspectives bring new energy; (d) people

come together to explore what is unknown; (e) vulnerability is a catalyst for alchemy.

**Co-Creation vs. Conscious Co-Creation**

In the memoir portion of this research, I have used the terms making, un-making, and re-making

to denote a way of being relative to the colonial system. We are made first through our domestication

(Ruiz, 1997; Ruiz Jr., 2013; 2017), then by pushing back on aspects of the system, and finally, by

re-engaging with the system with a different sense of self and agency. We are constantly co-creating the

realities we inhabit but, to varying degrees, may misinterpret our circumstances as something that is

happening to us. It might be conceivable that we can co-create within small and defined scopes, but the

idea that we co-create the entire world may seem too big to grasp. We become conscious co-creators

when we embrace that we are the artists of our lives and assume accountability for the fact that we are

always co-creating the collective experience, even those parts we perceive as unrelated to us (Ruiz, 1997).

I use the term stop-making to denote the beginning of conscious co-creating as a way of being that does not centre the colonial system but instead supports the conscious, inspired, and untamed interactions that occur when people engage the universe and each other with a sense of sovereignty, interbeing, intuition, intention, and curiosity. Conscious co-creating is not motivated by a need to solve a problem, make money, or otherwise gain/reclaim power within the colonial system. That does not mean that co-creations do not solve problems, make money, or impact power within the colonial system. It means that it is not their primary purpose. Conscious co-creating focuses on enjoying our time together while evolving toward greater consciousness and freedom. A sense of sovereign power and authentic expression fuels it. In my experience, conscious co-creation operates based on energetic exchanges, magnetism, intention, expansion, and mutual joy instead of being governed by the rules that animate the colonial system and human relations.

I summarize Myss' (2002b) seven energetic laws of co-creating, which align with my notion of conscious co-creating.

1. Every thought creates form. For every choice (external and internal), there are outcomes.

2. Like attracts like.

3. Investing energy into the past decreases the energy we have to create in the present.

4. Every thought and emotion speeds up or slows down our pace of change.

5. Make no judgment, have no expectations, and give up the need to know why things happen.

6. Co-creators are accountable for their choices instead of blaming others.

7. Creation moves in cycles; opportunities to evolve will occur repetitively.

These laws point to the energetic patterns at play within and between people as they co-create the realities they inhabit. Unlike interpersonal dynamics, which are often the focus of co-creative practices, these laws are impersonal.

**Initiating Conscious Co-Creations**

Recognizing that each person's experience of co-creating is unique, I share my process to provide context for what I mean when I refer to conscious co-creation throughout this inquiry.

### *Intention and Resolve*

When I approach life from a conscious co-creative state of mind, I enter with a clear intention that feels like a move toward greater consciousness. What we create is decided in the arena of our minds well before the moment comes to take action. What we manifest reflects our deepest beliefs, perspectives and desires, regardless of whether we know them. For years, I have marked the entry of this creative state in a particular way; I put two or three bright blue streaks in my hair on either side of my face. Each streak carries a reminder that keeps me focused and courageous. When I see my reflection in the mirror, I repeat those things to myself. When people ask about them, I accept the opportunity to reaffirm my intention for this co-creation to myself and the universe, often resulting in connecting with potential co-creators and resources.

### *Invite*

With clear intent and resolve, a story emerges explaining why I am moved to initiate a co-creation. It involves both emotion and logic and is fueled by a sense of passion for something that moves humanity toward a greater degree of consciousness and joy. I know when the wick of passion has been lit because I cannot put down the idea. I live and breathe it. I energize it, and it energizes me. This does not mean I know how it will come together, but I know I intend to find out.

When initiating a conscious co-creative process, I approach it with the same sense of surrender to life's great mysterious creative force and a deep willingness to allow the process to unfold in and

through me. I invite the universe to conspire with me. I speak out loud, first to myself and then to others, about my intention and why I am so excited to explore it. I am not concerned with how the idea will come to fruition, as I have observed miraculous coming together processes enough that I know how it does not matter at this stage. The best use of my energy is to become crystal clear about what I would like to manifest, why it will bring me and others joy, and how it will feel to create, present, explore, and celebrate it. I allow myself to feel enthralled by the possibilities.

### Magnetize

I let this whole process magnetize me, with the full intention of attracting to myself the people and resources that will form the collective womb in which this new conscious co-creation can take shape. I tell the universe, "This is what I want to explore. Please bring everything needed together to make it an enjoyable and enriching experience. If not exactly as I imagine, then show me something even better. Find people who share a similar desire and are willing to consciously co-create. Help us recognize each other."

### Gathering

I allow my intuition to guide me to conversations, resources, and contacts that answer the questions I ask out loud to the universe daily. I expect to be met with an abundance of synchronicities. I will, for instance, ask a question about a process or focus on a specific need and then expect to be given direction in some way, such as a conversation I have, someone I meet, a book I encounter, or an experience I have that helps me perceive things differently. I watch for it, and I am amazed at how things typically unfold within a few days.

### Synergy

When I am open to my internal guidance system, there will come a time when I sense that everything needed to move from preparation into conscious co-creation is in place. The best way I can describe it is like a water finder that goes off when it finds water underground, but in this case, it is a

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pathway finder, and it feels like it starts to buzz in my awareness when the right combination of things come together. Among these things are inspiration (in me and others), capacity (time, people energy), resources (money, skills, space, tools) and resolve (the desire to create outweighs inertia). I switch the way I speak about the desired co-creation to reflect that the initiative is happening rather than preparing to happen. I describe how it functions in its future state and why it is so meaningful. I begin to gather people who have taken up within themselves the spark of inspiration and feel pregnant with the idea to the point that they must see it born. This stage requires me to find a balance between holding onto and nurturing the flame of inspiration and surrendering to the collective experience realizing that others may know more than I do about moving the idea to the next stage.

## A Context of Intuition

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines intuition as "the power or faculty of attaining to direct knowledge or cognition without evident rational thought and inference; immediate apprehension or cognition" (n.d.). It is critical in all aspects of who I am, particularly in conscious co-creating, because it helps me sense more than is evident on a rational level and gain insight into what is happening in a situation, what is needed, and people's motives and fears. The presence of intuition changes the conscious co-creative experience from being an exercise in linear, reductionist logic to a truly transformative, even alchemizing, experience. In this research, I will not attempt to explain how intuition generally works but acknowledge that it is a part of my life that I cannot speak of without explaining my subjective experiences. I understand that intuition is a sense that everyone has, not something unique to me. It becomes more robust with use or atrophies if not used. Myss (in Trank, 2019) defines intuition as the "natural ability to not just sense energetic data that fills this dimension of the invisible world, but to interpret it, to understand energetic data" (n.p.). She describes three types of intuition: survival, creative, and visionary (Myss, 2002b).

**Instinctive Intuition**

Instinctive intuition is survival based and relates to our sense of safety in the world through finances, shelter, safety, and connection to others (Myss, 2002b). All people have instinctive intuition if they learn to heed it rather than overriding it with rational logic. It is akin to the internal guidance system the animals in Thailand used to move to higher ground before the 2004 Tsunami reached shore. In my own life, I have had countless experiences of instinctively reading the energy of a situation, responding to it even though my rational brain had no reason to, and it resulted in the preservation of my health and, in some cases, my life. In one case, a driver ran a red light and skidded through the intersection. I was not hit because I heeded my instinct to wait instead of driving when the light turned green.

**Creative Intuition**

Creative intuition is personal and relates to the choices we make with the agency each of us has been afforded in life (Myss, 2002b). Unlike instinctive intuition, it is not related to the necessities of life and human connection but to how we make choices to navigate the experience of life. Once again, I do not offer any particular philosophical perspective but share an example of how I have experienced this type of intuition and how it contributes to my co-creative experiences. A few years back, I strongly desired to immerse myself in academia again. I had a clear idea of what I wanted to learn and began calling schools to see if I could find a doctorate program that felt like a fit. Unfortunately, I did not experience a feeling of excitement or expansiveness with any of the programs I called. I asked the universe to help me find something that would "make my heart sing." Two days later, I was at a massage therapy appointment, preparing to pay, when another client referred to herself as a "wacky professor." That line caught my attention, and I initiated a conversation with her, including my intention to return to school and my search for a program that met my specific interests. She asked if I would consider Nipissing University, where she was a professor. They had a small program that was looking for people like me. I went home, looked up the program, and knew immediately from how I lit up inside that it was

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perfect for me. I sat down and wrote the two-page letter important to the admission process. It felt

effortless since what they sought naturally aligned with who I am. I did not apply to any other schools,

and a few months later, I received my acceptance letter.

In my experience, asking the universe for guidance is not about making a wish or saying a prayer

but more like casting an energetic pebble into the etheric pond with clarity and conviction that the

people and circumstances that are a match feel the ripples and respond. I have experienced countless

instances of intuition-assisted decision-making in work, education, creative projects, finding homes, cars,

resources for personal growth, relationships, parenting, and other life matters. Each time, it felt like

exactly what I was looking for came to me precisely at the right moment.

**Visionary Intuition**

Visionary intuition is impersonal and connected to the collective rather than our personal

decision-making or survival (Myss, 2002b). I have experienced this intuition as something that feels like it

flows into me, often being received as a complete and detailed vision in a short period of time and

without rational processing. The vision is something I feel inspired to create for the collective rather than

myself. As a creative person, it is not difficult for me to brainstorm many unique ideas of how I, or

someone else, could impact change within society. Brainstorming is not visionary intuition because it is

an analytical process focussed on how to express oneself in the world rather than the energy of the

collective inspiring forth in a person a vision of something to promote the growth and expansion of

humanity. As I understand it, all of the universe is made up of energetic frequencies. Those tuned into

these specific frequencies can consciously or unconsciously pick up on these transpersonal energies and

choose to co-create in response. Whether that vision takes root on a local, regional, national or global

scale is determined by the person's beliefs about their potential to consciously co-create on that scale.

Suppose they believe in their ability to co-create locally but do not believe they could ever influence

things globally. In that case, they will not tune to receive visionary intuition that is global in scope, or if they do, they may simply discount it, perhaps deciding it is an unrealistic fantasy.

Another aspect of harnessing visionary intuition is a person's capacity to navigate the many twists and turns of co-creating and grit when faced with perceived obstacles. The willingness to serve the visionary intuition must exist so strongly that it overpowers the doubt, fear, and apathy encountered from inside and outside themselves. For people bringing new ideas, technologies, medical breakthroughs, musical expressions, leadership, models of relationship, and other novel expressions to the planet, there are no templates to follow, and they are blazing a trail as they venture into the unknown.

Visionary intuition is an area of tremendous growth for me. Since my mid-teen years, I have received and responded to visionary intuition. I started with responding to intuitive leadings on a local level which felt like a big stretch in my life for someone who had only begun speaking to people outside my family a few years earlier. As I have grown in my confidence, I have become more open to co-create with visionary intuition that could have a global impact, although I still notice at times that I shy away from actions that would put me in the spotlight quicker than I feel ready. Williamson's (1992) quote resonates with me:

Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness, that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, 'Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous?' Actually, who are you not to be? (p. 165)

As I become more willing to be seen in the world, and my confidence grows, I notice that the scope of the visionary intuition I receive expands along with me. At the time I am writing this, I am working on expanding an initiative that teaches students, and the adults who work with them, how to consciously co-create cultures within their classrooms and schools that shift away from social norms that perpetuate gender-based violence and sexual assault and towards those that promote equity, consent,

healing connection, and vulnerability. The vision for the initiative came in response to a request from some mothers in a particular community I was working within. They asked if I would talk with their children to address the sexual trauma they felt was an underlying cause of the community-wide addiction. I felt for these mothers who were survivors and stated my willingness to co-create, even though I was not sure how to go about it without causing resistance within the community. They were unsure also, so I brought the desire to the universe and waited. A few days later, I felt confidence, peace, and creativity flow into my being, along with an approach that would shift the culture gradually over time without feeling threatening. Writing the philosophy, approach, and the first eight activities took a few hours. I could sense how one flowed into the other and how to scaffold them for a gentle approach. New ways of explaining complex topics came to mind, as well as how to explain this initiative to cautious school administrators in a way that would inspire courage and calm. The activities were well-received without any need to tweak them through trial and error. I have shared this program in several schools and received no resistance in any of them. This seemingly effortless yet complete vision differentiates linear brainstorming/problems solving from visionary intuition. It is this energy that I seek to connect to in my work as a social entrepreneur and social change leader.

**Concluding Remarks**

A complex interplay of social entrepreneurship, colonization and decolonization, understanding of grief, conscious co-creating, and intuition contextualize this self-inquiry. Nevertheless, I am left with the question of how I got to where I am today on a deeply personal level. In addition to being born into a family that had adopted an Indigenous child, I am alive during a time in history when colonialism is being more openly challenged within mainstream Canada, alongside stop-gap measures of addressing inequity and injustice. My life circumstances place me at the epi-centre of these dynamics and is, therefore, an exciting site for exploring where the personal meets political. In the words of Bullough and Pinnegar (2001), "self-study researchers stand at the intersection of biography and history" and "when biography

and history are joined, when the issue confronted by the self is shown to have a relationship to and bearing on the context and ethos of a time, then self study moves to research" (p. 15). That is the subject of my memoir and its deconstruction, which will lead to recommendations I can offer to other SEs interested in digging deeper.

As I conclude this section, I want to acknowledge one last related body of literature and where I might exist within it. People who initiate change that contributes to transforming existing institutions or creating new ones have been called institutional entrepreneurs (Di Maggio, 1988, p. 14). While this includes people working for change within organizations, it also includes the fields in which they are embedded, which are recognized areas of institutional life. Social entrepreneurship is one such field. I acknowledge that my research challenges commonly held assumptions of social entrepreneurship and what constitutes success. According to the literature, the fact that my life is rooted in multiple fields (e.g., colonialism, social entrepreneurship, spirituality, co-creation, community development, education, and grief) increases the likelihood that my thinking will cross-pollinate, challenging the fields and institutions with whom I engage (Battilana et al., 2009; Emirbayer & Mische, 1998; Phillips et al., 2000; Rao et al., 2000; Sewell, 1992). Institutional entrepreneurship research asserts that a person's social position provides legitimacy and offers a bridge to diverse stakeholders , thus offering them access to dispersed resources (Maguire et al., 2004). In telling my stories, I hope my embeddedness in these fields legitimizes my recommendations for a decolonial approach to social entrepreneurship and other social change initiatives.

# Chapter 3: Methodological Design

## Overview

My goal was to explore experiences, how they shaped me and how I shaped them, and how my life intersects with the social, political and familial dynamics of my time; a qualitative study was, therefore, the best fit. Yilmaz (2013) defines qualitative research as:

> ...an emergent, inductive, interpretive and naturalistic approach to the study of people, cases, phenomena, social situations and processes in their natural settings in order to reveal in descriptive terms the meanings that people attach to their experiences of the world. (p. 312)

This research required delving into my development, learning journey, beliefs, worldview, and perception gaps as a White social entrepreneur striving to influence social change at a particular place and time in history. Critical autoethnography with a decolonizing lens equipped me to delve into the historical-socio-political element intrinsic to my life story as a woman with Indigenous sisters. This methodology enabled me to explore various educational and personal experiences through the lenses of uncolonizing and decolonizing, as well as the phenomenon of recognizing oneself to be a privileged part of the colonial system and, therefore, a part of its longevity regardless of personal values and intentions to the contrary. It also allowed me to explore my process of becoming (Prigogine, 1980) an accomplice for social change, the power struggles inherent in creating social change, and the ethical perception gaps in the notion of doing good in the world. Finally, these methodologies were rooted in an arts-based process because I wanted to share the stories and discussion from this research appealingly to the general public. While this chapter contains my methodological decisions, Chapter 4 contains the results collected in the form of a memoir which, in sharing with the world outside academia, will fulfill my intent to further social change.

# Methodologies

Complementary methodologies facilitated the multi-layered story of this research; as explored in Table 4, these include critical ethnography; storytelling, Indigenous methodologies and critical Indigenous qualitative research; and arts-based research. These methodologies enabled a blend of personal inquiry, affirming and critical examination, internal and external knowing, and connection to a particular place and time.

**Table 4**

*Impact of methodologies on the shape of study and areas of exploration*

| Methodology | How it shapes this study | Facilitates exploration of: |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Critical autoethnography | Honours story as a gateway to understanding self in past, present, future | The intersection between person and culture |
| Storytelling | Story as a sacred healing tool | Soulwork (Atkinson, 1995) |
| Indigenous methodologies (IM) | Honours Indigenous worldviews and values | Critical examination of power and colonial system |
| Critical Indigenous Qualitative Research (CIQR) | Presumes interconnectivity<br><br>All research is political and moral | |
| Arts-based research | Honours story as a gateway to exploring and sharing the human journey individually and collectively | Internal knowing and personal and societal transformation |

## Critical Autoethnography

This interdisciplinary research approach "centers the self as a site of research" (Marx et al., 2017, p. 2) and translates personal experiences into the social sciences research realm in a unique, storied way

that is accessible to readers within and outside of academia. As a methodology, critical autoethnography

has its roots in qualitative inquiry (Ellis, 2004) and builds upon ethnography, autobiography,

phenomenology and critical identity theories (e.g., Adams et al., 2014; Chang et al., 2013; Hughes et al.,

2012; Hughes & Pennington, 2017; Jones et al., 2015; Reed-Danahay, 1997). Autoethnography

shape-shifts between genres, allowing it to take various forms based on the needs of the authors (Marx

et al., 2017), at times being analytical (e.g., Anderson, 2006), emotional and evocative (e.g., Bochner,

1997; Ellis, 2004), poetic (e.g., Richardson, 1992), performative (e.g., Hamera, 2011; Jones et al., 2016;

Spry, 2016), and endless other possibilities (Marx et al., 2017). Autoethnography aims to centre unheard

and historically marginalized voices in ways that convey people's lived experiences within

socio-cultural-political-historical contexts and provides an avenue for stories of the socially marginalized

to enter the discourse of academia (Marx et al., 2017). Autoethnography lends itself naturally

> to critical perspectives addressing how power and privilege play out in socio-personal lives and
>
> how these entities are reproduced as well as resisted. Deeply personal accounts of race, gender,
>
> culture, language, and other aspects of identity can powerfully illustrate how people live with
>
> and through privilege and marginalization each day. (Marx et al., 2017, p. 2)

 While autoethnography naturally supports critical inquiry, relatively few (Boylorn & Orbe, 2014;

MacKinley, 2019; Madison, 2011; Tilley-Lubbs, 2016) explicitly state they are conducting critical

autoethnography (Marx et al., 2017). Those who have done so used critical autoethnography to connect

autoethnography and intersectionality (race, class, gendered, sexed, positionality, etc.; Boylorn & Orbe,

2014) or to connect evocative personal narrative with cultural critique and contextualization (Bochner,

1997; Bochner & Ellis, 2016; Ellis, 2004).

### *Critical Autoethnography for this Study*

I knew I needed a research methodology that would allow me to examine the complexities of my

life as a White social entrepreneur who works within Indigenous communities and has Indigenous sisters

due to the Sixties Scoop. As a professional whose life work focuses on the transformation of systems and who aims to do good in the world, I sought to understand how my experiences within that system predisposed me to perpetuate it despite my intentions to do otherwise. On a personal level, I sought to understand how I could go from being a child who was so shy that she rarely spoke in public to someone whose life work has resulted in me not only speaking in front of large groups but doing so within the gaze of the public. I wanted to understand how I oriented myself toward social entrepreneurship. While I did not know what I would discover in revisiting my past, I sensed that if I could work through the discomfort of feeling vulnerable and offer my subjective perspective, I would expose my values and discover meaning—"to know why, and how, this came to pass (and not that)" (Makler, 1991, p. 45). If I were willing to re-story my past, from an attitude of being "surprised by otherness" (Pagano, 1991, p. 201), I would be directed to my ignorance and discover a story worth telling. For "every knowing contains its own ignorance" (Pagano, 1991, p. 201).

Following Boylorn and Orbe (2014), I examined the intersectionality of my life. Instead of positioning myself as a member of a marginalized community, I acknowledged the power and privilege I hold because of my white skin, Euro-Canadian ethnicity, socio-economic status, level of education, cis-gender status, sexual orientation, family religion, and countless other cultural perspectives that have shaped me. Owning my privileged position as a member of the colonizing culture comes with the acknowledgement that my actions, regardless of my intention to do good, may have contributed to the ongoing attempts to colonize Indigenous Peoples and lands. As a foundational methodology for this study, critical autoethnography allowed me to "push against the grain of norms established by the dominant society, problematizing my own actions and practices from a sociocultural perspective" (Tilley-Lubbs, 2016, p. 6).

While I found some examples of critical autoethnography that examined de/colonization from an Indigenous perspective (e.g., Popova, 2016) and some members of Euro-American or Canadian culture

reflecting on their positionality within the vulnerable communities they work (e.g., Tilley-Lubbs, 2016), I found relatively few from colonizing cultures (e.g., Wood, 2017) using critical autoethnography to critique themselves through a decolonizing or uncolonizing lens, which is not the same as a critical lens (Tuck & Yang, 2012). While autoethnography has multiplied in the social sciences in recent years (Bochner & Ellis, 2016), it has yet to impact education significantly (Marx et al., 2017). Being relatively new to the genre, critical autoethnography's scope of influence has been limited (Marx et al., 2017). Given the public discourse around Indigenous land rights, racism, and reconciliation, it has never been more needed. Using the breadth of my life stories to explore how my personal life intersects with the socio-political-cultural-historical climate of today will contribute to the small but growing body of research focused on uncolonizing the White settlers (Cissell Lucas, 2013; Zanussi, 2018).

**Indigenous Methodologies (IM)**

This critical autoethnographic study was rooted within Indigenous research methodologies that see all things as interrelated and resist attempts to fragment or isolate (Kovach, 2009; 2010; Tuhiwai-Smith, 1999); it is action-oriented, relationship-centred, and power-conscious (Tuhiwai-Smith, 1999). I looked to Denzin, Lincoln, and Tuhiwai-Smith's (2008) conceptualization of critical Indigenous qualitative research (CIQP), which asserts that research is always political and moral; uses methods critically for specific social justice purposes; values the transformative power of Indigenous knowledge; seeks forms of practice that are empowering and emancipatory; requires research to be "ethical, performative, healing, transforming, decolonizing and participatory" (p. 2); focuses on the concerns of Indigenous Peoples; and is assessed in terms of its benefits to Indigenous Peoples. While this research did not directly involve Indigenous participants, I looked at my life within context, and my context involves having Indigenous sisters and spending the majority of the last twenty-five years living and working within Indigenous communities. My Indigenous friends, elders, and colleagues have emphasized the importance of applying a decolonizing lens to everything I do, whether with Indigenous or

non-Indigenous peoples. This lens is tuned to recognize and name colonialism, power, privilege, White

fragility (Diangelo, 2018), and systemic racism. CIQP provided a robust framework and directive for this

study, a merger of inquiry, personal transformation, critical examination, and social change.

### *Not the Same as a Critical Lens*

As discussed in the backstory, uncolonizing and decolonizing lenses are not identical to a critical

lens, an important distinction when applied to critical autoethnography. A critical lens highlights

inequalities, power imbalances, and biases within ourselves and society at large; uncolonizing and

decolonizing lenses focus on settlers attempting to subjugate Indigenous Peoples and displace them

from their land in order to profit from the natural resources (see Chapter 2: A Context for Colonization,

Decolonization, and Uncolonization*)*. A critical lens prompted me, the researcher/subject, to examine the

infrastructure and distribution of power, privilege, and oppression and my positionality relative to other

people within the colonial system. An uncolonizing lens prompted me to consider myself in relation to

the Land and the colonial government's ongoing vendetta to remove Indigenous Peoples from their land

so that colonizers like me could use resources. As Tuck and Yang (2012) so thoroughly articulate,

approaching social justice through a lens that does not differentiate between these two things worsens

the plight of Indigenous Peoples by demoting them to just another group that wants their fair share of

the colonial pie, and doing so, removes the objective measure of returning stolen lands as a signifier of

whether decolonization is indeed occurring. They differentiate between the work that settlers do to

uncolonize their mind, from the actions that settlers (and their governments) take to decolonize the Land

and Indigenous-settler relations. Carrying this thinking over into methodology for this study, I ensured

that my critique and reflection were in relationship to un/de/colonization and the many ways my

systems-change work intersects with this particular form of injustice which, I assert, is at the core of all

other social injustices.

**Storytelling**

Within Indigenous worldviews, story and knowing are intertwined (Archibald, 2008; Kovach, 2009), and internal knowing is as vital as external knowing (Archibald, 2008; Kovach, 2010; Wilson, 2001). Storywork (Archibald, 2008) is a culturally nuanced way to explore both types of knowing, which requires deep listening. In listening deeply, we elevate research "from an extractive exercise ... to a holistic endeavor that situates research firmly in the nest of relationship" (Kovach, 2009, p. 99). Given that my research was autoethnographic, my deep listening focused inward to discover those things within me but not always apparent to me, yet still actively shaped my beliefs, actions, reactions, motivations, and judgments. In focusing inward, I also aimed to integrate all aspects of my being, including the psychological, spiritual-mystical, and cosmological realms, with my way of being in the world as a social change leader. It was also focused outward to view myself from different perspectives and locate myself within the socio-political-cultural-historical fabric of my times. Other scholars, authors, mentors, teachers and critical friends were instrumental in expanding the scope of my outward focus, causing enough internal chaos (Doll, 1986; 1993) to prompt novel explorations of my self-in-context while seeking to reestablish cognitive equilibrium.

Storying is a process of moving in a multitude of directions at once, a concept I was first introduced to through the Medicine Wheel teachings and Stages of Life teachings (e.g., Best Start Resource Centre, 2010; National Indigenous Literacy Association, 2012) and later, through the Directions of Knowledge Learning (e.g., Rheault, 1998). When narrowing down my search for a container in which to approach writing a critical autoethnography, I searched for something with enough flexibility for me to operate fluidly within a multi-directional space while embracing the view that human learning happens in the context of self-in-relation (Graveline,1998) and as a result of experience. I used Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) articulation of narrative inquiry as a starting point because of their use of the Deweyan view of experience, in particular, situation, continuity, and interaction that create a "three-dimensional

narrative inquiry space" (p. 50). Within their conceptualization, *place* (situation*)* is along one axis,

temporality (continuity), specifically *past, present* and *future,* is along a second axis, and *personal* and

*social* (interaction) is located on the third axis (2000). Clandinin and Connelly (1994) offer four

foundational directions: inward (inside self), outward (toward community), backward (in time), and

forward (in time). *Inward* refers to internal conditions, such as "feelings, hopes, aesthetic reactions, and

moral dispositions" (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994, p. 417). *Outward* refers to the environment, and

*Backward* and *Forward* refer to temporality, past, present and future (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994). With

a multi-directional focus, the storyteller can revisit the past with her knowledge from the present, thus

opening the possibility of discovering new meanings (Shields, 2005). I personalized and expanded upon

these directions to guide my inquiry (see Table 5) to include how I imagined others were experiencing life

(*inside outsiders)*, *top-down* or bird's eye views that might be akin to a witness perspective, perception

gaps that may result from biases and privileges, and a transpersonal perspective that lies *deep within*.

My additional four directions prompted me to employ uncolonizing and transpersonal lenses to

this exploration, thus increasing the potential for unsettling my views and perceptions, and inviting me

to look at my recollections from a different point of view. By focusing on the internal experience of those

around me (*Inside Outsiders)*, I aimed to de-centre myself from the story and imagine what another

person might have been experiencing, regardless of whether they shared it with me. Whiteness studies

advocate decentralizing the White subject (Harvey, 2007; Leonardo, 2009; Wojecki, 2007; Wood, 2017).

This directional prompt cued me to decentralize, which proved to be a valuable tool in expanding my

scope of perception, irrespective of whether my imaginations were accurate, especially when they led

me to seek more profound understanding. The *top-down* view prompted me to perceive an experience

in which I have a strong attachment, in a less attached way, like a historian reporting on an event with

the privilege of knowing how it fits into the greater scheme of things.

**Table 5**

*Expanded Directions of Inquiry*

| Direction | Details |
| --- | --- |
| *Original directions from Clandinin and Connelly (1994)* | |
| Inward | the experience within (feelings, hopes, reactions, moral dispositions) as per my memory |
| Outward | existential conditions; the environment, context, reality, including my perceptions of others and how I imagine they experienced me |
| Forward-Backward | temporality; movement through past, present, and future |
| *Directions added in response to literature review and experience* | |
| Inside Outsiders | how I imagine others were experiencing themselves and their existential conditions |
| Top-Down (Bird's Eye View) | a detached view of what might be perceived if witnessing myself, and others, within a given context |
| Perception Gaps | the aspects I miss because of my biases and privilege |
| Deep Within | transpersonal perspective; how the wise self in each of us, that connects us all, might view a situation |

Before this research, I had regularly imagined actor Morgan Freeman who narrated the film *March of the Penguins*, narrating scenes from my life; I realized that I could elaborate on this notion to create a narrative perspective that could further unsettle my ingrained perspectives. The *perception gap* is a direction that many do not acknowledge yet it is essential in any critical autoethnographic analysis. I use *perception gap* instead *blindspot* to avoid ableist connotations. Telling stories that are not conscious of power and ignoring biases supports the continuation of oppressive colonial structures by reinforcing the notion that those things do not exist. Throughout this research, I continually asked, "What am I not able to perceive here?" to prompt myself to interrogate my perceptions. Lastly, by asking myself to focus *deep inside* on the transpersonal source energy that connects all beings, I was prompting myself to contemplate who I would be if I could throw off the shackles of my domestication (Ruiz, 1997) and

followed my innermost leadings, instincts, intuition, and spirituality. While unsettling to old paradigms and narratives, this focus offered new insights regarding paths forward for a colonizer engaging in uncolonizing work.

*Story as Soul Work*

In the words of Palmer (2000), in this research, I "let my life speak," putting myself undeniably in the spotlight, a terrifying position for someone who prefers to be intentionally translucent conducting quantitative research or in the company of many co-researchers engaging in participatory action research. Being both researcher and subject in this study brought up memories of being both the dancer and choreographer, leaving no one to blame should the performance not be received well. Engaging in critical autoethnography was the research equivalent of laying my soul bare within an auditorium of strangers. In offering up my life for analysis, I told stories that were secret, sacred, and cover stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995), sometimes peeling back the cover stories to reveal to myself and the reader the secrets buried deep within. In facing unexpected and painful memories, I engaged in growth toward a less-painful imagined future (Clandinin & Connelly, 1990) through "restorying and attempts at reliving" (Clandinin & Connelly, 1990, p. 4) the memories of childhood, this time with the company of my adult self. As Clandinin and Connelly (1990) so cleverly articulated, I was "at once, engaged in living, telling, retelling, and reliving stories" (p. 4).

In telling my stories, I wrestled with my demons, danced with my angels, made plans with my inner guide and, ultimately, connected with my soul (Atkinson, 1995, p. 5). I followed the breadcrumb trail my memories left me and returned to the story of my older Indigenous sister, who died young and tragically. As Atkinson (1995) so poignantly intuited,

> The most powerful life story expresses the struggle of a soul living in a material world. The most important stories we tell about ourselves are those that express the timeless within us. We

discover in the process of telling our life stories that we are more sacred beings than we are

human beings. A life story is really the story of the soul of a person. (p. 4)

While I did not set out to do so, in telling the stories that emerged from this research, I have shared

aspects of my spiritual autobiography (Atikison, 1995), how I recognize expressions of myself in the

world and the cosmos, and how I am inextricably interconnected with them. In doing so, I engaged with

the universal choreography of connectedness that has been, will continue to be, danced by humankind

until the end of humanity. While the research has been challenging, there was also a comfort in finding

myself within the age-old patterns such of love, joy, togetherness, separation, loss, power, betrayal, and

redemption, knowing I am not the first, nor will I be the last, to feel such deep emotions.

**Arts-Based Research**

Wisechild (1991) asserts that "creativity involves crafting a form to hold the intensity of

experience" (p. xvii). While I did not know all that I would discover when I embarked on this critical

autoethnographic study, I was confident, because of the nature of my life experiences, that the findings

would have an emotional charge and that I would want to share them with others. Having engaged in

arts-based and arts-informed research (Bach, 1998; McNiff, 1988; 1998) to create and perform several

fictional stories based on a group's composite of life experience, I was inspired to devise a creative way

to share my findings so they would be impactful and enticing to people outside academia. I needed a

delivery tool that allowed me to tango with both the personal drama of my life and the

socio-political-cultural-historical context in which my life has taken place without taking the reader out of

the story and into the weeds of academic jargon or scientific analysis under the pretense of exposing

objective meaning. According to Dewey (1934), art can be seen as a way to study learning experiences

since "art expresses meaning instead of stating meaning like science does" (deMello, 2007, p. 207). As

Eisner (2002) points out, an artful portrayal invites the possibilities of multiple perspectives. In his words,

There is, in the arts, more than one interpretation to a musical score, more than one way

to describe a painting or a sculpture, more than one appropriate form for a dance

performance, more than one meaning for a poetic rendering of a person or a situation.

In the arts diversity and variability are made central. (p. 197)

Offering my lived experience within an artful space to invite multiple perspectives without the necessity

to communicate some conclusive universal meaning from them was an essential addition to this study.

I decided to communicate the findings to the public as a memoir to take the reader through the

experience of my becoming, showing them my experiences and struggles as I made sense of them.

Laying bare pivotal moments in my life in an artful yet critical narrative, I committed to creating for my

audience a space where my experience can be vicariously lived (Barone, 1995). Novak (1975) describes

how the story becomes separate from the teller of the story:

A story, once told, no longer belongs solely to the storyteller. It has existence independently of

his will, intentions, or analysis. It is an object accessible to others. Others may see in it what the

storyteller does not. Story is not narcissism or subjectivity, but it's opposite: the making of an

independent object. (p. 199)

Well before I knew what it was called, I was drawn to arts-based research because of its

usefulness in performing inquiry that is activist, engages dialogue, and is orientated towards social and

political action (Finley, 2011; Knowles & Cole, 2008). While it puts me in a vulnerable position, I invite

people to look into my story, be moved by the contradictions and limitations, see the things I cannot,

and, in doing so, deepen their focus on the various issues my life story calls into question. Leading by

example in a vulnerable way, I hope to inspire other White settlers, especially those who want social

change, to engage in their own critical inquiry process.

# Methods

Just as dance technique shapes movement, research methods shape what emerges from the inquiry process. The technique does not stifle the process but provides a foundation to build, express, and innovate. Similarly, the technique of writing stories was the starting point for this research; however, other forms of writing and reflection were welcomed and included poetry, storied reflections, imagined dialogues, and letter writing. In all cases, I used an uncolonizing lens to look at my life circumstances and to recognize perception gaps that I might not usually be conscious of due to my privileges as a white-skinned settler.

## Choosing Memoir

A memoir is a "narrative essay, organized around a single theme, topic or situation which uses selective aspects of the life history, often combined with other material, to explore it in depth" (Cohen, 2012, p. 176). While based on personal recollections, the focus can encompass something larger than the author's life. A memoir was an ideal method because it required me to focus on a specific theme, that of doing good and the perception gaps inherent in this notion;  as well, it offered a familiar way to package it. By familiar, I mean a memoir is easier to read than other academia-constrained narrative or autoethnographic research forms. Memoir allowed me to communicate in an everyday, localized language that reflects life at this particular time in history, thus inviting the reader into both the personal nature of the story and into a critique of social structures interwoven throughout (Barone, 2001a, 2001b; Denzin, 2000; 2003; Finley, 2011). My ultimate goal is to add to the cultural forms that are "part of an ongoing, humanly constructed conversation about the reality we are shaping as we participate in it." (Jensen, 2002, p. 198)

**The Impact Arts Process**

As I was determining the method, I was mindful that one of the secondary goals of this inquiry was to provide a process that could guide others who wanted to engage in a similar self-inquiry. This inquiry followed the IMPACT Arts process I have used with groups to write collaborative fictional stories based on historical, social, or cultural issues of importance to them. Together, groups (a) learn about a particular issue; (b) discuss how it relates to them; (c) create characters; (d) determine a plot; and (e) bring the issue to life in a story.

As this was a critical autoethnographic piece, I applied this process to myself and worked alone rather than in a group. I did, however, have critical friends whose role was to support me in self-inquiry by asking questions, sharing resources, and engaging in conversation meant to challenge the depth, breadth, and positionality of my exploration. In this inquiry, the stories are nonfiction, the characters are people from my life, and the storytelling medium is a memoir that tells my transformational learning journey using a critical lens. This inquiry process acknowledges the "messiness of experience" (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994, p. 417), the interconnections between the personal and social within any experience (Dewey, 1916; 1934; 1938), and the continuity of time within narrative inquiry (Dewey, 1916; 1934; 1938) that allow us to "meet ourselves in the past, present and future" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 60). As subject, researcher, and storyteller, I examined my learning experience, early family experiences, observations of society, and reflections on how I impact and am impacted by society.

Table 6 shows how the IMPACT Arts process was applied to each inquiry stage and facilitated the development of field texts through expansive learning, autoethnographic inquiry, critical examination, and stories to highlight themes.

***Step 1: Learn and Expand***

As outlined in the IMPACT Arts process, my self-study began by engaging in a variety of learning experiences meant to broaden my understanding of my lived experiences and perspectives, and how

**Table 6**

*IMPACT Arts Process Applied to this Study*

| IMPACT Arts process | Applied to this study |
|---|---|
| Learn and Expand | Read, engaged in workshops, listened to speakers, and watched films meant to broaden my scope of self-understanding. |
| Explore Personal Relevance | Wrote stories about pivotal moments in my personal life and development as a social entrepreneur. Used the various directions of inquiry to explore deeper. |
| Identify Characters | Identified key people in my learning journey, their qualities and characteristics. Identified "characters" I have played at different points in my life. |
| Determine Plot | Examined stories for central themes and invited critical friends to help me broaden my perspective. |
| Create and Share the Story | Shared findings as a memoir. |

these intersect with the world, with a focus on social entrepreneurship, and systemic change. This involved a variety of avenues, such as reading books, watching digital media, and engaging in focused conversations. I sought direction from a few key mentors, family, friends, and acquaintances to gain new and different perspectives from people who are both similar and different from me. I journalled throughout the process, which became data for this research. Areas of exploration included: unconscious bias and racism, White supremacy culture, developmental trauma, attachment styles, mindfulness, non-attachment, non-violent communication, the violence of social justice and politics, and the intersection of climate justice and Indigenous sovereignty. I journaled and reflected on these experiences over many months. I also attended circles and a sweat lodge with Indigenous teachers and engaged in regular therapy sessions with a psychotherapist. All of these had the effect of expanding my worldview and deepening my understanding of myself.

*Step 2: Explore Personal Relevance*

Before I began writing, I searched through my archives of school assignments, personal reflections, journals, personal and professional conversations, email conversations, childhood memorabilia, and other educational artifacts. I asked relatives for old newspaper articles about specific incidents in my life and searched through family files related to significant experiences in our family timeline. Additionally, I searched online for publicly available material in print, video, audio, and images that contextualized my journey within the broader familial, historical, and cultural milieu of those times.

**Pivotal moments.** When I felt ready to write, I asked myself what pivotal moments brought me to this place as a person and social entrepreneur. A pivotal moment was defined as a significant life experience that shaped me so considerably that, if I had not experienced it, I would not likely be the person I am today. At this initial stage, I wrote all moments that came to mind without evaluating them for their significance or whether they met my definition of pivotal. I wrote in the format that felt most appropriate, including poetry, stories, vignettes, storied reflections, imagined dialogues, and letter writing. I first immersed myself in the personal nature of the experience I was writing about, looking at it from the *inside* (my personal experience of myself) and from whatever perspective felt most natural to me. I set a timer for 20-30 minute intervals and wrote continuously during that time, without censorship or evaluation. I then set the story aside for a day or two, later approaching it to look at it from many directions.

I continued to write in and around the original story, adding these various perspectives. This multi-directional contemplation made me question why I thought each experience mattered. Answering this question for each story began the meaning-making process as I sought and found the significance I had assigned to each experience.

**Building-block moments.** The next layer of writing involved finding building-block moments, which I defined as those experiences that created the internal framework that gave meaning to the

pivotal moments. In contrast to the pivotal moments, which were time-specific, building block moments included cumulative experiences that amounted to a significant impression or learning.

**Missed moments.** To all the storied moments identified, pivotal and building-block, I employed the outside in, inside outsiders, top-down, deep within, and perception gaps viewpoints described above. I contemplated, "What might I have missed because I was so immersed within my perspective, privileges/lack of privilege, biases, judgements, assumptions, and/or unresolved trauma?" Any new perspectives were either woven into the meaning-making section that followed the narrative writing or made into their own stories, which became a part of the data set.

### Step 3: Identify Characters

Reflecting on the stories, I noted the people that played a crucial role in my development as a person and as a social entrepreneur. These became characters in my story. I summarized their significance in my life trajectory in a line or two and added these to my reference notes. I considered their personality, how that interfaced with my personality at the time, and what impact, if any, it had on how I interpreted the experiences we shared. I observed how I was a shapeshifting character in my own story, bringing to life various personalities. This helped me notice my character arc as I changed over time.

Once I identified many different stories with their meaning, I began to share them with my critical friends to gain their feedback and questions. While not necessarily characters in my story, their comments and reflections helped me better recognize the different characters at play over the course of my life and my personality, which has had various distinct and contrasting expressions over the years. Identifying these characters became critical before considering the memoir's themes and structure.

### Step 4: Determine Plot

By this stage, I had reached a critical mass of stories. I paid particular attention to recurring themes and connections and examined these experiences within the contexts they occurred, the

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spiritual and emotional factors that informed the meaning I gave them, the continuity of the

experiences, the people that were key in shaping my experiences, and how I perceived myself to have

evolved. During this analysis, I simultaneously considered all layers of "self-in-relation" (Graveline,1998,

p. 52), including my relationship to self, key characters in my life, the influence of society, the

Indigenous-settler context, the created world, and the cosmos. I tracked promising areas for analysis in a

document titled "Plot," which opened the door to new insights and the discovery of pivotal moments

that I did not initially realize were so significant.

### *Step 5: Create and Share the Story*

I used the themes and reflections from Step 4 as a foundation for weaving my stories together

and re-contextualizing them within the social, political, and cultural environment of the time. I reviewed

data for its relevance to my personal development and considered how the realizations informed my

work with people who want to learn how to co-create the change they want to see. I consulted with a

writing coach specializing in memoir writing and broke the memoir into four sections: "Making",

"Un-making", "Re-making", and "Stop-making".

### Ethical Considerations

As my research was self-study, I restricted the scope to ensure I was the only person involved. I

reviewed research on relational ethics to ensure the proper handling of issues, such as when we

research and write findings that implicate others in our work (Ellis et al., 2011). To prevent the

identification of people referenced in the stories and my reflections, I employed narrative techniques to

obscure and/or change details, names, and circumstances when necessary to conceal their identity.

In the case of my family, whose names and identities I could not entirely conceal because of the

nature of their relationship with me, I limited the information I shared, made use of information that was

publicly available and/or commonly known and non-contentiousness. I agreed with Makler (1991) who

stated,

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It is easier, somehow, to speak of strangers than to talk of those we love. For we are joined to those we love, and we wish not to harm them. Even in the telling here, I have chosen to excise portions of my memory, not to recount certain events because they seem to add little to the narrative and had the potential to cause discomfort. (p. 45)

I focussed my writing on my perceptions and experiences. I did not attempt to frame my stories as objective truths or include other family members' perspectives or details of their lives that I did not know.

To find a balance between honesty and respect when writing details that contextualize my stories, I used three measures to make decisions about how to approach these cases:

1. I considered whether the information I was sharing was public knowledge or was already shared openly by the person involved and their level of comfort with this;

2. I considered how I could share the information while presenting those involved in the most favourable light possible; and

3. I asked my family member, if that person was alive, or my other family members, if that person was deceased, for help communicating the facts in a way that preserved dignity and relationship. I did not experience any conflict in this area as most of my immediate and extended family are deceased, and the few of us who are living share a common understanding of the facts of our family experience, which are non-contentious and openly discussed without conflict or tension.

In the case of stories that occurred while I was in a particular First Nation, I completed a community engagement plan and sought their input on the types of stories I told and how I told them. Once again, I focused on publicly available or widely known details. It became clear that several pivotal learning moments in my life are partly due to the generosity of this First Nation, who has welcomed me into their community for nearly three decades. Sharing my journey with them is a way of expressing my gratitude.

Ultimately, I chose to share snippets of my memoir in this research, further preserving anonymity.

