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HEALING SELF AND COMMUNITY: LIVING PLURALISM IN THE ANISHINAABE PARADIGM

Andrea A. Fitzpatrick
University of Montana

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HEALING SELF AND COMMUNITY:
LIVING PLURALISM IN THE ANISHINAABE PARADIGM

By ANDREA ANN FITZPATRICK

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Thesis

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Committee member: Phil Condon, Environmental Studies

Committee member: Stephen Neyooxet Greymorning, Native American Studies

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Abstract: Healing Self and Community: Living Pluralism in The Anishinaabe

Chairperson: David L. Moore

Committee member: Stephen Neyooxet Greymorning

Committee member: Phil Condon

This thesis is a study of pluralism through Anishinaabe writers Winona LaDuke, Basil Johnston, Lynn Anderson, and others, focusing on their perceptions and pedagogies and how those perceptions inform pluralistic living. Anishinaabe methodology tends to be innately interconnected, and pluralistic. As such, it can enlighten, heal self-identity structures, and perceptions of the biosphere. I will contextualize how it is necessary to investigate the stories we learn and those we tell, how it is vital to understand where they come from. Included is analysis of how pluralism shows up in mine and other Anishinaabe life ways through the literary works of Winona LaDuke, and *Last Standing Woman; Recovering the Sacred: The Power of Naming and Claiming*; Basil Johnston, *The Manitous: Spiritual world of the Ojibway*; and Kim Anderson, *Life Stages and Native Women: Memory, Teachings, and Story Medicine*; and other Anishinaabe literary work. The voices of traditional Anishinaabe methodologies have much to contribute to the idea of healing self and community. The importance of taking responsibility, being honest, and being compassionate can help us move away from compartmentalized approaches and dialectic conversations that oppose each other. Instead of oppositional tactics, pluralism attempts to call for a dialogic, interdisciplinary approach that could greatly advance our current perspectives. Pluralism asks for deep inquiry into one's self and perceptions of the world. We will see examples of inclusive, reciprocal and innovative perspectives of the Anishinaabeg. Cooperation with Indigenous people's worldviews and pedagogies can help us be better equipped for mitigating the social, educational, and ecological concerns of our contemporary culture.

List of Terms:

Ogichidaa: are Anishinaabe warriors in their definition of the world warrior

Anishinaabe: are the People, also known as Ojibwe, and Chippewa for which there are many different spellings

Pluralism: a state in which two or more points of authority and or points of view coexist

Stockholm Syndrome: Strong feelings of loyalty from victim toward captor

White Earth: an Anishinaabe reservation in Minnesota

Imperialism: the act of extending a country's power through military force or other means of coercion

Miigwech Giichi Manidoo: Thank you Great Mystery

Contents

Introduction: Cognitive Imperialism, Blames and The Stories We Tell

- I. History in Stories
- II. Bias Government and The More-Than Human
- III. Anishinaabe and Oshki Anishinaabe Perspectives, and Relationships
- IV. Mapping the Chapters

Chapter One: Healing Across Lines of Difference: Pluralism in an Oshki Anishinaabe Perspective

- I. Moving from Arizona
- II. Worldview and Relationship with Trees
- III. The Hunger of Wiindigoos
- IV. Worldview, Timber and Relative
- V. Cellular Memory and worldview
- VI. A Surviving Indigenous Worldview and Imperialism
- VII. Difference, Relations and Apocalypse
- VIII. Rice Relations, Big Business and Ecological Trauma
- IX. Work Ethics, Victimhood and Worldview
- X. Living Pluralism and Transcending Victimhood
- XI. Commodification and Anishinaabe Perspectives
- XII. White Earth, Economics Logic, and the Wiindigoo
- XIII. Selfishness, Work Ethics and Kindness
- XIV. Niche Culture, Irreverence and Collective Responsibility

Chapter Two: Healing the Anishinaabe Identity and The Stories We Tell

- I. Othering
- II. Speaking our Stories
- III. Ishkwegaabawiikwe's Story and Mine
- IV. Mixed Blood and The Oshki Anishinaabe
- V. The Power of Self Reclamation
- VI. Pluralism Across Border Lines
- VII. Anishinaabeg Diaspora
- VIII. Boarding Scholl, Stripping Self Identity, and Moral Direction
- IX. Breaking Free, Reclaiming Self Identity
- X. The Ogichidaaweg
- XI. Not all Fiction, and The Good Life
- XII. Connection and Being Anishinaabeg

Conclusion: Forgiveness is Life: Finding Love in a New Paradigm

- I. Living the Good Life
- II. The Labels We Use Can Connect or Separate
- III. Difference in Perceptions
- IV. The Sacred Is a Place of Substance
- V. Suicide Isn't a Statistic
- VI. Contribution

Introduction

Cognitive Imperialism, Blame, and The Stories We Learn

When we are young, the words are scattered all around us. As they are assembled by experience, so also are we, sentence by sentence, until the story takes shape.