## Concluding Remarks

The combination of critical autoethnography, storytelling, critical Indigenous and qualitative research within an arts-based research process resulted in a structure that empowered me to explore my learning journey, the depth of tension that exists between my domestication as a settler, my desire to see systemic social change, and the negative impacts my settler privilege has on the lives of people I care deeply about, including my Indigenous sisters. It also allowed me to explore memories in a way that not only recounted my perception of the experience of the past but caused me to interrogate those memories causing them to become multi-directional where they were once one-directional. Finally, the storied nature of this inquiry necessitated the connection with deep emotions and memories that were previously not accessible to me, which resulted in a very transformative experience.

## Chapter 4: Re-Presentation

### What I Was Looking For and What I Found

When I started this self-study, I wanted to understand how I became oriented toward social entrepreneurship, including pivotal moments and developing essential skills and mindsets. I anticipated discovering things that could add to the broader understanding of how to educate people wanting to be leaders for social change. What I did not anticipate was how the process itself would unearth in me memories related to my Indigenous sisters and how those memories, along with my work within Indigenous communities, would lead me to explore decolonization and uncolonization as themes within this research and as an ultimate expression of transformative social entrepreneurship. These additional lenses offered three important things to this research. First, it invited exploration of the deeper causes of social and environmental injustice and how those have become entrenched in all aspects of our system. Second, I felt compelled to consider what experiences primed me to lean into the challenging work of uncolonizing and decolonizing, and to map the stages of my uncolonizing process thus far. Finally, exploring the perception gaps I discovered through this process further highlighted the importance of adding this type of reflexive practice into the education of social entrepreneurs and other change leaders.

### This Memoir in a Nutshell

*...we all live at the intersection of our small worlds and the big one around us. If we want to serve others, we must attend to both.* (Palmer, 2018, 3:21:53)

I started this journey of reflection, not knowing where it would lead but compelled to discover myself more deeply in all of this. What is the value of exploring my life through story? It is, after all, just one life among many. As Palmer (2000) wrote, "The story of my journey is no more or less important than anyone else's. It is simply the best source of data I have on a subject where generalizations often fail but truth may be found in the details" (p. 19). I find that stories can touch people on a level that pure

logic can not. Good stories use all types of knowing to communicate messages that engage the whole person, and they call on both the teller and the listener to use their ways of knowing to dig deep into their souls to discover the meaning the story has for them. It has been said,

> In the life story of each person is a reflection of another's life story. In some mysterious, amazing way our stories and our lives are all tied together. A life story gives us the benefit of seeing how one person experiences and understands life over time. In telling our life story, we gain new insights into human dilemmas, human struggles, and human triumphs, while also gaining a greater appreciation for how values and beliefs are acquired, shaped, and held onto. In this way, the story of one person can become the story of us all. (Atkinson, 1995, p. 4)

Encountering these stories, I invite you to explore with me, and through me, the various themes that arise when I, a person who has dedicated my life to creating an equitable and just society, begin to peel back layers of my experiences, beliefs, biases, and privileges with the intention of better understanding my perception gaps. I begin by wondering, "Is there such a thing as doing good? How am I contributing to the problems I witness within society? In what ways are these problems real or simply my perception? What if the world is as good as it's gonna get?"

The following excerpts from my memoir trace the processes of making, un-making, and re-making, as well as the point where I stopped making and allowed myself to engage in a way that was not mediated by the system.

Like most during the initial stages of life, my making was the creative product of the people who sculpted me to fit into their view of the world. Like Ruiz (1997), I refer to this as my domestication. From this place of domestication, we enter into the broader world, expecting that we will be able to apply what we have been taught to the circumstances we encounter and be met with success.

The second part of my memoir tells the stories of my unmaking, which took place because what I encountered in the world did not fit what I had been taught. I consider what factors resulted in my

choice to begin dismantling my worldview instead of simply returning to the faith, beliefs, and cultural norms of my youth. My early religious training, combined with my untamed spirituality and potent interpersonal experiences, put me on a track that would result in prioritizing my internal compass and desire for truth over belonging to the culture of my childhood, thus launching a phase in my life that would shake me to the core.

The third part of my memoir chronicles my experiences during a phase in life where I consciously chose to expose myself to things that would help me to rebuild some understanding of how things worked since my domestication did not equip me to exist as a being of the system, that also challenged the system. I gathered new data about how the system creates order and security while limiting our ability to survive or thrive without it. I discovered it was designed to favour certain people and oppress others. It was a re-making of sorts whereby decentering my own experiences and centering those of others, I reoriented myself within the system and became conscious of the privilege it afforded me.

The fourth and final section of the memoir, stop-making, is a glimpse into my experiments as led by my internal promptings, not by the system. I share these stories with the full awareness that I am a work in progress, and what I feel is so profound now may not feel that way to me later. I may also write something now that I disagree with later. Despite this reality, I choose to share anyway, as living into a new reality requires a paradigm shift of epic proportions, spurred on by a revolution of imagination like nothing we have ever experienced. Being willing to be vulnerable and risk being wrong is a big part of the shift. In the spirit of pushing back against a patriarchal system that stifles everyone and the burden of perfectionism that snuffs out the light of far too many flickering ideas, I offer my imperfect stories with the hope that they show that it is ok for us to stumble forward together.

### A Note On Writing Style

To be authentic, how I have written the memoir reflects my experience recalling and writing each part of my life. Those parts that were well remembered and occurred after I had developed

metacognitive skills are written as rich stories in the present tense and followed by detailed reflections.

Those parts that happened when I was a small child are written in the way that I recalled them as an

adult: a series of images, emotions, impressions and fragments, an approach that has been embraced by

others doing narrative work (e.g., da Silva, 2021; Gleeson, 2020).

To keep this dissertation an acceptable length, I present excerpts from each section of the

memoir keeping titles intact. These experts will allow the reader to understand the themes I reference

and unpack in Chapters 5 and 6.

**Excerpts from My Memoir- Part 1: Making**

Even before I knew I was
Looking
Hearing
Sensing
Mother Culture had me cradled in her bosom
drinking the kool-aid of the time
Making
Initiating
Domesticating
Another ambassador to the cause
Another Being of the System.

When we are born, we believe what we are taught without question. We accept the identity and

the roles that our parents give us–this is my name, this is my home, and this is what we believe

about life, and God, and more. I am told who I am, and before long, I answer to the name I am

given; by believing them, I become like them. This isn't good or bad, it is simply the way it is.

When I become aware, I realize that others don't know who I am, because they don't know who

they are. No one really does. We don't need to know who we are in order to exist and be happy.

(Ruiz Jr., 2017, p. 15)

**Outside Insight**

*The Voice*

When I look in the mirror, I am reminded of the captive sloth I encountered in Brazil–eyes sleepy and glazed with a misplaced grin. Since I was a child, this voice has been that of Morgan Freeman, who, in my opinion, has a knack for making the seemingly mundane happenings of sloths, penguins, and other assorted creatures like myself seem exciting as he narrates with unbridled enthusiasm. His deep voice, and sing-song cadence play in my head, adding a sense of humour and perspective I welcome on days like today. Today, I hear, "Try as she may, nothing can rush or slow her down. As though stuck on a one-speed setting, she will plod along with that weak, grin-like expression, committing to neither her joy nor her sorrow." The voice continues to narrate as though I am some rare and unusual specimen on a National Geographic film. "Today, like every day, she will make big and ambitious plans for herself, but given the snail-like speed at which she invariably moves, she'll be lucky if she manages to complete one thing before curling up for an afternoon nap."

*The Psychic*

Newly separated from my husband and trying to reconcile all that has happened in a few short months, I made the appointment, and since then, I've been unable to focus on much else.

One hour turns to two, and several cups of coffee and half a pack of cigarettes later, she completes her tour de force of my life and circumstances, offering insights that are confirming and expanding. "The pain in your joints and pressure in your chest are unexpressed emotions," she tells me. "Going places that the devil dare not tread, seeing what you've seen, and feeling what you've felt, leaves a mark. From birth, you have taken everything in and, with complete calm on the outside, stored all the emotion away into the nooks and crannies of your body." She says that the patterns of energy in my body suggest cumulative trauma. I say that I have no memory of anything traumatic in my early years.

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She encourages me to be kind to myself, explaining that, if and when ready, things that were long buried may come to the surface.

A few days later, while walking, I think about past trauma; I feel the dull pain in my knees with each step. Morgan offers a frank assessment, "Even in her sloth-like state, moving so slowly that emotional rigor mortis is imminent, she remains entrenched in her resolve to do things her way." I chuckle. He's not wrong. I do have a tendency to set my course and stick to it with pride regardless of any obstacles in my way.

To prove to myself and Morgan just how open-minded I am, I entertain possibilities: "What would it look like if I stopped to look inward as the psychic suggested?" What if I slowed down and looked inside at what might be going on?"

**Excavation**

***Unearthing the Image***

In the days that follow, I listen deeply to my familiar "Still Small Voice," which has been my anchor and wings since I was a child, keeping me grounded and helping me have the faith to move forward. Unlike Morgan, this voice doesn't communicate in words but in sensations of expansiveness and contraction, alignment and non-alignment, love and fear. I am mentally weary, but the decision to move ahead feels less exhausting than staying under the weight of inertia slowly suffocating me.

I close my eyes and invite Morgan, my internal narrator, to join me: "Like an archeologist who suspects that an ancient treasure may lie just beneath the surface, she begins digging enthusiastically with a determination that will go down in the history books, and be admired the world over, for generations to come." I laugh. It's funny how I tend to approach many things in my life as though I'm on an expedition to find, conquer, and move on as efficiently as possible. I decide that I need to chill out, this is uncharted territory, and there is nothing I need to prove. I take a deep breath and tell my shoulders, which seem permanently attached to my ears, that they can settle down; I deliberately

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unclench my jaw and open my mouth wide to release the tension, breathing in deeply and exhaling

slowly. What begins to surface in me are not necessarily memories but rather physical sensations in my

body.

### Unearthing the Cause

Over the upcoming weeks and months, each time the tightness sets in, the image of my older

sister settles into my reality. Uncomfortable and unsettling, I am determined to understand what is

happening to me. Each time, I try to stay in that discomfort a little longer than the time before. And so, I

turn to the knower of all things–Google–and begin searching. I would have preferred a therapist, but

with limited finances, Dr. Google is the next best thing. I discover that what I'm experiencing is implicit

memory that is stored in the body, not in the mind, created at a time in my life when I didn't have the

words to express it or a framework to understand it (Poole Heller, 2019). This is common with

developmental trauma that occurs through the daily happenings of childhood, creating a template for

what "normal" feels like.

### Unearthing the Treasures

I open myself to recall early memories of me and my older sister, Diane.

*I love that she allows me to perch on the counter and watch as she "makes herself pretty."*

*Sometimes she lets me put her lipstick on too, and brushes my hair like hers. We both have jet-black hair,*

*and I like how it looks shiny and smooth when the bathroom lights shine on it. I stare intently as she puts*

*different colours on her eyelids, pink on her cheeks and black on her eyelashes. I think she is so pretty,*

*and I want to look just like her, but she says I'm way too little to wear makeup. She puts a dab of lipstick*

*on my already pink lips and the tiniest bit of blush on my snow-white skin. I look at myself in the mirror*

*with curiosity.*

***Unearthing the Pain***

Feeling like I'm getting the hang of this, I open to receive another memory, bringing myself to my childhood home. I let myself sink into it, deeper into my body, without trying to label the feelings. Morgan's voice appears: "Determined not to disturb the site, she approaches this time with the caution of an archaeologist using her finest of brushes, carefully dusting away each grain of sand with caution, lest she causes things to crumble at the very exposure to daylight, and flees the scene, never to return." I'm able to stay with it long enough for a memory to surface.

*From the perch of my highchair, I can clearly see their angry faces–my mom, my dad, and my Diane. The dinner plates are still on the table. The talking gets louder and then turns to yelling.*

*"If I'm not good enough for you just send me back!" Diane fires.*

***The Stolen Bounty***

*I like to sit in Diane's room. It helps me remember her. It's been so long, and I don't hear my parents say too much about her anymore, just on phone calls or when family and friends visit. I sometimes like to go into her room to remind myself that she isn't someone I dreamed up. Mom says her room is still set up for when she decides to come home.*

Dad loved Diane with everything he had. Mom hoped her training and experience with children would help her to be the kind of mother Diane needed. They both felt they had given her everything they had and loved her the best they could. Nevertheless, accepting a child from foster care at 11 years old couldn't erase the years of trauma she endured or the mark it left on every aspect of her psyche.

At 16 years old, she left home. This was not the first time; however, this time was different. My Dad wasn't able to catch up to her, and the police were not able to find her. She vanished, and the silence left in her wake was all-consuming.

After not hearing from her for months, I remember overhearing my mom once saying to my dad, "I guess she's dead." The whole house was heavy with despair.

**Commence Good Girl Training**

The year Diane left, I started Junior Kindergarten. Previously a chatty child at home, at school, I was mostly silent, preferring to observe others and play by myself. I was so quiet that my teacher thought I was hearing impaired and requested a hearing test. I returned to school after that hearing test with a new understanding that I was being watched and that the adults in the room had a very specific idea of what I should be doing. I continued to enjoy my art and daydreaming, but I was careful to pay attention to what was happening, aware of the consequences of not doing as expected.

Years of surveillance followed, with teachers reporting back to my Mom about my levels of conversation and socialization and my Mom checking in with me each day to ask if I had talked or played with the other children.

By grade two, I had caught on to the inherent judgment involved in schooling after reading my report card. With my new literacy skills, I could read what adults said about me. I began to understand that *everything* I did was monitored and evaluated. Using my natural inquisitiveness, I deduced what I needed to do to get as close to perfect as I could on tasks my teachers gave me. I began to wonder, "Did I feel like I needed to be perfect so I didn't get sent back? Did I think I would be yelled at if I was not perfect enough?  What did I believe it meant to be "perfect"?"

I was a quiet, precocious young girl with a very sensitive spirit who wasn't prepared for the world's harshness. I was a free spirit who just wanted to be myself but was bombarded with messages that who I was wasn't good enough. Many children face this hardship as they are being domesticated (Ruiz, 1997; 2017) into a culture attempting to shape them into what they feel is valuable, good, and admirable.

 I didn't want to get sent back, I didn't want to be labelled broken, and I sure didn't want to go to hell, a recurring theme throughout my Catholic education. I became obsessed with perfection because the farther away from perfection I got, the closer I was to the things I feared.

**My Domestication**

When we were born, we were programmed according to the beliefs of our family and our

society. We didn't have any knowledge, we didn't know how to speak, we didn't use the word in

order to create our reality—we simply lived in the moment. But the human mind is a field, fertile

for ideas and opinions, and whatever ideas and opinions are tended will grow there. (Ruiz Jr.,

2017, p. 46)

My world was small, and I didn't question what I was being taught. It had never occurred to me.

Everything from language, customs, values, holidays, relational norms, and even my own name, I

accepted without question. To be recognized as good, I knew I had to appear outgoing, talkative, and

confident; do well at school; work hard; listen to my parents; serve others, especially the poor, sick, and

oppressed; only speak kind words; love God and my neighbour as myself; never use drugs or alcohol; not

have sex before marriage; allow men to lead; follow the law of the times; obey the ten commandments;

and be disciplined and measured.

I did what was good, and I was taught that I could anticipate that I would be blessed. I was also

taught the flip side of disregarding the laws, performing poorly, loving themselves more than God or

neighbour, or becoming a woman who was assertive and challenged men. These lists became the

framework upon which my early life was built and how I judged myself. As I entered the latter half of my

childhood and teenage years, life presented me with experiences where these simplistic notions of

goodness and badness were no longer helpful when contradictions arose.

**Prodigal Sister Returns**

I can barely believe my eyes. Is it really her? I don't remember when I last saw her. Maybe grade

one or two? I wonder if she'll recognize me now that I'm in grade three. Still not convinced, I bolt out the

front door onto the porch to get a closer look.

It is her! We head to my room. I love this alone time with Diane, watching her sing along to her records and dancing now and then. She seems more like her old self, and that makes me smile. I see our reflections in the mirror over my dresser and try to commit to memory every bit of this perfect moment: the way she sings, the way we're dressed, the way it sounds when I try to sing along.

Eventually, Dad comes and gets us for supper.

After dinner, my younger sister and I head to my room. I shut the door just in case there's arguing. But it never happens. We finally get called down. Everyone looks happy enough, and I am relieved. Diane has her jacket on, and everyone is at the front door. I can see that someone has pulled into the driveway to take her away again. Mom and Dad hug her and tell her to be safe. Promises are made to visit more often, but something tells me that's just one of those things adults say but don't mean.

It's hard not knowing if or when I will see her again.

**No Turning Back, No Turning Back**

***Now I Lay Me Down to Sleep***

I lay in bed, my sheet pulled up to my chin, waiting to be kissed goodnight. At 11 years old, I still love how safe I feel when my parents tuck me in. Tonight, however, I'm not content. My sense of unease has been growing. I'm not afraid. I'm concerned.

I tell my dad, "I keep thinking that you're going to die in a car accident, and I don't want that to happen." He looks at me with loving eyes and assures me that he loves me, and no matter what happens in life, to him or anyone else, I will always be ok. He kisses me on the cheek and hugs me. I search his face for distress, but there is none. I am comforted by his presence, but it doesn't take away the nagging sense of dread weighing heavy on my heart.

***A Few Weeks Later***

I watch my dad hug his parents and imagine Morgan narrating, "Unaware of what lies just around the corner, he says goodbye to his parents one last time."

I feel detached from it all, like an outsider looking in with curiosity.

***August 13, 1987***

There's that feeling again.

I hate when it comes up like a blinking red light that just won't stop.

"I love you, Dad."

"I love you too, Ducky."

Five o'clock rolls around, and I watch out the window for his car to pull in. 5:10 pm comes and goes. 5:28 pm. 5:35 pm. Finally, Mom says we need to eat so we can get to dance class on time. I am distracted the entire class.

After dance, I go to my room. The warm August air blows through my window as I finish reading the last page of a book, one of many I've read involving death this summer. In the final chapter, the girl dies, and her family heads out into the night sky to find the brightest star that is her.

A knock on the front door echoes through the house. I brace myself. My little sister, Melissa, bounds into my room, "It's the police," she announces.

I notice the voice in my head speaking solemnly as I watch as though it is someone else's life unfolding: "The men step into the entranceway as the mother steps back, her face clearly displaying her shock. Her head bobbles back and forth between her pastor and the police officer, whose expressions display a combination of apprehension and pity. They hate this part of their job where they have to blow up peoples' otherwise happy lives. The two girls sit on the carpeted stairs and look down on the scene; nightgowns pulled over their tiny knees, legs and shoulders touching as they huddle together. In a

moment, they will hear the news that will send each of them into a tailspin that they will spend the rest of their lives recovering from."

I walk toward the officer. Standing on the last step so I don't feel quite so small, I ask him to tell me what happened.

My dad got hit by a big heavy truck because he was in the wrong lane.

I go outside and lay on the grass. The grass feels cold and damp and pricks my bare legs. The sky is clear this August 13th night in 1987, and there are lots of stars in the sky. I find the brightest star, "Goodnight Daddy. I love you."

Worse than losing Dad was seeing my mom in pain and fear. She asks me to remember, "In life, there will be things that will hurt and be scary, but no matter what, keep your chin up and your eyes on Jesus, and you will make it through." I'm not sure what that means exactly, but I appreciate the sense of security it gives me to know she has some sort of plan.

**The Porch**

The next morning feels heavy, and the world just doesn't fit together the same anymore. The humid August air is so heavy that it feels hard to breathe. I watch grown-ups come and go, veterans who have seen more than I can imagine in my short life, and people I have always assumed would know what to do in situations like this. And yet, they crumble in grief, unable to stand without the help of the other. I have not seen this before, and at this very moment, a crystal clear thought goes through my mind: "The adults are just as scared and messed up about this as kids, only they have longer legs."

**August 13, 2021**

Instead of powerful authority figures who knew everything, adults became people, just like me, who were simply doing their best to get by.

My connection to God was the only thing I felt I could bank on in life, and my mom's direction to keep my "chin up and eyes on Jesus" became the road map I would follow. I. I figured that Jesus must be

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that little voice that speaks to me without words. She would say, "Whatever questions you have, just ask God and then listen deeply, and the answer will come to you." I did, and that still, small voice grew and became my most trusted and constant companion.

**Proposal...Take Two!**

"So, will you marry me?" I heard my dad ask my mom one evening a few months before he died.

"I thought you were already married?"

"We are," they answer, almost in unison.

The discussion is whether they will marry again within the Catholic Church.

"When I married you the first time, we were so young, and neither of us was involved in our faith at a heart level. I want the experience of re-committing my life to the woman I adore, this time with God and before God, in the spirit of the sacrament of marriage."

There is a picture…of them that day, dressed in business casual on the steps of the Catholic church, flanked by their two atheist friends and the priest. Within weeks of this photo, my dad was laid to rest in the graveyard only a few steps away. When the news came that he had died, his priest was one of the first she called, so her husband could receive the Last Rites sacrament, something she knew would matter immensely to him.

It would be inaccurate for me to paint my early religious immersion like it was a dogma-free panacea of open-mindedness. My parents had their opinions and the churches they attended; the gift of their example in my early years left a lasting impression that spirit was more authoritative than religion and that love was more important than being right. I took my mom's advice to "keep my chin up and eyes on Jesus" to heart and was very dedicated to discovering who this Jesus character was and why he was worth keeping my eyes on…I was counting on the fact that Jesus had something to offer that would make the sadness of our reality a little less overwhelming.

I began to participate in conversations about the world, spirit, religion, humans, rightness and wrongness, and my mom carried on the tradition they had started together by supporting Melissa and me in openly exploring, asking questions, and challenging ideas…A big believer in the Holy Spirit as the mover and shaker of souls in the present day, my mom would prompt us to listen to the "Still Small Voice" inside of us that was meant to guide us through all the many details of life that scripture would have no way of foreseeing. Her views gave us permission to explore deeply that internal knowing that goes by many names–intuition, holy spirit, great spirit, life force, source, gut instinct.

I began to notice… how life as a female garnered much attention about how I was supposed to be, speak, dress, and behave…. After many conversations with church leaders who insisted that women could lead other women but not men, I knew three things for certain: 1) I could not deny the spark that was growing inside me to be a leader; 2) I had no plans to change my gender;  and 3) I could not promise that I would not act upon this urge and any other that felt exciting and expansive, just because they thought the Bible said I shouldn't.

**It's Never Getting Better**

***Prodigal Sister Returns…..Again***

After my dad died, Diane's arrival back into my life was such a relief. At 11 years old, I was entirely out of my league and just sat beside her, feeling the pain of her loss, unsure of what to do. "He must have been so disappointed in me. He only tried to love me, and I caused so much trouble. I'll never forgive myself. I wish he knew how much I loved him," she said with tears streaming down her face.

For the first time, I knew what to say. I told her about a conversation with Dad before he died. I asked him, "Do you love Diane?" he replied without hesitation, "Yes." "Even after all the things she's done?" "Yes, I love her no matter what. Nothing she could have done or not done would change how much I love her." I asked if he was mad that you ran away. And he said, "No, but I am sad. She's my

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daughter, just like you and Lissy. I miss her, but she hasn't done anything bad. I know she loves me, and I love her, no matter what."  "Why are you asking me all these questions?" he asked. "Just wondering"

She promised she would visit more often. I could see in her eyes that she meant it. I had no idea where she went when she wasn't with us, and she never shared too much information. I loved her while I had her and learned to let her go when I didn't.

### *The Best Night Ever*

Diane and I skate together around the outside rink, dodging the snowballs a few boys throw to entertain themselves while others chase the girls who play along by skating away squealing. When the boys skate at me, I don't skate away. After a particularly successful maneuver where I managed to throw one of the pursuing boys into the snow bank, she laughs and cheers me on, then shifts to a more serious tone where her coaching seems to extend past the logistics of how to keep a 13-year-old boy at bay. "You need to make sure they never know what to expect from you so you can keep the upper edge. If they suspect they can take advantage of you, they will, so you need to be ready to kick them in the butt if they get all up in your face or try to push you around. Stand your ground with them, and don't be afraid to take them out if you have to."  She has a serious look that I'm not used to seeing. "I'm proud of you for being tough. You're gonna need it as you become a teenager," she continues as we head inside for hot chocolate, her arm around my shoulders.

### *Marriage and Baby*

One evening during dinner, Diane called to inform us that she was pregnant and getting married. I heard my Mom ask her who she was getting married to and why; clearly, this was not expected.

It feels strange to be with her in our new home with her new husband and baby. It could just be the newness of everything, but something feels off to me. Her face looks tired, and her hair isn't done as it usually is. And, while she looks down at her baby boy with such admiration, it seems like she doesn't really know what to do with him, where his things are kept, or how to comfort him.

In the privacy of my room, she turns to face me and lifts the heavy bangs that are covering half her face, revealing a massive bump-broken skin in the centre and nasty purple bruises around the edges. "He did this to me,"  she confesses, immediately followed by an order not to say anything to anyone.

**Once Again, Farewell**

*If Something Happens to Me*

I wake up one morning with an urgent sense that we must see Diane. "We can go next weekend," Mom suggests, but this doesn't settle the nagging sense of urgency.

We drive to see her and take a walk to the park. After some playful time at the park, she seems to have loosened up somewhat, although she still seems stressed. On our way back, I'm a bit ahead of my sisters and mom pushing the stroller when she catches up and says. "If something ever happens to me, I want you guys to raise my son."

When we say goodbye to her that day, I look at her intensely, taking her all in. I feel her frenzy, like a startled bird, feathers ruffled and unable to sit still. She smiles goodbye, her son in her arms. I wave back, looking at her through the car window as long as possible before she disappears.

*The Call*

The call is brief, and when Mom hangs up, I know it's bad news. I've seen that look before. "Diane was hit and killed by a truck a few hours ago on her way home from work."

*Final Makeover*

Approaching the coffin and looking inside, I am greeted by the shell of a body that was my sister. She is badly bruised from the accident but presentable enough for a family viewing. On her lips is bright red lipstick that looks so out of place that I can barely concentrate on anything else.

Morgan, the voice inside my head, assesses the situation, "Having lived a wild life, this once untamed and unconventional woman is carefully packaged into a perfectly sized coffin, wearing a perfect dress, and looking like the perfect model of a put-together woman, loving mother and wife. You'd never

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know of her struggles because, like the catastrophic damage sustained by her body, they have been skillfully hidden."

On the way home, I picked out another lipstick colour from the pharmacy. Later that day I returned to the funeral home, waited until no one else was visiting, and asked the funeral director to open the casket for me.

"You're looking a little rough in there," I tell her. " It's one thing to be wearing that dress, but the red lipstick is a whole other tragedy," I say quietly with a hint of playfulness, imagining that if she could hear me, she would appreciate the humour.

I wish I could hear her laugh one more time. I loved when she laughed. I can feel the tears trying to well up within me.

I run my fingers across her stiff, cold lips to remove the red lipstick, wiping them on my pants. I remember when she taught me how to shape my lips so she could put matching lipstick on me… I put the lipstick on my pinky finger so I can more easily get into the tight spaces of her once-soft lips.

"I love you, and I will miss you."

### Final Farewell

Diane's older sister is at the funeral, and I watch her from a distance, sensing her pain. Even though I know little about their relationship, I can see how much she loved her. My hope of remaining invisible is squashed as Mom approaches me with two women I don't recognize. I immediately notice the height of their heels and the shortness of their form-fitting skirts. Their legs appear to extend forever. I'm told these are Diane's friends and colleagues. They were with her the night she died and asked to meet me. A volcano of emotions has come alive, and my mind races:

"Why did you leave her on the road?  Are you stupid, or did you just not care? Even I know you should move an injured person if they're in the middle of a highway on a dark rainy night!" Thankfully I

keep my thoughts to myself, and one of them hands me a beautiful rose. "We're really sorry for your loss. Your sister was a good person."

**The Girl Who Dared the Kings**

***The Man Who Dared A King***

Lately, I wake up most mornings and fall asleep most nights to the sound of arguing in the kitchen, directly above my bedroom. No amount of pillows or blankets over my head seems to make much of a difference; believe me, I've tried. Since Mom remarried, there hasn't been a quiet morning, and they have only been married for a few months!

This old book, "The Man Who Dared a King,'' with its faded blue tattered cover is one of my favourites. I don't think it was written any time in the last 50 years, but I loved it. Or perhaps more accurately, I loved how it felt to look forward to the story all day and then to cuddle up on the bed to be read to in the evening.

Dad would regularly ask, "What do you think about the man feeling so strongly about his cause that he was willing to die? Do you think it was worth it for the man? Did his actions make any difference since he was hanged and the King did not change his ways?" I'll never forget how my dad spoke to us with such passion about these things, always emphasizing how it's essential to be brave and speak up for what is right, no matter how scary or the cost.

***Back to Reality***

The arguing has reached a new crescendo, and I am jolted out of my reminiscing. My house is filled with arguing at 7:30 am, and I wait as long as possible before going up for breakfast in hopes that they will have left. Some days, I'm ok to take on the dynamic to be less rushed, but not this morning. Seeing my mom's already grieving spirit close up like a wilting flower has become so hard for me. I worry about her.

At church, I'm told that this new husband is now the head of the house and that I need to respect him; ironic advice, given he is the least respectful person I have ever encountered. I'm told as a young woman that I do not have the authority to challenge a man, an opinion that I simply will not accept. My pastor's consistent lack of response shows he has dismissed me as a maladjusted teenager, not an observant insider who knows precisely what is happening.

All of this gave me much-needed clues about the invisible constraints that seemed to be tethering these good-hearted adults to complacency. I surmised that something about my situation did not match the collective dream playing in their heads. In that dream, men are protectors, homes are peaceful, marriages last forever, bad guys look like criminals, it's not abuse if there's no hitting, and teachers' jobs are to educate, not be social workers–because there is no need for anything else when homes are so perfect. And most importantly, good girls accept God's will without disturbing the peace.

### Helper

When the student is ready, the teacher will appear–Buddha

Sometimes, in times of darkness and desperation, life sends helpers in disguise that don't always give us what we want but certainly give us what we most need.

Mr. M enters the classroom on a mission, clearly unhappy about something, but none of us dare ask what. He abruptly starts class by demanding we name the three points of some legal term. He calls on a timid girl with dark brown hair and a rosy complexion, which gets rosier when she feels put on the spot. She quietly answers, "I don't know," which is not surprising, as she always replies that way. He promptly tells her to leave; humiliated, she grabs her books and makes a quick exit. He continues his rampage with the girl to my right. A reasonably confident person, she gives two of the three points and admits she can't remember the third. He bellows for her to leave; she quickly gathers her belongings and stands to leave. I'm dumbfounded and truly annoyed! "You might as well kick me out too, then," I concede, "because I can't remember the third one either."

Mr. M commands me to sit down, to which I reply as calmly as I can muster, "Why should I do that?"

"Because I'm the teacher," he retorts.

"Well, you're not acting like one right now."

"I said, sit down," he tries yet another time, but I'm not backing down. The play is already in motion.

"This is a waste of my time. I have other things I need to get done before the end of the day, so I'm going to do those," I inform him in a respectful yet firm tone.

I stared at Mr. M, and Mr. M. stared back. Then he turned and left the classroom.

**Two Days Later**

Mr. M enters the class, and I feel relieved that he looks calm today. The bell rings, and he calls the class to order. "It has been brought to my attention how out of line I was last class and some of its impact. I always tell you to leave your baggage at the door, but I didn't do that. Instead, I came in here as though looking for a fight. I owe you all an apology, especially those I picked on. I'm sorry for how I treated you, and I hope you can look past it as we move forward with the class."

**30 Years Later**

When I found out Mr. M was retiring, a friend coaxed me to reach out and offer this pivotal moment: "What made this encounter so significant," I told him, "was that you apologized and did so in a way that made me feel like my voice mattered. You were in a position of authority and could have easily squashed all opposition, including my spirit, but you didn't. You helped me realize my power. I don't know what you did between one class and the next, but you showed up for us, a powerful man who was not too proud to tame his ego and apologize specifically for how you had let that ego run amuck." At this point, I'm crying, and I can also see the tears in his eyes. "This matters so much to me because I was

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desperate to help my mom and sister deal with an abuse dynamic at home." Finding my sense of personal power is how I stayed mentally well despite the constant friction.

I relayed to Mr. M  how I took what I learned from my encounter with him and applied it to my challenges at home. In one encounter, my mom's husband took issue with me for some reason and got right in my face. He stood so close I could feel his breath and spit hit my face while he bellowed, "Who do you think you are?" A thought of my dad came to my mind as I forced myself to stand my ground and not look away, even though my heart was beating so hard I thought I might faint. Calmly yet as confidently as I could muster, I replied, "I'm Erin Jayne Horvath, daughter of Stephen Horvath, and I will not put up with this behaviour in my house. If you can't act civilized, you will have to leave." I pointed at the front door. I truly thought he would hit me, but, to my astonishment, he walked out!

I indeed defied Mr. M. 's authority, but in stepping out of his role as a "good teacher," he gifted me with the opportunity to step out of my role as a "good student" and claim my power. It became the most powerful educational experience of my elementary and secondary schooling career. I discovered that people within the system are just people, regardless of how the system dresses them up to be unapproachable authority figures. I learned that if I connect with that humanity, it is possible to shift aspects of the system off its axis, even if just for a moment, and change what was a system-mediated encounter into a human-to-human transformative experience.

**Great Big World**

***Learning to Fly***

There are those people whose approach to life challenges us to jump right out of our comfort zone and into the unknown. I have been blessed to know so many of these creators who see the world as their playground and unabashedly approach their lives with boundless enthusiasm. My younger sister, Melissa, is one of these beautiful people who has made and completed more bucket lists than anyone I

have ever met; she still jumps headlong into life. There are also those who, when we meet them, we sense a magnetic attraction and feel compelled to jump into the unknown with them.

### Dave

My 18th summer, I spent with Dave and hundreds of inner city, primarily Black children and teenagers, learning about the realities of gang violence, incarceration, and poverty and getting to know him. In his mid-thirties, Dave had already lived a full life of adventure, from living on the streets as non-conforming youth to years of humanitarian work worldwide. Discussing issues that weighed heavily on my mind, Dave would often respond with a relaxed shrug of the shoulders. His laissez-faire attitude was both humorous and infuriating. Instead of arguing why his views were right, he'd be more inclined to express why he probably was not right if there was such a thing as right. He'd tell me he prioritized relationships over rightness and believed in the mystical leadings he had experienced personally with God.

As I concluded high school and began university, we co-created an organization whose mission was to educate students about globalization, colonization, and how our choices in North America impact Indigenous Peoples nationally and abroad. I began to broaden my scope of the world, encountering many new cultures, customs, spiritual worldviews, practices, and a host of new challenges.

### Lessons in Masailand

We approached a Masai man in Western clothing and introduced ourselves. He seemed around our age, and as young adults, we were eager to get to know each other more. During the conversation, he shared that he has been preparing to get a second wife. This news felt unsettling for someone in my group, so she asked why he would do such a thing to his wife: Wouldn't she feel unloved? Curious, He looked at her and replied, "Why would she feel unloved if I brought another woman to be her friend and family? I treat her with love and have been working hard to find another wife soon to lighten her load."

I was under the impression that love was universally understood and found it revealing how two kind, curious, and light-hearted people could be so genuinely baffled by one another. While I didn't yet understand all the mechanics of culture, observing this interaction confirmed that there were no universals when it came to human culture.

### Josh

Closer to home, I had begun volunteering at a centre for street-involved youth, most of whom had experienced homelessness, addiction, or both at some point. Young and with nowhere near the life experiences of these people, I was wisely advised just to listen as people shared experiences of childhood trauma, domestic violence, life in the sex trade, addictions, mental health, homelessness, and many other challenges that were so far outside my scope of experience there was nothing I could add of any value except for a listening ear and some practical amenities.

Nine years my senior, Josh and I were paired to walk the streets of the city once weekly with a backpack of harm-reduction supplies and toiletries. Our job was straightforward but not simple: build relationships with people. Josh was streetsmart with stature and strength that led me to believe he could easily defend us should anything arise. As we walked the streets together each week, I was surprised to discover that Josh was a gentle, quiet-natured introvert who was in recovery from his addictions. He found giving back through volunteering a meaningful part of his healing. As time passed, I trusted him enough to open up about my experiences living in a home with my mom's abusive husband, her depression, my younger sisters' struggles, my older sister's tragic death, and the ongoing custody case for her son. Sharing with Josh, I did not feel quite as alone; I felt seen, loved, and accepted for exactly who I was.

### Spreading My Wings

Today, as a mother of two teenage boys, I reflect on the significance of meeting these helpers and gain a new appreciation for my mom. She could have discouraged, even prohibited, my involvement

in things that would introduce me to the realities of street life, take me out of the country or keep me from a typical summer job. But she didn't. She encouraged me to follow my bliss and be creative with how I would pay for my life and learning.

Years later, my mom disclosed her apprehension each time I left her nest to venture out into the world. She chose not to let that come in the way of teaching me to listen to and follow my internal leadings, precisely what I would need to become proficient at to ultimately live my unique life in a way that felt fulfilling to me.

As I parent my two teenagers, I recognize this as an act of bravery and unconditional love.

### Leaving the Nest

This was my first time helping an organization redefine itself. Within a few short weeks, we had created a haven in the inner city where youth could make meals, rest, learn, get counseling, and other services. We spent hours on the streets building friendships with youth and inviting them to help us shape the new space. As I walked up and down the main drag, past the various strip clubs, bars, and sex shops, I wondered about Diane. I reached out to those doing sex work, offering safer sex supplies, food, and other practical necessities, keenly aware that she worked somewhere in this neighbourhood.

A few weeks prior, I had stood on the rooftop of an orphanage I was volunteering in Mexico, looking at the night stars. "I have a desire to understand this world," I had said to the universe. "I have a desire to be creative. Please bring me a work opportunity that will open the doors of my heart wider than they have ever been before."

### The Plane Ride That Would Change Everything

A few weeks later, I was boarding a tiny police plane and being flown into a First Nation community to set up a sports and arts camp for youth during the summer.

**Part 2: Un-Making**

I wake up from a kool aid-induced slumber
Eyes puffy
Ears ringing
Brain foggy
Through the cacophony of
clanging and screeches
From cogs and wheels turning
I hear music

It disappears.
Maybe I imagined it?

Cuddled up beside Mother Culture
I sip some more
And begin to drift again

Wait!
There it is.
That beautiful music!

I look to Mother;
her cogs, wheels, and magical kool-aid

And back toward the beautiful music
playing in some far-off place

I take one step toward it,
then two
always keeping Mother
within arms reach.

Eventually we realize through our awareness that what we learned growing up–

about the world, about life, about ourselves–it's not exactly true.  This isn't good or bad, right or

wrong; it's just the way it is.  A time comes when the brain is mature enough that we start

doubting, we start challenging our own beliefs.  Only then can we start shifting what we believe,

expanding the mind so that everything is possible. (Ruiz Jr., 2017, p. 125)

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**Bad Guy**

***And Then There Was Here***

I'm not entirely sure what to do now. The police who dropped us off in this First Nation won't be

back for another ten days, and part of my leadership role is to figure out the next steps. I walk around

the community alone, taking in the simple houses surrounded by water, trees, wildflowers, and a smell

of nature that I have never experienced before. That voice in my head that speaks with Morgan

Freeman's sing-songy tone chimes in:

"And so, the girl who always has a direction for her life wanders into this unfamiliar place,

hundreds of kilometres from the next community or town. There are no roads out, only roads within,

and she walks those in circles, zig-zags, and whatever other direction keeps her feeling like there are

many options. She looks at other adults with a warm smile, and they look down or away; try as she

might, she just can't understand why. It is a whole different world here. She's the outsider, a feeling that

is unfamiliar to her."

***The Hungry Messenger***

A boy comes to the porch of our residence; he looks about seven years old, although I can't see

his face as his hair is covering it. He brushes it away and asks if we have any food. I share something with

him, and we chat casually.

"Are you guys the new cops?" he asks in a friendly tone.

I point at my jean shorts, sandals, t-shirt and ponytail and ask him if I look like a cop.

"No, but you could be a Narc."

"What's a narc?" I ask, clearly revealing my ignorance.

"Undercover drug cop. That's what some people are sayin'."

"Well, you can tell them that we're not. We typically do camps with kids, but there aren't that

many kids around here during the day for us to do that," I explain as I sit beside him.

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"I could probably get a few of my cousins and friends, and we could play with you in the afternoon when everyone wakes up."

He brushes his hair away from his face again. "I have some hair cutting stuff if you'd like a haircut. Just ask your parents."

Later that day, he returns, and I give him a style that makes him smile.

Within no time, the word spreads, and youth start showing up asking if I'd cut their hair for them…We found our groove of playing with the kids in the afternoon and then hanging out with the teenagers in the evening. Not what we had planned, but still great.

**A Walking History Lesson**

One evening, two teenage girls, a few years younger than me, offered to tour me around the community.

I've walked in circles around this community many times, but as I head out with these girls, it feels completely different as they show me *their* community. I receive an immersive history lesson that bleeds seamlessly into the present-day situation that has resulted in the police being banished, the place being eerily quiet, and the graveyard being tragically full of young people.

First, they tell me about the government's unrelenting efforts to separate Indigenous children from their parents. This has been going on for decades, they explain, first by making kids attend residential schools for most of the year where they were told that their families were dirty, primitive, uneducated, heathens and many other terrible things. They tell me that many of them were abused in unspeakable ways and are still trying to recover from all that. Most people in this community attended these church-run schools until 1989, when they shut them down. They then tell me about the sixties Scoop where Indigenous children were taken from their families, sometimes for no reason, and sent to live in White families to make them forget about who they are and learn how to be like White people. Finally, they tell me about the child welfare system filled with Indigenous youth–their friends and

cousins, nieces and nephews–in another attempt to separate Indigenous children from their families, culture, communities, and the Land. Some children have never returned. They are assumed dead. My heart is heavier than it has ever been in my entire life just hearing about this reality. I can't fathom what it must feel like to live it.

They are telling me that the people I have assumed are the good guys–the police, the church, social workers, child welfare, schools–are, for them, the bad guys! They are not the bringers of justice, salvation, help, protection and opportunity but rather injustice, condemnation, uncertainty, trauma, and disconnection.

Up until this point, I have never looked at my white skin as something that would be considered a bad thing.  In fact, I never paid much attention to the colour of my skin at all.

### A Call Home

I call my mom on a pay phone outside the police station and tell her what I'm learning.

" Why do the people in this little place look a lot like Diane?"

 "Because she's native too," she replies simply.

 "Wait, what?  Why didn't anyone tell me this before?" I sputter, trying to catch up to my emotions. "How do you know?"

 "It said it somewhere in the foster care and adoption papers, I believe. Or maybe it was her social worker who told me. I don't know. It has never been a big deal for us because we would love her regardless of ethnicity," she replies, still sounding rather casual.

My barely twenty-year-old brain is struggling to piece everything together, not because it is a complicated concept to understand but because of the emotional heavy weight that comes with it. No, no, no! This can't be! My sister, and her older sister, were Sixties-Scoop children? This all happened well before I was ever born. To be more accurate, only one came to live with my parents and was adopted, and the older one remained in another foster home, but for all intents and purposes, we were all sisters.

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I'm sure my parents thought they were doing a good thing by providing a good home, but in reality, they were part of something disgusting, sinister, corrupt and awful! I feel awful! In this community's eyes, my parents would be considered one of the "bad guys"–one of those White families that stole Indigenous kids from their families and destroyed lives. I feel unsure of myself, my goodness, and my family's goodness. I feel self-conscious and exposed. How could I have spent all those years walking around the world feeling good about who I am and the family I'm a part of, only to find out this? What else am I participating in now that I will later learn is part of some horrible colonization agenda? This sense of self-consciousness is bewildering yet strangely familiar.

**Not the First, Not the Last**

This was not the first conversation I had with my mom that had an unravelling effect on me. How strange it is to be sitting in a First Nations community dealing with the bombshell of learning my sisters are the Sixties Scoop kids and find my mind wandering back to another time in life when I felt profoundly betrayed by my parents' choice to withhold truths from me.

"On the school bus, I heard Jason say that he saw his parents making his little brother. What did he mean by that?" I asked, my big blue eyes looking at her for a response.

As an early childhood educator, my mom was well-versed in these types of conversations and did not skip a beat in explaining all about penis' and vaginas and what fits where in typical 1980s birds and the bees fashion. This answer was far from the "left in a cabbage patch" mythology that was popular when Cabbage Patch Kids were all the rage. Unable to contain all my emotions, I left to cry. I regrouped and returned to my mom, who was still folding laundry.

Standing in the doorway, I cleared my throat and, through moist eyes, stated, "I can see why you'd only have two babies. You wouldn't want to do that too often! Why did you let me believe that I was left by a stork in a cabbage patch?"

"I wanted to wait until you were older to tell you," she replied. This answer made absolutely no sense to me and did nothing to take away the sting of betrayal.

"Is there anything else you're not telling me because you think I'm not old enough?" I ask her, point blank.

In telling me this story as an adult, she said she knew this was a time to deal with me human to human, not parent to child. "Yes, there are other things I haven't told you, but if you ask me now, I promise I will answer you as truthfully as I know how."

One by one, I go through all my favourite holiday characters.

"I'm telling you the truth about all of this," she tells me, "because I want you to know something. God is real. We can't see God either, but God is not the same as Santa, Easter Bunny, Tooth Fairy, or Rudolph. God is not make-believe; God is real."

It was the first of many conversations where my questions would blow up my understanding of reality. By the time I asked the question about my sister being a Sixties Scoop kid, I had gone through many iterations of question bombing, where I asked questions I knew could change my internal world forever. Lying on the couch in that First Nation community, I knew what to do–simply be in the crater left in my thinking and emotions and the reality that these truths always existed in plain sight, yet I could not perceive them for what they were.

### Surveying the Damage

The grief pours out like a tidal wave threatening to drown me, crashing everything I thought I knew into tiny, unrecognizable pieces. What am I to make of all of this? Does no one outside of this place know about these atrocities? If they know, why didn't anyone tell me? Or, worse, do they know but are covering it up on purpose? How can we be the good guys, as my church tells me, when we are so clearly the bad guys to these people?

Out of this confusion, I sense a moment of clarity, where the emotions temporarily subside, and I can see myself in my mind's eye as though I'm a bird high up in the sky. I'm overcome with a sense of awe that in the whole world, I would find my way to this place, not to do any basketball or performing arts or "do-good-ing," but in doing so, cross paths with those two fierce young women and hear the truth of their experience on this planet. I sit in this calm place for a moment, silencing my thoughts to hear the inner wisdom, that still small voice that feels like it is bubbling up inside me. From that silence, a question reverberates to my core. "Will you give your life to this?" I wasn't exactly sure what "this" meant, but I felt confident that the bell could not be unrung. So in a puddle of tears and despair, I said "yes" and started the un-making, un-schooling, un-civilizing portion of my life that would change me forever.

**Making The Invisible, Visible**

***Real-Life Stereogram***

The way I held my gaze as I approached my life and the world meant that, while the larger picture existed this whole time, I could not perceive it.

As I learned more about treaties, residential schools, traditional teachings, incarceration, foster care, government and the various Nations within the Land we were now calling Canada, I began to see more pieces within the picture. As I challenged my Western colonial mindset to let go, I began to perceive how these things fit into the larger picture of colonization.

***Kanesatake Fury***

I will never forget the day I saw Alanis Obamsawin's film, *Kanehsatake: 270 Years of Resistance*, and the shutters flew entirely off.

Who the hell bulldozes a burial ground for any reason, never mind for a stupid golf course? Tears of rage fill my eyes. I feel ready to go to war against the absolute cruelty of it all. I keep waiting for something in the documentary to take a turn for the better, for some common sense White person to

speak up and insist that the army not declare war on these people because they object to their relatives' graves being bulldozed. There is no redemption, sober second thought, or surprise resolution at the 11th hour.

The government I thought was the backbone of this country of peacekeepers is full of shit! That realization hits me hard. I feel the anger of grief well up within me, and the tears return to my eyes, but instead of crying, I take a deep breath. As a White woman, the last thing I want is for my tears to pull any attention away from the conversation because I'm only getting the memo now about all of this (Diangelo, 2018). I accept that what I have just viewed is downright horrific, flies in the face of what I previously thought was true, yet is entirely accurate.

I tried to share what I was discovering. If people understood what was happening, they would be horrified and take a stance for change. Instead, some seemed disinterested; others said I was being overly dramatic and hostile, and others insisted I must be misunderstanding something. Still, others used it as an opportunity to explain why Christian salvation was the only answer to problems in the world. One told me that I needed to be careful because Shamen may have cast a spell on me, making me think all sorts of strange things, and that satan is hard at work through their primitive ways. In some cases, they were willing to see an element of it, such as youth poverty and suicides, and would be quick to suggest solutions such as organizing to send us supplies or clothing for the children. My anger grew as I continued to experience people's indifference and disbelief.

Over the year, I noticed a shift in myself. The more I accepted that the things I was seeing, hearing, reading, and learning were true, the more I was able to listen to Indigenous people speak about their experiences with White people, institutions, churches, and governments without getting defensive, making excuses, or trying to point out that not all White people are bad. I wanted to understand who was orchestrating all of this awfulness, and listening closely to people's stories was giving me clues, bit by bit.

**The Summer of 1997**

The following summer, upon their invitation, I returned to the same community but this time with four new friends– all of us White young adults except for one guy who was East Indian. The community leadership quickly supported us in putting on youth programs for the summer as they continued to experience crisis after crisis. They gave us an empty house which we made available to everyone 24 hours a day, running various recreational activities and helping provide emotional support to the youth and their families.

*Harriette*

It's a hot day, and my friend and I are cleaning up our place before heading down to the water to swim with everyone else. We hear screaming. He opens the door and is greeted by nearly twenty soaking-wet children in bathing suits, shaking and crying uncontrollably. "A woman is hanging down by the water." When we arrive, we find a young woman lying on the shoreline by our friends. It only takes one touch to feel the coldness of her skin, and we realize there is nothing we can do to help her.

Upon seeing the body, my friend went into shock and began experiencing severe post-traumatic stress, including hallucinations, sweating, shaking, and sleeplessness. Going from never thinking about death to witnessing a young person take her life is a massive step for anyone. I recognized that my prior experience with death had provided me with a significant starting point for processing.

We gather around the hand-dug grave, and people sob as ropes lower her casket, men flanking the grave on both sides. Shovels are brought out, and people take turns covering the grave with soil, including myself and my friends. The friend that is struggling with her own trauma reactions says she wants to help as well. Tears streaming down her face, she takes the shovel and starts digging. Her crying and shaking intensify. My friends and I approach her to offer support, but two women from the community come alongside her before we get to her. One puts her arms around her shoulders, and the

other holds the shovel with her, and together they support her as she continues to shovel, cry, and shake with the grief of it all.

The grace and compassion of those women move me to tears even to this day. Grace … is when we are given something undeserved. Here are these two Indigenous women who have buried so many of their young people over the past five years due to trauma that can all be traced back to White people in one form or another, yet they are embracing this young White woman whose personal world is crumbling in on her as she struggled to cope with their reality. Is it possible others were looking on with resentment at this emotional display? Indeed, and I wouldn't blame them. One only had to look around at their graveyard to see that it was full of recent graves, the last recent tragedy only weeks earlier. People were exhausted. Adding settler people having an existential crisis to the mix is the last thing they needed. The kindness that these women extended is a tribute to this community's ability to love bigger than we could imagine. There was an allowance for our personal experiences and meanings of grief to exist alongside theirs. Later I was told that some felt sorry for us enthusiastic yet terribly naive settler people, who were mere youths ourselves.

We were surprised when several adults hosted a barbecue to say goodbye to us a few days later, a stark contrast from the beginning of the summer when most adults didn't even look in our direction. We hugged the youth goodbye, and I promised I would return.

**What Are You Doing Here?**

At the community's request, I returned the following summer, bringing with me one friend from the previous summer who became my spouse in several more years. People seemed surprised that we came back; apparently, they had become accustomed to the revolving door of teachers, youth workers, pastors, missionaries, police officers, doctors and nurses that frequented the north.

Conversations with the youth and adults became more real, confrontational, and honest. I remember one in particular with a woman who started as a skeptical neighbour but, over the years, became a friend.

"Why have you come here?" she asked bluntly.

"To learn and to help where I can"

"Because you know we don't need you or any other White person to save us. We're capable. If you're here because you think you're gonna save us, you should leave right now," she said sternly, looking directly at me for emphasis.

"I saw how capable this community is last summer. Even with the tragedies, people came together. Honestly, I don't know how you do it over and over again. It's true that when I was first told about this place, they said you're a community in a state of crisis and need help."

"We do need help," she responded. "But we don't need rescuing. There's a difference."

She became someone we turned to. I began to see the value in her approaches, which were very different from my own and valued her willingness to correct me.

**Go Back to Where You Came From**

This notion of "why I was here" became even more personal when a few youth who had lost a family member at the hands of the white-skinned police officers would shout out to us in Anishinaabemowin. They said it often enough that I memorized it and then asked somebody I trusted what it meant. "Go back to where you came from," she translated, giving no explanation, apology, or comfort.

"Go back to where you came from." I let that turn about in my mind. And where exactly is that, I wondered. I considered where I would go if I took these kids at face value and returned to where I came from. What is someone like me to do when this body I am in is a composite of ancestors from various European countries?

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True, the community leadership has invited us here… however, I am still distraught by this and consider my connection to the bigger issue of settler people being in places we were never invited nor wanted.

As a first-generation immigrant on my dad's side, I have grown up hearing his family refer to the "old country," this was a continuous reminder that my family was not Indigenous to this land.  I have never considered whether we were entitled to be here just by virtue of the challenging situations they were fleeing. For years a story of entitlement to this place has been passed down from generation to generation, telling people like me that this is "our home and native land." Before asking permission from the Chief and Council to come into this particular community, I had never even considered asking for permission to go anywhere that I wanted to go in the world.

### Inside the Tornado

I genuinely want to right this wrong in me, but how?  I feel like I don't belong anywhere, like an uprooted plant pulled from the only pot it's ever known, unsure of what type of plant it is or where on earth it came from.

I feel like I'm losing my mind. How am I possibly supposed to find a way out of this? What I know for sure, I can't go back to not knowing about all this stuff. I can't stick my head in the sand and pretend it doesn't exist. However, I've got to devise a way not to let these thoughts and feelings run amuck and render me useless. I could dismiss them as rude kids. I could assume their leaders' opinions trump theirs and just continue. But those do not feel right to me. I sit with it longer and finally get up, knowing what I will do. The next time I see the two most vocal kids walking together and looking relaxed, I approach them. "I just want you to know that I get this is your home. I don't get to decide what happens here. You and your community do. You're welcome to participate in our activities if you like—it is your community, after all.  But I get it if you don't want to," I offer.

Those kids began spending time with us in the coming days, and in the coming years, we developed a solid relationship with their entire family.

**Let Me Introduce You**

"Why haven't I met that many people our age in this community?" I ask Leanne, a confident and clever young Anishnawbe woman. "Come, I'll introduce you." She leads me up the hill to the graveyard. I realize what she means, and my heart sinks.

"Let me introduce you to the friends and cousins I grew up with," she says without hesitation or sentimentality. I follow her as she introduces each by name as we stand at the foot of their grave. One after the other, we go through the whole graveyard, stopping at a dozen or more crosses with flowers, white picket fences, pictures, necklaces, and other memorabilia that loved ones have put on the grave in remembrance. I notice many dates are in the early 1990s, only a few years ago. In some cases, the mounds of soil are so recent that grass and blueberry plants have not yet had a chance to cover them, and the artificial flowers are still bright and vibrant.

"Most of us went to residential school together," she adds.

That ended in 1989, and less than 10 years later, she is standing in a graveyard showing some White girl why there are few people our age to hang out with. I look at her, looking at me, surrounded by her friends' graves, her head held high, her eyes staring right at me.

While I don't know the specifics of each situation, I know that, in all cases, their deaths are directly or indirectly a result of childhood trauma that has its roots in policies that were meant to "destroy the Indian in the child" but instead destroyed the child altogether—a whole group of children in this case.

As we talk, I learn her cousins, siblings, and younger friends still leave their communities at the end of August each year to go away to high school, where they must be boarded away from home and family.

"Wait, I thought residential schools were done?"

"The ones that were run by churches and White people are done. Our own people run these," she clarifies.

"So residential schools have not actually stopped in this country; they have just changed shape," I process aloud.

Here we are, both women in our early twenties, intelligent, confident and outspoken, yet our lives have been so different.They will likely continue to be different because of one very significant difference. She is Indigenous, and I am White, and at this time and place in human history, that factor makes all the difference.

## Lessons from Alcatraz

The Matrix is everywhere. It's all around us, even in this very room. You can see it when you look out your window or when you turn on your television. You can feel it when you go to work, or go to church or pay your taxes.  The Matrix is the world that has been pulled over your eyes to blind you from the truth… A prison for your mind.

—Morpheus and Neo in *The Matrix (* Wachowski & Wachowski, 1999)

### *The Matrix*

As I sit in the darkened theatre in Budapest, I have no idea that the movie I am about to see will play a huge role in my initiation into adulthood. I'm engrossed in the metaphor. The premise? The world we experience as real isn't real, and humanity is not fully living but plugged into a computer having an experience of living. Out there, sure, but it is speaking to me to my twenty-three-year-old self that, in recent years, has become angry and disillusioned with the bullshit of the world and how little the average Canadian seemed to care about it all. Neo's suspicion that something is amiss in the world is confirmed, and he is invited to choose between one of two pills that will have dramatically different effects.  Taking the blue pill will immediately end the realizations he's experiencing, and he will wake up

in his bed believing he had a dream, or the red pill, which will start a journey of uncovering just how

deep the illusion of The Matrix is. The metaphor of The Matrix resonates deeply with me, and I am

intrigued with the parallels of what this could mean for me and my experience of waking up to a world

that is far from the idealized one I was led to believe existed.

Like Neo, I constantly challenged the dominant cultural norms and had a nagging sense that

something was not as it seemed.

There's nothing quite like gaslighting of the religious variety to coral a non-conforming mind like

mine back into folds where blue pills are available on tap in exchange for a sense of belonging offered by

few others.

### My Own Red Pill Experience

A few months later, I have my own red pill-blue pill experience that creates a sequence of

realizations that accelerate my un-making.

An Indigenous elder has come to speak to our cohort of graduate students. I listen to his story

about… how he hitched a ride with members of the National Indian Brotherhood heading to what

would become the infamous takeover of the former Alcatraz prison.  At the end of the occupation, ashes

from the fire were gathered into a container and, to his astonishment, given to him with instructions to

distribute and share what he had learned.  He asks if anyone would like to take some ashes with them.

He gives me and others a tiny bit on a piece of paper in the palm of our left hand. I shut my eyes and

close my hand around the ashes. As he prays, I begin to feel a warm sensation in my hand, which soon

travels up my left arm, becoming more intense as it goes. I begin to feel uncomfortable as the warmth

settles into my chest. I try to open my hand, but it doesn't budge.

Stepping into the warm fall air, I head to the picnic table, which is far enough from the nearby

Toronto traffic to give me a bit of privacy. Then out of nowhere, I notice a powerful and distinct smell of

a cedar smudge. In the depths of my being, I sense a woman's voice. I can't see her with my eyes or hear

her with my ears, but somehow I know she's there, and an image of how she looks fills my mind's eye. She's an older Aboriginal woman, wearing a skirt and sitting beside a fire with an Aboriginal man to her side farthest from me. She tells me that the colour of my skin does not disqualify me from living on the earth in a good way or from being accomplices with Indigenous Peoples and ways of being. She affirms that how I have come into this world is exactly how I was meant to be and gives me a spirit name, "She walks with us." I feel so much shame in myself, shame about being a White person. What right do I have to receive any of the words or the energy she shares with me? I feel so profoundly unworthy, like an imposter.

Finally, once back in the privacy of my apartment…"This is the craziest thing, and I don't know what to make of it, but whatever this gift is, I accept it to the best of my ability. Please help me understand it all because, honestly, I'm pretty in the dark right now." Then, as though nothing was ever wrong, my hand opens, revealing the little folded paper package containing the ashes I had barely looked at before they were placed in my palm five hours earlier.

Life continually offers us opportunities to choose between the blue and red pill, to see things for how they truly are, or to remain in blissful ignorance. Sometimes we recognize those moments and make a conscious choice. However, more often than not, we unconsciously reach for a handful of blue pills, washing them down with a big swig of conditioned responses meant to protect ourselves from the unknown, the new information, experience or perspective that will change everything.

Something powerful happened when I requested the universe to lead me into the unknowns of my heart, mind, spirit and emotions. This was the beginning of an unmaking that would rock my world and dismantle everything I believed to be true.

**Privileged White Girl Meltdown**

If it was just one thing–one idea, one truth, one revelation, one historical fact, one paradigm-challenging concept–I could have managed to adapt and carry on. Instead, it was a million

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different things piled up way too high in my psyche, causing me to teeter in my identity, boiling and

brewing in my emotions, and pressing all the buttons of my insecurities at the same time, to the point

that I could not cope anymore. The "me" that I knew was crumbling.

I was overwhelmed to the core with guilt and shame like I'd never encountered, culminating in a

complete breakdown during my first year of graduate studies. "There's got to be a mistake! I've been

born into the wrong culture! I have only ever wanted to do good in the world, to help people, and then I

find out that I have been born into the most despicable type of human being ever! Creator, do you hear

me? You screwed up somewhere along the line because this is not the body that matches my heart! Or

maybe this is some sort of a cruel joke…not only that, I was raised in a Protestant and Catholic family

too! While you were at it, why didn't you make me male? Then I could be the perfect representation of

the loathed White man!"

I grieved hard. I grieved who I thought I was, who I was trained to see myself as. From early years

of Sunday school and hearing the missionary stories to my family sponsoring a "third world child," to the

damned shoe boxes full of plastic shit that we would send all across the globe to "bless" people who

were not as fortunate, to the prayers for those who have not yet experienced "the riches of God's

blessings because they are still living in sin"– all of this was priming me to believe that white-skinned

people, our governments, our schools, our health care and certainly our religion, had something special

to offer the world, and helping those places to progress was a selfless admirable thing, the stuff heroes

are made of, and afterschool specials are emulated after.

Elizabeth Kubler Ross' (1969) stages of grief were in full swing, and it was not pretty. Mostly I

grieved the loss of feeling like the good person I once thought I was.

My need to look inward fueled some of the guilt, shame, and anger I had directed toward myself.

I felt I should focus on those suffering, not on myself. I wanted to build authentic relationships with

diverse people and hear their truths. Yet, their truths took aim at my preconceived notions like a highly

skilled sniper determined to hit every nerve, identity, value, and belief I had come to rely on for my sense

of orientation in the world. I didn't yet realize that my grief work was what I needed to do in order to be

genuinely open to other people and other truths.

**Humpty Dumpty's Wall**

My wall, which I had been building with great care, block by block my entire life, began to get

unstable…these unfamiliar blocks represent the new things I was learning and experiencing.

Thankfully my mom had introduced a concept that became a foundational block in my wall.

"When unsure of something you are told or direction given, check with the Holy Spirit, who is there to

guide you through everything in real-time and can add clarity as needed. Trust that over the opinion of

others," she would say. Her guidance gave me permission to listen deeply to the internal compass within

me… I felt completely justified in questioning anything I encountered in life.

It was a specific realization that caused my wall to start cracking, crumbling, and eventually

rupturing: I had been devoted to leading a divinely inspired life focused on doing good in the world, yet

my unique life circumstances showed that, without a doubt, I was connected, directly and indirectly, to

things that were causing massive harm. The biggest mind grenade was that, the whole time, I didn't have

any of these things on my radar. I would never have conceived that my sisters were part of a government

scheme meant to assimilate Indigenous Peoples by separating children from their families. I would never

have conceived that the missionaries that were the heroes of my childhood stories would be the ones

abusing Indigenous children at schools that the government and churches were in cahoots about. This

realization broke my wall, causing me to "have a great fall." Try as I might, I could not put myself back

together again, nor the wall upon which I was once comfortably perched.

***Broken, But Not Crazy–Whew!***

I later learned that what I was experiencing had a name–*disorienting dilemma* (Mezirow &

Cranton, 2012). This resulted from being inundated with experiences that did not fit my expectations of

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the world and could not be made to make sense given my current worldview.  I was being caused to

question my most deeply held beliefs about "goodness" and "badness." As the evidence against my

current view of the world mounted, I had to work harder and faster to rearrange my mental constructs

to make sense of everything. Soon there were far too many contradictions to accommodate. I could no

longer reconcile what I had been learning with the worldview nurtured in my mainstream,

Protestant/Catholic, middle-class, caucasian home. When I finally cracked, out came "The Matrix," which

consisted of the many years of Sunday school lessons, sermons, guidance counsellor advice, TV shows,

movies, documentaries, lectures, books, songs, news stories, and countless social interactions that I had

ingested believing they were accurately informing me about myself and the world, as well as "goodness"

and "badness."

I re-discovered a word I first encountered in my psychology classes: schema. Jean Piaget (1966;

1973)… observed that we sort the knowledge we gather through experience into groupings known as

schemas. Either new information can be fit into our existing understanding of the world (assimilated), or

we have to change our understanding so the new things can fit (accommodated). I had a schema about

good and bad. That schema fits into a larger schema of "how the world works," which I realized I no

longer understood.

My existing schema of good/bad included these beliefs: (a) intention is more important than

impact, (b) goodness and badness are demonstrated through actions, (c) people are generally good, (d)

badness occurs when people turned away from the Christian god and his guidance about what is good,

(e) not acting in intentionally good or bad ways results in a person being neutral, (f) spiritual and

religious people were conduits of good, (g) people and institutions were mostly good and could be

trusted to look out for the good of the majority, and (h) "others" needed help, and we did the helping.

That made us "good."

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This lens was no longer holding up to the test of reality, and I had no idea what to do next. I was sad, embarrassed, and ashamed. I kept to myself, unsure of what words to use to express my experience of feeling like an imposter in my life. I was a broken Humpty, with a broken wall, with no idea how to repair either as I had entirely rejected the "King's" regime–his horses and his men!

**Something Touched Me Deep Inside, The Day the Music Died**

And then, silence. Not because my heart didn't want to sing but because no words could express the complexity, grief, and sorrow within me.

**Dancing with Shame**

I didn't know where I was going, but I knew I didn't want to stay where I was, broken and angry, at the foot of my crumbling wall that I was sure would collapse on me given a bit more time.

During those weeks following my meltdown in my apartment, my shame continued to mount until I had a debilitating cycle happening. Either I would look at myself with contempt or project it outward at the other White people who appeared to be living blissfully ignorant lives, untroubled by their participation in a world set up to favour them. When I focused my contempt inward, I noticed my "woe is me" tendencies as I desperately wanted to feel that I was fundamentally "good," even though I had no idea what constituted good anymore. When I projected outward on the other White people, everywhere I looked, I saw bullshit.  Bullshit news reports, bullshit worship services, bullshit curriculum, bullshit political policies, bullshit charity–my entire world felt like it was doused in bullshit!

*Enter Ishamael*

One day, one of my classmates mentioned an author, Daniel Quinn (1995), whose work she greatly admired…. a fictional story… examin[ing].. the plight of humanity through the eyes of a gorilla, Ishmael. Ishmael describes Leaver Peoples as those who live in harmony with the Land, taking only what they need and seeing themselves as part of an interconnected web. On the other hand, Taker Peoples see humans as the pinnacle of creation, and "the world is a human life-support system, a machine

designed to produce and sustain human life, (Quinn, 1995, p. 69)," meant to support their infinite

expansion. To do that, the Takers became agriculturalists, manipulating the earth into producing more to

fuel the expansion (Quinn, 1995). The part that made me stop dead in my tracks was a simple diagram

(Quinn, 1995, p. 152). A horizontal line showed the timeline of the Leavers dating back further than

3,000,000 B.C. to past 2000 A.D. It was a long line, and I understood that Leaver cultures have

successfully lived on the planet for a long time. Then I noticed the right side was a relatively tiny offshoot

starting around 8000 B.C. and heading past 2000 A.D. It was labelled "Takers''. That is when the light

went on:

"Wait, oh my goodness… yes. Oh wow! I get it! I don't come from a line of inherently defective

or hurtful people! I'm a Leaver person whose people have forgotten they are Leavers!"

Quinn's words became the catalyst that would start my long ascent out of my self-created pit of

shame. At that time in my life, I didn't know anyone talking about shame in any productive way. Many

years later, I encountered shame researcher Brené Brown (2012), who explains, "Shame is the intensely

painful feeling or experience of believing we are flawed and therefore unworthy of love and belonging"

(p. 69). She elaborates, "Shame is the fear of disconnection–it's the fear that something we've done or

failed to do, an ideal that we've not lived up to, or a goal that we've not accomplished makes us

unworthy of connection" (Brown, 2012, p. 68). Bingo! This described my experience perfectly. Coming to

understand how I was unknowingly causing harm resulted in me judging myself as a bad person. While I

didn't believe this "badness" meant I was doomed forever, I no longer knew what actions could lead me

out of "badness." Growing up, the notion of goodness came with a clear set of dos and don'ts, and since

I had discovered that list to be biased and inaccurate, I no longer had a guide to work from, no strategy

for redemption. In addition, I had lost my sense of belonging. Speaking up about the dangers of

missionary work, starting churches, and residential schools in Indigenous communities immediately

resulted in my ostracization from those circles of people, as back in those days, the terms truth and

reconciliation were not yet conceived, and most Canadians didn't even realize Residential Schools were

happening. At the same time, many Indigenous Peoples looked at me with contempt, and rightly so.

While I was spending so much time and energy working within one particular Indigenous community, it

was evident that I did not belong there either. My family loved me but did not understand me. I didn't

know if my friends would accept or reject me as our views became increasingly different, and I became

more outspoken about what I saw in the world. According to these groups, I would forever be flawed

and imperfect and never quite belong anywhere.  I had taken on shame, and like an itchy wool sweater, it

was becoming more irritating by the minute.

### *This Changes Everything*

The discovery that I came from a history of Leaver peoples, albeit many generations ago,

renewed my sense of worth. I began wondering how to deal with the uncomfortable shame I was

carrying. I decided to talk to my professor about it. She was not only a wise Indigenous woman but

someone whom I had grown to trust. What I remember her saying in reply moved me from stagnation to

action:

"The Creator does not make mistakes. You were born into exactly the body, family and cultural

circumstances you were meant to be in. Being born White and Christian, you belong to the group with

the most economic and political power. If I walk into one of your churches or governments and speak to

your people, they won't truly listen to me because all they can see is my brown skin. On the other hand,

you know how to speak to them, your language and worldview, and most importantly, you look like them

so they will listen to you. You can get upset about all the power you have been born into, or you can

acknowledge it and use it to ally yourself with us."

Her words and the intensity of her eyes were exactly what I needed to reorient myself. I made a

decision that day. If I was going to remain on this land, I would claim every last bit of power I had as a

White person. I would multiply it and expand it. I would expand my interconnection to something much

larger than myself, which I called the universe, to remind myself I didn't need to understand it to honour

it. I would lean into the fact that my life exists at the border between cultures and between the physical

and non-physical, and while I may not feel like I entirely belong anywhere, I can engage across each of

these. I would harness all of this and be an accomplice with the Leavers. And for those like me, who are

descendants of Leavers who have forgotten, I will try my darndest to live my life in a way that might

spark a deep sense of remembering within them too.

**Walking With, Not Away**

In high school, Melanie and I were involved in evangelical Christianity. While our paths in life

have been quite different, she and I have maintained our devotion to spirituality. I've been preparing to

have this conversation with her for many months. We have always respected each other and been

honest, so I know that, whatever she asks me, I will tell my truth.

"I hear all of what you're saying, but I still don't quite understand why you have walked away

from Jesus because of all this?" she asks, leaning toward me, her eyes curious and full of love.

"I haven't walked away from Jesus," I tell her. "I've walked with Jesus through all this. The same

sense of spiritual connection I've had since I was a child is still with me today, and it's that security that

gives me the strength to listen to someone else's truth, even ones with horrific violence that implicate a

religion that has played an integral role in shaping me. The security of my faith allows me to ask tough

questions about what is real and what is not. It's been scary. Ironically, I have walked with Jesus right

outside the institution of the church, and now, he and I are looking in from the outside."

She nods, and I can tell she's thinking deeply. That's one thing I've always appreciated about her.

She's willing to listen and try to understand me.

I know that whatever I tell her, she will love and respect me, and in recent years, I have noticed I

no longer want her to separate herself from the Church just because I can no longer participate in it as

an insider. I don't need my friend, who in many ways represents a version of myself, to leave her religion

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in order for me to feel that my path is a valid one. In sharing my words, I made peace with a part of

myself. And as she continues to look back at me with love in her eyes, my faith in Love grows stronger

than ever before. I may not know exactly where I'm going, but I do know how I will get there.

**Part 3: Re-Making**

With each tentative step
The music gets clearer
Over the drone of the System
And the wails of Mother

From this place of borders
Neither here nor there
In one ear the drone
The other, the music

I see the womb of the System
In which I was raised
Continuing it's incessant
production
reproduction
overproduction
destruction.
Money Never Sleeps.

One more step toward the music
I'm stopped dead in my tracks
my umbilical cord
has reached its max.
Security
has yet again,
tethered freedom.
Captivity has domesticated the wild.

When we begin to break free of the habits we learned during our domestication, we become

warriors. This is when the mind wages a war against itself–against knowledge. Eventually, the

knowledge that domesticated us becomes our ally, and the mind learns to transform and

transcend itself. We are remembering who we are. We are Life. We are truth. (Ruiz Jr., 2017, p.

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**Embracing the Borders**

I learned the term *border worker,* to describe myself and others from different cultures who set

aside some of their cultural customs to relate with one another in a way that is a blend of both cultures

(Haig-Brown, 1990; 2010). Borders can be the physical spaces where people meet (such as health care

systems, schools, and justice systems) but also the borders of worldviews and cultures, which require

those involved to step outside the familiar and into something unfamiliar.

What I didn't realize is that everyone I encountered, especially Indigenous Peoples, were border

workers because of forced participation in colonial systems. I had imagined that I had stepped into their

world when I stepped into their community. I didn't understand that in these border spaces, the

momentum of power is heavily weighted in favour of the colonizers. This isn't *their* world, and even

though it is happening on their territory, it is a version of White culture taking place within an Indigenous

community.

Haig-Brown (1990) spoke of the "ever-present tension between being useful and being

undesirable"(p. 230). I constantly wondered if my involvement was not helping but continuing the legacy

of colonization.

I learned that many Indigenous Peoples who engage with people like me in the borders

between cultures experience a feeling of separation, even rejection, from their communities and

cultures–conversing in English, completing "White peoples" education, or working in a "White career"

being typical examples. I have often witnessed Indigenous people being told by other Indigenous Peoples

that they are turning into "White Indians," "Apples," and other terms meant to signify a perceived loss of

Indigenous-ness.

As I built authentic friendships with people in this community, I slowly began to be invited into

people's personal, familial, and communal worlds, and I began to invite them into mine. It was a slow

dance of trust as we would reveal an aspect of ourselves and then see how it would be received. I

learned to listen deeply to the pain people were experiencing at the hands of White people without mounting a defence. I also learned to become vulnerable in sharing how unsure I was about how the world worked now that I knew about the terrible things happening. As time went on, I was invited to contribute in more of a work capacity, which I believe involved them checking to see how teachable I was and how willing I was to be corrected. My one friend, who was also my colleague, would periodically lean over and whisper, "You're being really White right now," when I would slip into patterns of interaction that were too opinionated, word-heavy, or bossy. It was sometimes challenging to receive their feedback as helpful guidance as I wanted to do things perfectly. To be useful in this context, I soon realized that I had to be willing to be wrong.

Borderwork is messy because there is an inevitable power imbalance that must be explicitly managed whenever non-Indigenous people become involved. I could leave the community anytime I wanted, leaving behind their challenges and any conflict stirred up through initiatives we were working on together. It took a very long time for people to believe that I was in it for the long haul with them, whether I lived in a particular community or not.

The border is full of complexities, risks, contradictions, emotions, and simultaneously opposing forces. It is political, deeply personal, and almost certainly a place where theoretical ideals fall flat, and relational vulnerability becomes the only real hope for building reciprocal trust. It continues to be a profoundly unsettling place for a White settler who is trying my best not to repeat cycles of colonialism and oppression.

**Through The Eyes Of A Child**

***When I Was His Age***

"Mommy. What's wrong?" I hear the tiny, lispy voice I love calling me from the backseat.

How do I even begin to answer him?

"I'm crying, darling, because I'm thinking about what that man, James, said about feeling sad when he was a little boy because he didn't get to see his Momma and Daddy."

"Why didn't he?" my three year old asks me.

"I honestly don't know, darling. I don't know why anyone would do that," I reply.

We're both quiet for a minute.

"Momma is somebody gonna take me away," he asks in the quietest of voices. I turn and face him.

"No, darling. No one's gonna take you anywhere," I say with conviction recognizing his need for reassurance.

As fate would have it, he was born into this world with the same white-coloured skin as the people who make the laws of this land and has two white-skinned parents who are well educated, well resourced, and if it ever came down to it, would be able to fight the system to protect our children, because the system is set up to favour parents like us. We are assumed innocent because of our skin colour, and we know people within all levels of the system who, through our professional and personal associations, would help us if someone dared touch our children. "I reach back to touch his tiny feet and see the emotion in his eyes. He has always been a particularly empathetic child, and while he may not understand what all this is about, I am certain he feels the gravity of it.

"Let's head back home and see Becca and Tawnie, ok," I smile at him. "Dad might be home too."

He smiles. Becca and Tawnie are two Indigenous girls that live with us so they can attend school. In one case, the school in her community burnt down, so she would not be able to finish elementary school until it was rebuilt, which could take years, and in the other case, she, like nearly every other Indigenous teenager living in a northern and/or fly-in community, must leave their families and communities if they want to attend high school.

*The State of First Nations Education*

What most settler Canadians don't know is that not all eligible Indigenous students have the opportunity to attend high school, never mind post-secondary. Without high school being available in each community, children as young as 13 years old need to leave the community if they want to attend high school and be housed in boarding houses, which are a residential school of sorts run by Indigenous Peoples, or at homes like mine, often hundreds of kilometres from their home and family where they are vulnerable targets of racialized violence (e.g., Talaga, 2017). The long-standing Canadian tradition of undermining kinship ties and separating Indigenous children from their families continues to this day. Using ranking systems, students must apply and compete against each other for the limited spots. Once accepted, students like the girls who lived with us…would be expelled from school and sent back home if they were caught drinking or doing drugs three times. Tell me what percentage of non-Indigenous students would graduate from high school if that was the standard they were held to! Hell, how many of us adults would have graduated under these standards?

So why do I cry now? Shouldn't I be elated that me and my children were, by chance, born into this world with a skin colour that assures us that there won't be laws to legislate my children away? I cry because I have calibrated my heart to expect a peaceful life for all my friends and their children, not just the white-skinned ones.

**Child of Another Mother**

I'm reminded of a piece of art one of my friends made a decade or more ago where she found magazine pictures of women from all around the world holding one or more of her own children in her arms. She then cut the children out of their mother's arms and placed them in the arms of another mother from elsewhere in the world. She was imagining how this would change how the world worked. Would we send the child in our arms to be a soldier on the other side of the world, knowing it is our child they will be fighting?

Why do so many of us settlers not register the gravity of what has and continues to happen to Indigenous children and families? An answer to this question came about a year ago when I ran a workshop on decolonization and decolonization. A few days after the bodies of 215 children were discovered buried around the Kamloops Residential School site in British Columbia, the group assembled with this revelation fresh on their minds. Ava, typically a quiet and reserved intellectual, spoke about her dismay around this discovery. Her words caught in her throat as she struggled to hold back her tears, which finally overflowed as her grief poured out.

"Sorry," she said several times and tried to regroup.

"Don't be sorry," I responded. "These were children that were discarded, 215 of them; it's appropriate to have strong emotions about something like this."

She sobbed. In all my years of telling everyone I can find about Residential Schools and the other horrors of colonialism, I have never encountered someone who responded with the intensity of emotion that I felt matched the gravity of the situation. I asked her what was so different in this situation.

"It's that they were children, helpless, innocent children. How could they do that to them? There's nothing, nothing that can excuse that!"

At that moment, the horror became real to all aspects of her, not just her intellect. She could imagine those children as her own child or grandchild and realized nothing in the world could excuse this behaviour. Decentering our lived experience and embracing what anthropologist Eva Mackey (2016) has called "settler uncertainty" are necessary first steps in beginning the uncolonization process for colonizers. I know from experience that it's profoundly disorienting and scary to realize that what you've been told all your life, explicitly and implicitly, is not necessarily true. Appropriately, she had become uncertain. Suppose she can tolerate the discomfort of this new uncertainty and take herself out of the spotlight in order to spotlight the reality of another. In that case, she may begin the work of uncolonizing

her mind, which, if it goes far enough, makes way for the decolonization of the Land and Indigenous-settler relations.

**Becoming a Mother**

Why would someone who has benefited from being plugged into the system ever unplug themselves from the same system their life force animates? For the small price of giving up our instincts, freedom, spirit, and autonomy, we can forever suck at the teets of the beast, fearful of disengaging lest we wither. My mother once told me that when I was born in 1976, the beast, taking the shape of the formula-making companies, advertisers, and the medical system, implanted in her a belief that she would not be able to make enough milk to nurse me.

My confidence in my instincts grew as I gave birth at home with a midwife who encouraged me to tap into my primal knowing. The first night my mom got up with me after my son was born, she was concerned that his fussing was because he wasn't getting enough milk from me nursing him. I assured her that he was feeding well. So deep, deep, deep was that seed of doubt. I saw her confidence in my biology and the biology of women growing within her as my son grew strong and plump within days, drinking only my milk. At this time in my life, I lived in a First Nation community where my role as a mother was revered and my instincts trusted. My connection with my child was supported, even facilitated. I felt confident that our instincts would guide us and my body would sustain us.

Why talk about the primal experience of becoming a mother? Because it is one of the things that, try as it may, the system can never control. I have met countless women who best understand what it means to be connected to a force more significant than the colonial system because of their deep bond with their children. They will share stories about instinctively knowing their child needed help, going against authority figures who thought they knew what the child needed, and the communication that happens without words.

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**Becoming a Mother of Another**

These two beautiful beings looking at me with such complete trust, unconditional love and wonder summoned forth within me a devotion so deep that I have become wholly enraptured with them. Whether we are together or apart, their presence is in every cell of my body and spirit. It is as though I've become interwoven with these two beings; now, I have their interests at the forefront of everything. When I look at the world, I feel two sets of big blue eyes looking out from within me, and the image of the world has been transformed. They have alchemized me into Mother, not just *their* mother but into a way of being and interacting within the world that is the archetypal Mother.

After taking several years away from intense work to raise my young children, this is the first big undertaking I have agreed to. Tawnie, an Indigenous girl I had known since she was a small child and who I helped parent during her teenage years when she lived with us, was the first to ask if I'd come back to her community to help her and her friends who had become painfully addicted to opioids.

A month or so later, I set foot in the community again on a bright, crisp January morning in 2012. I'm walking on the side of a snow-covered road reflecting on the conversations I've had in the past few days since I've returned. I'm stirred out of my walking trance when a truck pulls up beside me with Luke inside, a man I know well because we used to work together, and his son was involved in many of the youth programs we ran.

"Some of us have been talking, and when you were here last, you were a young lady, but you have returned, a woman. We can see it in the way you hold yourself and how you speak. We can see that you're a mother by the way you look at our children."

***Dear Parents, Aunties, Uncles, and Cousins***

Three days into our community-wide planning related to opioid addiction, the time has come to talk with the youth. I ask, "Imagine we're writing a letter to your parents, aunties and uncles. What would you want to say?"

One voice follows another, and I write everything they say, speaking it back to them as I write. Some speak for themselves, others whisper their ideas to another child or an adult, and it's spoken out. As I witness them in their courage, for the briefest of moments in my mind's eye, I see my two children sitting on their knees with these other children; I hear their voices. Then suddenly, I am with these children as a Mother, and the love I have for my children feels as though it has flooded into the space, and my heart is overflowing with love for them and for their parents who, just like me, house the child parts of themselves within their adult bodies.

I was engaging differently as a facilitator because I had brought my Mothering energy into my work and let it lead. Instead of staying rooted in my perspective, I would work to let go of that need to control and trust in our connection and then move into the "space" between each of us. In doing so, I would no longer limit my sense of experience to my singular body but raise my awareness to sense what was happening for all of us as a whole.

Underlying it all was the Mothering lens. I had witnessed the day-to-day development of my children and intimately understood what prompted specific fears and behaviours in them because I was there to witness the original incidents. Now as I look at this group of us, Indigenous and colonizers, children, parents, grandparents, aunties and uncles, I acknowledge we all started as innocent, open, curious babies. I have not witnessed all the day-to-day events that have shaped each of us, but the imprint is there nonetheless. And when the pain of life becomes too great, some need to escape. How painfully tragic that the energy of Residential schools, which was set in motion to separate Indigenous children from their parents, continues to reverberate into the present day, still keeping Indigenous children from their parents, only this time it's through opioids. How incredibly strong that energy is. That day, however, I witnessed something more powerful than that: the hope of the youth and the bond of a community that simply refuses to give up on one another, no matter how difficult the journey is. Witnessing this is one of my life's most impactful and humbling experiences.

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**Letter to Diane**

Dear Diane,

Today is your boy's 16th birthday! He isn't so little anymore! He has quite a funny sense of humour and is a fabulous musician. He plays guitar like his dad. He's having a tough time in life, though. A few weeks after you died, his dad was in a motor vehicle accident and was seriously brain-damaged. He's been in a nursing home for the past 14 years. Even if that wasn't the case, I don't think he would be able to parent him anyway. Your boy has bounced around places his whole life, and now he's staying with me for a while. He's a hurting kid who has seen too much violence in his young life. I've been trying to help him get properly assessed, a job, and whatever support he is willing to accept. I'm concerned he has developed his own addictions and wish I knew how to support him better.

He asks about you sometimes, and I try to share what I know but realize that what I don't know by far outweighs what I do. I was younger than he is when you died, and the memories I have are from a little sister's point of view. I know you were pretty with dark wavy hair. You were feisty with a fun sense of humour. I loved it when you laughed. You had a way of finding the "funny" in things. You had a soft heart but often acted tough. According to Mom, you were great at climbing trees and could hold your own in a running race with anyone. Your abilities came in handy when you wanted to sneak out of your room by climbing out your window, onto the roof and down the trellis, before running like the dickens (that's mom's expression, not mine). You rode a motorcycle and survived a big wipeout, which always sounded pretty badass to me! You had a great record collection and loved playing music in your room. I heard that you were a good dancer. And you loved your boy very much and wanted the best for him.

And, of course, the thing that no one talked about–you were Indigenous. Did you even know that? I found out a few years ago because I connected the dots on some things and asked Mom about it. She said the foster care social worker told her you were 'native.' I don't know much about what that meant for your life, except that you ended up in the foster care system. As I get to know more about the

experience of the Indigenous people I meet, I'm piecing together things about why your life was the way it was. I guess I'll never really know, but I try to share this stuff with your son because I want him to understand that there were reasons why your life went as it did, even if we don't know them.

So, ya, that's what I can tell him. When I write it out like that, I realize it's not that much really. I wish you were here to show us who you are.

I love you,

Erin

**Behind The Curtain**

"I am Oz, the Great and Terrible,"spoke the Beast, in a voice that was one great roar.

Who are you, and why do you seek me?"

—L. Frank Baum (1900), The Wonderful Wizard of Oz

Halfway around the block, one of my children spots a most exciting site… garden gnomes! They immediately crawl under the trees to take a closer look. At that moment, two older women walk out of the house, and I can tell by their coloured dresses and head coverings that they are Mennonite. After some small talk about the children and the gnomes, she asks if I live in the neighbourhood. I tell her where we live far up north, to which she replies that she knows the area very well because she was part of a mission that ran one of the Residential schools. I'm very aware of that Residential school and explain that I have friends from a particular First Nation that attended there. Upon hearing this news, she became even happier and started asking me about people by name.

"I'm having a hard time with this conversation," I confess, "You're asking me how people are doing, and the truth is that many people are struggling with addictions, self-harm, knowing how to parent, and feeling like they don't belong. A big reason for the struggle is the trauma they experienced at your school and others like it."

" I'm not aware of any trauma that happened at our school," she replied.  Her tone of voice is sincere.

I take a deep breath and try to ground myself in an emotional space that will be compassionate. "You see my children playing over there? That's how young some Indigenous kids were when they were taken away from their parents. It wouldn't matter where they were taken or how loving the people who looked after them were. The problem is that they were taken at all. No matter what, it is traumatizing for children to be separated from their parents, family, and siblings… they were made to eat unfamiliar foods, speak a language that wasn't theirs, and receive punishment when they spoke their own language. They were made to follow Christian ways and were punished when they did something the staff thought was wrong. In the case of many of my friends, they also experienced sexual abuse..."

"I was never aware of any sexual abuse happening," she assures me.

"And yet it still happened," I reply gently yet firmly.