— Louise Erdrich, *The Plague of Doves*

I'll open this thesis by introducing myself in space and time as it may be necessary to follow the text. My name is Andrea Ann Fitzpatrick, I am currently and for the foreseeable future living in Missoula Montana. The stories in this thesis leap through time. From my present, to my past, to my present again. My worldview and that of the Anishinaabe tends to be cyclical in nature, rather than linear with beginning and end dates. Time is a circle, a hoop, a great spiral ever in motion, and the truths upon it are enduring regardless of where we are in the cycle. The stories, mine, and others, shared here are found at differing and similar places in the cycles of time. I cite a story or tell a story of my own and tie to the one cited. With each section I start with something big and then spiral down and focus in. The structure is both deductive and inductive in reasoning to try to break down an only linear, black-white, right-wrong understanding. There is some sense of repetitions because this thesis works to address subtle and powerful aspects of truths of no othered-ness at different angles. The structure of this thesis is set up to challenge traditional academic thesis structures in its shape and content. It makes a case for a pluralistic understanding of no othered-ness, for allowing Indigenous, specifically Anishinaabeg voices and perspectives into the traditional academic structure.

Speaking toward pluralism, I am married to a Jew who is half Irish, and we have three small children, a boy who just turned three years old, and twin girls who are 23 months old. I am roughly half Native and carry some white and Castile Spanish blood. The Tribes I hail from are

Anishinaabe, Ute, and Choctaw. I identify most with my Native and Spanish heritages. I grew up mostly in and near the panhandle mountains of Idaho; however, my parents not having a smooth marriage meant my mother left my father many times while I was growing up, so we spent some years in Arizona and some months in Utah, North Dakota, and Colorado. My growing up years were filled with a strange combination of abuse, wisdom, and love. Now a mother myself and having done much self-work I was struck when researching for this thesis by the above quote from Erdrich. It is poignant and poetically true to my experience of growing up. We are molded much by the words people say to us when we are young and the experiences we have with those people. My husband has a brain injury, and to help him and to try to understand his struggle and keep our relationship alive and well I have done an immense amount of reading and researching on the human brain, how it develops and functions at different ages, how it operates. This has been pivotal in helping me heal from my own family trauma, in understanding my husband's challenges, and to be a better mother. The human brain which regulates everything in the body from mood to appetite and more until the ages of six and seven years roughly is in a fully receptive state. Children till that age do not separate fact from fiction. They do not have mental walls or protective constructs to shield them from other people. Think of a bare nerve in still air. Its fine until something touches it, a wind brushes against it. As fragile and sensitive as that bare nerve is, so are the children of the world. Each one of us when we are young is cognitively, emotionally, spiritually, mentally, and energetically without walls: defenseless. The stories we are told when young build the foundations of who we become, brave, intelligent, kind, nurturing, critical, angry, depressed, violent, abusive, and so much more. Those of us who were hurt in deep ways have the potential to grow profoundly if we can find the courage and a community of people who see us, hear us, and love us anyway. The stories that follow in this thesis are stories

of pain and healing, of cowardice and courage, and the thesis attempts to show how neither is separate from the other but a portion of the whole not in harmony.

History in Stories

A story shared gives strength to the teller. No shame can live under the light of compassion. In telling their stories Anishinaabeg peoples regain their personal and communal power. A subjugated voice has no freedom to express. A free voice tells the story and in the telling energy is released. In the telling we remember who we are, where we came from; in the telling we remember the pain and transcend it. We are still here, we are still speaking our stories, our histories, and in so doing little by little we reclaim that which was lost. Some things can never be brought back: a young Anishinaabe boy's innocence ripped from him at the boarding school. The impact of that experience influences what he teaches his children and they, their children. The old growth forests in all their glory, the memory and pain of great loss.