"Regardless of your kindness, you were a stranger to them. Your ways and beliefs were not theirs, and you were not their family. Imagine if someone took all the Mennonite kids away and some other ethnic group raised them–say Chinese, East Indian, or even some other group of White people that didn't know your Mennonite ways, like new age spiritualists. Or even worse, what if they thought your Mennonite ways were evil and told your kids that the adults were evil, dirty and unevolved? Those kids would come back to you physically but wouldn't look like you, talk like you, or know your religious beliefs, foods, or customs. They wouldn't know or feel what it is to be Mennonite or what it's like to grow up in a family because they would have been robbed of both growing up in an institution. Do you understand what I'm saying?"

***Missionaries, Philanthropists, Activists, Oh My!***

**Missionaries.** The conversation this woman shared has helped me answer a question that has taken up residence in my mind for years: Who is the mastermind behind all this genocide and colonization?

Like Dorothy searching for the Great and Powerful Oz, this conversation has been a metaphorical "pulling back of the curtain," confirming what I have been suspecting for a while.  There is no singular entity with special powers sitting behind there orchestrating it all in full awareness of the consequences, it's people like this woman and I who give life to a genocidal system, yet are blissfully unaware, doing what we define as good within the story we tell ourselves. The Great and Terrible Oz isn't just some of us. It's all of us; it's the complex, interrelated system of which we are all part, with its social, economic, religious, educational, judicial, medical, and media cogs and wheels which keep it in perpetual motion. It has been operating without interruption from generation to generation, rotating members in and out of the system but never stopping. We are beings of the system, interconnected within a complex web of relationships, powering the machine of civilization through our compliance to it and service within it. The connections are not simply human-to-human but are also human-to-system. In the process of our domestication, we have come to have a relationship with a set of societal beliefs, customs, and values that have informed who we see ourselves to be, how others see us, our role in the system, and our beliefs about what is good/evil. In this way, someone like this woman could convince herself that taking small children from their parents was a kind gesture, a charitable act, and a service to humanity. To believe she was doing a good thing, she must have been convinced that what she could offer was better than what they would receive if left to be with their families and communities. She must have believed that she was privileged to have her religion and culture and was doing those children a favour by teaching them her ways, which are the ways of the system within which she is inextricably bound. It would never have occurred to her that she might possess the power to enact genocide, so she never

scrutinized her actions to check that they weren't. After all, genocide is what tyrannical maniacs inflict on others, not wholesome missionaries, right?

As a child, poverty and suffering became coupled in my mind with turning from God, specifically the Christian God. I was taught that either people turn away from God and suffer, or they turn away from God and cause someone else to suffer, but the action of turning away was the culprit. Never once did anyone mention the connection between colonialism, imperialism, capitalism and the suffering of people worldwide, suffering which Christians and other forms of charity were called to alleviate. Being invisible to the average colonizer, the system itself was never called into account, not because it was deliberately hidden but because we had become acclimated to it. My conversation with this Mennonite woman allowed me to gaze into a powerful, magnifying mirror, where she reflected a part of myself that I would rather not face. Not so many years ago, I could have very well been her.

**Philanthropists.** We worked tirelessly to educate young people, believing this to be a good investment as they would become future leaders who, hopefully, would lead from a broader understanding of the causes of poverty and environmental destruction. Initially, the students would engage for multiple years, making long-term, meaningful relationships with Indigenous (and other) peoples in Canada and abroad. As time passed, we saw more engagement from what appeared to be a desire to pad their resumes. Philanthropy had become trendy and evidence of a do-gooder mentality that appealed to places like medical, social work, and law schools. We decided that we would no longer offer experiences for college and university students to engage in this way. Not only was it problematic from the perspective of how it benefited Canadian students, but the notion of charity and philanthropy was problematic as it became clear that it was not changing a thing; it was just filling gaps within the system.

Hearing the Parable of the River (LaFayette, n.d.) changed my worldview profoundly. One day some villagers were working in the fields by a river and noticed some babies floating in the current. They

rescued as many as possible, ensuring they were fed, clothed, and integrated into the life of the village. Others felt they would be doing more good to find the actual cause so no more babies ended up in the river needing aid. "But it's too risky, potentially confrontational, and in the end, you might fail," replied some who had the most invested in the rescue effort. "It's not for us to take on the whole system. Besides, what will we do with our time if we no longer have this to do?" ("LaFayette," n.d.).

It was modern times, and instead of only babies in the river, a whole array of societal rejects floated by. People living with addictions, Indigenous Peoples, trauma survivors, the poor, women, black people, transgender people, people with mental health challenges, children raised in the child welfare system, prisoners, those displaced in the name of progress, and as a result of climate changes–you name it, all bobbing along trying to keep their head above water. Lawyers, social workers, probation officers, nurses, doctors, counsellors, police officers, welfare caseworkers, employment workers, guards, food bank workers, shelter staff, crisis relief workers, charity workers, philanthropists and many more are all trained to scoop up people out of the fundamentally flawed system, convinced that the blame lies within the floaters for the predicament they find themselves in. I began to notice just how many baby catchers there were in the world and what a gaping hole would be left in the economy if people were suddenly NOT to fall through the cracks. What would happen if societies were set up so people could more easily enjoy their life experience together, and therefore the professional and volunteer "baby catchers" were not needed? What would society be like if there was no longer an economic necessity for the system to be so catastrophically unsuccessful?

**Activists.** My youthful heart was moved and inspired by the courage, determination, and wit these activists showed in the face of great opposition. Their willingness to give their lives to challenge the system of the time reminded me a lot of the stories of Jesus, an activist whose stories I grew up listening to. I found great irony in the fact that countries professing Christian roots were often the ones committing the biggest injustices. The institution of Christianity had adopted him as their poster child

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while completely divorcing themselves from his message. Like Jesus, I saw activists willing to give their

lives to stop a system that may or may not memorialize their efforts one day and who very well may

change their message entirely to suit their agenda.

It became apparent that while an essential last-ditch effort, activism in and of itself would not

change the world. We were tackling justice issues in a piecemeal way, with every group trying to get

their fair share of the colonial pie, often without fully digesting why its a problem for one group of

settlers to be fighting with another group of settlers for more land, power, or recognition while on land

that was stolen from Indigenous Peoples. I often met with other settler activists discussing the rightness

or wrongness of particular actions and finger-pointing at the alleged causes. Opinions would be flung

around like weapons to separate those who were a part of the solution from those who were a part of

the problem. Oh, the sense of righteousness that dominated those spaces and the fear of not being good

enough that was hiding behind so much of the rhetoric!  And as long as it was fueled by judgment and

anger, it invariably produced more judgment and anger.

### And Then, This

 Ten years before writing the iconic, The Wonderful Wizard of Oz, L. Frank Baum published a

weekly newspaper called the *Saturday Pioneer* in Aberdeen, South Dakota, where he responded to the

death of Sitting Bull and the massacre at Wounded Knee with a call to annihilate the Indigenous Peoples:

> The Pioneer has before declared that our only safety depends upon the total extirmination [sic]
>
> of the Indians.  Having wronged them for centuries we had better, in order to protect our
>
> civilization, follow it up by one more wrong and wipe these untamed and untamable creatures
>
> from the face of the earth. In this lies future safety for our settlers and the soldiers who are
>
> under incompetent commands. Otherwise, we may expect future years to be as full of trouble
>
> with the redskins as those have been in the past. (Baum, 1891, para. 2)

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I want to rise in disgust at this man who has betrayed my need for something in this world to be immune to corruption. The issue, even if for only a second, has become about my sense of grief over losing my nostalgic bond with a story, not about the extreme racism that resulted in the slaughter of hundreds. I imagine the curtain being drawn back on the room that contains the great societal beast, the Wizard of Oz. There he is, within this great mess of interconnections linking all people past, present, and future and the vast array of things we have created. And there I am, right in the mess of it all with him. We are both "part of the parade" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 61), and have, each in our own way, for good, evil, or a bit of both, co-created this world in which we find ourselves.

**Beyond Land Acknowledgments**

I've been challenging participants to see through the smoke and mirrors of the Canadian government's view of reconciliation to the truth of the matter, which is, on a nation-to-nation level, we have never been conciliatory, therefore being reconciled is an impossibility. With this collective story on repeat, it's possible to imagine colonial governments and Indigenous Nations were bosom buddies who simply had an unfortunate falling out, like two estranged family members who got into a silly squabble at Thanksgiving dinner and have not spoken since. This completely undermines the gravity of the truth that the goal has always been, and continues to be, for settler governments to take over the land and resources, removing Indigenous Peoples from it, if not by death, then by cultural genocide. Indigenous Peoples resisting a genocidal regime does not make them equal parties in a dispute that needs reconciliation. In fact, the promise of reconciliation and use of land acknowledgements have become tools for modern colonization as government, industry, and citizens continue to do whatever the hell we want after pausing to give a pitiful nod at the cost and sacrifice to Indigenous Peoples and Nations, while delivering hollow promises that we are working together on the long path to reconciliation.  The use of the term reconciliation implies that there will be a future for settler domination, only this time, it will be a kinder type of domination. We imagine that Indigenous Peoples will become amicable to their

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continued displacement and removal from their lands as settler peoples dismiss treaties and continue to

bulldoze through unceded land at will. It is a fictitious concept whereby settlers imagine a way where

none of our unearned privileges, stolen land, and political domination need to be relinquished, that we

get to ride off into the sunset feeling absolved from our genocidal structures without causing a ripple of

inconvenience to our way of life, security, or nationhood.

 Case in point, in the summer of 2020, Manitoba Hydro issued this statement, solemnly

acknowledging the genocidal acts it was about to commit right before flooding 45 square kilometres of

Cree lands at the Keeyask dam amid active protest:

> Manitoba Hydro recognizes and values that Cree culture, spirituality and wellbeing is grounded
>
> in respecting the relationship and balance between people, land and water, and all other living
>
> things, and that [dam] impoundment and its impacts cannot be separated from the larger
>
> environment. We acknowledge that there will be environmental and cultural loss to our partner
>
> First Nation communities as a result of the required changes to the land. We will continue to
>
> work with the communities to understand and share knowledge of project effects from both
>
> Indigenous and technical science perspectives. (Bowen, n.d.)

True to the Canadian brand, Manitoba Hydro and the Manitoban and Canadian governments are

committing a polite and politically correct genocide, but genocide nonetheless.

**White Moderate 2021 Edition**

> I have almost reached the regrettable conclusion that the Negro's great stumbling block in his
>
> stride toward freedom is not the White Citizen's Counciler or the Ku Klux Klanner, but the white
>
> moderate, who is more devoted to "order" than to justice; who prefers a negative peace which is
>
> the absence of tension to a positive peace which is the presence of justice; who constantly says:
>
> "I agree with you in the goal you seek, but I cannot agree with your methods of direct action";

who paternalistically believes he can set the timetable for another man's freedom. (King Jr.,

1963, para. 19)

Months ago, myself and a colleague were tasked with helping this organization prepare for this

meeting where delegates will vote whether to modify its guiding principles to include a specific call to

dismantle racism and systemic barriers to inclusion within their organization… there were two general

mindsets in which white-skinned people were approaching their collective learning and the proposed

new principle to dismantle racism and systemic barriers to inclusion within the organization. One

mindset saw their principles as guideposts that move and adapt with the times. They focused on

minimizing the pain of exclusion and racism that Members of Colour were experiencing. The others saw

their organization's principles as gospel and saw proposed changes as a threat. Their focus seemed to be

on minimizing their discomfort as White people whose views, privileges, beliefs, protocols, principles,

and ideologies felt threatened.

When the meeting chair invites comments on the motion, I am curious what this White,

middle-aged man has to say. At one of the educational forums, he expressed concern that the process

was being rushed, to which people present reminded him that the work has been over a decade in the

making…It soon becomes clear that his opinion has not shifted and, in the two times he speaks, he

introduces the notion that some groups of people are hurt because the forms of oppression they

experience are not explicitly named in the new principle while race is, and puts a counter motion on the

table to postpone this motion indefinitely, which would essentially break the momentum Members of

Colour and their allies have built.

What is unfolding amounts to procedural torture as Members of Colour, along with their plea for

inclusion, drown slowly as the metaphorical bathtub of this meeting fills to the brim with White people's

tears and resistance under the guise of proper meeting etiquette courtesy of Roberts Rules of Order

(Robert et al., 2020). This tool, rooted within a colonizing framework meant to preserve the power of the

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powerful, is fulfilling its purpose beautifully within this meeting as officials start and stop to ensure the

rules of a long-dead White US general are followed to a tee. The procedural weeds it has created are

later called out by a Member of Colour as a tool of White supremacy culture (Okun, 2021), resulting in

the topic of racial exclusion barely being discussed.

 I know this man's heart is for justice in the world, yet when given an opportunity to be allied

with Members of Colour, he chose this path instead. How is it that he, and other "good" people, will

advocate for justice at all costs outside the walls of the organization while delaying, resisting, or avoiding

the same actions within? Maybe the issue isn't about *being good* but about *feeling good*. We feel

comforted by our belief that we're the heroic good guys who hold the bad guys accountable. However,

when we're being asked to relinquish even the smallest amount of our privileges, protocols, principles,

views, beliefs, opinions, and delusions of grandeur, suddenly, we feel our identity as a good person is

being put on trial.

It's not that they don't care about the pain of racism Members of Colour are experiencing. It's

that they care more about the discomfort they are experiencing within themselves because their

organizational structure feels threatened.

In opening this meeting with his opposition, this man has gifted the organization with its next bit

of contrast to fuel the inclusion work ahead of them. He is showing them that they have not yet arrived

at the place they aspire to be.

**What's In A Name?**

***Her Name is Diane!***

What's in a name? That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet

(Shakespeare, 1993).

We had been texting back and forth, reminiscing about our shared sister, her life, and her son,

when she took me by surprise: "Her name is *Diane*, not *Dianne*. I told your parents for years that her

name was Diane," she texts. Given the context of our conversation, I feel the correction, and I am taken aback by it. I'm unsure what to say next; I admit I wasn't aware of that.

I wonder what it felt like to release the little sister whom she survived countless horrors with, so she could have the chance to be a part of a "good" family, even if she remained where she was in a different foster family? What joys and sorrows came up for her when her little sister was ultimately adopted? What did it feel like to have that sister's name be changed as that family made her "theirs," giving her their surname, a new middle name and adding another "n" to her first name? I wonder what it felt like to no longer have the same surname as your beloved sister, the only family you've known?

What's baffling to me now is that even after all I have observed and learned about Indigenous children, and the significance of removing, anglicizing, and changing names, I never asked about this regarding my sister.

### The Power to Name

What's in a name, Mr. Shakespeare? Identity, meaning, lineage, and belonging, to name but a few things. What's in the power to name? Among other things, the power to erase someone's identity, meaning, lineage, and sense of belonging. What a perfect colonial tool.

Adoption has happened for at least three generations on one side of my extended family…I noted in every single case, some sort of name change happened, regardless of the culture of the child, and found myself curious about this tendency to rename people to make them "ours." I think about my sister, who was adopted at 11 years old, and suddenly, she's asked to refer to herself differently. Perhaps she welcomed the change because it came with the promise of a family. Perhaps she just went along with it because she felt it was necessary.  Perhaps she protested it in some way. I'll never know. I do know that by 11 years old, I had a pretty strong attachment to my name and would have noticed this change, so I feel for her. While the intention was no doubt to make Diane feel like she belonged, they erased aspects of her identity without needing her informed consent.

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This got me thinking about all the times White settlers have used our self-granted power to rename places and people already given Indigenous names (Gilio-Whitaker, 2022). I know Indigenous Peoples arbitrarily given anglicized surnames based on common items in the area, such as plane names and boat motors. Even the idea of needing a surname was forced upon Indigenous Peoples when that was not their custom. I am friends with the descendants of some of these people.

Just imagine any map and all the names on it. All those places with an English name originally had an Indigenous name. Some of those places still have that Indigenous name, yet we continue to write over them, often in derogatory ways (Gilio-Whitaker, 2022). Such arrogance and entitlement! We have so little reverence for other people's ways that we feel it is our place to rename the world to suit our fancy.

From that day forward, out of respect for her, our older sister whose devotion to her remains deeper than the ocean, and the person who named her, I changed to call her *Diane.*

**Not Murdered, But Still Missing**

Opening my texts, I see a message from Diane's sister. She wants to share her experiences connecting with her birth family with me. Tears well up in my eyes as I take in the images followed by comments and captions, documenting the traumas endured in the foster homes of the 1970s, the challenges of getting her foster care records released, old pictures of family members, and news about what happened to them over the four decades they have been apart. One after another, the images and text appear on my phone. A picture of her mother. A picture of her and our shared sister as young teenagers smiling brightly at the camera.

At one moment, I want to soothe the pain she is experiencing, and the next, I want to unleash a torpedo of wrath at the world so great that it would obliterate anyone or anything that causes harm to a child–to my sisters! I notice my urge to talk to her about the child welfare system catastrophe and share information about how others I know have handled similar experiences. I notice guilt rising at the thought that my parents… participated in a government scheme to separate Indigenous kids from their

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families. One after another, my brain is firing off ideas as I try to smooth my emotional discomfort. I text her how I feel and then delete it before pressing send. She has not asked me for any of these things.

I lean into my internal discomfort and simply observe it. I am determined to witness her grief and resist the urge to make it about me–my opinions or feelings, the corrupt systems we live in, or the larger plight of humanity.

I can know the facts and hear the stories of abuse suffered in residential schools, foster care, and the penal system. However, I will never fully comprehend what that does to a child's emotional landscape and nervous system and how it has shaped these two women who are my sisters. I will never know what it feels like to be on the receiving end of genocidal attempts …the whiteness of my skin protects me.

While my sisters, and the other children in their family, were dispersed into various foster and group homes, they were missing from *their* families and communities. They were missing from each other. Gatherings would happen, and special occasions would be marked, family members would be born and die, and all the while, they were missing–casualties of a foster care and government policy intentionally designed to make children become "missing" from their parents, families, history and culture.

The reality is that our nephew is missing from our lives due to his trauma. He has lived nearly his entire life without his parents; his mother, Diane, died a month before his first birthday, and his father developed a brain injury in a motor vehicle accident only a few days before his first birthday. He has never experienced a single birthday with his parents and has missed celebrating countless milestones and celebrations with them. The intergenerational "missing" continues while he has spent a decade in and out of prison, struggling with addictions and missing the opportunity to be a father to his child.

I'm fixated on the word "missing." Such an inadequate word to describe the magnitude of what has happened and is happening. I long for a day when "missing" is not limited to murders and

unexplained absences but centres around that idea of place, belonging, community and relationships.

With this way of seeing it, people like my sisters and nephew would be understood to be missing from

the lives, family, culture and history that was rightly theirs to experience in all its fullness.

## Part 4: Stop-Making

"A hamster in a cage just spin'n your wheel," he says
as he strolls by humming a tune.
"Helpless"
"Dependent"
"Wouldn't survive a day on your own"

I recognize the tune and
try to follow
But the umbilical cord pulls back
Tethered
Fettered

I trace my cord to the system
I see his truth
And know what I need to do
With shaking hand
I cut the cord
And birth myself anew

Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing
and rightdoing there is a field.
I'll meet you there.
When the soul lies down in that grass
the world is too full to talk about.
Ideas, language, even the phrase *each other*
doesn't make any sense.
The breeze at dawn has secrets to tell you.
Don't go back to sleep.
You must ask for what you really want.
Don't go back to sleep.
People are going back and forth across the doorsill
where the two worlds touch.
The door is round and open.
Don't go back to sleep.
—Rumi, *The Great Wagon*

**This is God**

He casually looks up at me, his big blue eyes sparkling in the sunlight, "Mamma, I've been thinking," an opener that can lead anywhere with him.

"You know in my body book, there is that tiny little bit in the lungs?" he asks.

"The alveoli?" I reply.

"Yes, the alveoli. Well, you know how that's in the lung, and the lung is in the person's body, and that person is in their family, and their family is in the community with all the other families–bird families, and frog families, and tree families–and the community is on the earth, and the earth is in the galaxy, and the galaxy is in the universe? Well, I think that whole thing is God."

I am genuinely shocked. This is not what I expected–AT ALL. How he describes it makes perfect sense to me, yet I have never thought of it that way.

I was experiencing a strange sense of being more expansive than the body I was in and a connection to Land, other beings, and the cosmos as I had never experienced before… this was not intellectual knowing. It was a physical change of perspective felt in my energy field and has remained with me to this day.

Before this encounter, I hadn't considered the notion that God might be a divine pattern where seemingly separate entities are interwoven and then nested within something larger than itself, a sort of blueprint for creation.

I suspect I'm not the only one who sometimes forgets that I am not my body but rather the presence peering out of it, perceiving this grand experience I'm having (Tolle, 2004; 2005). The presence in me that peers out into the world is the same energetic presence that is shining forth from all other living beings, even those that don't have alveoli to breathe air or eyes to peer through.

***Disassembling Me***

I have adopted all sorts of labels for myself, some consciously and others unconsciously, to differentiate myself from the whole. Things I was told by my parents, teachers, friends, church leaders, the media, friends and countless others who, upon encountering me, took it upon themselves to tell me who they think I am. In doing so, they told me who they thought I was not and who they thought I should not be. I accepted many of these without any deliberation or consideration.

Since then, I've taken on countless others… seeking them out for myself and slapping them on like Girl Guide badges. Some of my labels feel like an acknowledgement of a relationship more than anything else; *mother*, *sister*, *daughter*. Others feel heavy with expectation and judgement; *leader*, *liberal-minded*, *creative problem solver*, and *strong* among a few of the many descriptors I use to set me apart from others… I notice how thoroughly they are steeped in judgements towards myself and others and how I declare what I am not by virtue of declaring what I am. In the case of *leader*, I am judging myself not to be a follower, or at least more inclined to lead than follow. I am revealing that, in my mind, being a leader is viewed as more admirable than being a follower… In saying I am *liberal-minded,* I am implying I am open-minded, progressive, and less judgemental… This is wildly ironic given that coming to this conclusion requires me to have judged a different subset of people to be conservative… close-minded, backward, old-fashioned and judgemental. Furthermore, I am telling myself that my thoughts that I would consider conservative-minded are not valued as highly as those I consider liberal-minded… Even something that seems as innocuous as saying I am *strong*, as in resilient, victorious, triumphant, and fierce, tells me that I have decided to label other things weak, not-resilient, victim, and passive. Not only do I praise others who are strong and pity those who are not strong, but I also extend that same harsh judgment to aspects of myself. I wonder, what is the significance of my choice to spotlight certain parts of myself by claiming it as my identity while countless other things are

left unnamed, unspotlighted, and unproclaimed? Furthermore, is proclaiming them a good, bad, or neutral thing?

I recall some conversations with my Indigenous friends… their language focuses on describing something as a verb instead of a noun. For example, a couch might be described as "a thing you sit on." I have been taught to label things around me as nouns–mother, teacher, police officer, criminal, musician–as opposed to someone who nurtures, someone who shares their knowledge, someone who upholds colonial law, someone who violated colonial law, and a person who makes music. If I viewed the world in this way, I would no longer be a collector of identity badges because engaging in a particular action at any given moment would not mean that I was anticipating, expecting, or obligated to do that again.

### The Gift and Curse of Contrast

When we started in our avatars (bodies), we had no self-consciousness, sense of awareness of what type of body we were born into, or the implications. We joyously mingled with all forms of creation without any mental commentary about separateness, belonging, identity, appropriateness, or status, and certainly without fear of judgment. I remember observing this in my children when they were toddlers interacting with other beings without needing labels or context. I was the one who began to label the world around them -dog, bee, boy, girl, adult, woman, man, water, and so on–believing myself to be doing my parental duty of helping them understand who they were and who they were not. I would share the beliefs I was taught about those labels: messy dog, dangerous bee, busy boy, sensitive girl, disabled adult, black woman, old man, dirty water, and so on. I imported years of beliefs, conditioning, and experiences of my own, downloading them on these new arrivals and invading their minds with ideas, fears, and judgements from a different time and place.

*The Challenge of Labels*

How can we live in a world of labels and identities and use the experience of contrast to help us move towards healing our sense of connection rather than creating more division and strife? I cannot ignore that I live in a society that looks at my white skin and my Indigenous friends, co-workers, and sisters' brown skin and determines my life is more valuable than theirs. I lean into the differences so profoundly that I eventually feel the contrast between our existences within every part of my body, mind, spirit and emotions. This requires looking for the contrast between my privileges and theirs, my fears and theirs, my opportunities and theirs, and the public recognition I receive and theirs. I draw near and feel the tension in the contrast between who I am according to the colonial worldview and who they are. I stay in this pocket of dissonance long enough to let it recalibrate me to the realities of other people's lived experiences. This leads to a greater understanding of what those parts of the whole are experiencing because other parts enact spiritual mutiny in believing themselves to be separate from the whole. Sitting in the pocket of dissonance is an uncomfortable practice but also one of the most powerful in causing me to break free from my patterns of spiritual mutiny, even if for only a time. While it does not change how the world treats me because of the identities it slaps on me, the unearned privileges I am afforded, or the unearned penalties I am dealt, the dissonance expands my sense of my borders to include more and more expressions of the whole to which I belong.

**The Perfection in Everything**

**Serenity**
Stillness so complete

deafening
profound
all boundaries melt away

Not a movement, not a sound.  Only space.

She cradles me tenderly
Like a newborn arriving for the first time
Eyes wide, heart open.

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In that stillness,
I disappear.

I whisper my thanks
To all that conspired
To create this perfect moment.

Serenity.

I was canoeing in Northwestern Ontario north of the 51st parallel in virgin Boreal forest … We left the main lake and took shelter on a narrow, winding river lined with trees and rocks. It's here that everything went so still and silent that it felt like someone had pressed pause, and I was in suspended animation. The birds, critters, trees, wind, and water stopped, as did me and my paddling companions. It wasn't a choice per se but a response, perhaps even an instinct. I dared not breathe, for it felt like it would somehow break the spell of this unexpected and exquisite moment. For a time, I wasn't sitting in a canoe observing nature; I was nature. While my location didn't change, I perceived myself as part of the whole, integrated within the lakes, trees and rocks in a place that had existed since time immemorial and witnessed by countless beings: winged, finned, two-legged, four-legged, and crawlers. I was fully witnessing and being witnessed. There was no resistance, no thoughts chattering in my head, and no feelings being superimposed on this impersonal and perfect moment. It just was.

The sum total of all the happenings in the elements, animals, plants, minerals and humans since time immemorial culminated to co-create that moment. From the forces that created the rock formations, to winds that fell the tree on the shoreline, to the fish carcasses on the rocks, to the birds in the nest nearby. Every choice and happenstance contributed something to this present moment. I didn't take any of it personally, nor did I have expectations for how it should be.

**Saviour, Save Yourself**

While it is easy for me to accept what I perceive as a beautiful moment in nature, it is much more challenging for me to accept that the moments I inhabit during the rest of life are also perfect

culminations of the choices and circumstances that have led up to it. More often than not, I decide that whatever is occurring in the world is somehow less than it could have been if only people were more aware, loving, just, and fair. If I am not being mindful, this puts me in an almost constant state of resistance to the perfection of each moment. For instance, I stumbled across this reflection piece I wrote several years ago after working with two Indigenous communities facing wide-scale opioid addiction.

> For about eight months, I've been spending two to three days a week in a community, being a guide, motivator, organizer, confidante, and entertaining friend as I help them implement the plan they created to address this opioid crisis. I have done everything logical I can think of to prepare people for action, but still, there is little movement, mostly apathy—thick, crushing despair. In a conversation with a friend, she hears the heaviness in my voice and asks if I have the strength to be with people as they "sit in their shit" and accept that they may never choose to get up out of it? My eyes fill with tears as I grasp this truth. All the enthusiasm in the world won't convince some people of their value as human beings. This is something well beyond me, something between them and their Creator. All I know is that wanting someone to change because I am uncomfortable with their reality makes the call for change about me, which is not fair to them. (Horvath, 2015, p. 6)

I positioned myself as the hero and them as the victims rather than seeing all involved as neither hero nor victim but as beings having a human experience, co-created by countless choices made by countless people since time immemorial. I could not hold space and witness the moment fully or recognize how I, directly and indirectly, contributed to co-creating it. All I could sense was the separateness of each of us within it. The supposed problem which needed overcoming belonged to them entirely. I positioned myself outside of it rather than fully within it. Why did I label the situation as THEIR shit instead of MY shit or OUR shit? Why was I not focusing on my opportunity to change instead of their opportunity to change?

If you looked in the mirror and did not like what you saw, you would have to be mad to attack

the image in the mirror...if you accept the image, no matter what it is, if you become friendly

toward it, it cannot *not* become friendly toward you. This is how you change the world." (Tolle,

2004, pp. 218)

I am learning that what manifests in the world is an outward reflection of what is happening

inside humankind. Suppose I can remain in the pocket of dissonance within myself. In that case, I can

become friendly toward whatever has been co-created, recognizing that nothing in that moment is

wrong or needs improvement, no matter how much I may judge it as bad, unjust, tragic, or horrific. It all

makes sense, given the sum of our collective choices. The Tao Te Ching teaches:

Do you want to improve the world?

I don't think it can be done.

The world is sacred.

It can't be improved.

If you tamper with it, you'll ruin it.

If you treat it like an object, you'll lose it. (Mitchell, 1988, verse 29)

In this place of acceptance that the world and the moment I am in is sacred, my challenge becomes

approaching it with curiosity and courage so I can take it all in rather than pushing it away, numbing out,

denying, or otherwise distancing myself from it because it stirs within me a profound discomfort.

### *The Paradox*

In radically accepting that the world is as it is, should I ignore the injustices and suffering I

perceive and instead channel my energy inward to my growth and transformation, thereby transforming

a part of the world by transforming myself? Or, in radically accepting the world as it is, should I channel

my energy to the service of others, allowing myself to be transformed by expanding my sense of self to

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include their experience, thereby transforming the world? Aware of this tension between the need for reflection and action, I embrace an ebb and flow between inward and outward focus. I focus inward to understand myself better and what gets in the way of me showing up in the world consciously and compassionately. I focus outward to remind myself that I am connected with something much bigger than myself and, within that collective, there is much suffering and much inspiration. The inspiration emerges from my sense that we are not just humans having a spiritual experience but spiritual beings having a human experience.

### *Serene Sisterhood*

When I apply this way of thinking to my experiences with my Indigenous sisters and nephew, I immediately notice discomfort rise within me. I realize I will never know the many factors–historical, cultural, familial, biological, spiritual– that came together to create the life that was Diane's. Perhaps the most meaningful thing I can offer is my genuine curiosity and complete acceptance of countless factors that culminated in her death, including my indirect complicity in co-creating it through my ancestor's/family's decisions to immigrate here, occupy land that displaced Indigenous families, and adopt an Indigenous child.

Given all the factors that came together on all past, present, personal, and transpersonal layers, I concede that it makes sense that her life would have ended suddenly early one May morning. While this brings tears to my eyes, I accept it even as I write it. To see a significantly different outcome for her son, I accept that a different set of circumstances must come together. Positive aspirations and good wishes will not be enough.

### Beyond Us and Them

We have to create conditions where people feel safe to feel and to care. That goes against a lot of our programming about how to make something change in the world. Sometimes you can pressure people into changing, you can force them, but the powers-that-be have more force than

we do. I don't think we're going to win in a contest of force. I think we need to induce a change of heart. The narrative of "us versus them" is ultimately part of the problem. Traditional activism, which is about overcoming the latest bad guy, isn't deep enough. It just brings us another version of the same. (Eisenstein in Lingo, 2014)

I turned and casually introduced myself: "I'm an educator developing a program on healthy relationships and sexual violence prevention for high school students, and I'm trying to understand the mindset of alpha high school males. Would you be willing to talk with me about your experiences and perspectives if I promise only to explore your perspectives?" He immediately smiled and confirmed that he was a self-proclaimed alpha male in high school and would be happy to talk with me about his perspectives on women and dating. What followed was a fascinating conversation! He shared two encounters: one between him and a woman on the street and another between him and a woman at a dance club. "I don't get it," he said genuinely after describing the two scenes. "Sometimes they want you to tell them they're beautiful and all that, and other times they tell you to fuck off." He merged seamlessly into a very well-articulated analysis of the double standards he had experienced at clubs… I kept listening and asking questions to understand his perspective better. When the conversation came to a natural close about 40 minutes later, I thanked him for sharing his experiences and mindset.

To my surprise, he asked me what I thought about his situation with women. This wasn't something I was anticipating or wanting. I took a deep breath and shared with him what it feels like to be a woman, in particular, never knowing when someone–even another woman–will offer an unsolicited review or opinion about my weight, sex appeal, attractiveness, style, makeup, personality, intelligence–you name it, no topic is off limits. I explained how my mom has been terminally ill with cancer and that I have been supporting her in her journey, looking after my two children while running a home and a business that has me travelling a lot. I explained how my beloved grandparents had just died and how I am dealing with a hassle regarding their estate, and that I am a student, fitting my studies into

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the nooks and crannies of my early mornings and late nights. I asked him to imagine telling me, out of the blue, that I have a nice ass while I'm out doing errands. I could see by the change of look on his face that he understood the issue.

I decided to admit something to him. I told him that I noticed him checking me out when he got on the plane, and as soon as I saw that, I consciously brought out a version of my personality that I use so that it's less likely I have to deal with unwanted sexual attention… His face turned a bit flushed, and he averted his eyes. I told him I was the only one out of four sisters with no significant experience of feeling out of control of my body. I had, however, like nearly every woman, been the target of unwanted sexual comments, gestures, and touch.

We sat quietly for a moment, and I contemplated if I dared show him the part of my personality that feels most natural. I took a deep breath and felt myself tremble just a bit as I tried to relax. I brought my legs closer together and crossed them casually. I allowed my muscles to relax and posture to soften and moved my arm, which I had kept close to my body, to the armrest between us. I turned and spoke with him in a warm, relaxed tone without any edge or slang. I allowed my guard to soften, then looked at him relaxed and confidently. I watched his posture shift as well. We looked at each other as though with new eyes. "Hi, I'm Erin," I said warmly, extending my hand. "Greg," he said kindly, reaching for my hand, "nice to meet you, Erin."

At that point, the conversation became much more sincere and vulnerable. He shared how badly he wanted to find love and be loved. He asked why I thought he was attracting some of the same types of women. An hour and a half had passed, and our way of interacting now barely resembled how we were at the start of the flight. Our paths crossed in this vast universe for only a brief speck of time, but it in no way diminished the meaning of it. The infinite number of things that came together and culminated in that vulnerable connection was perfect.

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***Why so Polarized?***

I observed my son over several months, learning to debate as part of his grade eight curriculum. Week after week, students were separated into two teams, always two, never more. They had to either argue for or against something. I watched my son be shaped through the process where an outside authority, his teacher and classmates, decided which team won by awarding them points. Points were earned by being able to rebuttal the other team's assertions. I watched him get excited as he won and down when he lost. He could quickly tell me how many debates he won and lost but could rarely tell me anything about what he learned through the process. It had become about winning, not learning.

We are domesticated to write essays that assert and then "prove" a thesis, assuming our point of view is worthy of defence. Over and over throughout life, we are taught that we need to have an opinion, even if our actual experience is limited or nonexistent in an area. We are shown tactics to prove what we think is correct and find the resources and people that will support our viewpoint. We see it modelled everywhere in society where people take a stance and become entrenched in being right, even in the face of reason and goodwill.

Participating in politics has only furthered my belief that, as a society, we are currently invested more in our feelings of rightness and belonging than in understanding and looking out for one another, especially the most vulnerable.

So how do we begin to change this type of polarization? Approaching conversations with the intent to understand first before being understood has become a spiritual practice as I retrain my mind to see the people I am interacting with, regardless of their actions or perspectives, as the divine people that they are at their core. Almost every time, if I can be patient enough to build a sense of connection, the person will disarm and meet with me at the table of vulnerability where we can authentically relate. When I meet Indigenous Peoples,  teenagers, seniors, wealthy business people, the extremely poor,

even the chipmunks that insist on digging under my driveway–I am reminded that I am meeting a part of myself.  A different expression but still a part of the whole. There is no "us and them," only "us."

**From the Mouths of Babes and Chiefs**

*A Prayer for Grams*

I sit with my two boys on the bed at their grandparents' house after visiting my Mom in the hospital. Stage 4 ovarian cancer is the diagnosis, and her condition is critical. They ask if she has a dying kind of sickness, and I nod yes, and feel my raw eyes sting with tears. I suggest we pray for Grams, although I'm not exactly sure what to pray for except a miracle. The oldest, feisty and fiercely loyal, talks directly to the cancer and tells it that he's coming for it and will beat it up. He punches and kicks the air as he acts out his intentions, eyes wide and earnest. The youngest is quiet, looking down at his hands as he plays with the edge of his pyjama pants.

"My prayer is that Grams will have a great time dying," he finally says after many minutes of silence. He looks at me calmly and sincerely, catching me off guard. Most certainly not the prayer I was expecting, but it is perfect. She ended up living another four and a half years, and I must say that she really did have a great time dying!  She would say that her last years were her best in terms of the joy and intentionality with which she approached her life, built relationships, made memories with those she loved, and left her legacy. Life transformed from being a fight into being a celebration.

*A Prayer for a Community*

Within months of hearing the wisdom of this prayer, I encountered the same type of message but within the most unexpected setting when I was working with a First Nation community as they addressed the opioid crisis within their community.

"Why do we want to do this work to address the opioid crisis in the community?" I asked the group.

For this exercise, we practice asking why after every one of our answers until we feel we have gotten to the very root of it all. Someone started, and others followed.

"We don't want people to keep dying."

"Why does that matter?" I inquire.

"Children are losing their parents, aunties, uncles, cousins."

"Why does that matter?" I inquire.

"They are suffering. We are suffering"

"And why does that matter?" I inquire.

"We can't pass on our traditions if we are always busy suffering.

"And why does that matter?" I inquire.

"We need our people to be strong and well."

It was quiet for about half a minute as people pondered, and it seemed the group was done until the Chief spoke up for the first time in that circle: "Why this matters is we are meant to enjoy our time together." He explained that his elders taught him that people were put on the earth to enjoy their time together, and addictions were getting in the way of that. The Chief's words left me feeling quite vulnerable about the focus of my life's work, which was almost exclusively centred around solving some sort of perceived problem.

I wondered how many jobs are not focused on solving problems. How many products exist that are not focused on solving someone's problems? The whole foundation of a capitalist economy is to identify or create problems (even if they do not exist) and then sell a remedy to that problem. What on earth would our society look like without this?

These two teachings from my son and this Chief completely turned my thinking and my practice upside down. What would it feel like to believe our purpose is to enjoy our time together on this planet no matter where we fall on the birth-death continuum? Instead of existing to solve some sort of real or

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contrived problem in the world, I would focus on removing any barriers between all beings and the joy

we all intend to experience together on this planet. This was a meaningful shift of mindset for me. Now

as I approach my life and practice as a social entrepreneur and change leader from the perspective of

understanding that all beings are interconnected, I look for ways to co-create joy rather than solutions to

problems. The processes can look nearly identical, but when the source of the co-creation is rooted in

joy instead of fear or lacking, the energy behind it is markedly different. This energetic shift allows us to

work towards something that feels good instead of working against something that feels bad.

**Magnetizing Ourselves**

> We approach our lives on different trajectories, each of us spinning in our own separate, shining
>
> orbits. What gives this life its resonance is when those trajectories cross and we become
>
> engaged with each other, for as long or as fleetingly as we do. There's a shared energy then, and
>
> it can feel as though the whole universe is in the process of coming together. I live for those
>
> times. No one is truly ever "just passing through." Every encounter has within it the power of
>
> enchantment, if we're willing to look for it. (Wagamese, 2016, n.p.)

It's a beautiful, sunny morning, and I am thoroughly enjoying my quiet breakfast alone at this

quaint cafe sitting outside under an umbrella, meditating and reading my book after enjoying my food…

when I was leaving the apartment… I felt an internal prompting to go back inside and grab this particular

book, so I'm sitting here curious about what will come of it.

I pass by a table with the young couple on my way out. "Excuse me. Can I ask what book you

were reading?" she asks with a hint of timidness.

 "Ah, there it is. The reference to the book I was waiting for."

After a short conversation about the book …They invite me to sit down with them for a few

minutes… They express how amazed they are that this conversation is unfolding as it is, and she

confesses that she had been watching me the whole time wanting to say something but was afraid it would be awkward. He had been encouraging her to say something.

"What a coincidence!" she remarks.

"This is how I experience the world; this doesn't feel like a coincidence. This is exactly how things seem to work," I reply gently yet matter-of-factly. I share my half of the story of returning to get the book.

Their faces light up with amazement. "You're kidding!"

I explain that these sorts of things have happened so often in my life that I have come to expect them. I share with them that I regularly magnetize myself to bring what I need to me... As I understand it, we bring the things we focus on to ourselves. The more precise the intention and the stronger the focus, the clearer things will come toward us as though we are magnets. It could be an answer to a question we have, a resource we need, a kindred spirit, and infinite other possibilities.

"So, I assume that we have been attracted to each other for a reason, and I'm open and curious to see what it is," I conclude.

She looks serious for a moment; then, I can see her resolve shift. "Can I ask you a question that's been on my mind then?... How do you get rid of fear so it doesn't get in the way?" she asks with sincerity and a level of vulnerability that I rarely encounter with people, especially someone I met less than ten minutes ago.

"I don't try to get it to go away. I just accept that it's there. If I try to get it to go away, I'm telling a part of myself that it's unacceptable and needs to be banished. Instead, I breathe through it and feel how the emotions manifest in my body. I don't say anything because I find when I do, I make up stories to try to make sense of the strong emotions I feel when the truth is there is no way for me to know all the things that have come together to create the fear that is alive in me at that moment... I find if I can

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just stay quiet and inhale and exhale deeply and continuously for however long it takes, it will eventually

pass… I still fear and honour the fear, but I consciously choose my next move..."

"If you have time, can I ask you another question?" she asks. Her tone has gotten even more

serious."Ok, I'm just gonna take the chance and put this out there; whatever comes of it is fine. If

nothing comes of it, that's ok, too," she begins working up the nerve. "I'm a graduate student, and for

my research, I want to do a community-engaged art installation… but I don't know how to make it

happen. I'm afraid to put myself out there."

At that moment, the light bulb goes on for me. I'm beginning to understand the points of

attraction that have brought us together… "You're gonna love this," I say with a wink and playful tone.

"What I have done professionally for over twenty years is work with people to consciously co-create

what they want to see in their communities. I operate a not-for-profit community development

organization dedicated to this, and one of our areas of focus is community-engaged art."

"Ok, wait.  So you do community-engaged art?" she clarifies. I nod and smile. "I'm completely

overwhelmed right now… So how do you do it?" she asks.

"Well, the first thing is I get curious about what kind of story wants to be told through me and

why. In my experience, the *why* is very important because it will draw other people to the project. I

spend a lot of time remaining open to ideas until something ignites a *why* in me that is so intriguing that

I can't put it down. I created a feature film a few years ago, and my *why* was inspired by my two young

boys…I was overcome with emotion to the point of sobbing because I realized that if society had its way

with them, my innocent, open, loving boys would soon be caged in by toxic masculinity. I wanted to tell a

story that showed men and boys making different choices. Once I found a *why* that moved me to my

core, I began to magnetize myself, asking the universe to connect me with others who find this *why* so

compelling that they would contribute the skills, resources, and expertise needed to bring it to life. I

think of it as cosmic networking," I say lightheartedly. When I shared the *why* with people, they were

often profoundly moved and made a financial donation on the spot. I have so many great stories from that project of how the needed people came from the woodwork. From the person reviewing a funding application to how our film crew came together, to how we found our needle-in-a-haystack lead actor who happened to be a professional actor, who had done a Tedx Talk about toxic masculinity."

"Wow," she states, then averts her eyes looking down at the table. "I don't know if I could do that, though."

"You would do it the same way as you co-created this moment today. First, you noticed something that caught your attention, right? Something that seemed a little out of the ordinary, brighter, that caught your attention. Then, with the help of your wonderful ally here, you worked up the courage to say something. Then…you chose to believe there was something to be discovered in our paths crossing, and so you asked me the two questions that have been weighing on your mind. That is exactly how you will proceed moving forward. You'll get very clear about your questions and the *why* behind what you want to co-create. You'll be watchful for things that seem to catch your attention… and follow up with curiosity expecting the answers, resources, and people to find you. When your co-creators feel drawn to the *why* of your art installation, you'll get curious with them to discover together how it wants to come to life in the world… Perhaps the purpose of drawing me to you today is for me to affirm that you are already co-creating. You just need to become more conscious that it's always happening"

There is something so wonderful in being drawn to someone and feeling how, even if just for a short time, your particular puzzle pieces click… you share exactly what the other needs. For her, it was to be validated that she already has what she needs to co-create, and I received an answer to the question that was pressing on my mind. I wasn't sure if I should touch on my understanding of co-creating in my research. In being drawn to this emerging co-creator… I received my answer.

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**The Transformative Power of Conscious Co-Creating**

*The Great Sleep Project*

The woman who has called is a well-known champion of Indigenous rights and a Residential school survivor who works for a local Indigenous organization helping her people heal from all forms of colonial violence. Our group sent her and several other wise community members, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, the story to review and make suggestions before the final version is shared with the community. The story is archetypal and resulted from a four-month-long, community-engaged art project that included over 150 people in its creation.

"The story is very moving. I shared it with my colleagues. It really brought up stuff for us as survivors of the Residential school system. It's the part when the woman sees the apparition of her child, and the villain tells her she can have him back; all she has to do is reach out to him, but if she does, she will be pulled so deeply into her grief that she will lose herself. Her conversation with the child profoundly moved us. I wanted to let you know that," she says with much emotion in her voice.

With her consent, I explained how this part came to be. We had created the story and were fine-tuning the writing to reflect the mythical and spiritual qualities we had heard from participants… I sat, eyes fixed on the screen, as I read through the story with a fresh mind. I felt the energy inside me build until it reached a crescendo; a surge of emotion and energy pulsed through me. I put my hands on the keyboard, and suddenly, this passage came out. I had no thoughts whatsoever about what I was typing. It was as if my hands had a mind of their own. I watched the screen, reading the words as they appeared, wondering what would come next. At last, my hands stopped typing, and I looked down to see the tears that had fallen on the keyboard.

"I don't feel any of us can take credit for those particular words, but we feel honoured that they came to us. They were very moving to us as well," I reply.

### *The Power of Conscious Co-Creating*

The creation of this collaborative story is an example of conscious co-creating, an approach to changing the world that does not require us to preemptively judge the world as corrupt, doomed, out of date, or otherwise flawed. This doesn't mean we don't still see injustice and strive for a more equitable, respectful, and sustainable existence. It just means this sense of lack does not fuel our co-creating and is not a retaliation against the system. It starts from the premise that how the world is makes sense, given all the choices that have come together to make it as it is. It means each person who joins as a co-creator acknowledges all of who they are, including their history, privileges/lack of privilege, power/lack of power, and how they engage with others. The transparency with which the group's process addresses these things results in tension which can then be harnessed in service of the initiative.

It entails entering into relationships with others with an openness to conceiving and birthing something unique which bears the specific energetic signatures of those involved… participants need to embrace the discomfort of the unknown, being vulnerable, being seen, and being called into accountability. The process is just as important, if not more important, than the outcome itself… It may also include an opening up to guidance, energy, and inspiration from beyond the typical five senses… Ultimately it involves surrender and a deeply held trust in the alchemy that arises when more than one person enters the state of flow… In all cases, it involves embracing what we don't know, and in that, unknowing is where the magic begins.

In this particular co-creation, I had the opportunity to experience the power of visionary intuition… In particular, ideas, thoughts, and words come suddenly and in chunks that are bigger and more complete than I could think up within that time frame.  One second it's not there, and the next, it is… In all these instances, the words have a pearl of wisdom to them that far exceeds my knowledge and creativity.

Being able to receive and make sense of the energy opens new possibilities for what to co-create outside of a world governed by the colonial system. Within the colonial system, the direction of energy and power has always favoured human beings above all other beings. Moreover, within humans, the system is designed to benefit the White, male, cis-gendered, heterosexual, able-bodied, and wealthy. When change leaders strategize to make transformative changes within this rigged system, the results are typically a gradual and moderate diversion of resources and power towards those with a lesser slice of the colonial pie. When we play within the rules of the colonial system, the system adapts, often by placating those who protest while continuing the carnage on every other front. However, when human beings bring the parts of ourselves that are untamed, wild, intuitive, spontaneous, emotional, joyful, free-spirited, creative, and vulnerable, the switch is flipped, and those within the system (all of us!) previously asleep in our own lives, notice a part of ourselves come to life. This part that comes alive, for however long, is infinitely more powerful than the system's momentum.

***Vulnerability***

Brown (2012) describes vulnerability as "uncertainty, risk and emotional exposure" (p. 2) and asserts that it "is the birthplace of love, belonging, joy, courage, empathy and creativity. It is the source of hope, empathy, accountability, and authenticity"(p. 34). The act of co-creating is by nature, an act of vulnerability because it requires stepping outside the conditioned safety of the system, challenging our domestication, and allowing the untamed parts of ourselves to lead the way. We don't know what will happen when we invite the mystery of life in, and that can be terrifying. In doing so, we risk social, emotional, and economic sanctions as others who are living their lives governed by the system respond to the disruption our non-conformity causes in their world.

Vulnerability is something that mainstream educational systems do not prepare us for, and many workplaces struggle to actualize. After all, why would an education system meant to produce beings of the system equip students with a skill that would equip them to live outside the system? Vulnerability

is… a way of relating that is ideally first experienced within the safety of a supportive family environment when the older generations model how to be completely authentic and compassionate towards the many expressions of oneself. In such a home, a child experiences unconditional positive regard and support from caregivers centred enough in who they are that the child can authentically share their hopes, aspirations, fears, failures, thoughts and feelings, knowing they will not risk their attachment to their caregivers. When there is conflict, the child experiences non-violent language, and actions focused on bringing deeper understanding, ultimately restoring harmony. They experience adults admitting that they do not know everything, that there is more than one right way, and that it is ok for there to be ambiguity. In witnessing this, children learn that they are safe to show up in the world unguarded and authentic, even if they are unsure about what they want or where they are headed in life… They fear conflict less because they know how to repair any harm that might happen and have faith in the process through experience. In learning this, they can extend a similar acceptance to those they interact with.

### My Cinderella Tendencies

Each conscious co-creative initiative I engage with has at least one moment where I have what I nickname a *Cinderella moment,* where I first feel frozen on the spot, and once that fades, I have the urge to run and hide. I began to refer to it as my Cinderella tendency after it occurred while playing a game called Cinderella with some children at an orphanage in Mombasa, Kenya where I felt put on the spot and literally ran away in embarrassment.

In order to effectively co-create with people, I've had to learn how to respond compassionately to my Cinderella tendencies. When I can come to any moment exactly as I am without hiding, denying, or rejecting any aspect of myself, I invite others to do the same. This has been particularly important when working with people whose lives have been horribly impacted by a system set up to favour people like me while penalizing people like them. Being present in those settings requires me to own my unearned

privilege and ignorance and be prepared to be held accountable, not only for my behaviour but often for the collective I represent. It matters significantly whether I can tolerate my discomfort long enough to stay present. It means accepting that at some point in the co-creative process, I will be wrong, misstep, and need to make amends.

**Not So Total Recall**

Sometimes, when I least expect it, a moment of clarity comes blowing into the clustered arena of my mind, rustling the shutters and blowing the carefully sorted stacks of memories and meanings about sacrilegiously. I've been listening to a love story where the purest, most intense spiritual love exists between two characters. It doesn't last long, but they touch each other's souls so profoundly that they are forever transformed (Brown, 2015)... Suddenly my heart and mind are flooded with images, not of lovers but of my older sister. She was my first Love; the profound connection that did not last long but touched my soul so profoundly, transforming me. She was the first person that wasn't a parent or other adult family that I shared my heart with fully and without reservation, with the beautiful naivety of a child believing she would always be there with me and for me. I loved her without conditions, without knowing anything about her or expecting something from her. She and I were in love, an Indigenous girl and a White baby/child crossing paths for a short time. During that time, she left an imprint on my heart… this fictional story has pierced me somehow, and from the deep recesses of my heart, the pain of this childhood wound is gushing forth.

I recall the first time Diane brought her older biological sister to our house when I was around 12 years old. She had been in my life off and on during my early childhood, but when Diane left home, those visits stopped, and I didn't integrate memories of her into my later childhood. I was told Diane had another sister, but I did not understand what she meant to Diane or the nature of their relationship. After not seeing Diane for two years, she came back into my life like a whirlwind around Christmas… As I recall this, I begin to feel the emotions I was experiencing when I was told that the pretty lady with the

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long dark hair and memorable laugh was Diane's older sister. They clearly knew each other well and spoke of the various things they had done together both recent and past. I remember feeling shocked and hurt. All this time, I thought I was the only sister. I felt like I was special to her, but I didn't get to see her for months, even years, because of her life challenges. I could accept this if it were all that was possible, but I did not know how to accept the fact that all this time, she was capable of being this person's sister but not mine. I was devoted to her completely, and I felt exposed and betrayed… My big sister was, in fact, a little sister, and her big sister felt more important to her than me.

My rational adult brain knows that this idealized version of their relationship is inaccurate, as her older sister has spoken at length about how hard it was for her to keep tabs on Diane. Diane's adulthood was as precarious as her childhood; she turned to drugs, alcohol, and the sex trade to cope and survive. The reality is that they were not off having tea parties without me, but my twelve-year-old heart did not know that… My emotions were short-circuited and got pushed down somewhere so deep I didn't even realize they existed. Now that the floodgates had opened, there was no stopping the memories.

***Meeting my Anger***

As though out of the blue, I recall a moment when I was so mad at Diane. It was that time she came home for Easter after Dad died and got drunk before coming to church with me. I allow myself to connect to the feelings I was having. Embarrassment. The sister I looked forward to showing off was drunk at church, and I was suddenly unsure of my choice to drag her out of bed. I remember doing my best to help her so she would be less likely to stumble or say something that would reveal her drunkenness. And anger. I remember now how upset I was with her. I felt like I wasn't her priority; her friends were. I was angry that she wasn't living up to my dreams of what a big sister would be. I didn't know how to deal with all that anger back then. I didn't know how to adore her and be angry with her at the same time, so I exiled my anger.

***Poor Diane***

*It's Christmas Day, and Diane has arrived to have supper and stay the night. I am so happy she's come, even if it's with some creepy-looking guy I've never seen before. I don't like him, and she is being super flighty like we were just one stop on a whirlwind tour. I think she is staying over, but she announces she can't stay and leaves soon after supper. I'm disappointed but coping until my Grandma, in conversation with the other adults, declares, "Poor Diane." I notice a tiny twinge. She has hit a nerve in me. I let it go. It is Christmas, after all. Then she repeats it. Poor Diane. And yet again. Poor Diane. Surprising even myself, I jump to my feet and welcome myself into the conversation, like a jack-in-the-box that, after a slow windup, has nothing else to do but pop out. "Not poor Diane!" I retort. Grandma is understandably shocked. As a quiet kid, I have never spoken this way, especially not to her. My eyes well up with tears. Overwhelmed by my feeling and the intensity of my reaction, I run from the room, hoping to avoid repercussions.*

My adult self looks back on this situation with more curiosity than my twelve-year-old self could muster through the hurt feeling of a little sister who just wanted her big sister to be there this painful Christmas when the grief of being without her dad was so immense that she felt lost in it. Now I wonder, what was Grandma referring to when she expressed her pity for her? What could the adults see that I could not? Why did Diane have to leave so soon? Who was the man who came with her? What did she do to convince him to give her a ride? Was something happening between the two of them that made her uneasy? Did she want to stay longer but then couldn't? I will never know.

***The Letter***

Suddenly, as though out of thin air, I recall writing a letter to Diane a few weeks before she died expressing my sadness and anger.

Dear Diane,

I love you and want to say this to you so you understand where I'm coming from.  It's really hard for me when you say you will show up, and then you don't. It's even harder when you show up but then go out and get drunk with your friends… I don't understand what is happening… Now you have the new baby, and it still seems like you're all over the place.

Why are you like this?  Why do you drink so much? Why do you still work at the club when you have a baby now? Do you look after your baby, or is someone else doing it because something seems strange to me? Why do you stay with your husband if he is hurting you? Why don't you just come home and live with us?

We will help you raise your baby. I love you, and I just want to spend time with you. I'm not trying to be mean, I just don't understand, but I want to.

I love you so much,

Erin

She silently read it, then slipped it into her bag. She didn't say anything. Nothing. As she got up to leave, I asked her if she would respond. "Maybe," she replied as she left the room.  I never did get any answers to my questions because she died a few weeks later.

***Cracking Open***

All of these memories that were apparently hiding in the recesses of my psyche came flooding in, filling me with conflicting feelings that I didn't realize existed within me. I was at once a strong adult woman and a tender child as I recalled these stories of my sister's visits, but with an essential understanding I didn't know back then–Diane was Indigenous. Her challenges in life were not caused by a wild nature, rebellious spirit, or inability to follow the rules, as I heard someone once say about her. She was a trauma survivor whose early life was so abusive that her nervous system adapted to a life of constant threat. She was not privileged to grow up in a calm, safe environment. Drugs and alcohol gave her temporary reprieve from the precariousness of her life, perhaps her closest thing to the feeling of

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safety. Her challenges were rooted in the trauma of being Indigenous in a colonial country that considered her life dispensable.

As I began to spend time within Indigenous communities, I saw the patterns of the colonial beast all around me. An Indigenous child is removed from her family, experiences sexual trauma and other abuses, turns to addictions to cope, and then is deemed unpredictable and unreliable. She is told she is wild, rebellious, and unwilling to follow the rules.  Her parents and siblings cry because she misses family gatherings, and her children shriek as they are taken away into foster care by White foster care workers, so many of them women. Over and over again, there was a version of the story she and I shared being played out in families, communities, and Nations throughout the world.

Over and over, the pattern continues, perpetuated by good-hearted folks just like me.

**When Will Reconciliation Be Done?**

***Behind the Walls***

There is something about the cold, immovable metal services that makes me feel on edge as I stare through the thick plexiglass windows waiting for him to enter with the other prisoners. This place has been home to Diane's son for nearly a decade, as he has gone in and out for various offences. I finally see him come through the door in his orange prison wear; his eyes are bright and excited as he looks around for me. It's been a couple of years since we've seen each other, and I excitedly fumble with the 1980s phone receiver, eager to talk with him.  As he speaks, I can hear the prison accent he's got going on and laugh with him at the tough guy persona he's built for himself. "Don't blow my cover,"  he jokes playfully.  Only 13 years difference in age, we've had more of a cousin relationship, although I am technically his aunt. Eventually, we settle into a groove, and as the prison accent falls away, I see in his 30-year-old eyes the vulnerable boy that used to climb into my lap as a toddler looking for comfort. Being raised without parents, he would go between three households. He was, and still is, bright, artistic, with a sense of humour that cracks me up.

"You know, when I was waiting to come in here, I was talking to your Mom." His eyebrow raises. "Don't worry, just in my head, not out loud."

"Phew," he adds playfully.

"But seriously, I was saying to her, you may not have been able to be there for your boy when you were here on earth, but if there's any way you can swing it from where you are, he really could use ya now."

His pain is palpable as he looks back at me, his face serious.

"You know she loved you the best that she knew how in the few short months she had before she died," I add, feeling the tears begin to sting my eyes.

" Ya, well, that doesn't do me no good now, does it."

Beneath the anger, I sense his sadness… I want to tell him to fight back against this tidal wave of oppression and not believe the lies that he is broken, unworthy, or corrupt… I breathe deeply and notice my desire to make him my happy ending story. I accept at that moment that it may never come to be and feel my body shiver with the emotions that possibility invokes.

A few days later, I read a letter to the editor asking, "When will reconciliation be done? We have compensated the natives for the harm at Residential Schools but it seems they always want something more. What do we need to do to just be done with it all and call it even?" The writer clearly has no relational connection to Indigenous Peoples nor understanding of the impacts of genocide.

Taiaiake Alfred shines a spotlight, right through the facade that is political *Reconciliation* in Canada:

Reconciliation? Like many of my sisters and brothers, I have trouble understanding what it is that we are trying to reconcile. Is the time for fighting over? Have we come through to the other side of the nightmare that is history? Have we decolonized this country?... The essential harm of colonization is that the living relationship between our people and our land has been

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severed…Reconciliation is recolonization because it is allowing the colonizer to hold on to his attitudes and mentality, and does not challenge his behaviour towards our people or the land. It is recolonization because it is telling Indigenous children that the problem of history is fixed. And yet they know through life experience that things have not changed and are getting worse, so they must conclude I am the problem. (Alfred, 2017, p. 11)

I think of my nephew sitting behind bars believing himself to be the one who is messed up and broken. When will all be reconciled within his life? Is there some magic offering that will erase his mother's, auntie's, and grandmother's history of trauma, neglect, and genocide? Is there some amount of money that will compensate for losing both his parents before he was a year old or the fact that he came into this world impacted by alcohol? I think of his mom who died young after being a child in foster care, his aunt who continues to endure a disproportionate amount of trauma being an Indigenous woman in this country, my Indigenous friends and colleagues who survived unspeakable atrocities at residential schools, and whose Indigenous children who still must leave their communities to attend high school...  When will reconciliation be done for them?

**From the Ashes**

***Making Sense of it All***

Six months into writing stories of pivotal moments in my life, I was taking stock of where I was in the process, trying to discern a path forward… I wanted to keep the stories about my sister private because they felt so personal, messy, and unresolved… [ I ] instinctively wanted to shelter this part of myself from the harsh eye of academia. I knew I could put together any collection of stories I was comfortable with; no one would know the difference, but I wanted to understand why I felt compelled to write what I had… Perhaps if you, dear reader, were looking at my life, you would have been able to put it together in no time, but because it was my own life, and my perceptions were clouded by my fear, beliefs, and biases, it was not apparent to me.

Uncertain how to proceed, I called on the universe to send me a lifeline. After a minute or two of focusing only on my breathing, the answer to my question arrived as a vision of a whiteboard in my mind's eye. On that whiteboard, I could see all the different types of stories and themes I had been tracking. Then I saw arrows showing me how the various topics were interconnected… I saw myself as a little girl and my sister Diane as a young teenager. I saw her skin tone in a way I never could as a child. I saw all the connections in her story that led up to her, an Indigenous child, being raised in a home with me, a White child.

The adult me looked on with a profound sense of understanding of how my need to have answers to my questions about her life prompted me to search for her out in the world long after she had died. I could see at that moment how so many of the things I've done were my way of getting to know her and trying to understand why she had left me so soon.

My attention was also drawn to the impact my Dad's death had on my personality. In my mind-eye, I saw my quiet childhood personality, afraid to be seen, transform into a quiet teenage personality who was willing to face profound internal discomfort to speak out about things that felt threatening, especially to those I cared about… As a teenager, my need to be courageous on the battlefields of my home afforded me skills and a disposition that many of my peers didn't have, perhaps because they went home to rest at the end of the day in a peaceful space… On the other hand, I was always on guard, for I never knew when the next fight would start, and I would need to emerge from my room to even up the sides. That tendency to look for sides that need evening up stayed with me, becoming a lens through which I scanned the world around me.

### The Ashes

For 20 years, I had been a caretaker for these ashes expecting to find an Indigenous person, community, or cause to give them to when the time was right. Despite watching for this opportunity, nothing had occurred organically.

What if they were meant for me? As soon as I asked myself that question, my entire being was overcome with emotion. I wasn't sobbing because I was sad; I was sobbing because I was afraid if I was to really accept the ashes as though they were meant for me, then I would need to share the story of the ashes, along with all the other stories that reveal the way I approach my life, and my vocation. I thought about how they would likely be considered bogus by the university accepting my stories as part of my doctoral research. I imagined myself submitting my work to my advisory committee and them saying it was pseudo-research. I imagined standing before my academic defence committee and them telling me I had to prove that my ways of knowing are real; otherwise, they would not accept my work. I imagined myself on a political stage… being called out by one of the other candidates for being a flake. Scariest of all, I imagined being ridiculed in the media by Indigenous Peoples saying I had co-opted their traditions.

I noticed the shame I had been carrying about these ashes and my belief that I didn't deserve them because I am not Indigenous to North America. I noticed how I had allowed myself to feel like an imposter.

I decided that leaving out my sense of spirituality would feel like I was not being true to myself. To open-heartedly accept the gift of these ashes, I had to accept myself fully, and one way I could do this was by honouring all parts of myself through the stories I share. I chose to accept the gift and responsibility I was given when I was born into a White family with an adopted Indigenous sister. I chose to embrace the intensity with which I loved her and still love her. I choose to walk with Indigenous men and women the way I wish I could have walked with my sister throughout our lives.

It is now clear that I found my way into social change leadership because of an unconscious desire to change the circumstances that resulted in my beloved sister leaving this world, young and tragically. Perhaps I hoped to get back at the unjust world that took my sister. Perhaps I hoped to ensure that no one else's sister suffered the same fate as mine. Perhaps I was trying to make up for a sense of guilt for not doing more to help her while she was alive and feeling angry with her before she died.

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Perhaps it was that being with people that reminded me of her, I could share my sisterly love for her in another way. Perhaps it's a combination of all these or another reason I will never know.

Does this mean all my leanings toward social change leadership are because of my unresolved grief for my sister? I don't believe so, for in my subconscious journey to understand her life, I began to understand so many other people's lives, including mine. This has filled me with compassion and love for the complexity of the human experience. At once, we are heroes within our own stories and villains within someone else's, and within every villainous part of ourselves, there is a part that feels the victim. From the hurt of our victim, we set out to protect ourselves and those we feel connected to.

With varying degrees of consciousness, we have co-created the world to be a reflection of the sum of our internal worlds. We have infinite power and freedom. With it, we have created a societal prison that is choking the life out of us, all while possessing the wild and untamed essence of life that can break us free from our self-imposed captivity. This connection between the state of our internal worlds and the state of the manifested collective world continues to capture my attention and fascinate me… I am inspired by what's possible when people wake up to their power to co-create outside the system, motivated by a desire for all to have what they need to enjoy our time together on this earth.

**Dear Diane**

When I began writing, I was focused on my vocation as a social entrepreneur, yet everywhere I turned, within my stories, memories, and reflections, there you were. At first, I thought it was a coincidence, but as the pages started adding up, I paid closer attention to what this could mean.

One day, as I traced everything I've done professionally and personally, I realized that all the seemingly random detours are not random. They are held together by one thread that flowed from my heart into the world, looping in and around so many different parts of life in search of you, my first love. Whether it was working with street-involved youth in inner cities, sex workers, those healing from sexual trauma, living with addictions, living on reserve, being allied with Indigenous people, advocating for

Indigenous families impacted by the child welfare system, or helping youth, many of them Indigenous, or writing collaborative stories about what matters to them, or equipping children to create consent-based school cultures, the little sister in me was trying to know you!

I loved you so thoroughly and with reckless abandon. For many years, in my bedtime prayers, I sent my love for you out into the world, searching for my missing sister. Even after you died, that love just kept on searching and brought me along to witness all the expressions of you I encountered along the way. Your son is among the most precious. Each of these expressions of you heals a wound in my heart, and in sharing this love story of our uncommon bond, I hope it will play some small part in healing the wound that exists within humanity, wounds created by wounded people who did not know how to show the respect that they were never shown themselves.

What mixed emotions I have now. It is a disgusting government agenda that resulted in our paths crossing, yet my heart didn't know that part before falling in love with you. While I couldn't see it then, being born into this world as an Indigenous girl/woman meant you faced things I will never face as a White woman. I am so profoundly sorry this world was not ready to cherish you the way you deserved.

I will let this love I have for you continue to lead me through life, and I will look for reflections of you in the world around me; in the cheeky humour of your son, the resilience of your older sister, and in the strength of the many Indigenous women whom I have the privilege of knowing in this lifetime. I wish you peace where you are, and I hope that somehow, in writing this story, my love finds its way to you.

In Sisterhood and Love,

Erin

**Epilogue: Lessons in Letting Go**

Exposed to the reality of death consistently throughout my life, I feel I have been spared the illusion that collecting material things will result in deep happiness for me. I have, however, meticulously collected memories… From childhood, I kept, labelled, and archived everything… I lived far north, so I

only kept the functional necessities of a home with me, leaving all my most precious keepsakes at my

mom's place. She was moving and asked me to come home and condense my mountainous collection of

things.

When I was done, there were ten boxes in total… Proud of my work, I returned home only to be

informed a week later that all my belongings had mysteriously gone missing during her move… The

police eventually figured out who stole my things and speculated that he was trying to get back at my

mom. Instead, though, everything he took were the boxes that contained my most precious moments.

Oh, how I grieved the loss of those moments!

It took me about a year to fully understand that this theft was a gift. It forced me to come to

terms with how I lived my life: absorbed in collecting my experiences instead of living them and then

letting them go.

As I bore witness to my family members' last breaths, I began to question whether the creation

that happens when we "story" ourselves is always a positive and expanding thing, as reflection doesn't

guarantee that our perceptions are accurate, insightful, or self-liberating. In sitting with my mother to

hear her final reflections on her life, what struck me is how often she was able to recognize in hindsight

that the meaning she gave to her experiences, and the act of storying them, was the thing that caused

her the most pain as she tried to determine their big meaning from her limited perspective as one

person on this planet for a brief time… The closer she got to her final breath, the less she cared about

her stories, other people's stories, and anything that wasn't in the moment. I realized then how attached

I was to my memories, the meaning I give them through my stories, the perceptions that result, and how

justified I feel in defending them, even if to no one but myself.

Perhaps memories are the "material things" of the unseen world–the things we hold on to that

don't matter all that much in the grand scheme of things. In re-telling certain memories, I ask myself:

Why choose these moments out of the millions of moments I've had in this lifetime? What do I hope to

gain from giving them added clout? How have I shaped my experience of the world by focusing on these moments and not others? How have I limited who I am at each moment because of conscious or subconscious allegiances to a character profile or plot line I developed for myself?

**Concluding Remarks**

As I wrap up this experience of storying my life, a movie is happening in my mind. In it, I'm collecting memories from different points in this human experience I'm having, and, much like I did when I ordered my most precious material belongings, I am re-living, analyzing, ordering, and displaying them in my writing. As I close up each box, I imagine that I smile and label them according to the treasure inside, "Most Precious Memories," "Most Pivotal Memories," "Most Impactful Memories," "Perception Gaps," "Lessons Learned," and then walk them out to the curb for pick up. I don't need a thief to teach me this lesson anymore. I willingly give them up. I know they are not me. I am the one within that is perceiving.

Like a monk spending days making a sand mandala only to pour the intricate creation into the river immediately upon completion, I release these carefully crafted stories of myself. The process holds the meaning, not the stories themselves. I have gone into the recesses of my heart and discovered treasures I didn't realize were hiding there. I discovered the pain and grief of a little girl in search of her sister. In letting go of these stories about my love and grief, I emancipate that little girl long after her sister's death and give her permission to rest. How that will change my work in the world is yet to be seen, but in willingly relinquishing my attachment to these stories, I make space for whatever comes next.

# Chapter 5: Deconstruction

When I started this self-study, I asked myself some guiding questions, uncertain of where they would lead me in this exploration:

1. What pivotal moments have made me–personally and professionally?

2. How have I learned to be the way I am in the world?

3. What perception gaps do I have, or have I had, in understanding the role my privilege, unconscious biases, and subjectivities have had in shaping my understanding of self, the world, and my approach to doing good?

4. In what ways might I need to be unmade and remade? (Clandinin & Connelly, 1990, 1994; 1995; 2000; Ellis & Bochener, 2000; Martin & Parr, 2020).

The collection of stories and the meaning-making that followed revealed answers to these questions, themes, and conditions that made it more likely that I would become oriented toward social entrepreneurship. It became apparent that I have been engaging in uncolonizing work and that this journey had distinct phases. While it was not my intention, I intuitively led myself through a narrative therapy process where I recalled incidents by telling them as stories, processed related emotions, and separated myself from the incidents to gain new perspectives (Ackerman, 2017).

In this chapter, I deconstruct the various aspects of my life within these phases of settler uncolonizing. I conclude by examining my perception gaps and the many different ways that *doing good* masqueraded in my life. Throughout this chapter, I link the insights in my deconstruction to specific sections of my memoir presented in Chapter 4. To set the stage for my uncolonizing journey, I begin with an overview of my domestication, including the invisible nature of the system and my attachments to it.

## Introducing My Domestication

Like every other human on this planet, I was "born into a story already in progress" (Shields, 2005, p. 180), a story that Mother Culture (Quinn, 1995) had been whispering into the ears of my great

grandparents, grandparents, and parents since the day they were born, based on the dreams of all those that came before them. From the moment I took my first breath, my world was flooded with expressions of this dream, causing me to see through a lens established well before I knew I was looking (Shields, 2005). On the one hand, this lens has little to do with me, having been shaped by countless factors outside of my influence well before I ever arrived on Earth. On the other hand, it has everything to do with me; it shaped me like a gardener shapes a bush, trimming away everything until I was in precisely the shape my mother culture deemed acceptable. Then gradually, to whatever degree I accepted the cultural and family beliefs, ambitions, biases, judgements, and aspirations as my own, I took over their role and began trimming and pruning myself so I continued to fit favourably into the worldviews of those that raised me.

I first heard this process called domestication by Don Miguel Ruiz (1997), a Mexican Toltec who followed the teaching of his grandmother's line, authoring several books to share those teachings beyond the oral tradition of his culture. Like other Indigenous Peoples, he grew up listening to his mother culture, only it was a different mother than mine, whispering different words based on different dreams of the world. He describes it this way:

> The dream of the planet is the collective dream of billions of smaller, personal dreams, which together create a dream of a family, a dream of a community, a dream of a city, a dream of a country, and finally a dream of the whole humanity. The dream of the planet includes all of society's rules, its beliefs, its laws, its religions, its different cultures and ways to be, its governments, schools, social events, and holidays. We are born with the capacity to learn how to dream, and the humans who live before us teach us how to dream the way society dreams. (Ruiz, 1997, p. 23)

To understand the story arc of my journey as a person and a social entrepreneur, I needed to understand how my early interactions with societal and family dreams shaped me. This set the stage for

understanding why some aspects of my un-making were particularly challenging while others felt easy.

The stories shared in the "Making" section of my memoir illustrate two things: the societal dreams shaping me, and my level of attachment to these dreams, meaning the degree to which I had internalized and made my own, the beliefs, values, visions, and aspirations of the collective dreams. Before delving into what I discovered in my stories, I want to offer context to my journey by describing how I understand the invisible nature of the system, as this turned out to be a significant character in my story even though others felt it did not exist.

**The Invisible System**

One of the things that makes it so easy for the system to carry on without interruption is its ability to function incognito, unnamed, unexamined, and largely dismissed as just the way things are. Had my life gone along without significant challenges that drew my attention to it, I may still be blissfully oblivious. For the entirety of my elementary and secondary school years, while attending schools funded by the system, I can not remember a single time when anyone engaged me in a discussion about the system, its parts, and how they worked together to achieve a particular dream for humanity. Aspects were presented to me, such as religion, schooling, banking, judicial, and voting, but those introductions did not critically examine, compare, or contrast our collective dream and the system created to manufacture it with other dreams and systems. As far as I understood, there was only one dream: the good dream, the best dream, the only dream worth dreaming. More often than not, any introductions to other ways of living served to highlight that I was privileged, living in the first world, as opposed to the dreaded and doomed third world where kids die of hunger, disease, living out a pitiful existence, without access to proper education, health care, a home, and without the good fortune to be born into a religion (Christian/Catholic) that offers the one true path to salvation. As a child, I assumed that the lack of misfortune others experienced was because they were not fortunate enough to live in a part of the world with a societal dream as good as mine.

Until I was a young adult, I did not know there were systems that governed every aspect of the Canadian settler dream of prosperity: political systems to manage dreams of power, religions to manage spiritual dreams, educational systems to prepare and recruit students to animate economic and social dreams, media systems to tell the masses about the dreams they should be dreaming, a health care system to fix any symptoms caused by a failure to adapt to the many physical, mental, social, and spiritual stresses related to the dream, economic systems to ensure those with power could finance their dreams, and a law enforcement system to discipline those who did not fit into the dream or who opposed the dreams of the White, rich, and powerful. I could sense that there were rules at play, and I felt they were there to protect, help, and empower me. As it turns out, my instincts were correct. Given my white skin, the Catholic/Christian faith in which I was raised, and other privileged aspects of my being, the system was indeed set up to privilege people like me.

**Attachments**

Ruiz Jr. (2013) refers to our taking on familial and societal dreams as *attachments*. We are born into the world without attachment to the collective ideas, values, beliefs, and dreams of the people and systems around us. As time passes, we form attachments to ideas, symbols, and expressions, infusing them with meaning.

In Stage 1, we are our "authentic selves" (Ruiz Jr, 2013, p. 42), doing and being exactly what we feel led to do, as is seen with most young children. In the case of me and my religious upbringing, my authentic self might have been genuinely delighted to dance or sing along to music simply for the joy of it.

As people enter Stage 2 of attachment "preference" (Ruiz, 2013, p. 46), we still move with the awareness of the authentic self while recognizing our ability to attach ourselves to something as we engage in the present moment. However, we can let go of the attachment when the moment passes. I

felt this way during my younger years about the stories, ceremonies, and customs of Protestantism and

Catholicism. I found comfort and familiarity in things my family did but was also able to let them go.

As people become even more invested in the collective dream and learn the words, symbols, and

ideas it uses to describe things within it, we take those labels and apply them to ourselves. In Stage 3,

they become our "identity" (Ruiz, 2013, p. 50), which stays with us even after a moment has passed.

When we interact with others, we look closely for their identity as it tells us how they fit into the system

relative to ourselves. We may feel threatened or upset if our identity is not validated. I first remember

faith identity coming up in Grade 2, around the time of my first communion, when my parents were

conversing about their perceived differences between being Catholic and Protestant. There was debate

over whether Catholics could be saved if they were not born again. This conversation would be repeated

many times during my childhood. In response, I began to refer to myself as a Catholic Christian, figuring  I

would cover all the bases and ensure my salvation (and the positive regard of both sides of my family). I

was encouraged to take that identity with me wherever I went, wearing symbols to declare it and

engaging in conversations to share it.

Becoming even more attached, our identity becomes the model by which we accept or reject

ourselves, and in doing so, we enter the fourth stage of "internalization" (Ruiz, 2013, p. 54). When my

family began attending evangelical churches, I remember the notion of holiness being introduced and

much effort being put into differentiating what was holy from what was not. I began to judge myself and

others against these ideals, and they became the measure by which I accepted or rejected myself.

The fifth and most extreme level of attachment is "fanaticism" (Ruiz, 2013, p. 58), which

describes a rigid attachment to knowledge with an excessive intolerance of opposing views. In a religious

movement, these would be the people who put religion before relationships, rejecting people because

they do not follow the same ideals and potentially viewing other faiths as a source of evil. While I do not

believe I became this attached, I was undoubtedly in the company of those who had. I developed fears

about whether my loved ones would be considered saved under these strict standards. I was beginning

to engage in conversations with the intent to persuade others to believe the things I was taught were the

best, holy, and righteous ideals.

Acknowledging my degree of attachment may give the reader a sense of why the things I

encountered were unearthing and disruptive to my inner world and sense of belonging.

## Uncolonizing My Colonizer Status

As settlers, and other non-Indigenous peoples, work for self-emancipation from our stifling

systems, beliefs, and structures, we must commit to removing all obstacles in the way of Indigenous

Peoples living in their sovereign ways, regardless of whether we understand or appreciate those ways.

The collective human spirit, and Mother Earth, need those teachings as we digest the truth that, in less

than 150 years, capitalism and industrialization have brought societies, species, and the climate to the

brink of collapse. The pain of disconnection we feel in our spirits, and see reflected in society, is not the

only reality available to us, but it is the only one many can imagine right now. We are like zoo animals

born into captivity. The full potential of our freedom is unimaginable to us. In the film *Instinct*

(Turteltaub, 1999), Anthony Hopkins' character frightens his therapist by opening the cage that separates

them from the great ape he once knew in the wild:

> ...he won't come out. See? Even if he can. Not far from here is a fence, and on the other side of
>
> the fence is freedom. He can smell it, but he'll never try to get there. He's given up. By now he
>
> thinks freedom is something he dreamed. (0:15)

I suspect this is true for most humans. We have access to the same instincts, mystery, and ceremonies

that our uncolonized ancestors had; only our inability to imagine life outside the one we are living keeps

us metaphorically caged. We have difficulty imagining anything but this social order, political structure,

capitalistic economy, education system, health care system, and justice system. I have been in countless

conversations with non-Indigneous folks who rant with frustration when I suggest that settlers need to

uncolonize our approach to climate justice and not assume that the answers exist within the same colonial worldview that created them (see Chapter 4: "Beyond Land Acknowledgements"). There are Indigenous Nations whose traditions contain the wisdom to live on this land in a non-adversarial way because Indigenous Peoples have never separated themselves from the Land. Similarly, the knowledge of how to live in community still exists and has been demonstrated in how Indigenous communities support each other through the COVID-19 pandemic.

This wisdom co-exists with the symptoms of colonization and trauma–diabetes, alcoholism, drug addiction, mental health impacts, acts of violence, hunger, and homelessness (Vanussi, 2018). I will never forget an Indigenous woman who later became my friend, turning to me after discussing the horrific abuse her community has experienced and the struggles they were now facing, "We must seem very broken to you." In fact, what I was struck by was how incredibly resilient they were and continue to be. Many colonizers experience one or two traumas in our individual lives and spend the rest of our days trying to work through them. Here this Nation, and countless others, have experienced the raths of attempted genocide at our hands for hundreds of years and yet still show up for one another in a way that far exceeds anything I have witnessed in the non-Indigenous towns and cities I have lived in or near. The continued existence is a testament to the strength and wisdom inherent within these teachings, which so many settlers have become alienated from through our processes of colonization, separation, and forgetting.

## Thematic Understandings and Primers

As I was organizing the key themes and learnings from this study, I recognized that my life circumstances and choices had created some conditions that made it more likely that I would become oriented toward social entrepreneurship and uncolonizing work within my own life. I call these conditions: primers. Reflecting on these primers alongside the stages of Indigenous decolonization outlined by Laenui (2000), I identified complementary stages for myself as a settler engaging in

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uncolonizing my mind in order to remove resistance to decolonization which Tuck and Yang (2012)

measure in terms of land returned and sovereignty honoured. Table 7 displays Laenui's (2000)

decolonization stages alongside my uncolonizing stages.

**Table 7**

*Uncolonization Stages Alongside Decolonization Stages*

| Decolonizing Stages<br>(Indigenous)<br>(Laenui, 2000) | Uncolonizing Stages<br>(Settlers) |
| --- | --- |
| Rediscovery and Recovery | Embrace Uncertainty, Unsettle and De-centre |
| Mourning | Mourning |
| Dreaming | Retire Colonial Dream and Resource Decolonial Dream |
| Commitment | Adopt a Guest Mentality |
| Action | Honour Sovereignty and Return the Land |

Laenui's (2000) conceptualization of colonization and decolonizing for Indigenous Peoples was examined

in "The Process of Colonization and Decolonization" (see Chapter 2). My conceptualization of the stages

of uncolonization, which I will present in this chapter, focuses on the settler's experience of unsettling

their colonial mindset and the unearned social privilege accompanying it. They complement the stages

of Indigenous decolonization (e.g., mourning and taking action); however, the specifics are notably

different and require fleshing out. While I present these stages looking back over my life, the reality is

that they are non-linear and continuous. Like the variable nature weather within the cycle of the

seasons, I observe these stages as an ongoing feature of my inner landscape.

 Table 8 shows my primers in relationship to the uncolonizing stages I identified within myself.

These primers are the experiences that prepared me to lean into each stage of the uncolonizing process

rather than run from it. I acknowledge there will be more primers as I deepen my work in the cycles of

uncolonizing, and these represent a snapshot in time. They should not be interpreted as universal

primers for all people. I share them here as part of my deconstruction and to lay the groundwork for the

recommendations I will share in Chapter 6.

**Table 8**

*Uncolonizing Stages Alongside My Primers*

| Uncolonizing Stages (Settlers) | My Primers |
| --- | --- |
| Embrace Uncertainty, Unsettle and De-centre | 1. Urgency<br>2. Practise being comfortable with discomfort<br>3. Empowered to follow my internal compass<br>4. Highly personal and potent experience<br>5. Not yet invested |
| Mourning | 6. Previous experience with mourning<br>7. Support through the mourning |
| Retire Colonial Dream and Resource Decolonial Dream | 8. Strong relational context |
| Adopt a Guest Mentality | 9. Frequent reminders that I am not from here<br>10. Consent and boundary training |
| Honour Sovereignty and Return Land | 11. Learning to perceive like an archetypal mother |

**The U-Turn in the River: A Metaphor**

I offer this ecology-based metaphor to ground this discussion about uncolonization and primers.

As I present each stage of the uncolonizing process, I return to this metaphor and highlight a particular

aspect to clarify the inner journey of the uncolonizing settler.

In a provincial park near where I live, there is a river that, over time, has been gradually changing

its location by changing its direction. It flows in one direction, then makes a sharp U-turn and heads back

in the direction from which it came, creating a thin land mass between the two opposite flowing

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channels of the river. As the water gets to the bend, the current erodes the shoreline on the outer side of the bend and deposits the sand on the inside shoreline, forming a beautiful beach where boaters get out to sun themselves. The river creeps closer to the lookout deck where I stand 25 feet above, looking down at the U-shaped river below and the trees whose roots are about to run out of soil to cling to. It is only a matter of time before they fall into the river, where they will lie motionless beside the remains of many other trees that meet a similar fate. From the beginning of the warm season to the end, I watch these trees and the soil they are on recede, only to reappear on the beach on the opposite side. Like so much of nature, it is simultaneously an act of destruction and regeneration.

I use this metaphor to explain something I have noticed in myself and my work as an educator and social entrepreneur. There is a precarious time in the settler uncolonization process where there needs to be enough destabilization to hold our attention without overwhelming us, resulting in us closing off, running away, or distracting ourselves. Balancing the unsettling and settling forces allows the settler to survive the contradictory currents in the metaphorical U-turn and emerge willing to do uncolonizing work to continue in the new direction. Mackey (2016) speaks of the importance of settlers embracing anxiety and uncertainty as they may "offer pathways out of the settled expectations of settler colonialism" (p. 37).

The "Making" and "Un-Making" sections of the memoir explore the mix of unsettling and settling forces that challenged my domestication as a White settler, introducing a level of uncertainty related to the system while deepening my certainty in the truth of the wild me. This is "Stage 1" of my uncolonizing journey. Five factors were vital in this stage of my uncolonzing journey, ushering me through the destabilizing phase to the other side, thus priming me to change the direction of my life. First, I experienced a sense of urgency due to my home life. Secondly, I had practice being comfortable with discomfort. Thirdly, I felt empowered to follow my internal compass. Fourth, the experiences I was having were highly personal, emotionally charged, and potent. Finally, these experiences happened

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when I was young and had not yet established a rigid sense of identity, nor was I highly invested in particular beliefs about the system.

**Stage 1: Embrace Uncertainty, Unsettle, and Decentre**

*Primer 1: Urgency*

Within my family, I discovered that people could create systems to govern collective dreams, but not everyone will agree. My parents' differences in faith exposed me to the phenomenon of talking about and challenging ideas, beliefs and perceptions (see Chapter 4: "Proposal, Take Two!"). They did not refer to their religions as a part of a system, but I could see that two people I loved and trusted had differences of opinion. Watching them discuss and debate their invisible theoretical frameworks showed me that systems existed even though I could not see them or understand why it mattered to debate them. The fact that they remained relationally connected and supportive of each other showed me there was a difference between believing something and pushing that belief on someone else. If this were my only exposure, it would not likely have resulted in me being willing to challenge my beliefs, at least not at that point in my life.

The urgent circumstance that stirred me from my slumber was living in a home with an abusive man during my teenage years (see Chapter 4: "The Girl Who Dared the Kings"). I found my life at the intersection of three branches of the system whose rules and regulations were largely invisible to me and who were unwilling to help me, even though I requested help from them on multiple occasions. Those branches were religion, child welfare, and education. My circumstances caused me such distress that I became highly motivated to understand why none of the adults I spoke to would take action to help my mom, sister, and me. It did not matter how much I spoke about it or how blunt I was; not one teacher, guidance counsellor, pastor, youth worker, relative, or coach took a stance to help. Everyone knew what was happening and seemed kind-hearted, yet no one did anything. It was as though something more influential than me was whispering in their ear, causing them to turn their backs on

something that I had put plainly in their view. I began asking questions to make the invisible more visible to me.

**Challenge the specific**. The sheer intolerability of the situation created the urgency to follow my internal guidance, even if it conflicted with the invisible system and its faithful servants. I chose to challenge the man living in my home and risk rotting in hell at some later date because not challenging him meant rotting in the hell I was in now, watching it suck the joy from those I loved. I could not accept that invisible system's beliefs and compromise my joy and sanity. It would be three more years before my mom would finally leave the situation, but I left the emotional hell I was in the moment I stopped playing along. It felt liberating, although scary, to reject the subordination of women in my family and within my church. While there would be many more encounters, I no longer felt powerless within them. I reimagined myself within my circumstances and showed up authentic and empowered. In doing so, I witnessed an important truth: despite my rebellion, the world did not come crashing down around me. Instead, my world began to be shaped by me.