In Winona LaDuke's *Last Standing Woman*, the Anishinaabe voice stands strong retelling traditional stories and history. Though *Last Standing Woman* is a novel, LaDuke says in an author's note, "This is a work of fiction although the circumstances, history, and traditional stories, as well as some of the characters, are true, retold to the best of my ability" (LaDuke 10). This is important to note, because all LaDuke's work I have read and worked with prior throughout this thesis is non-fiction entirely. *Last Standing Woman* reads as poignant and powerful in the writing of this work; LaDuke has enacted Gerald Vizenor's ideal of Survivance beautifully, capturing the personal stories interwoven with the traditional stories and bringing them to life and light.

Reading *Last Standing Woman* has been an experience in feeling and remembering my own life through a fuller recollection of what it means to be human in a world full of relatives

that support me always. When I set out to get a master's degree I chose two specific focuses: Environmental Studies and Native American Studies. I did so with the intent to use English writing as my third focus, as the carrier for the other two foci. I had a grandiose idea of my thesis making a big difference in the university. I took personal joy in researching and learning about my own peoples to fuel the thesis. Let me just say, the tension within the very discourse I now write is one that challenges me as a part-native writer to put to words the points of this thesis. The dialogue in which I now participate and write is one with its own bias and point of view, one that reflects the dominant cultures' logic and language paradigm.

One such bias is viewing the more-than-human world as non-animate. My own point of view does not support this bias of a non-animate world; rather as Winona LaDuke would say, "Native American teachings describe the relations all around—animals, fish, trees, and rocks—as our brothers, sisters, uncles, and grandpas" (LaDuke 2). This too, is my way of seeing the world, full of my relations. Growing up I was called "too sensitive." It was a phrase I heard a lot. Later, away from family and mountain, the label became "strange" or "naïve" because I could hear the rivers' song, sense the flowers' growth waxing or waning, feel the energy in rocks and know if was going to snow. I sensed the natural world alive and a part of me and discovered that my perception of a sentient world beyond human and animal was not the normal viewpoint.

Another bias is the discourse's propensity to communicate in oppositional dialectical methods. The challenge then, is to come to a place of understanding difference within a cultural discourse that tends to punitively judge differences and oppose pluralistic perspectives and methodologies. Some of the Anishinaabe perspectives and values in this thesis will include such concepts as service to the community, connection, pluralism, stories, and healing. Indigenous ecological practices are often dismissed for the same reasons Indigenous life-ways are still seen

as naïve, superstitious, and romantic. A point Winona LaDuke makes in *All Our Relations: Native Struggles for Land and Life*, is “in the final analysis, the survival of Native America is fundamentally about the collective survival of all human beings” (LaDuke 5). Note that she says *all human beings*; she is referring to the collective of humanity not just Native peoples. Despite appearances to the American westernized mind, Anishinaabe worldview embraces a pluralistic and dialogic approach well steeped in practical value norms. In today’s world, traditional Anishinaabe perspectives of life ways are demonstrating viable models for healthier social ecological systems.

Part of my history is that, unlike many reservation folks or enrolled peoples, I don’t have memories of my grandmothers dancing or drum circles and pow wows. I have memories of living from the land, fractured home life and tight close-knit family. I have memories of family stories told all winter long and the hard work of summer getting ready for winter all over again. I was raised with a sense of pride for living on a mountain in the mountains. My mother taught me to observe the seasons, to trust my instincts. She taught that our Native way was in our DNA, that we became a part of the land if we loved it and lived from it and in tune with it.

I could feel some part of my soul waking up when reading *Last Standing Woman*, some part I had almost forgotten in the hard years. In reading other Anishinaabe stories, I suddenly could remember the way the wet autumn wind caressed my cheek on the mountain I grew up on, how I could smell the rutting elk down in the gorge, the vivid blush on huckleberry leaves that grew wiry, thick, and short against the steep mountain hill. I had almost forgotten...forgotten how midwinter wind stung my cheeks, how the moon glimmered on inches deep hoar frost and how that frost crunched under my footstep on a solo moonlit walk. I had almost forgotten how sweet mountain spring water tastes fresh from the ground, or how the moist earth smells in the

new spring sun. I had almost forgotten how the wind souged in the trees and lulled me to sleep each night, how the wind whispered through the cabin cracks across my face in the night while I lay cuddled beneath a heavy rag quilt my mother sewed for me, the musical clank of cast iron cookstove lids in the morning as my mother lit the stove to cook a meal. How I ached for big bodies of water and found small joyous solace in tiny cold streams and creeks and springs' torrential rain. Some part of me began reconnecting when reading *Last Standing Woman*, helping the healing of a special something crushed so small I almost forgot it was there: Miigwech Gichi Manidoo.