**Challenge the whole**. The urgency of this situation, and my response to it, essentially opened the door for me to question the infallibility of the religion in which I was raised. I wondered, "If they could be so off on their assessments that they would believe half the human race was inferior, what else might they be missing the mark on?" Once I had taken such a bold step to challenge my mom's husband and my faith community, I no longer felt I had much to lose in asking questions to understand the educational system where I spent the majority of my time observing, watching, and learning the invisible rules of Mother Culture. With the cat out of the metaphorical bag, I was on full alert, trying to understand the spoken and unspoken rules, beliefs, biases, assumptions, and power plays happening around me. The story of my encounter with Mr. M (see Chapter 4: "The Girl Who Dared the Kings") was one of a handful of experiences in high school where I felt an urgency to interrupt the sequence of events happening around me instead of just observing them. In hindsight, the incident with Mr. M was

pivotal in my development because his response validated my experience and perspectives, showing me that influential people could be accountable. The powerful people I had taken issue with up to that point in my life responded in evasive, dismissive, and minimizing ways. As illustrated in his apology to my class and our conversation thirty years later, Mr. M felt an urgency to address how he had veered off track in relating to his students. He did not dismiss my concerns or tell me I was wrong. He used that information to do some soul-searching. Through his humility, he demonstrated that there is something more important than the rules of the educational system: the sacredness of the human spirit. While he spoke nothing of this in his apology, he demonstrated it with his actions, which really mattered to me. Indeed, he was more powerful than all of his students within the rules of the educational system, but he was not more powerful than us in the context of the universally-created order of life. He showed me that it was possible for even the most powerful within the system–the White, male, heterosexual, athletic, attractive, and wealthy–to be accountable when he had overstepped and trampled on another sovereign human spirit. He taught me an important lesson about myself, others, and the systems we are all plugged into: that our shared human spirit is more powerful than any system.

***Primer 2: Practise Being Comfortable with Discomfort***

As a child growing up in the late 1970s and 1980s, I would not have called the things I was challenging systems, but being fluent in fairytale-speak and the king/queen references from the Christian stories from my childhood, I understood that there were kingdoms, and kings were the bosses of those kingdoms. Several of the stories my dad read to me as a youngster, including the stories of saints and Jesus, included an element of people challenging the king, the religious establishment, or both, often paying with their life. This was quite the counter-culture stance one might expect from my dad, given that he was a retired police officer who spent years enforcing the laws of the Canadian kingdom. It clearly showed that he considered spiritual laws more authoritative than human law. When my younger sister and I were not listening to stories about people doing courageous things, we heard about pets

rescuing people from burning buildings, raging rivers, or some other calamity. Our dad loved these stories of heroism and bravery. These stories, and the accompanying conversations, primed me to view discomfort, when motivated by care and justice, as courageous: a necessary inconvenience.

By the time I was a teenager, my connection to evangelical Christianity was strained; I was unwilling to adopt their belief that women were subordinate to men or that the Bible was infallible (see Chapter 4: "The Girl Who Dared the Kings"). They, however, continued to be my only spiritual community, as I knew of no other faiths and was not ready to give up on them. So I honed in on the idea that faith was personal and about being who we felt called to be. Within my church youth culture, wearing t-shirts with various Christian sayings was common, making our bodies a walking billboard, and ourselves, the target of people's attention. One shirt I wore on occasion had lots of different coloured fish on it swimming in the same direction and one white fish swimming in the opposite direction. It said, "Go Against the Flow." During a time when so many teenagers were trying their darndest to fit in and be cool with their fashion, I would get a kick out of intentionally trying not to blend in, including sometimes wearing a shirt like this. By the end of high school, pretty much everyone knew I was a student leader with Christian values, an open heart, and a willingness to call her faith to task. I became known for discussing various topics with peers, including women's rights, drugs and alcohol, mental health, abuse, parental problems, faith, suicide ideation, and sexuality. I would bring together people with opposing views for conversations about contentious topics and would go out of my way to build bridges to make this possible. For instance, I befriended a particularly grouchy and opinionated teacher who was very vocal in his opposition to religion in general and Christianity in particular. I invited students who would typically oppose him to come and hear his point of view. The room was packed. I made a point of mixing with all types, befriending people in classes, hallways, sports, community, and after-school activities. I enjoyed my approach to life, which included being genuinely curious about who people were.

The stories in the "Great Big World" (see Chapter 4) show the first glimpses of how I re-imagined the motto of "Go Against the Flow" by choosing to go against the flow of what Christian culture told me I should do as a young woman. Instead, I followed the sense of flow I could sense within me. When I was told it was incorrect for a woman to be in leadership over a man, I followed my flow and co-founded an organization with Dave (see Chapter 4: "Great Big World–Dave") and another friend who was a woman. When I was told that other perspectives were wrong, I followed my flow and sought opportunities to immerse myself in different perspectives to assess things for myself (see Chapter 4: "Great Big World"). And, when I was told it was disrespectful for youth to challenge adults, I chose to follow my flow, respectfully challenging those who appeared to be abusing their power and, in doing so, discovering the subtleties of how to do this without prompting those adults to double down on their oppression (see Chapter 4: "The Girl Who Dared the Kings–The Helper").

To be clear, all of this was difficult. While I had my epiphany standing on the porch at 11 years old (see Chapter 4: "No Turning Back–The Porch") and found my voice, I continued to experience anxiety at the thought of doing something that would put me in the spotlight (see Chapter 4: "The Transformative Power of Co-Creating–My Cinderella Tendencies"). I would feel hot and sweaty, my heart would race, my skin would flush, and my mouth would suddenly go dry at the thought of taking action. I was even more anxious about not acting when the flow around me felt exploitative, unkind, or unjust. As the discomfort of non-action mounted, it overpowered the discomfort I felt when taking action, ultimately prompting me to act. Once again, urgency would come through for the win, nudging me out of complacency.

My bravery increased as I became more familiar with the sensations of physical and emotional discomfort and experienced that they would not last forever or overwhelm me. I used the skills I learned in my early performing arts training and mandatory school public speaking competitions to hide my terror and embarrassment, giving the impression that I was more calm and collected than I was (see

Chapter 4: "The Transformative Power of Co-Creating–My Cinderella Tendencies"). Learning to stay in the spotlight for the duration of the speech, song, dance, whatever it was, took every bit of courage I had as a quiet child that wanted nothing more than to disappear. The encouragement of my parents, teachers, and coaches transformed those experiences from personal shutdown moments to personal development moments. While I do not advocate for masking emotions as a general approach to life, it was an invaluable tool to have in my toolbox when a high anxiety experience was inevitable but important to me. Asking questions of the police officers after my dad's accident (see Chapter 4: "No Turning Back"), giving my sister a makeover in her casket (see Chapter 4: "Once Again, Farewell–Final Makeover"), questioning religious leaders about their views (see Chapter 4: "The Girl Who Dared the Kings"), speaking out when teacher's misused power (see Chapter 4: "The Girl Who Dared the Kings–The Helper"), and taking a stance against abuse in my household (see Chapter 4: "The Girl Who Dared the Kings–Two Days Later") are some of the early opportunities I had to practise getting comfortable with being uncomfortable. These experiences laid an important foundation, preparing me for challenges yet to come. I am sure I would not have had the personal fortitude to witness the injustice and hardships of colonization up close had I not developed some resilience and tolerance in these earlier years.

### Primer 3: Empowered to Follow My Internal Compass

**A much-needed life raft.** "Listen to the Holy Spirit, and you'll know what to do," was the advice my mom repeated every time I found myself stranded, unsure of what to do next as it related to the dilemma of women in the church (see Chapter 4: "Proposal...Take Two!"). With those simple words, she created a life raft for me and gave me the permission I needed to disembark from the collective views and head in more expansive directions. When I say expansive, I mean that subjective state that occurs when all the cells of my being light up, and I feel invigorated, engaged, and curious (see Chapter 4: "The Power of Conscious Co-Creating"). Her words gave me the confidence to speak whatever was true for me. While I had my dad for fewer years, he contributed significantly to priming me to follow my internal

compass by the way he interacted with me during the bedtime conversation where I shared my sense

that he was going to die in a car accident soon (see Chapter 4: "No Turning Back, No Turning Back–Now I

Lay Me Down to Sleep"). The fact that my dad did not try to convince me that I was wrong was the most

potent validation he could have ever given me and also the most terrifying, as I wanted nothing more

than to be reassured that everything would be all right. In hindsight, I suspect his response was

grounded in his ways of knowing and a desire not to undermine that within me. My mom soon came

onside when she saw this way of knowing regularly in my life. She not only believed me but would follow

my promptings, such as going to see my sister before she died (see Chapter 4: "Once Again, Farewell–If

Something Happens to Me"), heeding warnings about certain people, and generally accepting that I

sometimes sensed things before they happened. Her actions showed me that she trusted my inner

guidance system, which helped further my trust in it. I sometimes think about how different my life

might have been if my parents' behaviour showed that they thought I was wrong, broken, or exceptional.

While my younger sister and I have our own unique ways of sensing and being in the world, they did not

seem particularly impressed or unimpressed by us. Their hands-off parenting style focused on whether

we lived with kindness, integrity, and humility. I credit their casual pragmatism for giving me the safe

space needed to build faith in this aspect of myself.

As I spent more time in society, I discovered that people generally did not put much value in

using an internal compass, intuition, or the spirit within to guide their lives. Some said these ways of

knowing and sensing were fake, a hoax, weird, and made up. While it was generally more accepted

within my church, aspects of my experience still rubbed them the wrong way because they felt it did not

align with the Bible. In those cases, they said it was witchcraft or satanic influences. Having a strong

analytical mind, I began tracking patterns. I soon learned I could say things like gut feeling, hunch,

synchronicity, instinct, dream that felt so real, in my mind's eye, going with the flow, following my joy,

and similar euphemisms, which were less confronting to people. Interestingly, when I told my stories

using these words, people did not pull away, and many felt safe enough to tell me about their ways of

knowing, which felt unusual. After hundreds of these conversations, I have concluded that I am not as

different as I initially imagined.

**Meeting co-creators and comrades.** By the time I reached teenage and young adulthood, I was

using my internal compass as my primary source of guidance to avoid danger, understand people, create

opportunity, find paths of least resistance, predict outcomes, and recognize people that would be ideal

co-creators and comrades. The two people I described meeting in "Great Big World" (see Chapter 4) are

examples of people that prepared me to be open to the next stage of life. In the case of Dave, he became

my first co-creator and a father figure (see Chapter 4: "Great Big World–Dave"). He taught me the

importance of building relationships and creating things that nurtured humans and the planet, not the

capitalistic colonial system. The case of Josh showed me that it was possible to exist outside the Christian

framework and be a loving, compassionate person (see Chapter 4: "Great Big World–Josh"). In many

ways, he was more loving and compassionate than many I knew who believed they had cornered the

market on God and Love. In their unique ways, both helped crystallize my belief that deep listening and

radical loving can overcome the chasms that divide people.

**Distinguish religion from spirituality.** Perhaps the most important way trusting my internal

compass primed me to follow an uncolonizing path in later years was by helping me differentiate

between religion and spirituality. One of the gifts of growing up in an evangelical Christian setting was

the emphasis on a personal relationship with the Divine (see Chapter 4: "Proposal…Take Two!"). While I

still encountered the legalities of Christianity, I used the teachings about it being a personal, spirit-led

journey to push back on those influences that did not honour the fullness of who I was (see Chapter 4:

"The Girl Who Dared the Kings"). I came to differentiate the collectively shared dream of religion from

the free-flowing movement of spirit, which knew no bounds, limits, or conditioned biases. This

distinction proved to be essential in later years when I learned about the atrocities of residential

schooling and experienced anger when faced with a church that chose to remain ignorant and largely

unrepentant (see Chapter 4: "Bag Guy;" "Making the Invisible, Visible;" "Privileged White Girl

Meltdown;" "Dancing with Shame"). Learning that the beliefs of humans did not limit Spirit filled me

with hope even when continually faced with people who denied the existence of the system and its

many expressions of dominance, including residential schools, Indian hospitals, and the Sixties Scoop.

Ultimately, my willingness to follow my internal compass led me out the front door of the institution of

the church, leaving its limiting constraints but never the internal compass I discovered while growing up

within it (see Chapter 4: "Walking With, Not Away"). Now when I talk with people, regardless of their

faith or views, I aim to use their words and concepts to create a bridge of understanding to speak about

the spirit that flows through each of us (see Chapter 4: "Beyond Us and Them").

*Primer 4: Highly Personal and Potent Experience*

I have heard many moving pleas for settlers to take up uncolonization work. I believe with all my heart that this is what we must do; I wonder why any settler would do that. Before learning about these troubling truths, my life was relatively easy and uncomplicated. I was taught beliefs that created a formula that I believed would lead to a good life: work hard in school, look after the sick, disabled, and less fortunate, love your neighbour as yourself, and trust in God and God will provide. Why would I inconvenience myself with uncolonizing work when it makes life much more challenging?

**Personal.** In August 1996, I stumbled into an answer to this question when I was introduced to Indigenous-settler relations through a walking history lesson with two Indigenous teens who were only a few younger than me (see Chapter 4: "Bad Guy–Walking History Lesson"). Working through their grief caused by the police shooting their family member, they were passionate and unapologetic in their delivery. If they were trying to soften the blow of this reality to my worldview, I did not notice, as every word left an emotional imprint as they shared their experiences, introduced me to people, and pointed out key landmarks. All of that was highly potent and impactful, but the fact that I discovered through this history lesson that I had Indigenous sisters made all of this highly personal. I would never have dreamed that my older sister was a part of my family because of elaborate government schemes to remove Indigenous children from their families. Adding in the truth of churches being in cahoots with the colonial government to execute all this, it was a true conspiracy that I would not be able to walk away from. It was no longer an impersonal injustice happening to some stranger out there. It had become a very personal injustice happening to people I loved and people I was meeting that were my age. This was not ancient history; it was happening now.

While I did not realize this at the time, I believe that one of the reasons I stayed so engaged is because, at an unconscious level, it was helping me answer the question my soul was asking, "Who was Diane, and why did she end up leaving so soon?" Even though Diane was dead, there were young

women like her who built friendships with me. I did everything I could to understand the beast of colonialism that was hunting them. My relational connection to them motivated me to listen as they shared their stories detailing attempted genocide, discrimination, neglect, and abuse of all kinds. If I had been encountering all of this in a book or newscast, I might have walked away to spare myself the emotional pain, but coming from real people, I felt I could not turn away no matter how uncomfortable their truths made me.

**Potent.** The second catalyzing event was the suicide of Harriette, the young woman who was our neighbour during the summer of 1997 and whom we found deceased by the water while swimming with children (see Chapter 4: "The Summer of 1997–Harriette"). While I did not know her very well, what impacted me was that she was close to my age, with her whole life ahead of her. I struggled to understand and respect her decision. I witnessed the pain in the eyes of the many children who saw her lifeless body on the shore. Barely an adult myself, I felt we had shared this experience, and I felt compelled to stay involved in the lives of those children. This experience solidified the despair in many Indigenous communities facing a youth suicide crisis; I could not unknow it once I knew it. Many of those kids, who are now parents themselves, spoke for years of the trauma of this experience (see Chapter 4: "Becoming a Mother of Another–Dear Parents, Aunties, Uncles & Cousins").

The personal and potent nature of these experiences created a relational bond between myself and others who shared the experience. Being with people in the despair and courage of it all opened my heart to the pain caused by colonization, which is very different from intellectually understanding it.

### Primer 5: Not Yet Invested

My faith in the system began crumbling as a teenager with the discovery of injustice towards women within my churches and society (see Chapter 4: "The Girl Who Dared the Kings"). By age 20, I had discovered the truth about residential schooling, the Sixties Scoop, and other genocidal practices against Indigenous Peoples (see Chapter 4: "Bad Guy"). These revelations prompted me to explore many

other types of injustices within the world (see Chapter 4: "Great Big World"). I continued to surround

myself with people whose lived experiences were different from my own, often witnessing firsthand the

discrimination, bias, and violence that was a daily reality for the people with whom  I spent time,

including people experiencing homelessness, youth without families, Indigenous Peoples, Black children,

people in the global south, those experiencing poverty, LBGTQ2S+ community, and those living with

addictions. When my identity was still being shaped, I discovered I was living in a world created by the

powerful to benefit the powerful (see Chapter 4: "Bad Guy;" "Making the Invisible;" "Visible"). Had first

my exposure to these truths occurred later in life after I had become deeply invested in colonial myths

and my privileged place in the system, I would have had a much harder time accepting the truths I was

learning.

**Stage 2: Mourning**

Extending the metaphor of the river changing direction, one aspect of the settler uncolonizing

journey is mourning all that will be no longer so that we have renewed energy to embrace what is and

the new direction we will be carried. Canadian settlers function with presumed entitlement to place,

customs, culture, and the privilege within the system created by settlers, to serve the interest of settlers.

These presumptions are so infrequently challenged in the Canadian milieu that losing these things is

incomprehensible, even amidst many initiatives touting reconciliation. As such, they are not considered

grievable, and no common language has been developed to discuss it within the realm of potential loss,

nor are there customs in place to guide people through the mourning process. This massive perception

gap within our individual and collective consciousness acts as an insulator for the status quo of

colonization and the ever-expanding system of capitalism. As long as settlers continue to think of

colonization as a horrific event of the past or present, our settler identity is sheltered. When we shift to

understanding it as a structural initiative, our identity is challenged as we find ourselves located amidst it

all, playing some role in its perpetuation.

Like Butler (2004), I recognize grief as profoundly political, not just personal, holding the

potential for transformation within it: "[M]ourning has to do with agreeing to undergo a transformation.

There is losing, as we know, but there is also the transformative effect of loss …" (p. 21). In the case of

settlers, the transformative potential lies in shedding the dehumanizing shackles of colonization, which

have muted our ability to recognize Indigenous lives as inherently valuable and, therefore, grievable. It

also involves mourning the loss of privileges, identities, recognition, and entitlements upon which many

settlers have built their sense of place and security in life (see Chapter 4: "Bad Guy;" "What Are You

Doing Here?;" "Let Me Introduce You;" "Privileged White Girl Meltdown;" "Dancing With Shame;"

"What's in a Name?"). As I grieved these types of ambiguous losses, my mourning led me into

transformation as I tried to process something that felt simultaneously personal and political. I fumbled

through my early years of uncolonizing because there was little societal recognition that what I was

experiencing was real, and as such, there were no societally endorsed practices to help me mourn.

Instead, I created my own practices from my experience mourning losses caused by death, which,

unbeknownst to me, had equipped me with transferable knowledge and skills to process these less

familiar forms of loss.

While ambiguous grief could be explored from the perspective of Indigenous Peoples'

experiences, I focus on the settler experience because that is where my experience lies. I will explore

four types of ambiguous grief settlers may experience as they uncolonize: loss of identity, loss of

recognition, existential loss, and loss of place. I will conclude my examination of stage 2 (Mourning) by

describing two additional primers.

### Loss of Identity

Many settlers, myself included, were domesticated to identify as Canadians and told that all

people had equal rights to make a home here. Within the colonial dream, settlers are the brave heroes

and courageous pioneers who venture into dangerous spaces and bring light into the metaphorical

darkness. Being a part of that cultural story fills many with pride. Faced with enough evidence of our

collective acts of genocide and attempted genocide, I could no longer accept the cultural story I was

taught (see Chapter 4: "Bad Guy"). I began disidentifying with and challenging the validity of the term

"Canadian." I felt betrayed by the brand in which I was so heavily invested. To process information that is

contrary to our beliefs about ourselves, we need to grieve who we thought we were, which is not an

easy task considering there are few examples of how to mourn this type of loss, nor any definitive way to

achieve closure as there is no readily available alternative identity to adopt or a way to resolve the

internal tension (see Chapter 4: "Privileged White Girl Meltdown;" "Dancing With Shame"). One of the

noted challenges of settler uncolonizing work is that it is highly uncomfortable, causing many to run from

their feelings of settler guilt before any substantive change can manifest in their lives (Tuck & Yang,

2012). I hypothesize that guidance related to mourning this type of ambiguous loss would better orient

and equip settlers to stay in the cycles of grief longer and more productively, ultimately resulting in

changes in mind and behaviour.

### Loss of Place

When I began to understand the story of how I came to be on this Land, a profound sense of loss

related to home and place descended upon me, along with the undeniable feeling of being an imposter.

It never occurred to me that anyone would view my presence here as an intrusion, a grand displacement

scheme called colonization. Where did I belong? I felt lost and detached from a sense of place (see

Chapter 4: "What Are You Doing Here"). The way I wandered about from town to town, city to city, was a

constant reminder that no particular place felt more like home than another. I was, at best ambivalent,

at worst aimless. I knew it was not appropriate to adopt Indigenous lands and customs as my own

(Morgensen, 2009), nor did I want to. I wanted to feel my sense of belonging to a place, a home that felt

like the spot on earth that the Creator had meant for me and my people. The challenge I had as a person

of mixed European ancestry, the details of which were not all known to me, I had no way of knowing where I should return to.

I have never resolved this feeling of being without a home, and, like Boss (1999), I speculate that the experience of being separated from the Land that was home is a wound that has been passed from generation to generation of settlers. My ancestors came to this new land without a sense of relationship to it. It was not the Land their grandparents taught them to survive on, the place with their sacred sites, or the place they buried their dead. Their sacred homeland remained across the ocean. It makes sense that this new land was approached with the callousness of people who had just numbed themselves to the pain of separation and displacement in order to make the journey to a foreign land. This way of relating has continued to this day within settler society, causing me to wonder, "Do the psychological wounds of settlers contribute to the system of abuse they have created?" (Gilio-Whitiker, 2018a, para. 10).

### Loss of Recognition

In my life, loss of recognition came from both within and from outside my culture of upbringing. Like many, I had bought into the idea that I was a peacekeeping Canadian and, an extension of that, a good and loving Christian. Initially, I dealt with the reality that people I was interacting with, many of whom were Indigenous, Black, or other People of Colour, generally looked upon White people with skepticism and suspicion (see Chapter 4: "Bad Guy;" "What Are You Doing Here?;" "Dancing with Shame;" "Through the Eyes of a Child"). My presence with them was not celebrated, and in some instances, I was publicly challenged or outright rejected (see Chapter 4: "What Are You Doing Here?"). I now understand why this stance is justified, but I did not then. In my ignorance, I was oblivious to the ongoing harm caused by the belief in White supremacy. This skepticism and contempt starkly contrasted my conditioned expectation that people would welcome my presence and the help I was willing to offer. This, understandably, impacted me deeply, and as I began to learn about all the ways Indigenous, Black,

and other Peoples of Colour have been harmed by White peoples, policies, and culture, I began to doubt the beliefs I had inherited about goodness and badness, rightness and wrongness (see Chapter 4: "Privileged White Girl Meltdown;" "Lessons from Alcatraz;" "Dancing With Shame"). Just because I was learning this did not mean I was welcomed into particular social, community, spiritual and cultural spaces, nor do I think I should have been. Within academia, I was admitted into learning spaces led by and predominantly attended by Indigenous, Black, and Peoples of Colour with the expectation that I keep my discomfort in check so the focus could remain on their experience, not mine (see Chapter 4: "Making the Invisible, Visible"). To process my internal discomfort in these spaces, I needed to let go of my need to be recognized as a good person. It was not their job to ensure that I, a White settler, felt good in my skin. There was little direction in academic or social settings for how to process the crippling experience of shame, embarrassment, and disappointment; as a result, my process developed largely through trial and error.

When I began to tell other settler peoples what I was learning and witnessing in school and Indigenous communities related to the trauma of colonization, I experienced a loss of recognition from people who were not ready to process this reality (see Chapter 4: "Making the Invisible, Visible"). In two cases, I was portrayed publicly as someone leading others astray. One group even called me Jezebel, a wicked and evil woman referred to in the Bible (1 Kings 18:19-21) (see Chapter 4: "Making the Invisible, Visible"). In dramatic and subtle ways, I experienced behaviour meant to shame me back into the fold, and when I would not relent, I fell from their grace. I could not simultaneously dismantle my colonial domestication and maintain my standing within the cultural groups to which I belonged, because I could no longer uphold the standards they used to decide who was good and bad. Moving forward in my uncolonizing journey depended on my willingness to let go of the need to be recognized and enter the borders between cultures.

I discovered that my sense of acceptance had to come from within because I did not fully fit into any group I was engaged with, be it Christians, mainstream settler society, or Indigenous Peoples (see Chapter 4: "Embracing the Borders"). I grieved the loss of an image of myself that I held as important, based on recognition I received from others through aligning myself with their views of goodness (see Chapter 4: "Privileged White Girl Meltdown;" "Dancing with Shame"). Learning to cope with the loss of recognition when I challenged my church's expectations regarding women in leadership prepared me for what it would feel like to step further outside the bounds of what my church community endorsed (see Chapter 4: "Girl Who Dared the Kings"). I had practised grounding myself in a sense of goodness not defined by others, but it was still quite scary to mourn the loss of recognition that gave me security and the potential of my corruption, should I be wrong. I can see why settlers might abandon their uncolonizing work at this point, especially those older than I was, and have had many more years to develop a sense of self firmly tethered to a group's view of goodness.

### Existential Loss

Canadians' involvement in organized religion has been steadily declining in recent decades (Statistics Canada, 2021) as more people choose not to adopt the beliefs of an established religion as or to turn to it as a source of community, inspiration, and authority. Given this context, the loss of religion may not only be viewed as nongrievable, it may be considered desirable. Even with a decline in religion, we each have a spiritual framework that helps us understand and experience ourselves in relation to others, including the Cosmos. This framework, created from beliefs we have adopted from our experiences and others, helps us determine if we are meeting our standards of living a good life. It is our north star.

I can attest that losing one's religious or spiritual framework, even by choice, can result in significant grief (Barra et al., 2017), and yet, this is not generally recognized as grievable as is evident in the fact that such few studies address it (e.g., Hansen & Lambert, 2011), and few social customs exist to

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acknowledge it. We grant time off to people who have lost a loved one to death, but we have nothing for people who have lost their spiritual community or framework. No greeting cards offer condolences on your existential crisis, no ceremonies for closure, and no societal protocols to follow. When my beliefs about the church being a source of good bumped up against the truth that the church has been instrumental in committing genocide, I found myself alone to grapple with this contradiction. Until recently, Canadian politics, education, media, and religion did not admit that the things the church and government did to Indigenous Nations and peoples were wrong. In fact, most people I spoke to could not string together two words to describe relations between Indigenous and settlers accurately. The things I was telling them were inconceivable because they clashed so dramatically with the belief system they had adopted for themselves. When I lost my belief in the goodness of government, the church, and the superiority of the faith, I received various expressions of resentment and disbelief. Even when I reached outside the church to connect within social, academic, and workplace settings, the understanding of the issues was not much better. The denial was so profound that it was akin to societal gaslighting, as though I was making it up. I no longer knew if I could trust anyone doing good in the world, including myself, which was profoundly unsettling.

My time spent with Indigenous Peoples in cultural, social, spiritual, community, and academic spaces was at once unsettling and settling. They spoke genocidal truths openly and unapologetically, which grounded me in reality and reminded me that all of this was real. I was not being radical, overreacting, angry with life, or duped by evil spells–all things people within the settler community told me.

The following two primers prepared me to process the ambiguous loss associated with the uncolonization process. I entered this destabilizing experience with prior skills in mourning which I applied to this new circumstance and, by grace, was met by at least one person who served as a

compassionate mourning coach, that did not placate my grief but helped me to process it constructively, emerging a different person.

**Primer 6: Previous Experience with Mourning**

My experiences of death, grief, and mourning have ranged from the drawn-out agony of caring for loved ones with a terminal illness, sudden accidents that shook me to the core, the sad yet anticipated death of the elderly, and complex situations such as death due to murder, suicide, and neglect. My first friend died of leukemia when we were three years old, and from that time into young adulthood, I experienced the death of someone close to me every few years, including friends, my dad, sister, brother-in-law, and sister-in-law, as well as several youths that I had become close to (see Chapter 4: "No Turning Back, No Turning Back;" "Once Again, Farwell;" "The Summer of 1997–Harriette;" "Lessons in Letting Go"). On more than one occasion, and for more than one reason, I sat with people during their final hours, witnessed their last breath, and watched the light leave their eyes. I did not realize that my frequent exposure to death, grief, and mourning was not something many of my peers had experienced, and certainly not to the extent I had. While the experience of relational loss is different from the experience of ambiguous loss specific to settler uncolonization, those early experiences of grief and mourning created familiarity and resulted in the development of transferable skills. Those skills include embracing uncertainty, orienting myself quickly, leaning into discomfort, and repairing damage after loss.

**Embracing uncertainty.** In my earlier years, I was often told, "God will never give us more than we can bear," which I thought was a distilled version of a few different Bible verses (e.g., 1 Corinthians 10:13, Jeremiah 29:11). However, I have since learned it is a verse from the Quran (2: 286). I am sure I wasn't the only one who, in my naïveté, thought that this would mean that the Divine would take its cues from me, recognize how vulnerable I felt, and save the challenging life events for people stronger and more equipped to handle it. When my dad died (see Chapter 4: "No Turning Back, No Turning

Back"), I remember people saying things like this to my mom or me as though it was supposed to be a comfort. I had no idea how to think about all this at eleven years old. Should I feel flattered that God looked at me and thought, "Now there's a kid that's got her act together. I'll reward her by giving her some challenges to contend with"? Perhaps, but I did not. I hoped with all my heart that having recently taken a hit on behalf of team humankind would have given me a pass on future life challenges, at least for a while. When my sister died two years later, well-meaning people tried to explain this seemingly unprovoked wrath from above. When my sister's husband received permanent brain damage in a motor vehicle accident twenty days after her accident, I concluded that there was no certainty to be found in how the world operated. I also concluded that God was not deciding that some people would coast along in life because they cannot handle challenges, while others would be given challenges simply because they could handle them. That seemed absurd.

Encountering death frequently and often suddenly helped me accept that life is a series of unexpected encounters, plot twists, and surprise exits. No amount of worrying changes anything, there are no workarounds, and no amount of devotion to a prescribed path creates immunity, regardless of what assurances family, religion, science, money, or politicians promise. Now don't get me wrong, I can worry right up there with the best of them, but in participating in this destructive habit, I am not pretending that it accomplishes anything besides self-torture. Embracing uncertainty on this fundamental level resulted in me finding that other surprises unrelated to life and death were, in comparison, not that big of a deal, or at the very least, to be expected.

By the time I encountered the truth about who my sisters were, why they came to be with my family, and the way that so many other Indigenous sisters were being treated, I had come to a place in my life where there were large cracks in the foundation of the story I had been told about how the world works (see Chapter 4: "Bad Guy–A Walking History Lesson"). I believe that uncertainty about the world

and my inner certainty that I could survive any surprise twists allowed me to stay present in whatever I was encountering, even if they were devastating to my worldview.

**Leaning into discomfort.** As far back as I can remember, I have asked a lot of very pointed questions. This tendency started young and was not discouraged by my parents, although they later confessed that they sometimes made up answers to settle my insatiable curiosity. My questioning, I am told, covered everything from how the world works to why people do what they do, to the mystical, to the intricacies of human emotions–nothing was off limits. In the stories shared for this research, this was seen when I questioned my mom about sex and holiday mascots (see Chapter 4: "Bad Guy–Not the First, Not the Last"), the police officers and undertakers about my dad's and sister's accidents (see Chapter 4: "No Turning Back, No Turning Back–August 13, 1987"), my church leaders about their views of women (see Chapter 4: "The Girl Who Dared the Kings–Back to Reality"), and my authority figures about their assumed superiority (see Chapter 4: "The Girl Who Dared the Kings–The Helper"). To process a new reality, I would follow my internal urges to ask as many questions as possible, gleaning as many details, emotions, and perspectives as possible to understand what was happening. I would collect these answers like clues to a treasure map and then work to organize them in some new way to find the treasure within them.

In approaching life led by curiosity and intuition, I learned some valuable lessons early on. First, many people have opinions to share but often have little lived experience to back them up, which became obvious when they had little to add after only a few follow-up questions. On the other hand, those with a breadth of lived experience often had a depth of knowledge that would allow them to engage in detailed conversations about topics. It became easy for me to recognize the difference between the two. Second, my questioning often made people uncomfortable, including myself, as I regularly found out unsettling things. I value the search for truth over psychological comfort or the need to belong. When faced with truths related to the many attempts at the genocide of Indigenous Peoples,

the way the system works, and other matters of justice, I have felt compelled to lean into the discomfort of asking questions and hearing the answers, even if the truths are deeply unsettling. There is something in me that finds it difficult to rest until I have found my ground zero in any given topic. As I listened to people tell me their experiences and perspectives, I knew immediately by the depth and detail of their responses if what they were sharing was true.

**Learning to orient.** One of the inescapable aspects of grief is the gut-wrenching pain followed by a sense of disorientation within one's internal and external world. I soon learned that people had different explanations, including that God preordains our time of death, it was an unfortunate mistake, payment for sin, to a demonic attack against life. Given that there was no one correct answer, I was already well-practised at looking inward for peace in each moment rather than to other people's opinions. This practice stayed with me through the experience of feeling increasingly distanced from a religion that was instrumental in attempted genocide and was unwilling to confront this truth. So while I walked away from religion, I brought my sense of spirituality with me, determined to use the parts that still felt true to mend the parts that were torn and tattered from the impacts of the truths I was learning (see Chapter 4: "Walking With, Not Away").

I credit my mom for teaching me to find things to use to ground myself when the world around me seems to be spinning out of control. From the early days after my dad's death, when my mom put me on her lap and reminded me to keep my eyes on Jesus, to her later coaching to look inward to find the Holy Spirit if unsure of what to do, she taught me how to centre myself on the things I can count on even when faced with situations that challenged my sense of security to the core (see Chapter 4: "No Turning Back, No Turning Back–August 13, 1987;" "Proposal... Take Two!"). A few years ago, when my mom was living with her own terminal illness, she would correct me when I would project forward to another place and time when she would be dead. She would say, "I may be dying, but not at this moment!" In other words, knock it off and stay present: the present moment is the only moment we've got!

Identifying focal points has been my go-to orienting tool for decades. I've used it to approach all sorts of experiences when life feels overwhelming, including settler grief and other discoveries of injustice in the world. Like a mountain climber heading to the summit, I use these focal points, often in the form of short sentences, like a climber uses the spikes to anchor themselves to cracks in the mountain face, preventing them from falling far should they lose their footing. At any given time, and for many different disorienting topics, I have created a list of points for myself in moments of relative clarity that I can use to ground myself. I've found that my ability to reorient myself makes me less fearful of hearing other realities, perspectives, and challenging experiences because I am confident that the disorienting feeling caused by integrating new perspectives will not last forever. I have the skills to integrate what I have learned, find new anchoring points, and steady my mental-emotional-spiritual world once again.

**Learning to repair after loss.** With the tendency to ask questions that blow up my own paradigms, I had to develop a means to repair them after losing whatever framework I used to give meaning to that area of my life. When I learned that my favourite holiday characters were made up and that babies did not come from a cabbage patch, I began the mourning work that would help me repair after this ambiguous loss (see Chapter 4: "Bad Guy–Not the First, Not the Last"). These losses may not seem like a big deal to an adult. For a child though, it had all the makings of a good drama–a feeling of betrayal by my parents and others who hid this truth from me, a sense of foolishness that everyone knew but me, and a feeling of grief as the magic evaporated. In the case of my discovery that Santa Claus was make-believe, I had to search for other meanings and magic, as the desire for those two things had not ended just because the truth was revealed. My Christian-Catholic upbringing offered a workable alternative for the spiritual significance, but it did not offer any replacement for the magic that would be missing the following Christmas morning when I looked at the presents. There were some pretty anticlimactic Christmases as I tried to work things out as a youngster. Things turned around when my dad

read me a story about Saint Nicholas, the man who is said to have put toys into the socks of children in his village. The thing that finally helped me to repair the loss of magic was the adoption of the idea that the spirit of generosity embodied by St. Nicholas (and others) is alive and well in the world. I liked that anyone could choose to be a Santa within their family, classroom, workplace, and community. It felt like a different kind of magic but something special nonetheless.

Looking back on my life, I have applied this process countless times to repair after big and small losses, concrete and ambiguous. I lost my dad, but not the desire/need for the fathering he provided. I lost my religion but not the desire/need to feel spiritually connected. I lost the story I had been telling myself that helped me feel like a good person but not the desire/need to be good. Given the new things I was learning about how the world works, I had to create a new understanding of what it meant to be good. Each time something in the world highlighted a fault in my perception of goodness, I experienced ambiguous loss again. In these moments, however, it was not as soul-shattering because I had come to accept that goodness is a non-permanent concept that will continue to change as I learn. My understanding of being a good person now includes a willingness to learn and change. This stance allows me to repair more quickly as I accept impermanence and ambiguity.

### Primer 7: Support Through the Mourning

Once I began accepting that the system is strategically built on the backs of Indigenous Peoples and the planet with their demise as the explicit goal, I became overwhelmed with grief and shame. I was ashamed to be White, I was ashamed to be raised Catholic and Protestant, and I was ashamed that I had been living my life completely ignorant of it all (see Chapter 4: "Dancing With Shame").

I could have become so shell-shocked that I would have backed away entirely, but my personal experiences with my grief resulted in familiarity in the space of loss and grief. I met people who informally played the role of grief coaches who were not there to comfort me but to call me in and challenge me to listen even more deeply. They did not let me off the hook in my colonial ways of thinking

but brought forth their truths with warrior-like conviction. Except for a few Indigenous men, the majority were women of different ages, all of them Indigenous. The two teenage girls who took me on a tour of their community were an example of this (see Chapter 4: "Walking History Lesson"), as were the women who helped my friend dig the grave (See Chapter 4: "Summer of 1997–Harriette"), Leanne who introduced me to her friends in the graveyard (see Chapter 4: "Let Me Introduce You"), the woman who confronted me, asking "What are you doing here?" (see Chapter 4: "What Are You Doing Here?"), and my professor in graduate school (see Chapter 4: "Privileged White Girl Meltdown"). In the years that followed, whenever I would begin to use strategies to relieve my settler guilt, there would be other Indigenous Peoples who would tell me to quit making it about me (centring myself) and whatever pain I felt I was experiencing, and focus on the lived experiences of Indigenous Peoples (decentre myself). Their experiences are more painful than any discomfort I may have listening to them recall those experiences (see Chapter 4: "Great Big World").

My professor in graduate school played an instrumental role in helping me translate the experiences I was having into a way of seeing the world whereby I owned the full gravity of my settler status, including my unearned privileges, but instead of allowing shame to immobilize me, she encouraged allowing it to motivate me to do differently (see Chapter 4: "Privileged White Girl Meltdown–This Changes Everything"). Her grace and wisdom helped me to stay connected to my spirituality, reminding me that guidance could be found there. I might have never known how to cope with the Alcatraz ashes if I did not have her wth me to process my experiences (see Chapter 4: "Lessons From Alcatraz"). In hindsight, I realize I needed her permission to accept that experience as I felt so unworthy of it as a non-Indigenous person. To use the metaphor of the river moving the sand, she was pointing to the shore that was building when I was focused on the side that was eroding. Her guidance did not attempt to lessen any of the disorientation I was experiencing. I could sense that she trusted the process shaping me, and her calm approach helped me endure rather than retreat.

I would have preferred that a non-Indigenous person support me through this process, not only because people experiencing oppression should not be expected to teach, help, or coach their oppressors, but because there are specific aspects to settler uncolonizing that another settler, who has done their internal work, would be able to relate to the loss of recognition and loss of existential framework. Unfortunately, I did not have these people in my life at that time. So I will be eternally grateful for the grace my Indigenous teachers, mentors, colleagues, classmates, and friends extended to me. Following the guidance of Indigenous teachers and elders, I am doing my part to support the uncolonizing work of other settlers and non-Indigenous Peoples so that Indigenous Peoples can concentrate their energy on advancing their own healing and decolonizing agenda.

**Stage 3: Retire Colonial Dream and Resource Decolonial Dream**

***Knotted up in the Colonial Dream***

Both of my grandmothers were artists who painted, sewed, and knit their way through life. I would frequently arrive at their place to find material, wool, and other creative materials strewn about. Every now and then, my maternal grandma, who was very waste conscious, would decide to salvage yarn tangled up together in a hopeless mess. I would watch and even help for a time as she would carefully tease apart one colour from the other, starting with the tight knots that had formed throughout, prying them apart with her arthritic fingers.

When I became conscious that I was knotted up in a colonial dream that was simultaneously a nightmare for Indigenous Peoples, I felt like my grandma must have felt trying to untangle the mess that was her yarn. I would focus on the part I thought was me and start to pull at it, but it wouldn't be long before a knot would form somewhere else, preventing me from breaking free. Without my knowledge or consent, I was domesticated into a system whereby my cooperation with it caused others harm. When I would try to do something so I was no longer participating in it, I was met with the reality that I could reject the privilege the system granted, but it would give it to me anyway. That's what it is set up to do. I

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thrashed about, trying to disentangle myself from this messy reality in which there was no way for me to feel good about the situation, myself, or my place within it. It was like finding out the board game of life is always rigged in my favour. That might have been fine for some people, but I do not want to succeed under those terms, knowing it was rigged against my Indigenous sisters and friends. I no longer had faith in the system, but I could not escape it. I was eternally tangled up with it.

So what did I do? This answer is best explained through the metaphor I opened this chapter with about the river changing direction. When I looked down at the travellers on the river, I noticed some interesting ways the people in canoes, tubes, and kayaks navigate this U-turn in the river. In one case, a group floated in together, holding on to each other's vessels like a string of travellers all knotted together. Often they would get out and sun themselves, at other times, try to climb up the side of the dune as though determined to keep going in the direction they started, despite the U-turn. I watched as one group of paddlers coxed their friends to hang onto the back of their canoe while they maneuvered a string of interconnected floaters and paddlers around the congested curve and down the other side of the river.

Like these paddlers, I realized I could use my entanglement within the system to coax other settlers around the metaphorical U-turns of their thinking and encourage them to reconnect with the energetic current that is more powerful than the system we have created to enslave ourselves. I came to accept that I would never escape the reality that I was born Caucasian into a Protestant/Catholic family that benefited greatly from the colonization of this Land. Furthermore, complaining about my privilege or rejecting my power would undermine the experience of others who struggle with oppression within the system. When my university professor, who is Indigenous, challenged me to embrace my place within the colonial mess and use my power to lead fellow settlers, she pointed to a possibility that I hadn't previously considered (see Chapter 4: "Privileged White Girl Melt Down–This Changes Everything"). Within her guidance, I found a sense of internal peace that had eluded me since discovering my sisters

were Indigenous. Perhaps it was because it gave me a chance at redemption. Maybe it was because I could see a way I could be helpful. I'm not sure, but I felt better consciously embracing my power than trying to deny or escape it.

### *Primer 8: Relational Context*

I wish I could say that a decision was made, and everything was smooth sailing. Alas, that was only the beginning. It was a process to retire the colonial dream in myself and learn how to use my energy and entanglement within the system to support decolonizing dreams. The stories in the "Un-making," "Re-making," and "Stop-Making" sections of the memoir show how much of my learning took place in relationships and through relationships. My partner, a few good friends, and I had begun spending two to four months a year in one particular Indigenous community at their invitation. When we graduated, my partner and I moved to the community and lived there full-time for three years, engaging in various community-led initiatives. An important thing happened; we grew to genuinely care for people there, and they began to care for us. We also grew to know each other enough for honest exchanges to happen (see Chapter 4: "What Are You Doing Here?;" "Let Me Introduce You"). As time passed, I desired to see change happen, but it was not motivated by politics, academia, or social justice. It was motivated by my relationships with these people I had come to care deeply about, and while I did not realize it at the time, it was rooted in my relationship with my older sister. I knew the ending to my sister's life, but I didn't know the beginning, and I didn't know why her life turned out as it did. Every Indigenous woman I befriended was like meeting an expression of her (see Chapter 4: "Bad Guy;" "Summer of 1997;" "What Are You Doing Here?;" "Let Me Introduce You;" "Becoming A Mother Of Another;" "What's In A Name?;" "Not Murdered But Still Missing;" "The Perfection In Everything"). While I will never know what is true about her and her circumstances, I feel like the many Indigenous people, especially women, who have shared some aspect of their lives with me have given me a glimpse into who she might have been.

Through relationships, I witnessed how Indigenous communities function completely and wholly without being based on colonial values and assumptions. I also witnessed countless ways the colonial system works against Indigenous Peoples. When my friend's son was not approved to attend high school because he did not score high enough on the ranking system that doles out the limited government funding for on-reserve kids to attend high school, her plight to get him admitted became mine. When a man in the community died at the nursing station while seeking treatment because a police officer stood on his back while a doctor watched, I shared the horror. When a friend lost her partner to suicide after struggling to deal with the trauma that began at residential schools, I comforted her in her agony. When I learned that a White judge sentenced an Indigenous person in the community to jail because she did not respond in court due to a language barrier, I became utterly convinced of the systemic bias against Indigenous Peoples. Time and again, I witnessed how the colonial system is designed to diminish the lives of Indigenous people, and each time the colonial dream in me died a little bit more. Once again, my previous experience with leaning into the discomfort of grief helped me to stay within the discomfort and messiness of these relationships long enough to be convinced (see Chapter 4: "Bad Guy;" "Summer of 1997;" "What Are You Doing Here?" "Let Me Introduce You;" "Becoming A Mother Of Another;" "What's In A Name?;" "Not Murdered But Still Missing;" "The Perfection In Everything").

My relationship with this particular community evolved and grew. In time, the community asked my partner and I to be involved in several initiatives directed by the community for the benefit of the community. While the colonial agenda influenced some of these, others were decolonizing, meaning they were asserting their ways of knowing, being, and interacting with the Land and each other. As we worked together, we looked to the Creator to know how to proceed, as there were many occasions where there was no precedent to follow. My natural intuition and appreciation for mystical ways of knowing helped me feel confident co-creating with those who chose to meet me within the borders (see Chapter 4: "Embracing the Borders").

At this point in my life, I am convinced that resourcing the decolonizing dream should be the priority of all social change leaders, and relationship building is the path for meaningful engagement. Anything short of this is colonialism rebranded.

**Stage 4: Adopt a Guest Mentality**

In the metaphor I introduced at the beginning of this chapter, I described a river that made a U-turn. I recounted watching boaters and floaters get caught up in the U-turn like interconnected balls of yarn, and some needing the coaxing of a fellow paddler to navigate the congestion. In my experience, the change of direction the U-turn represents requires a change in settler identity, making it an arduous path to follow. In my work educating settlers, I see how many are willing to learn about the history of Indigenous-settler relations and yet, the journey for most will eventually slow or halt. That is when the settler must commit to "becoming something other than colonial" (Lowman & Barker, 2015. p. 111). Opara (2021) observes:

> It is also emblematic of the ego-centrism and lack of self-introspection that often peppers well-intended decolonization actors and their actions. Often, they do not do the work of reaching down into that deep place of knowledge inside oneself to touch that terror and loathing of any difference that lives there, and see whose face it wears, so that the personal as the political can begin to illuminate their choices. Often, they do not submit themselves to the endless personal and political fracturing that is decolonization. The urgency dictated by white guilt leaves little space and time for actual reflection, deconstructing, deconditioning, relationship-building, and structural dismantling. Thus, grassroots indigenous and Majority World leaders are left in the dust, their ideas co-opted in the rush to "solutions", while colonial power paradigms and dynamics are left intact, patterns of oppression and structural injustices remaining unfettered and reinforced. (para. 15)

Settlers taking an interest in Indigenous rights without actually doing the work to transform themselves and the world presents obstacles for those working for decolonial change, in a similar way the boaters who stop on the river prevent others from moving freely. This work isn't about creating more accomplices to level out the playing field but is about removing the unique obstacle that the woke settler presents to decolonial efforts. Educational efforts to coax settler social entrepreneurs and change leaders around the bend of this change in mindset is, therefore, vitally important to the overall success of decolonization.

In this case, the action needed is to release the identity of entitlement and accept that we are immigrants living on Indigenous Land. Having experienced this shift within myself, I can attest to the disorientation caused by making a 360-degree turn to a life already in progress and the need to support settlers through this challenging stage when their conditioning is cautioning them to resist (see Chapter 4: "What Are You Doing Here?;" "Lessons From Alcatraz;" "Privileged White Girl Meltdown;" "Dancing With Shame").

In the stories in the memoir section titled "What Are You Doing Here?" (see Chapter 4), I recall conversations with Indigenous people who challenged my sense of entitlement to exist on their Land. I had previous experience travelling internationally, thus being a visitor to foreign lands. At the time, it never occurred to me that I wasn't entitled to be there or that some people might not want me there. I just assumed that if I could get there, I was entitled to be there. I remember how strange it was to write a letter to a Chief and Council to ask permission to be in their community. I felt a little indignant, like they were being over-controlling: dictator-like. In my mind, I was coming to help them with their youth who were in distress, and I couldn't imagine why they wouldn't want me (an enthusiastic Christian-raised university-educated White girl) in their community. Not knowing the history of intrusions inflicted upon them by people just like me, it never occurred to me that I might be a threat to their peace, way of life, or safety.

A couple of years later, after building solid relationships with people in this particular community, I witnessed some respond with suspicion and fear as Amish or Mennonite people came to the community to run Bible camps for the children. Once again, I saw myself in a different light. Some of the churches and residential schools attended by children from this community were run by Mennonites and Amish. To the degree people accepted or rejected the beliefs imposed on them and the intensity of abuses experienced in their custody, they either gravitated toward or avoided them. As I listened to some friends share their anxieties about these unwelcome visitors, I wondered why the leadership let them into the community. It was then that I realized that some people might wonder why anyone let me into their community.

I decided to ask some of my closer friends how they experienced me, and I did my best to listen without reacting. I learned that, in their opinion, I talk too much and too fast, as though I always think I need to have an answer. I learned that it felt threatening to my friends when I would hang out with other White people in the community for the evening, and that one friend called that "White Night." She joked that we were planning a takeover. I learned that they sort of saw me as an authority figure because of my white skin and that challenging me would potentially cause some people to feel anxious, so they might just agree with me to avoid conflict. I learned that there were many beliefs they assumed I had based on other white-skinned people they knew. I also learned that some people felt I was teachable and worth keeping around as I was willing to do difficult things with them rather than leave when things got hard, such as in the cases of suicides and mental health crises. Others thought that I shouldn't be allowed in the community at all. It was eye-opening and helped me become aware that me being White was not an incidental characteristic but something at the forefront of how people were relating to me (see Chapter 4: "Embracing The Borders").

I started to talk openly about being White and invited others to do so if they wanted. People started asking me questions about White people's racism, faiths, ways of dating, lifestyle choices, food

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preferences, parenting, and other ways of life. People also began to tell me about specific hurtful

experiences they endured at the hands of White people. While I can't be sure what it meant for people

to confront me with their pain, I hoped that the experience of receiving validation and an apology from

me might be healing somehow. Listening to all these experiences, I developed a much clearer

understanding that I represented much more than myself when I entered a conscious co-creative

relationship with Indigenous Peoples. I was a reminder of the many White people who had caused

terrible harm and deceit. Naming this was crucial to finding the safety to co-create (see Chapter 4: "The

Power of Co-Creating–The Gift of Tension").

### *Becoming Their Guest*

As I practised keeping my discomfort in check when things said were corrective or confronting,

people would more frequently coach me about how to interact appropriately within their community

(see Chapter 4: "What Are You Doing Here?;" "Embracing the Borders"). Instead of viewing myself as an

entitled visitor, I began to see myself as their guest, although it was clear that the invitation was not

unanimous. From this new mental framework, I started to perceive things differently. When I was a

visitor, I saw us as people who were different in customs and views yet equally entitled to be on the land

we occupied together. Our exchanges felt like a show and tell of sorts, with me sharing about my

Hungarian and Scottish heritage and them sharing their Anishnawbe heritage. The way I was thinking

allowed me to comfortably retain all my colonial privileges, customs, and ideals even while in their

community. Tuck and Yang (2012) attribute my sense of societal comfort to the fact that settlers have

always operated from a mindset of taking over rather than operating within: "Settlers are not

immigrants. Immigrants are beholden to the Indigenous laws and epistemologies of the lands they

migrate to. Settlers become the law, supplanting Indigenous laws and epistemologies. Therefore, settler

nations are not immigrant nations" ( Tuck & Yang, 2012, p. 6).

When I began to think of myself as their guest, I started subordinating my domesticated ways in favour of following their customs. I wasn't yet to the point of thinking of myself as an immigrant, but a shift occurred with this specific First Nation. As I heard more people speak about the differences between settler mentality and immigrant mentality, the sense of being a guest within this particular First Nation expanded and morphed into adopting an immigrant mentality wherever I was (see Chapter 4: "Dancing With Shame–This Changes Everything").

### Embracing an Immigrant Mindset

When I began to view myself as an immigrant, I no longer saw myself as having equal entitlement. I began to understand that I was on Indigenous Land no matter where I was, regardless of whether I had a relationship with a nation or was their guest. I began adjusting my beliefs and behaviours to honour Indigenous ways of being and doing as if I was in someone's car or home (see Chapter 4: "Beyond Land Acknowledgements"). As Indigenous Peoples shared their experiences, individually and collectively, I saw more clearly the relationship between settler privilege and their ongoing challenges, including trauma, addictions, and mental health crisis. I no longer felt like a visitor looking at their circumstances but rather a part of an ongoing legacy of intruders who were out of line in the most egregious ways. I began to recognize the connection between the ongoing takeover of Indigenous lands, capitalism, wealth gaps, and climate change. It was baffling how removing that lens of entitlement revealed a perspective that was there all along but was invisible to me.

### Becoming a Guest

After embracing an immigrant mentality, I found I could further deepen my understanding of becoming a guest as described by Koleszar-Green (2018) (see Chapter 4: "Guest Mentality"). This encompassed far more than being a guest of a particular First Nation. It was a spiritual disposition rooted in a relationship to the Land and her First Peoples and a political statement opposing the colonial, capitalistic system. I have come to understand that becoming a guest, as Koleszar-Green (2018)

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describes, means actively challenging the very system within which we are domesticated. It requires

social entrepreneurs and other change leaders to stop pretending that minor modifications to a colonial

system will address the inequalities and environmental destruction that plagues us. It requires taking a

knee to the Peoples whose Lands we are on and behaving as guests, not declaring this our home just

because we believe we are entitled to be here. Adopting a guest mentality is not something to pick up

when working directly with Indigenous Peoples and then put down when working on other initiatives

such as gender inclusion, climate action, or labour rights. It needs to be an ongoing practice, a way of

being in relationship to the Land and the Peoples Indigenous to it.

***Primer 9: Frequent Reminders That I Am Not From Here***

In a family where one side had recently immigrated to Canada, I grew up knowing that I was not

from this Land. While I didn't know where my other side of the family originated until later in life, I knew

they came from somewhere other than Canada. My grandparents called Hungary "the old country" and

Canada "the new country." They spoke openly about leaving behind certain customs, beliefs, family,and

a sense of community as they made a place for themselves in Canada. While I did not yet understand the

colonial agenda and how I fit into it, the regular reminder of my family's origins provided the foundation

I needed to believe that Indigenous Peoples were the original inhabitants of this Land.

The stories I heard in Catholic school about the missionaries coming to a barren, harsh land full

of Indigenous Peoples who murdered the priests (see Chapter 4: "Commence Good Girl Training")

introduced the concept that there was an onslaught of White people with an agenda to Christianize and

take over land and that they met with resistance. I'm sure they told these stories to convince young

Catholics like me of the holy and sacrificing nature of our forefathers in the faith however, these stories

also paved the way for me to readily accept the truths I heard from Indigenous Peoples about their

experiences with attempted genocide.

***Guesthood, Consent, and Boundaries***

One challenge to adopting a guest mentality was the fact that not everyone in that particular

First Nation wanted me there (see Chapter 4: "Why Are You Here?"). While I could think of myself as a

guest, I was still an intruder to some. This made relating feel complex and multi-layered. While women

would often consider me an insider related to my gender, I was simultaneously an outsider when it came

to my ethnicity. Just because some people invited me to help with youth programs did not mean they

wanted me at all community, cultural, or family events. Some adamantly opposed my involvement, while

others took great offence if I did not integrate with the community. Furthermore, just because I was

invited to a particular thing, at a particular time, and in a particular way did not mean that I would be

invited to participate similarly in the future. I soon learned the importance of asking explicitly for

consent as a regular part of every single day, making it an ongoing practice very specific to each situation

and person. Asking for consent required discussing and negotiating boundaries. Boundary work is "the

process in which actors (re-)negotiate or (re-)configure boundaries to either further integrate or

differentiate between actors" (Basir et al., 2022, p. 1610; see also Hunt & Benford, 2004). Defining the

boundaries between certain people or groups within the community and myself (and/or the group I was

with) became essential to establishing mandate and permission. I would often be managing multiple

relationships, each having expectations and boundaries around how they'd like me to show up as a

guest. In this particular community, one such example was the different expectations and comfort levels

people had in me operating the youth programs their child(ren) participated in. Some families were

cautious, preferring to keep their children in sight. Others felt okay with sports activities but did not want

me to speak to their child about any personal challenges they may be facing. Other parents felt

comfortable with me (and the group I was with) taking their child camping, while others would consider

this request highly suspicious. Adopting a guest mentality required me to almost continuously check in

with all involved to determine how to show up in a way that was trauma-informed, conscientious, and

mindful of the track record of transgressions that set the stage for the circumstances we were facing, less than a decade after their children stopped attending residential schools. These early experiences showed me that adopting a guest mentality needed to be co-constructed and adaptable and come from an etiquette of consent and boundary setting, which is ongoing, retractable, specific, and enthusiastic.

### *Primer 10: Consent and Boundary Training*

Arriving in this world in a female body has given me a heightened sense of caution regarding my safety (see Chapter 4: "Beyond Us and Them"). As a teenager and young adult, I listened very closely to instructions about sexual consent and became a vocal advocate for this within my social circles. I recognized this as a way that people can interact authentically and respectfully, a welcome alternative to the subtle and overt violence I was experiencing or witnessing. Having family members and friends who experienced the consequences of people, most often men, using force rather than consent in their sexual encounters gave me a real sense of the trauma that could be avoided if consent became the relational norm. Within a year of spending time in one particular First Nation, some of the people began to share with me how sexual trauma was a frequent and re-occurring part of their experience of colonialism and cultural genocide (see Chapter 4: "Through the Eyes of a Child;" "Behind the Curtain;" "Not Murdered, But Still Missing"). They went on to share other forms of abuse, neglect, and trauma at schools run by White people. For many, their abusers looked and talked a lot like me, resulting in me being an unintentional trigger for their trauma. As soon as I realized this, I began using the principles of consent I had initially learned related to healthy sexuality.

The Wheel of Consent (Martin & Dalzen, 2021) was developed to tease apart different aspects of consent within a sexual context; however, it can be applied to other kinds of human interaction, including social entrepreneurship and other types of community-based change. In this model, consent is broken down into who is doing the thing, and who the gift of doing is for. This creates four distinct quadrants. A person could be doing something to benefit others (serve/give), or themselves (take). A

person could allow someone to do something even though they don't benefit from it (allow), or benefit

from someone else's actions (accept/receive). When I overlay a guest mentality on this model, I am

prompted to consider the roles I tend to take when engaging with a community, group, or organization in

my role as a social entrepreneur.

- Who is doing?

- Who is receiving?

- How is the doer deciding what they will do? From whom are they seeking direction?

- How is the receiver communicating what they want?

- Are there times when a person thinks they are giving a gift in their doing but they are actually

  receiving a gift?

- Are there times when the people I am working with allow me to do something even though it

  doesn't benefit them or even hurts them? Why is this?

Reflecting on the various directions consensual exchanges can occur is a valuable tool to

cultivate a greater degree of consciousness, especially in situations with historical, systemic, social and

other power imbalances. Having explicit conversations to ensure mandate and permission is clear has

become essential to my practice, along with formal accountability processes where I actively seek

direction. Frequently reiterating my intent to operate from a guest mentality reminds me, and those I

engage with, of my desire to actively challenge my assumptions, privileges, and biases, including the

notion that I am there only to give. I have found that one indication that I am in a conscious co-creative

partnership is that there are a variety of exchanges happening where all involved are taking turns giving

and receiving.

**Guest mentality as a spiritual practice.** I have carried this consent-based approach to guesthood

into my life and daily practice regardless of who or what I am engaged with, personally or professionally.

Whenever I am invited to consciously co-create with a person or group, I am a guest in their world. How

they view their circumstances and interact with each other becomes my reference point for how I will communicate, the choices of words I use, the way I speak, the way I present myself, and the way I interact. While I remain authentic in my values and expressions, I challenge myself to shake loose as many perceptions as possible to become a guest who embraces other ways of being, doing, and perceiving. One of the greatest joys for me as a social entrepreneur is finding new expressions of myself through the process of becoming a guest as I enter co-creative relationships with individuals, groups, communities, and organizations who are often very different from me in their views and customs. I can develop new perspectives by consciously relinquishing my preferences and challenging my beliefs and patterns. It is important to note that adopting a guest mentality is not about becoming like another or co-opting other people's cultures and customs. Nor is it about trying to clean the slate of all our beliefs, customs, and values. Adopting a guest mentality shifts my focus from viewing myself as the host. It causes me to notice the many ways I use my power and relative privilege to create environments that are comfortable, familiar, and advantageous for me. Even when there is no inherent power imbalance between me and the people I am engaging, this shift in focus combined with ongoing and explicit consent can add a heightened degree of consciousness to each interaction.

**Stage 5: Recognize Sovereignty and Return the Land**

In the metaphor guiding this chapter, there came a time when those travelling on the river finally surrendered to the flow of the current and allowed it to carry them around the U-turn and back in the direction they came. For settlers and non-Indigenous peoples, returning to right relations with the Land involves a coming into flow with the Earth, our mother. One of my mentors refers to this as "being reconciled to the Land" (D. Skene, personal communication, September 5, 2022). When we reconcile ourselves to the Land, we harmonize with Indigenous ways of being, doing, and knowing. These rhythms guided our Leaver ancestors (see Chapter 4: "Dancing With Shame–Enter Ishmael"). Being reconciled to the Land is a spiritual transformation that involves taking our small yet significant place within an

interconnected creation and choosing to live within her rhythm (see Chapter 4: "This is God"). On a

political level, this would naturally result in honouring Indigenous sovereignty and returning land to the

care of Indigenous Peoples who still carry the teachings of how to live in harmony on the earth,

something that settler peoples will need to re-learn since we have become estranged from that wisdom.

As we stare down the barrel of a warming planet, I am convinced that the solution for what

plagues us does not exist within the colonial worldview and system, even if we were to greenify it to

mitigate the impacts of our greed and insatiable desire for growth. Many activists and social

entrepreneurs readily admit that humanity needs to engage with the earth differently. Very few can

imagine a way of being that does not involve the colonial system because most have never experienced

anything outside of it. We can only imagine driving the vehicle of colonialism in a less harmful direction,

making capitalism greener (see Chapter 4: "Beyond Land Acknowledgements"). There are, however,

Indigenous social entrepreneurs, activists, and change leaders who not only understand how to engage

in a decolonizing way but are actualizing it (e.g., Landback, 2023; NDN Collective, 2022; RAVEN, 2023).

The opportunity exists for settler and non-Indigenous social change leaders to amplify the voices of

these Indigenous changemakers if we are willing to release our preconceived notions of what is possible

and follow their decolonial lead. In doing so, we will enact that spiritual intention of being reconciled to

the Land, even if we do not know how to do that ourselves.

### Making Friends With the Searchlight

This step of living into Indigenous Sovereignty and returning land is a work in progress for me as

my intention to be reconciled to the Land bumps up against the privilege I've become accustomed to. I

find something transformative happens when I can withstand the intensity of the "searchlight of

complicity" (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p. 9) long enough for my life to be examined in detail, first by me and

then by others who may be interacting with me personally, professionally, or through politics. If I can

remain open despite the feelings of vulnerability, I can transform the searchlight into a magnifying glass

that draws attention to the realities, challenges, contradictions, and potential solutions (see Chapter 4: "The Power to Consciously Co-Create").

When people look through the magnifying glass, they will see me trying to reconcile my engagement in home/land ownership with the fact that few of my Indigenous friends own property, ascribe to property ownership, or benefit from the many people who own land within their traditional territories. They will see me speaking to the hypocrisy in the environmental movements I'm a part of. On the one hand, they proclaim solidarity with Indigenous Peoples. On the other hand, they are pushing for electric vehicles with batteries powered by minerals mined within Indigenous territories, causing much environmental and cultural destruction. They will also see me struggle to find the appropriate personal boundaries in friendships with particular Indigenous people whose experience with the trauma of colonization has resulted in mental health challenges that make it very difficult for me to find a balance between being there for them and maintaining my health. As a White settler, I feel accountable for easing the trauma, poverty, and precariousness they experience while experiencing emotional fatigue because of the energy it takes to remain in a compassionate relationship with people who struggle so deeply. Anyone looking at my life would see the tug of war between the political and the personal while my spirit yearns for freedom and healing for all.

### Primer 11: Learning to Perceive Like a Mother

My experience of parenting two beautiful children (see Chapter 4: "Through the Eyes of a Child;" "Becoming a Mother;" "Child of Another Mother;" "My Becoming a Mother of Another") gave me my first experience of being led by the instinctive, untamed, side of myself. In a very primal sense, the experience of birthing at home was an act of surrender to the earth and the miracle of procreation. It felt infinitely more real than anything else in which I have ever participated. Not only that, I gained a sense of belonging as I joined countless others who had birthed new life since time began. The feeling of

being led by nature herself never left me as I looked at my two children, and I found myself resisting the system and its many attempts to tell me what was best for these two untamed and sovereign beings.

Before this, I understood the concept of sovereignty within the realm of politics as my Indigenous friends and colleagues spoke about it, but giving birth to my children impressed upon me why it matters. I had spent countless hours studying my children and could observe the imprint left by their encounters from one day to another. I saw that some people and experiences caused them to light up with joy, and others caused them to recoil or revolt. I watched how impressionable they were and when they would sacrifice their authentic expression to conform at school, sports, or home. My oldest child has a way of challenging anyone who comes in between him and his authentic expression, including me. His unrelenting dedication to being himself is a daily reminder of the many ways that the system gets its tentacles into people, attempting to shape them into a useful cog in its machinery. I have watched both of my children resist this pressure, and I have watched them succumb.

This entire parenting journey helped me see the plight of Indigenous families through different eyes. While there is no way for me to comprehend the trauma and grief they experience due to the adversarial nature of the colonial system, I can appreciate the damage done by denying generations of children and adults their collective sovereignty. I understood the significance of undermining kinship ties in a way I could not relate to before. My parenting journey also gave me a very personal and potent experience of feeling connected to the Land, her cycles, rhythms, and other mothers of all kinds who care for their young based on instincts and a bond far more powerful than any human-made system.

**Discovering My Perception Gaps**

An area of focus for this study has been understanding my perception gaps (see Chapter 1: "Key Terms"). I wanted to know: What perception gaps do I have, or have I had, in understanding the role my privilege, unconscious biases, and subjectivities have had in shaping my understanding of self, the world, and my approach to doing good?

This section highlights key perception gaps identified throughout this process. Some I realized many years ago, and some very recently through the process of this inquiry. I have summarized them in two statements to reflect how I previously viewed things (then) and how I currently view things (now). I follow with a statement about what I missed, knowing that this is subjective and may continue to change as I learn more.

**Perception Gap #1**

**Then.** Religion is spirituality.

**Now**. Religion and spirituality are distinctly different.

**What I feel I missed.** I interpreted people within religious institutions as having the answers as opposed to seeing them as seekers. I assumed that the force guiding religions and their leaders was the same internal compass that I felt was leading me in my life. The internal messages from the churches I attended led me to believe their God was the source of love for a misguided world. When I experienced their discrimination because I was born female and later learned that Christians ran Residential Schools, I could no longer believe that religion always has people's best interests at heart. I now see religion as a branch of the system governed by human-made rules. Spirituality is a sense of interconnectedness with all beings on the earth and cosmos and being led by an innate impulse to evolve and expand. Religion and spirituality can coexist, but not necessarily.

**Perception Gap #2**

**Then.** Religious leaders know the truth yet are intentionally misleading people.

**Now**. Religious leaders, like everyone else, are just trying to figure things out, and in the meantime, we influence each other for various reasons.

**What I feel I missed.** Where people exist, I will find varying degrees of consciousness and unconsciousness, connection and disconnection, love and fear, freedom and captivity, vulnerability and

guardedness, humility and pride, stagnation and evolution. Just because someone thinks they know and tries to influence me does not mean I need to take their views personally.

**Perception Gap #3**

**Then.** Social entrepreneurship does not necessarily need to focus on decolonization to be impactful.

**Now.** Social entrepreneurship must have decolonization as its primary goal to be transformative. Anything short of that is philanthropic life support for a failing colonial system.

**What I feel I missed.** I mistakenly envisioned social change efforts as helpful if they were trying to make life better for the oppressed or the planet. I believed every little bit counted and that the world would be better if we all just did our part to leave it a little bit better than we found it. Now I understand that charity, an integral part of an unjust colonial system, does not change the system but allows the system to continue. It is funded by the people who benefit most from the biased system that affords them so much unearned privilege.

**Perception Gap #4**

**Then.** My choices to engage in social change were motivated by my curiosity and desire to help others.

**Now.** My choices to engage in social change are/were motivated, at least in part, by my subconscious desire to know my Indigenous sister, who died young.

**What I feel I missed.** While I knew about trauma and its impact on people, it never occurred to me that I would unknowingly have significant trauma influencing my life direction. When I began to remember the nature of my relationship with my older sister, I felt the emotions that had become trapped due to my feelings of abandonment and grief. When I began this research, I thought the stories about my sister were unrelated. Now I see that they are at the centre. I see my desire to know my sister woven throughout as so much of my choices aligned with an aspect of her life: Working with

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street-involved youth and sex trade workers, living and working in First Nations communities, doing collaborative arts related to racism and related sexual assault, working with First Nations on the opioid crisis, and developing a program with First Nations to promote healthy relationships in youth.

**Perception Gap #5**

**Then**. Doing good in the world is admirable.

**Now.** Doing good is the source of the problem, not the solution to the problem.

**What I feel I missed.** The notion of what is good and bad is entirely subjective based on our beliefs about what is right and wrong. What might be considered good to the doer might be heinous to the receiver. Furthermore, someone could come to the false conclusion that someone is experiencing hardships because they refuse to do what someone else considers the good and right thing.

I am sure there are other gaps in perception I will discover for myself as I continue my journey of becoming more conscious in my life and my practice. I offer them here, as incomplete as they likely are, hoping that it will encourage readers to add more reflexivity into their lives and practices.

### Goodness: The Ultimate Chameleon

Coming to understand the notion of doing good was a guiding force of this research. I, therefore, conclude this deconstruction by examining different ways I have seen the promise of goodness used to disguise another intention and why I now belieive that trying to be good and do good is a big part of the problem we are facing.

As I searched for themes within my stories, it became clear that interrogating the notion of doing good was complicated. Rather than being an objective character trait or moral value I could attain, the concept of goodness and doing good has been a chameleon, disguising itself to suit the context and motives of the person/people deciding what was good. While the notion of being good has been a powerful motivator, spurring me to co-create many things in the world, it has also been my Achilles heel

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because, at times, I have pinched myself off from joy out of fear that I was not being good enough, or worse, was being bad. The following are some of the ways goodness has appeared in my life.

**Goodness as a Golden Carrot (Recognition)**

In "Commence Good Girl Training" (see Chapter 4), I share my first memories of goodness being linked to my performance as a student and my willingness to strive for recognition. I had to perform a certain way to be recognized as intelligent, hard-working, and conscientious. Even in those early years, I saw how refusing the carrot resulted in punishment and disapproval, as those in authority took it very personally whether I wanted to conform to their ideals. If I did, I was good.  If not, I was bad.

As social change leaders, we must ask ourselves if our do good actions are motivated by a desire to be recognized. Are our actions motivated by a desire to get others to chase the golden carrot of recognition we dangle in front of them?

**Goodness as Privilege (Safety)**

I have reflected on the impacts colonialism has had on my Indigenous family members and friends (e.g., trauma, addiction, violence, suicide, prison, early death) (see Chapter 4: "Excavation;" "Prodigal Sister Returns;" "It's Never Getting Better;" "Once Again Farewell;" "Not So Total Recall;" "When Will Reconciliation Be Done?;" "Becoming A Mother Of Another, Perfection in Everything"). Those with a certain amount of comfort and privilege within the system can happily commit to prosocial behaviours to attain food, shelter, peace of mind, housing, physical safety, and mental peace because their security is not compromised. They can afford to do and be good because they have the privilege of feeling safe.

As social change leaders, we must ask ourselves if our understanding of good and bad is calibrated by our level of privilege and safety within the system. In what ways are our actions (or lack of action) motivated by our desires for safety and comfort?

**Goodness as Social Order (Power)**

Meeting people from around the world, I discovered that the notion of being good and doing

good, when backed by a political agenda, is almost always meant to sway citizens to engage in a way that

benefits the powerful (see Chapter 4: "Bad Guy;" "Making the Invisible, Visible;" "Through the Eyes of a

Child;" "Beyond Land Acknowledgements;" "White Moderate 2021 Edition"). Opposition to the "good

guys" was met with punishment, gaslighting, fines, violence, imprisonment, and even death.

As social change leaders, we must ask ourselves how our approach and views of doing good

endorse and fortify the positions of people in power. In what ways are our actions motivated by our

desires to gain or keep power? In what ways are our actions motivated by a desire to be viewed as good

by those with social or political power?

**Good as a Higher Calling (Meaning)**

There were those in my life whose version of goodness was fortified by their claims and belief of

a higher calling. The beliefs that the Divine endorsed their actions created many perception gaps,

preventing them from realizing the harm that was being caused or interpreting the harm as a necessary

by-product of helping the helpless (see Chapter 4: "The Girl Who Dared the Kings;" "Great Big World;"

"Bad Guy;" "Behind the Curtain;" "Embracing the Boarders").

As social change leaders, we must ask ourselves how our approach and views of doing good and

being good impose our sense of higher calling onto someone else without their enthusiastic consent. In

what ways are our actions motivated by our need to feel meaningful, special, or anointed?

**Good as a Path to Belonging**

Whether it's about belonging to a relationship, family, religion, workplace, classroom, social

movement, political party, street gang, or some other social structure, a person must conform to that

group's understanding of what constitutes good behaviour if they are to be accepted, protected, and

nurtured. The person will need to balance their needs to be authentic with their needs to be connected,

as veering too far outside group norms will result in abandonment, isolation or rejection, such as in the case of imprisonment (see Chapter 4: "The Girl Who Dared the Kings;" "Privileged White Girl Meltdown;" "Dancing With Shame;" "Walking With, Not Away;" "When Will Reconciliation Be Done?").

As social change leaders, we must ask ourselves how our approach and views of doing good involve coercion and bribery or require a person to hide or mute an aspect of who they are in order to belong. In what ways are our actions (or lack of actions) motivated by our desires to belong?

Recognizing the immense potential for abuse, coercion, and manipulation for selfish gain, a critical examination of goodness is integral to the practice of social entrepreneurship and other vocations that aspire to make the world a better place. Without a daily practice to interrogate our motives, we may unwittingly project unconscious motivations about goodness out into the world.

I assert that the notion of goodness is problematic because it is laden with judgment and prevents meaningful inquiry and dialogue. No one wants to be judged as bad (e.g., racist, privileged, greedy, homophobic, ableist, sexist, etc.). I have witnessed people's extraordinary efforts to avoid receiving being judged, almost always resulting in everyone becoming defensive, trying to prove why they are good despite the evidence levied against them. This tendency is especially pronounced in do-gooder circles and can be debilitating. As long as we strive to be good, we divert energy from being real. Realness is necessary to take inventory of what is happening and consciously co-create a path forward. As a social change leader and educator, this is my biggest challenge in working with people. Fear of being labelled bad keeps people in quiet shame. It makes them turn away instead of toward conversations that would help them learn because they do not know how to manage themselves when they feel judged. It keeps people silent instead of asking challenging questions to strengthen change efforts, which is especially prevalent when those experiencing oppression are leading the change effort and people fear questions may be interpreted as opposition. Fear of being declared bad prevents people from coming to the co-creative space with vulnerability, tenderness, and curiosity. I believe that pushing

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back on the notion of goodness should be a top priority for those serious about social change, and I dedicate the final chapter of this dissertation to showing how we can do that.

**Concluding Remarks**

The experience of deconstructing my life, perceptions, and motives through this self-inquiry has underscored the importance of orienting social entrepreneurs and other change leaders to an uncolonizing framework to interrogate themselves and their practices critically. By switching perspectives between subject and researcher and intuitively following a narrative therapy framework, I could recognize things within myself that I was previously unaware of despite my intention to operate reflexively. While I do not aspire for objectivity, nor do I believe it is possible when dealing with highly personal subject matter, the nature of the researcher role allowed me to look at my own life as though it belonged to someone else. In doing so, I discovered something hiding in plain sight: losing my sister during childhood and my desire to know her led me to seek answers within the world around me. I followed this love for her and the Spirit I could feel inside me through the process of interrogating my sense of self, my privileges within the colonial system, and my notions of what it means to do good while learning what it entails to be reconciled to the Land. I have developed strategies that allow me to sit in the pocket of dissonance long enough to be transformed by it.

I draw on this body of work in the final chapter to create a set of recommendations for social entrepreneurs, educators, healers, and other skilled professionals preparing people to be change leaders in the world.

# Chapter 6: Recommendations for Educators

In this final chapter, I demonstrate how we can unpack our cultural presuppositions, including the notion of doing good, to help our inner child escape the prison we have inherited through our domestication. To believe it is possible to escape the system, we must first experience escaping the prison of our domestication. Through the process described in this chapter, educators can guide learners through experiences that will prime them to engage in settler uncolonization. While these recommendations are written for educators, other skilled professionals could use them, including social workers, therapists, and healers. For this research, I have focussed on social entrepreneurs and other social change leaders; these recommendations are, however, just as relevant for other disciplines.

This research revealed 11 primers that were true in my case as a White, settler social entrepreneur: (a) urgency; (b) practice being comfortable with discomfort; (c) empowered to follow internal compass; (d) highly personal and potent experience to decentre; (e) not yet overly invested; (f) previous experience with mourning; (g) support through the mourning; (h) relational context; (i) frequent reminder that I'm not from here; (j) consent and boundary training; and (k) learning to perceive like a mother. Exploring implications for education, I build upon these primers and other learning outlined in Chapter 5 (Deconstruction) to offer recommendations to prompt non-Indigenous social change leaders to do the work of uncolonizing themselves and their social and environmental change practices. While these recommendations emerge from research that was a solitary endeavour, their seeds are in co-creations over several decades through my practice as a social change leader, social entrepreneur, and educator.

## Equipping Settler Social Entrepreneurs to be Accomplices in Decolonization

Why should educators care that a settler who benefits so greatly from the privilege afforded to them under the colonial system does not sink in shame, apathy, fear, or avoidance? When stuck in any of these states, those with power stagnate, preventing the system from being changed. Martin Luther King

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Jr. warned of the White moderate who is a more significant obstacle to systemic change than those in outright opposition because they are "more devoted to order than to justice" and prefer "a negative peace which is the absence of tension to a positive peace which is the presence of justice" (King Jr., 1963, para. 19). Social entrepreneurs and others working to fill gaps within the colonial system run the risk of being a contemporary version of the White moderate, diverting much-needed energy and resources away from actual transformative change.

If the goal is systemic transformation through decolonization of the Land and Indigenous-settler relations, then it is imperative to usher settlers through shame and into action as efficiently as possible. Those already leaning toward social and environmental justice, regardless of ethnicity, can become accomplices if we can show them that, at their core, they are not doomed, corrupt, or evil. They can accept the role they were cast in this human drama that began well before their arrival on the planet and change the story through their choices. In order to move from learning about Indigenous-settler relations to settlers relinquishing unearned privilege, there is a chasm of grief and shame to traverse. Helping this occur more efficiently is a doable task for a motivated educator, given the inclination for justice among social entrepreneurs and others working for change.

**Recommendation 1: Create a Power-Conscious Classroom**

Creating a power-conscious classroom involves teaching students how to (a) interact in egalitarian, power-conscious, and covenantal ways; (b) manage personal discomfort that results from privileges being challenged; (c) respond with Firm Compassion when someone with relative privilege is projecting their discomfort; (d) recognize the ways that privileges and oppression work within the system; and (d) develop a privilege equity practice. The intent is to create safety for all involved and set the stage for vulnerable self-reflection and sharing. Each of these are described below with examples.

***Teach Students How to Create and Use a Group Agreement***

> **Related to Primer 8**. Strong relational context

> **Related to Primer 10.** Consent training

Sometimes called a group contract, covenant, agreement, or full value contract, this tool is essential for any social entrepreneur or change leader. It is created by all involved, including the educator, using consensus, and should include what each person needs to feel safe interacting in a vulnerable way. It should include expectations around speaking and listening, consent, non-judgment and inclusivity, handling conflict or a breach of the contract, and having the right to choose the level of engagement. It should be worded positively regarding what the group will do rather than what they will not do. It is meant to teach students how to set up a culture of consent and respect with whomever they interact moving forward in their studies and career. It can be modified at any time with all group members' consent. Figure 5 is an example of an agreement; the key to its success is keeping it at the forefront of the group's experience and taking the time to address any infractions in a healthy manner. This tool can be adapted to suit different developmental levels. By the time they reach a social entrepreneurship class, students would ideally be well-versed in this decision-making style and able to provide leadership to its creation and ongoing use within the classroom setting.

**Figure 5**

*Sample Group Agreement*

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We will:
Actively listen while others are speaking.
Speak with honesty, kindness, and respect.
Balance the time we speak and listen so everyone has a turn.
Interact with consent.
Allow people to choose their level of engagement and respect people's right to pass.
Keep our judgements and biases in check, and help each other notice when we slip.
Speak without ageist, sexist, racist, ableist and other exclusionary language.
Take equal responsibility for upholding this agreement.
Address breaches of contract within the group before continuing.
Review this agreement before each class and make changes as necessary.

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***Create and Adopt a Responsibility Covenant***

**Related to Primer 2.** Practise being comfortable with discomfort

**Related to Primer 10.** Consent training

Teamwork can quickly derail because of one or more people's inability to manage their

discomfort after receiving feedback about how their behaviour negatively impacted the initiative,

project, organization, or movement. It can lead to boundary violations if those with more relative

privilege project their discomfort onto those with less privilege. Uncolonizing settler minds and

decolonizing Indigenous Land and settler-Indigenous relations are highly disruptive processes (Tuck &

Yang, 2012). As Fanon (1963) put it, "Decolonization never takes place unnoticed" (p. 36). Settler social

entrepreneurs must be able to sit with discomfort long and consistently enough to allow the truths we

are hearing to dismantle in us and our institutions, anything contributing to exclusion, discrimination,

and injustice. It requires us to assume that there is work to be done in us, as we have been breathing the

poisonous air of misogyny, racism, capitalism, and colonialism since we were born. On a positive note,

since we are a small but meaningful part of the system, the system begins to change when we change.

In response to the challenges we were witnessing, a colleague and I at the Canadian Unitarian

Council developed a tool called The Responsibility Covenant (see Figure 6) to

> …articulate how those of us with relative privilege will be responsible stewards of our internal
>
> experience while carefully choosing our actions when uncomfortable feelings and/or thoughts
>
> arise…it is not meant to silence people who are experiencing oppression or marginalization. It is
>
> intended to create spaces where those perspectives might be more easily expressed and
>
> acknowledged because those with relative privilege are managing their discomfort well.
>
> (Horvath & Bellmare, 2021, p. 5)

Adopting a Responsibility Covenant for daily use in class will help condition people to discern whether their discomfort is because they are experiencing mistreatment or because their sense of privilege is feeling threatened.

**Figure 6**

*The responsibility covenant: A tool for managing discomfort associated with loss of privilege*



**Responsibility Covenant**
To be accountable in relationship, I will...

| WELCOME | ENGAGE | INQUIRE | ASK | RESIST | EMBRACE |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Welcome people to share what's on their hearts in a way that is authentic to them and receive their offering with gratitude. | Engage my body, mind, spirit, and emotions in learning and embrace different perspectives. | Inquire into discomfort that arises when my security, worldview, privileges, traditions, protocols, and values are challenged. | Ask questions with the intent to deeply understand the person's views and resist the urge to make it about me, and what I think I know. | Resist urges to debate, analyze, censor, criticize, project, dismiss, minimize, moralize, silence, and perform etc., to deal with my discomfort. | Embrace discomfort as an invitation to focus inward on personal transformation. If needed, I will seek out pastoral support to process my feelings in a private setting. |

Reference: Horvath & Bellmare (2021); used with permission

***Adopt and Teach Firm Compassion***

**Related to Primer 2.** Practice being comfortable with discomfort

**Related to Primer 10.** Consent and boundary training

Adopt and teach firm compassion (Horvath & Bellmare, 2021, p. 9) as a way of interacting. This stance orients you as an educator, and social change leader, to engage and maintain composure while disrupting the status quo, which can feel very threatening to those accustomed to power within the colonial system, including ourselves.

To act with firmness (Horvath & Bellmare, 2021)

- insist that students own if they are acting out because their loss of unearned privilege makes them uncomfortable;

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- intervene when a space becomes physically or emotionally unsafe because someone with relative privilege is not managing their internal discomfort well. This intervention should occur even if no one lacking that privilege is present to witness it because it helps to recalibrate power dynamics; and

- ensure that those lacking relative privilege are not burdened with educating, caretaking, or disciplining their oppressors.

To act with compassion (Horvath & Bellmare, 2021)

- acknowledge and hold space for people's fears rather than shaming them for having fears;

- help those with relative privilege develop the understanding and coping skills to tolerate the internal discomfort that arises from the loss of unearned privilege;

- help a person find a professional to assist them in understanding the root causes of their feelings, resistance, and fears;

- be silent when in a state of reactivity because of a loss of unearned privilege to prevent injury through careless words. Take time to ground; and

- give space for people to participate differently and in ways that are on pace with their internal capacity to manage their internal discomfort.

Bring this to life through ongoing immersion within the classroom, encouraging students to notice what comes up within themselves when expected to engage in this way. Ask them to notice if they tend to lean more toward compassion or firmness and prompt them to find a balance between the two in their interactions.

*Teach about Privilege and Oppression within the System*

**Related to Primer 8.** Strong relational context

**Related to Primer 9**. Frequent reminders that they are not from here

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Explicitly teach students the ways that Canadian social systems are set up to privilege White, cisgender, able-bodied, wealthy, heterosexual, young/middle-aged, English or French-speaking men who are legally married to one woman. Be clear that the decisions about social structures have been, and continue to be, made by people who closely meet this description and thus privilege them and people like them. Privilege refers to a set of characteristics favoured within the colonial system, resulting in undeserved benefits for some people and undeserved penalties, obstacles, and oppressions for others. Those with less privilege have fewer rights than others, have differential/restricted access to aspects of the system, and often deal with discrimination within the system. Invite students to explore how this manifests in society and their lives through hearing the experiences of others, including fellow students and educators. Bring all discussions back to the core of colonialism (see Chapter 6: "Teach to the Core of Colonialism") and the role these privileges serve in relation to the colonial dream, which aims to remove Indigenous Peoples from their land to capitalize on the natural resources. Helping students see how each of these privileges serves a function within the colonial agenda is a foundational component of this consciousness-raising exercise. Within this exploration, introduce the White supremacy culture characteristics so it is clear to students what the impacts are and how to identify those characteristics within themselves (Okun, 2021).

To help students become shame resilient, differentiate the system from the people within the system. People can choose to become conscious of the dynamics that have domesticated them and be allies to one another, regardless of their characteristics or status within the system. Allies with many privileges within the system offer unique insights and can use their power and positionality to advocate for change.

**Help Students Develop a Privilege Equity Practice**

**Related to Primer 2.** Practice being comfortable with discomfort

**Related to Primer 5.** Not yet overly invested

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Integrate a privilege equity practice into the daily classroom environment so it is experienced first-hand while being discussed theoretically as real issues arise. Equity is not the same as equality in that it does not aim to treat everyone the same but rather rectify current and historical imbalances in privileges and oppressions to ensure everyone has what they need to thrive in the current circumstance. Developing a privilege equity practice requires knowing historical and present-day trends related to privilege and discrimination within the system and being relationally responsive to people within the present. Prompt students to

- scan for clues about the types of privilege and discrimination present/absent;

- research different types of privilege and oppression so those with less relative privilege do not need to educate those with greater relative privilege;

- talk to all involved about their privilege profile and the existing privilege equations;

- strategize ways to ensure that all can share in the most equitable way possible and implement those. Include these in a group agreement (see Recommendation 1: "Teach Students How to Create and Use a Group Agreement"); and

- invite feedback about how equitable the experience felt for all involved.

Rather than enacting a strategy to ensure equity, engage the students in analyzing their privilege and oppression dynamics as a class. This allows discussion about things that may not be immediately apparent to the educator, such as how gossip between students makes the learning environment feel unsafe or how the shyness of some participants limits their desire to speak during group conversations. Include an analysis of how the educator impacts classroom dynamics. The goal is not to assign blame or determine if people's experiences are valid but to be real with each other about the experience each person is having, regardless of the reasons. Allow the group to determine any changes they would like to implement to ensure each person has what they need to thrive within the circumstances you co-create in the classroom.

When preparing students for immersion within a placement or initiative, encourage conversation about the privilege profile of each person involved in relation to one another and the net privilege the initiative has relative to the system. While it can feel confronting, change leaders must address power and privilege equations early on in the initiative to give it the greatest opportunity for success, whether it be a classroom assignment or a social change initiative. Emphasize that every person they will interact with has a privilege profile, whether it's the funders, social entrepreneurs, policymakers, public servants, the people the initiative is helping, or their colleagues/teammates. The privilege dynamics of those involved will impact the trajectory of the initiative. To increase an initiative's chance of success, ensure that the net privilege is as strong as possible. For instance, build a support team of allies with high levels of specific social privilege to endorse and advocate for the initiative, balance privilege and power differentials within the leadership team, and address power differentials between the social change leaders and the people the initiative is helping.

Approach this exercise in a way that allows people to discuss aspects of their privilege and oppression as they are comfortable. Some people may feel unsafe discussing some aspects of who they are or may not find some things relevant, given the circumstance. Finally, creating space for people to share more as trust deepens is a healthy and relational way to approach things.

**Recommendation 2: Create Context for a Paradigm Shift**

Intentionally creating the conditions for a paradigm shift to occur requires educators to (a) examine their complicity in the colonial system; (b) explicitly illustrate how colonialism is the core of all injustices and needs to addressing in all social change efforts; (c) teach about the interconnected nature of all things and the place of humans within this natural order; (d) unsettle settler privilege while promoting a more profound sense of belonging to the Earth and the universe; (e) immerse students within a multi-logics framework; (f) adopt and teach guest mentality; and (g) guide students to examine their domesticated beliefs about the system, doing good, and being wrong. Each of these are described

below with examples. Ushering the student responsibly through this experience of personal

disorientation requires an educator who has done uncolonizing work on themselves and a classroom

culture that feels safe and supportive (see Chapter 6: "Recommendation 1: Create a Power-Conscious

Classroom").

### *Examine Complicity*

**Related to Primer 1**: Urgency

**Related to Primer 5**: Not yet invested

Educators who are serious about decolonial systemic change need to get curious about how we

are trying in vain to dismantle the Master's house using the Master's tools (Lorde, 1984). That isn't to say

there is no value in teaching or gaining the clout that comes with a colonial education. It does, however,

mean considering how our deep investment within the education branch of the colonial system may

limit how we can imagine Canadian society operating another way. After all, we have become highly

invested in the status that our higher education affords us within the system and dismantling the system

would result in a change in status for the colonially educated. It will influence how far outside the

colonial box we feel safe venturing within our personal lives and vocations and how boldly we teach for

the decolonial systemic change. Our lessons on freedom from the system will only be as urgent as our

need for freedom from the system. For this reason, we must consciously choose who will teach these

courses, for those experiencing oppression within the system will teach with a different sense of urgency

and passion than those experiencing privilege within the system.

### *Teach to the Core of Colonialism*

**Related to Primer 9**. Frequent reminders that they are not from here

Those who are committed to social and environmental justice, and stick with their learning long

enough, will eventually discover the interrelated and overlapping nature of various types of injustices. If

they dig deeper, they will discover that common societal beliefs, biases, and power structures underpin

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these overlapping injustices. Improving one injustice requires challenging the beliefs and factors that underlie them all. They will discover what I have been calling the system. So often, education for social and environmental change leaders gets to the point of discussing intersectionality and stops before digging deep enough to discover that the root cause of all social and environmental injustice is colonialism and White supremacy culture (Okun, 2021) that drives it. In not addressing the core oppression upon which this country is being built, the efforts to address the array of secondary oppressive symptoms that branch out from this (e.g., poverty, gender discrimination, racism, wealth-poverty gap, sexual violence, disabilities) become a philanthropic life support system, propping up the system, filling the gaps, and allowing it to continue to function unjustly but without wide-scale societal impacts. This has been called settler humanitarianism (Maxwell, 2017). It is akin to weeding a garden by picking the leaves of the weeds but leaving the root systems intact. The weeds will grow back.

Educators need to be explicit in naming the colonial dream: to eliminate or remove Indigenous Peoples from the Land so settlers can gain wealth from its natural resources. We also need to explicitly reorient students to the reality that settlers are not entitled to occupy this Land under the privileged conditions we have claimed for ourselves. Curriculum becoming more explicit about how colonialism has shown up historically (e.g., residential schooling, reservation system, The Indian Act, Sixties Scoop, forced relocation, resource extraction) is essential. However, it does not go far enough to show non-Indigenous social entrepreneurs and change leaders the societal beliefs and structures that allow the colonial dream to shapeshift and grow stronger with time. Framing it as humanitarian mistreatment provides an ideal cover story that makes it appear to be getting better while the dream continues to flourish and Land continues to be exploited. Without explicit reference to the beliefs and the structures that allow colonialism to thrive and the connection to taking over the Land, social entrepreneurs will be ill-equipped to determine if and how their initiatives are covertly supporting the continuation of this system. Knowing how things were done poorly in the past does not automatically translate into knowing

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how to do things well in the present. People need support to uncolonize their thinking, practice, and lifestyle and learn how to empower Indigenous-led, decolonial systemic change. The need to become decolonial must be explicitly named, bringing students into the core of colonialism, no matter what social or environmental causes they aim to address. This positioning will allow them to anchor into a relationship with the Land they are on, which includes understanding how they are out of alignment with Indigenous Peoples of that Land, their teachings, and all other beings that share the space. From here, they can work to discover how to live into Indigenous sovereignty and re-approach their particular causes with a new sense of self-in-relation.

*Teach About Interconnection*

**Related to Primer 8.** Strong relational context

**Related to Primer 5.** Not yet invested

I have educated my children in various ways, including having them attend a Montessori school. One aspect of the Montessori paradigm is the use of the five great lessons, a dramatic representation of broad concepts including: Coming of the Universe and the Earth, Coming of Life, Coming of Human Beings, Communication in Signs, and The Story of Number (e.g., Montessori for Everyone, 2023). The emphasis is on the interrelatedness of all things. After each dramatic presentation, students explore an aspect of the Great Lesson in detail to deepen and expand their learning in the areas that intrigue them. Students will participate in the great lessons for three years in their lower elementary years. Then they help present the great lessons for another three years in their upper elementary years, allowing a depth of understanding and curiosity to grow.

To raise generations of citizens equipped to lead systemic change, educators need to actively immerse students in learning experiences that invite them to explore the connection between things in a similar way to the great lessons. Beginning in lower elementary years, they can begin to name the colonial system and its parts (e.g., education, health care, banking & commerce, business & capitalism,

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media, religion, justice, social services, charity & poverty) and contrast this social system to other social systems. A cross-cultural analysis would create a big-picture understanding of how different cultures create collective dreams, a system to animate them, and a domestication protocol to initiate newcomers. The typical colonial approach currently centres on Western views, practices, and approaches and contrasts everything else. If addressed, Indigenous worldviews are usually lumped together as one entity, spoken of in generalities, and treated as the pre-civilization way of life. To be uncolonizing in practice, educators could start with Indigenous understandings of the interconnections between all things and the values upon which their local Indigenous civilizations are built by highlighting the many thousands of years Indigenous civilizations have operated on this land in a way that maintains ecological balance; speaking of the colonial worldview, system, and strategies for dominance in relation to Indigenous views: being transparent about the relatively short time the colonial system has been operating on this land and its impacts. The connections between privilege, oppression, capitalism, colonization, imperialism, globalization, and religion could be interwoven throughout. Similar to the recurring way great lessons are taught within Montessori schools, repeat these lessons every year and challenge students to deepen their understanding in an area of their choosing.

The intention is to help students see the world as a web of interconnections, the energy that flows between them, and the intentions that animate them. They could also begin to track the many ways that White supremacy (Okun, 2021) permeates the system, creating predictable patterns of privilege and oppression depending on the characteristics of each person within the system.

### Unsettle Settler Privilege While Promoting True Belonging

**Related to Primer 8**. Strong relational context

If we expect settlers to believe there is something better waiting for them after uncolonizing themselves and relinquishing their unearned privilege, they need to experience themselves belonging to something more compelling than the system. That different sense of belonging may come from

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experiencing themselves in relation to an interconnected web of being where no one, human or otherwise, is more valuable. The inherent worth of all things is celebrated (e.g., the ecological web of existence). Within this framework, the earth's cycles govern their lives, not the stifling and biased framework of the colonial system. Within this other way of being, no one has to prove their value by fulfilling a role outside of their nature. This can be an appealing ideological hook when working with those already inclined toward social and environmental justice. It may also appeal to students of all ages who feel oppressed by certain aspects of the system, even if they experience relative privilege (e.g., the impact of toxic masculinity on men). Educators nurture this type of relationship building by creating opportunities for students to be on the Land in naturalized ways that allow students to feel part of the earth's rhythms.

### *Immerse Students in a Multi-Logics Framework*

**Related to Primer 5.** Not yet overly invested

**Related to Primer 8**. Strong relational context

Students can be immersed in experiential learning opportunities with a multi-logics framework that includes social welfare, commercial, public sector, and a cultural-historical-systemic lens related to colonialism and its ongoing impacts. The cultural-historical-systemic lens is essential to empower social entrepreneurs to do more than prop up an unjust colonial system by creating initiatives that compensate for its shortcomings. Without this lens, the colonial system itself is not called out for its intentional design to make the lives of Indigenous Peoples precarious and dispensable precisely so settlers can remove them from the land and gain wealth from the natural resources. Not bringing up this sinister and intentional design detail results in people believing that the system was birthed out of a dream of equal prosperity for all, provided we all do our part and be good caring citizens. It ignores the core cause of the many injustices that flourish within the colonial structure. It allows people to falsely conclude that personal virtues and effort determine prosperity within the Canadian system rather than facing the truth

that the system is rigged to promote the success of certain peoples and the demise of others. Omitting the truth that it will never benefit Indigenous Peoples allows settlers to stay enthralled with the colonial dream believing that someday we will work out the bugs in the system and there will be prosperity for all.

**An ethical challenge.** When we create opportunities for emerging social entrepreneurs to engage in placements, internships, and other experiential learning, they gain valuable real-life experience. The burden to educate, however, often lies on the partnering organizations volunteering their time to engage with the students because money is not provided for supervision. These placements are pitched as a win-win for the student and the organization/businesses, but, in my experience, the volunteer effort required by the organization surpasses any benefit they receive from the placement. In adding the expectation that social entrepreneurs gain experience in cultural-historical-systemic logic from an Indigenous perspective, educational institutions must take responsibility for educating students about White supremacy characteristics, the many faces of genocide and colonialism, and how privilege works within the system. Insisting on a certain level of fluency in these concepts before releasing social entrepreneurial students into placements with Indigenous organizations will help ensure that Indigenous Peoples are not put in the role of educating their oppressors. A similar thing should happen for organizations working with other marginalized and oppressed groups. We must not put people in the position of educating their oppressions, especially without financial compensation.

### *Adopt and Teach Guest Mentality*

**Related to Primer 8**. Strong relational context

**Related to Primer 9.** Frequent reminders that they are not from here

Educators interested in this work can make the change from teaching from a settler mentality to teaching from a guest mentality (Koleszar-Green, 2018). Doing so demonstrates awareness that solutions to the problems created by the colonial system do not lie within the mindset that created the colonial

system. Solutions exist within Indigenous worldviews, and, given that this is Indigenous land, we must live into Indigenous sovereignty. The idea is not for settlers to create a role or expectations for Indigenous Peoples but to remove settler privilege and dominance, creating space for Indigenous ways to be centred. Seek guidance from Indigenous educators about how to structure a learning experience around the customs, needs, and ways of Indigenous learners and teach your settler students how to adapt, rather than continuing to favour colonial customs and expecting Indigenous students to adapt. Even if there are no Indigenous students in the class, the educator can take on a guest mentality and conduct their classrooms differently, knowing that the exposure will prepare students to be less entrenched within colonial ways as they proceed through life. Educators adopting a guest mentality might

- ask permission to be on Indigenous territory before giving a Land Acknowledgement;

- find out, when hosting an event on Indigenous Land, if there are ways that Indigenous Peoples would like to benefit from the event itself, perhaps by attending in some capacity or providing services (for pay) for the event;

- learn how to speak the language of the Peoples whose Land you are on;

- contact the appropriate Nation(s) to arrange a voluntary tax for Land owned within their territories;

- consider giving Land back to the First Nation or another Indigenous entity'

- learn the values, customs and traditions of the Nations in the area and, where appropriate, integrate those into events, workplaces, and classrooms under the guidance of a traditional teacher or Elder;

- get into the practice of asking Indigenous teachers or Elders for their perspectives and following their guidance. Compensate them well; and

- learn in a relational way through engagement in community events, reading, sharing circles,

    following local/national political issues, and ceremonies that welcome the public.

### *Guide Students to Examine their Domesticated Beliefs*

**Related to Primer 2.** Practice being comfortable with discomfort

**Related to Primer 5.** Not yet invested

As students become conscious of the system around them, invite them to examine their

domesticated beliefs (see Chapter 4: "Introducing My Domestication") by listing them as they relate to

something like attractiveness, love, marriage, education, art, celebrities, war, religion, or another topic

that is age appropriate and relevant to them. Ask that they use short, simple sentences with one belief

per sentence (e.g., To be attractive, someone must be fit.). Once they have listed their beliefs about a

particular topic, ask them to write down where they learned each belief. Who or what taught them this

is true? Under what circumstances? What were the intentions behind teaching them this belief? What

were the consequences of not adopting this particular belief? Have they ever questioned this belief?

What impact does this belief have on how they approach their life? What new beliefs would they like to

adopt instead of any beliefs that no longer feel like a good fit for them? Make time for students to share

their responses. Model depth of response by sharing your answers with them in a vulnerable and

meaningful way.

Once students have the general concept of challenging the beliefs they were domesticated into,

introduce three additional concepts to explore in the same way: (a) beliefs about the system (and its

parts); (b) what it means to do good and be good and (c) being wrong. This exploration aims to unsettle

beliefs and bring what is unconscious and unquestioned into conscious awareness. Help students explore

their resistance to questioning their beliefs and releasing their beliefs. The goal is not to imply that all

beliefs are wrong but to help them be courageous enough to cast a shadow of doubt on them and notice

how that feels. What would it mean to them to change any of their beliefs? Examine complicity and

resignation while drawing a connection between our beliefs about how things are and our ability to consciously co-create a different world. When exploring the notion of goodness, show students how to interrogate their intentions by exploring different perspectives, especially as it relates to how these beliefs impact their social change practice. Ask them to explore, with the help of a fellow student or friend with differing perspectives, how their beliefs may cause harm in the world. Invite students to explore the feelings and resistance that arise in them. Ask them to consider what they gain from acting on their beliefs of being good and doing good (see Chapter 5: "Goodness: The Ultimate Cameleon").

Finally, exploring beliefs about being wrong helps students become aware of what it means to them to admit they are wrong (e.g., "I'm stupid," "I'm bad," "I'm incompetent," "I don't know if I can trust myself anymore," "I'm an imposter"). Notice shame spirals that are happening and respond with firm compassion (Horvath & Bellmare, 2021; see Chapter 6: "Recommendation 1– Create and Adopt a Responsibility Covenant") while helping students find new beliefs that position a willingness to change as a positive trait (e.g., "I'm courageous in my search for truth over comfort," "Now that I know better, I can do better," "Admitting when I'm wrong makes me wise," "I am waking up to the nature of the system I am domesticated into," "I'm proud of the fact that I am willing to learn"). The goal is to help students find beliefs that support their resilience and grit to continue their uncolonizing journey and ultimately become invested in decolonial systems change.

**Recommendation 3: Create Opportunities for Vulnerable Reflection**

Having created safety within the learning environment and instability within the worldview of the students, the stage is set for educators to create opportunities for vulnerable reflection, including (a) teaching students to look inward for their direction; (b) using reflexive practice to create potent transformational experiences; (c) inviting sharing to build relational interconnection; (d) teaching *Loving Insight* through the lessons of the archetypal mother; (e) teaching co-creating through the collaborative storytelling; and (f) teaching collaboration instead of debate. I describe each of these along with

examples. This phase creates space for students to deepen their understanding of the complexities of privilege and oppression and find hope in the untamed spirit in all of us.

***Teach Students to Look Inward For Their Direction***

**Related to Primer 3.** Empowered to follow their internal compass

Educators can invite students to explore their internal compass, intuition, higher wisdom, creativity, and unique areas of giftedness, rather than continuing to inundate them with information about how to conform to the system, which further perpetuates the system. As they make decisions about their learning, group members, placements, and other learning experiences, ask them to look inward for guidance, reflect on their internal processes, and consider how they determine the right path for them. Educators can ask what it feels like from a subjective perspective (see Chapter 2: "A Context for Intuition") and invite students to share their knowledge as a personal phenomenon instead of a universal phenomenon (meaning what is true for them at that moment, not what they think should be true for all people in all moments). As well, learners can be encouraged to connect with the expert within them rather than default to an expert outside them. This ability is vital for social entrepreneurs and other change leaders who must make countless decisions; intellect alone will not be enough to guide them through the complexity of the terrain.

This recommendation is consistent with Indigenous teachings' focus on subjective truths and the interconnection of all things within the natural world. Teaching this without co-opting Indigenous knowledge requires educators to engage meaningfully and respectfully with Indigenous teachers who agree to work with settlers. In doing so, educators and students will experience how Indigenous teaching and learning is relational, not a history or social sciences curriculum integrated into a Western classroom environment.

When the time comes for settlers to face the truth about the many ways we are complicit in continuing the colonial system, knowing how to inquire deeply within is a tool that allows people to

move forward as accomplices rather than running from discomfort or becoming frozen in shame. If we train them to seek answers outside themselves primarily, they will find endless examples of corruption, injustice, and hopelessness. They will see the many ways they are complicit in causing harm. However, if they look inward and recognize the part of themselves that was once an innocent undomesticated baby, they may be able to reaffirm their sense of inherent beauty. If they look farther into their human lineage, they will find their ancestors who knew how to live on the land respectfully and sense the heritage of wisdom within them. If they go deeper still to feel the energetic life force that pulses through them and all aspects of the universe, they may sense themselves as part of the dynamic whole.

**Why this matters.** For the colonial system to maintain its power over its subjects, it has to convince us that someone else is the expert we should seek approval from and subordinate ourselves to. This belief convinces its citizens that what the system offers is better than what we can offer ourselves; more noble, evolved, developed, advanced, or holy. The education system has created an entire culture convincing parents and children that they are incapable of teaching and learning without the intervention of an institution. Undermining kinship ties is an integral part of the system's success, convincing many parents that their children are better off in the hands of professionals and starting their exposure to institutions as young as infancy in some cases. As children continue into elementary and secondary schools, the emphasis is not on learning their truths, unique forms of giftedness, or how their internal compass works, but on learning information the system deems vital to create more beings who will keep the system functioning. For those with the financial means to attend university, the assertion that the expert exists outside oneself continues as students are told they must use the written work of other academics to express themselves. Even if the source of their inspiration came from within, they are not instructed to delve inward. Instead, they are instructed to find someone else who has thought something similar and reference them instead. While I endorse giving credit to the work of others, I suspect this practice interrupts the process of engaging with the knowledge within oneself. It reinforces

the pattern of looking outside to someone else's truth. It undermines the internal compass (intuition), the creative spark, the genius expressed so uniquely in each of us, in favour of the censored and curated selection of experts academia has deemed worthy of referencing. So often, these academics represent views the system already feels are acceptable, at least acceptable enough to be published. Those with perspectives, experiences, and truths outside the system are shut out by the system, whose filters are calibrated to reject ideas that would result in its demise. In honouring the outside expert and ignoring the internal expert, we can become alienated from the wisdom of the Land and the cosmos, which is greater than any human regime. I have heard people express this disconnect in different ways, including the primal wound (Firman & Gila, 1997), pain of dismemberment (Palmer, 2017), and unconsciousness (Tolle, 2004; 2005). In this profound disconnect, we can lose our sense of knowing what is best for us, thus being willing to believe that someone else is better, smarter, wiser, and braver than us.

***Use Reflexive Practice to Create Potent Transformational Experiences***

**Related to Primer 1.** Urgency

**Related to Primer 3.** Empowered to follow their internal compass

Intellectual engagement alone rarely translates into the commitment to ongoing, meaningful change in a person or the system. Storied self-inquiry related to oppression and overcoming within the system can be a powerful tool to evoke strong emotions and a sense of personal urgency. Educators can build on this strong emotion to spur students on to the next stages of personal and collective change.

In this reflexive writing practice, invite students to identify five to ten pivotal moments that changed them in some fundamental way, then write or speak about those in detail, as though telling a story meant to transport a listener deep into their lived experience. Students can use words, images, music, video or another dynamic tool that invokes storytelling. The following questions might be useful:

- What five to ten experiences have been so pivotal that, if they did not happen, you would not likely be the person you are today?

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- For each pivotal moment, consider what experiences have created the internal framework that gave meaning to the pivotal moments (Building-Block Moments).

- For each pivotal moment, consider what you might have missed because you were immersed within your perspective, privileges/lack of privilege, biases, judgements, assumptions, and/or unresolved trauma.

- Describe times when you have felt your internal compass guiding you. What did that feel like? When did you listen to it? When did you ignore it? Why?

- When have you felt an urgent need to take action to change something?

Next, invite students to delve into the antagonistic elements at play within their stories. The following questions are good starting points for discussion:

- Who or what was working against your goals? Authentic expression? Best interests?

- In what ways did you work against your own best interests? Why?

- In what ways have the beliefs and structures of colonialism played a role in your life?

Students can be led to consider their pivotal moments, building block moments, and missed moments from all directions (see Table 5). This exercise helps each student identify a personal example of when the system's ideals rejected, stifled, or disapproved of some aspect of who they are. For some, this might be obvious, such as growing up queer, Black, Indigenous, or poor. However, for others, it might be less obvious such as experiencing toxic views of masculinity and femininity, being told there was no way to make a living doing something they loved, or that something about their nature is wrong. Whatever it is, finding this experience and crystalizing it can act as a doorway into further conversations about how the colonial system has a particular agenda for its citizens, depending on the role and worth it assigns to them. As an educator, the goal is to help the students understand how their personal experiences within a colonial system, positive or negative, are interconnected with the colonization of Indigenous Peoples. Regardless of whether a student has lived a very privileged life within the colonial

system (e.g., heterosexual, White male) or a less privileged life within the colonial system (e.g., Indigenous two-spirited woman), they are playing a role within an oppressive system, which takes power from some and gives it to others.

Educators will need to emphasize the difference between the colonization of Indigenous Peoples and the Land, and the oppressive aftershocks felt by non-Indigenous peoples within the colonial system; they are not the same thing. In drawing the connection to the core cause of all oppressions (colonialism), the goal is to help non-Indigenous social change leaders see that their liberation is intertwined with that of Indigenous Peoples and that they are most powerful when they align in solidarity with Indigenous-led decolonial efforts, aiming at the root causes (see Chapter 6: "Recommendation 2–Teach to the Core of Colonialism").

***Invite Sharing to Build Relational Interconnection***

**Related to Primer 3.** Empowered to follow their internal compass

**Related to Primer 4**. Highly personal and potent experience to decentre

**Related to Primer 8**. Strong relational context

Educators can invite students to share one or more of their stories and reflections (from the exercise above) within a small group who will ask questions and share comments to deepen understanding. After each person has shared, ask students to explore the following as a group:

- Consider yourselves archetypal characters within an overarching story of the system. Explore all the ways these stories are connected. Describe where privileges were given and taken.

- How was each character domesticated into the system? What beliefs were adopted by each character, and how did those beliefs impact the lives of other characters, directly or indirectly?

- Describe ways that the internal compass in each character has been leading each towards their authentic expression and freedom?

- What domesticated beliefs has each character let go of to embrace this internal guidance? Which are they still holding onto? Why?

- In what ways are these characters' stories of privilege and/or oppression related to contemporary and historical colonization of Indigenous Peoples and lands?

Inviting students to share these stories will leave a lasting impression. Hearing other people's experiences will deepen their understanding of how privilege and oppression work within the system. It will also challenge all involved to consider how their stories are connected to the colonization of Indigenous Peoples and Lands. Ideally, the group would be diverse and come to this exercise well-versed in White supremacy culture characteristics (Okun, 2021), Western worldview vs. Indigenous worldviews, and colonialism so they can include these in their reflections. Sometimes diversity is not possible. In these cases, increase diversity by sharing stories of people whose experience differs significantly from the students through guest speakers, documentaries, social media posts, autobiographies, and other stories of privilege/oppression within the system.

**Creating safety.** The personal nature of this activity will likely invoke strong feelings. To prepare for this, ensure each group has a written agreement about how they will interact safely and respectfully (see Chapter 6: "Recommendation 1–Teach Students to Create and Use a Group Agreement"). Include how the group will address interpersonal conflicts should they arise and ensure they are using some version of a responsibility covenant (see Chapter 6: "Recommendation 1–Teach Students to Create and Adopt a Responsibility Covenant"). Depending on the students' skill level, some coaching in healthy communication may be a valuable precursor.

 Conflict will arise within people as they grapple with very challenging topics. Breaking this activity down over many weeks will allow students to pace themselves and have time to decompress. Having a therapist, elder, or other supportive people engaged will help students process challenging emotions. These people must have done their own uncolonizing or decolonizing work and be proficient

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at having challenging conversations. Finally, students should be informed of an educator's commitment to run a trauma-informed classroom and what that means. While they can expect to feel some discomfort as they are encouraged to expand, they will not be forced to participate in something that will enflame unresolved trauma. Instead, appropriate psychological support will be sought and modifications made as necessary.

### Teach 'Loving Insight' through the Archetypal Mother Exercise

**Related to Primer 2.** Practice being comfortable with discomfort

**Related to Primer 8**. Strong relational context

**Relates to Primer 9.** Learning to see like a mother

The Archetypal Mother represents the love, empathy, and nurturing people need, along with generosity that reaches into all aspects of life (e.g., Where Wonder Waits, 2023). This requires loving insight. Love shows up as an action demonstrating that we want what is best for all involved. Insight shows up through the intent to understand how the accumulation of experiences shapes people and, thus, the circumstances they co-create together. Invoking this archetype is not about human biology or gender roles but about the energetic force it represents. It could also be referred to as the archetypal parent if that makes the concept more accessible to people. When we look at a situation with loving insight, we intend to recognize the barriers (e.g., beliefs, biases, wounds, practices) that get in the way of authentic expression, joy, inclusion, opportunity, and freedom for all involved. We can see past the resistance to the fear beneath that is holding that pattern of relating in place. When talking about transforming the system, we will inevitably experience resistance because people animate the system. Social entrepreneurs and change leaders who can see the humanity behind the resistance bring a powerful tool into the equation that can break the deadlock that happens when resistance in one person/group meets resistance in another.

For this exercise, invite students to examine one another and themselves with the loving insight of an archetypal mother and focus on understanding the sequence of experiences that shaped the person in front of them today. Remind them that even the most challenging and despicable people were once innocent children.

**Part 1.** While imagining the person as an infant or small child, silently consider:

- What don't I know about this person's experience within the system?

- In what areas can I have compassion for this person's life experience?

- In what ways has the system shaped them?

- In what ways have they resisted the system and followed their internal compass toward their more authentic and liberated expression?

- What fears, beliefs, and intentions underlie this person's way of being?

Consider the same questions while imagining this person as a teenager and young adult.

The archetypal mother knows that a person's behaviour in the present is a continuation of the experiences, beliefs, and conditioning absorbed since childhood. The archetypal mother takes a long view of the situation, recognizing that it takes intentionality to change domesticated beliefs and routines. She expects protests from people as they work through the grief of change but perseveres with *Firm Compassion* (Horvath & Bellmare, 2021; see Chapter 6: "Recommendation 1–Create and Adopt a Responsibility Covenant") because she is committed to the best interest of all involved. She helps each person remove the fears and barriers that prevent them from co-creating a world where all can thrive and lovingly holds them accountable. The stance of the archetypal mother is critical when working with people with high levels of privilege within the system, as they are often unaware that the ease they experience results from other people experiencing oppression within that same system. They do not view themselves as privileged and can be arrogant, entitled, and judgemental. Learning to engage with loving insight is essential for navigating the complex world of resistance.

**Part 2.** If trust and interpersonal skills are strong, invite students to verbally affirm the group member they are thinking about for this activity by separating the conditioned behaviours (which may be harmful) from the genuine heart of the person (represented by the child image in this exercise). This practice can help validate the inherent worth of the person, affirm their desire to be a good person, and reduce resistance to change.

"I can tell that your heart is in the right place by _____. I observe that the system has shaped you by _____. The fears and resistance that may be active in your life as a result could be _____. Given your experiences, that makes sense. The part of you that I see shining through as you follow your internal compass is _____. Thank you for taking the time to share your experiences. I value what I have learned through your story. "

**Receiver of feedback.** Prompt the person who is the focus of this feedback to receive whatever is shared without responding, defending, or explaining, even if they disagree with aspects of the assessment. Ask them to invoke the archetypal mother and focus on what they are learning about the person's beliefs, worldviews, values, fears, and mindset through this feedback. Whether flattery or criticism, encourage them not to make it personally. When applying this skill to a change initiative, the change leader's ability to manage personal discomfort and still listen to understand the mindset of those they are engaging with directly impacts the initiative and the people within it. The goal is to understand what keeps the people who animate the system stuck in a particular holding pattern. The more the social entrepreneur can listen while demonstrating they want what is best for all involved, the faster they will understand the fears keeping each person entrenched. Reflection questions for the receiver include the following:

- What thoughts and feelings came up within you as you listened to this feedback?

- In what ways are you making it personal?

- Have you judged this person to be for you/your causes, against you/your causes, or neither? How does this affect how you think about and engage with this person?

**An alternative option.** If trust and interpersonal skills are questionable, direct people to do this exercise in writing and submit it to the instructor or mentor in the case of a practising social entrepreneur. The instructor could provide follow-up questions to help the student learn how to share in a productive way. Once the instructor is confident about the content, these could be shared with the person involved.

### Teach Conscious Co-Creating Through Co-Creating a Story

**Related to Primer 3.** Empowered to follow their internal compass

**Related to Primer 4.** Highly personal and potent experience

**Related to Primer 8.** Strong relational context

This activity uses a scope-specific co-creative project to teach about conscious co-creation, the notion that all human experiences are co-created even if we are unaware (see "Chapter 2: A Context for Conscious Co-Creation"). The goal is to increase people's skills and awareness in a low-risk, safe environment.

Co-creative art projects are powerful ways to combat the linear nature of the colonial system while promoting interbeing, intuition, and creativity. Co-creating invites open and imaginative dialogue, critical reflection, genuine relationships, building trust, and the co-construction of meaning (Mantas & Schwind, 2014). Co-creators make something with the energetic signatures of all contributors interwoven within it. In doing so, they learn skill sets that are transferable for leading social entrepreneurial planning and community-engaged social change processes such as those being practised by Indigenous Peoples within Indigenous contexts (e.g., Caldwell et al., 2005; Minkler & Wallerstein, 2008; Monroe & Doxtater, 2020). A detailed exploration of collaborative social entrepreneurship and participatory action research approaches would complement and contextualize this lesson.

Invite small groups of students to co-create a way to express the stories they shared in the exercise above through a performance incorporating each story (see Chapter 6: "Recommendation 3–Invite Sharing to Build Relational Interconnection**"**). Embodying the story would deepen learning, especially if the group experimented with ways of switching perspectives or engaging the audience in a play on perspective. Doing a co-creative exercise allows students to engage in the following:

- create a group agreement (See Chapter 6: "Recommendation 1–Teach Students to Create and Use A Group Agreement");

- practise following their internal compass;

- practise using the Responsibility Covenant to manage discomfort (See Chapter 6: "Recommendation 1–Create and Adopt a Responsibility Covenant");

- practise balancing power and privilege within their group (see Chapter 6: "Recommendation 1–Help Students Develop a Privilege Equity Practice");

- experience how co-creating can result in something much more original and impactful than any one person could conjure on their own; and

- increase their confidence and ability to consciously co-create on a larger scale.

The experience will be highly personal and relational, potentially impacting students and audience members profoundly, unsettling people and prompting them to see the system in new ways. Ask students to reflect on this experience before launching into a practicum or placement to recognize parallels between this exercise and what they will encounter in the field. Ask them how they will apply lessons learned to their next co-creative venture.

***Teach Collaboration Instead of Debate***

**Related to Primer 4.** Highly personal and potent experience

**Related to Primer 8.** Strong relational context

In an increasingly polarized society teaching students to collaborate to explore perspectives is infinitely more useful than teaching students to debate. Dr. David Campt (2018) created the R.A.C.E. method (Reflect, Ask, Connect, Expand) to help people talk about racism in a way that will result in productive sharing and a change in perspective. I apply this approach to any contentious topic.

The reflection stage is done before engaging anyone in dialogue. Ask students to reflect on a specific incident when they behaved unkind, close-minded, or exclusionary. For instance, if preparing to talk about racism, think about a time when they thought or acted in a racist way. Give them time to practice telling that story in a vulnerable way, first by writing it and then sharing verbally with a friend. Also, ask them to think of one or more stories of things that changed their perspective and caused them to think and behave differently. Ask them to practice sharing that story, as well.

The second stage is an active stage to be done when faced with someone with a different perspective. It involves asking the other person to share their thoughts and views on the topic (i.e. racism). Instruct students to listen without interrupting and with the intent to understand.

The third stage is connecting, where students express how they can relate to the other person's perspective. At this time, the student shares their story of a time when they thought or acted similarly (i.e. racist). The dialogue partner should experience this exchange as affirming, not combative.

During the fourth stage, instruct students to expand the conversation by sharing what happened to shift their perspective. The goal is to move the conversation along in a way that does not feel judgment laden or threatening. Ideally, both people feel safe to explore the issue and are genuinely open to expanding their perspectives. If enjoyable, these people may feel safe to have more conversations in the future which could result in perspectives shifting.

Teaching students how to approach conversations this way will teach them how agreement and affirmation are more effective than disagreement and debate when opening a heart and mind. This skill is essential when working with people with differing perspectives, a common phenomenon within social entrepreneurship and change leadership.

**Recommendation 4: Create a Safe Place to Grieve and Regroup**

Vulnerable reflection opens the door for grief to emerge and for educators to embrace it by (a) orienting students to the stages of grief and practices for mourning; (b) franchising the experience of settler grief and Indigenous grief by naming it; and (c) co-creating mourning rituals with students and integrating them into the learning process. Each of these is described before with examples. The intent is to show students how to honour and process the grief they will inevitably experience in decolonial social change work, so they can more courageously emerge as accomplices in dismantling the colonial system.

**Teach the Stages of Grief and Ways to Mourn**

**Related to Primer 6.** Previous experience with mourning

**Related to Primer 7.** Support through the mourning

Educators need to first lay the foundation for students to effectively process the grief they will encounter as they learn about and engage with colonialism, social entrepreneurship, and systemic change by teaching the stages of grief (e.g., Kelley, 2015; Kubler-Ross, 1969), the types of grief (see Chapter 2: "A Context for Grief"), and ways to mourn. All change results in grief, even changes we want to experience, because every new beginning requires something to come to an end. Grief is cyclical and lifelong, not an event, although certain events can make grief more apparent. Normalizing grief helps students orient themselves within the experience and move through the stages with less resistance so they can more quickly become accomplices in dismantling the colonial system. Introducing mourning, we guide students to develop their practices for processing the experience of loss. In a relational yet informative way, talk about ways of mourning and invite students to choose a couple they will use when

they need to let go of something during their time together. Students who have developed mourning rituals can be invited to share what works for them or artistic expressions of grief and positive mourning (e.g., Adamov Ferguson & M'Lot, 2022; Boivin, 2020). As a class, decide how you will hold space for grief with firm compassion (Horvath & Bellmare, 2021) without allowing settler grief to overshadow Indigenous grief.

**A note of caution.** For some students, grief will be a sensitive topic. Let them know that any personal sharing must focus on coping strategies to deal with the stages of grief, not the specifics of incidents that created the grief. This approach helps ensure that speakers and listeners do not become dysregulated. While it is essential to process the incidents of grief, let them know that this learning environment is not equipped to do that in a personalized way. Discuss what they can expect and ensure a strong group agreement has been created (See Chapter 6: "Recommendation 1–Teach Students to Create and Use A Group Agreement"). Students should be infomred well in advance what days grief will be addressed so that they can be prepare. Students should always feel welcome to approach educators to discuss ways to make the space feel more emotionally safe for them. There should always be a reminder that they do not have to share anything or stay present if it feels unhealthy.

Teachers will need to ensure there are different ways to participate, such as writing about it or speaking to a partner or small group. For those who do not feel safe to share, educators should not try to persuade them; instead educators can create a space of solitude for students  to process; as well, space should be left open at the end of each session to clear the energy built up using sharing circles, music, laughter, or fun activity. Concluding with a grounding statement can also be helpful. For instance, "Those of us who have experienced great sadness can recognize great joy because we have experienced its contrast. As we leave this place today, let us intentionally seek out joy to care for ourselves and add a bit more joy to the world." Having a mental health professional on hand would be wise to support dysregulated students.

***Franchise Settler Grief and Indigenous Grief by Naming It***

**Related to Primer 6.** Previous experience with mourning

**Related to Primer 7.** Support through the mourning

At the beginning of each course, educators should name and teach about settler and Indigenous

grief, allowing that type of grief to become franchised (Doka, 2002; 2008) and accepted as a *grievable*

*loss* (Butler, 2009; Maddrell, 2016). Given that my lived experience, and the scope of this study, is the

settler/non-Indigenous experience, this section focuses on settler grief. However, educators must

present Indigenous grief similarly, using Indigenous resources and collaborating with an Indigenous

teacher (e.g., Doxtater, 2011; Kelley, 2015; Maldonado Moore & Doxtater, 2020). This should be

considered part of uncolonizing work for settlers regardless of whether there are Indigenous students in

the class.

Settler grief may include the loss of (a) faith in society and government; (b) feeling like a good

person; (c) identity and personal meaning; (d) spiritual framework or religion; (e) belonging to a

community; (f) belonging to place; and (g) privilege. Common expressions of settler grief include

- denying that the system deliberately privileges some and penalizes others, specifically

  Indigenous Peoples; believing the system is redeemable;

- denying that settler ways of living cause harm;

- anger at those people and institutions they feel have misled or deceived them;

- anger at those who are telling them that they are causing harm;

- anger at God/higher power for making them part of the oppressors;

- depression about what can be done to make things better;

- depression about where to be now that they feel like intruders on the Land;

- bargaining with themselves about how they can keep their unearned privileges while still

  advocating for decolonizing Indigenous-settler relations and the Land;

- bargaining within themselves to keep certain beliefs and practices in exchange for specific actions (e.g., donations to good causes, activism); and

- acceptance that real change will cost them their unearned privilege.

Acknowledging the grief inherent within the uncolonizing process does not absolve settler social entrepreneurs and other change leaders from taking action to honour Indigenous sovereignty and return the Land. Giving students a roadmap and skills for navigating grief will help them endure times of disorientation, knowing that it is an expected part of a challenging process that can be transformative should they engage fully and deeply.

***Co-Create Mourning Rituals With Students***

**Related to Primer 7.** Support through the mourning

Educators can support students in the grief process by co-creating expressions of mourning, individually and collectively. We can combat what grief researchers Neimeyer and Jordan (2002) called *empathic failure*, "the failure of one part of the system to understand the meaning and experience of another" (p. 96). Failure to understand may look like non-Indigenous and Indigenous students misunderstanding each other's personal experiences and/or meaning constructed from their loss, discounting grief expressions that are not relatable, or attempting to fix or remove someone else's grief. In addition, unless addressed explicitly, an imbalance might occur, such as Indigenous students being expected to caretake for settler students as they grieve their loss of unearned privilege.

Rituals for mourning include hosting sharing circles where each person can speak what they are experiencing and be witnessed without attempts to educate, correct, or enlighten. Another ritual is to invite students to bring a symbol of something they are letting go of and explain what it means. They can also share what they feel they may gain through this loss, an important component of embracing change. Educators can provide another symbol, for instance, a stone with a word on it, representing a virtue the student can choose to invoke to help them cross the bridge of grief. Educators can also work with

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students to co-create other rituals to consciously mark the resolution of grief and the emergence of new points of view using art and nature. For instance, you could invite students to spend time in nature, finding something that depicts their inner journey (e.g., a fallen log with new life growing out of it). Without disturbing the scene, the student could share the view with someone (or photograph it) and explain the meaning they have given it.

Educators would gain much wisdom by looking to Indigenous Peoples for teachings related to grief rituals. One example is the Lakota Wiping of Tears ceremony (Maldonado Moore & Doxtater, 2020). The principles of this ceremony "are being applied as a social change process to address 'wounds', healing, and transformation" (Maldonado Moore & Doxtater, 2020, p. 7) within Indigenous communities.

Whatever the ritual, create it intending to make the invisible experience of grief visible so it can be acknowledged, honoured, healed, and more easily released.

## Concluding Remarks

Highly personal, this research took me on a challenging journey of self-discovery that lasted four years, much longer than anticipated. When I began, I thought I would be reflecting on the factors that were in my conscious awareness, syphoning out which people and experiences were key in orienting me towards social change leadership. I did not anticipate the emotional charge accompanying this inquiry, the degree of personal expansion and insights I would gain, or that I would uncover subconscious aspects of myself influencing my career life path.

In this research, I have identified personal primers that have helped bring me to the place I am today as a person and in my social change work. I built upon these to create recommendations for educators, which I offer, not as authoritative direction, but in the spirit of transparency and accountability with a sincere hope that non-Indigenous social change leaders can *be* different and *do* differently, at a much quicker pace so Indigenous Peoples will be able to enjoy their sovereignty without colonial assault. I introduced a process for settler uncolonization to complement the existing process for

Indigenous decolonization (Laenui, 2000) and offered a metaphor to understand what that process is like. I interrogated the notion of goodness and offered some reflection on how it behaves like a chameleon, is highly problematic, and acts to slow down actual change.

Reflecting on this journey, I have two new sparks of meaning that I will carry forward. The first is the necessity for social change leaders to be challenged in our complacency with colonialism. If our practice is not actively dismantling colonialism, what we are engaged in is not transformative systemic change. It is philanthropic life support enabling the colonial system to survive another day. Regardless of the causes we address in our work, the solutions must always go so deep as to rectify colonialism, not just its many symptoms. Our efforts must co-create paths forward that are decolonial and led by Indigenous Peoples and the values that have sustained life on this planet since time immemorial.

To support Indigenous-led systemic change, we must see how emancipation from the colonial system benefits all people, not just Indigenous Peoples. We have to grieve the unrealized sovereignty within ourselves and believe that another way of being could exist for us, too, outside the colonial system that stifles our spirits while dolling out just enough unearned privilege to keep us placated. Until then, we may lash out at the audacity of Indigenous Peoples to assert their freedom from the tyranny of a system we cannot imagine ourselves being free from. The idea of settlers living into Indigenous Peoples' personal, spiritual, and political sovereignty may feel like a bridge that is too long and rickety to cross. This sense of overwhelm makes sense, given the momentum this system has gathered and the lack of a well-worn path to creating systemic social change in this way. Social change leader Myles Horton once said, "We make the road by walking" (Horton & Freire, 1990), and this is what I believe is required here.

The second spark is how essential it is for social change leaders to engage in continuousreflexive practice to understand ourselves deeply. As Eisenstein (2013) explains, when we do the work to become more conscious, it prompts others to do the same,

One of the ways that your project, your personal healing, or your social invention can change the world is through story. But even if no one ever learns of it, even if it is invisible to every human on Earth, it will have no less of an effect. The principle I am invoking here is called "morphic resonance"... It holds as a basic property of nature that forms and patterns are contagious: that once something happens somewhere, it induces the same thing to happen elsewhere. (p. 71)

Reflexive work happens internally but manifests externally; when it does, we set new patterns of behaviour in motion on the planet. We can trace the various manifestations of colonial conditioning within ourselves to the ongoing structures of colonialism and consciously choose to stop giving it the energy it depends on to animate itself. We can (re)connect with the life force that allows us to operate with intuition, compassion, creativity, and in rhythm with the Earth. Just as we can connect with the mothering instincts that have nurtured humankind since time immemorial, we can connect with the knowledge of how to live on this Earth sustainably, guided by a life force far more powerful than any human-made system.  As Ijeoma Nnodim Opara so powerfully stated, "This will require an imagination revolution. A liberatory mindset reset. A paradigm cataclysm." (Opara, 2021, para. 19). When approached from this place of resurgence, Indigenous and non-Indigenous change leaders have a common starting point to collaborate and co-create a soul song that will inspire and lead.

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