The Arizona desert I was born to is as much my home as the mountains I grew up in. They are both a land of grand beauty and power, a land I feel part of, connected to, and if forced to separate from, my spirit would die: it is a part of me. My early growing up was before I knew about White Earth, Red Lake, Leech Lake, Nett Lake, Fond Du Lac, and Turtle Mountain reservations and many more. I grew up earning my living in part from the landscape in which I lived, the mountains near the panhandle of Idaho. It was to these Idaho mountains my mother moved when she remarried, when I was four years old. I knew nothing of the Midewiwin, Ogichidaa, Ogichidaaweg, ricing or making maple syrup. I learned to build fires even in the dead of winter, cook on a cast iron cookstove top, live in and maintain a log cabin with no permanent foundation, knew how to build one. I knew how to search out pitch wood. I knew what time of the summer to harvest from the berries and fruit trees, trade for produce and purchase dried goods. I learned to hunt and dress wild game and smoke jerk the meat. I knew which woods were best for smoke jerking meat. I learned to cut and or grind wild game meat and can it in jars for safe keeping in the cellar my parents dug. I knew how to hand dry produce or can it in jars and how to cook from scratch on a cookstove. I knew when it was going to snow, or rain, before the

radio broadcast it. Spring time for me and my younger brother involved digging bulbs to eat while we explored which parts of the hills might still have snow or be bare and making our own miniature log cabins from twigs.

If I make it sound idyllic, in some ways it really was. In other ways, life prodded and poked at us so hard we became like the pink and yellow blooming cactus growing at lower elevations, prickly and defensive, only yielding to just the right touch. To heal, to grow and understand difference we must have some experience with it. My little brother and my experiences began with our new siblings cajoling us into play. They built trails through snow, placed us in a toboggan and gave us a big hearty push. I heard their wild laughter as the toboggan tipped over the edge and slid toward the gaping Glory hole. A glory hole is a vertical shaft in the ground that brings air into the horizontal mining shaft below. The depth and breadth of a glory hole depends on the depth of the mine, this one was about around a quarter mile deep and wide enough to embrace my younger brother and I in the toboggan.

During this time frame my new older brother buried me under packed snow and it felt cool and snug almost pleasant. Until he sinister voiced said “I am going to leave you now.” I panicked and struggled finding myself trapped I started to cry uncontrollably. His retreating steps returned he said coldly distant, removed, “calm down I left you a breathing hole.” I lost control of my breathing and felt the snow sprinkle around my face as I struggled, panicked, alive in a newly made grave. He meant for me to die. Fury and the barely caged rage of knowing he would be found out, released four-year-old me tumbling, sobbing into loose snow. Our new step siblings hogtied my brother with orange bailing twine and laughed when he cried and struggled to get free. He was three. Our early presence on the mountain was unwanted. Our new dad tied my brother’s ankles together shouting at him as he flipped him upside down and hung him from

the four-inch spike sticking out the cabins ridge log above our heads. My mother tugged at his shoulders and he shrugged her off. Pulled out his hunting knife and jerked my brothers pant leg violently away from his ankle saying, "I will skin you out like a martin". My brother's terrified gaze clung to mine until it was blocked. I tried to move so I could see him and got a glimpse of his pale face eyes scrunched tightly closed stiffly hanging upside down. I felt something in me snap. When it was over like someone had flipped a switch, our new dad laughed, and we clung to one another unable to understand what had just transpired.

When I was a new child on the mountain, he came in the dark of night; I never saw his face, trapping me in my covers. He would place his hand over my mouth, pressing me back into the foam cushion that was my bed, near suffocating life's breath from my body. Later as an adult the memory came in nightmare form. I would sit up in the middle of my bed alone a scream lurking at the back of my throat. The story, the words, I was told over and over again destroyed my sense of value and safety in the world. Training cells, breath, and thought to trust the adult inside is a work mostly not seen in the world. It is this vital self-healing work that is essential for each Anishinaabe and anyone else that wants to live the good life. We can allow ourselves to transcend our past wounds and use the knowledge they gave us to grow tremendously beautiful and powerful communities in the present. I can take these memories and make myself a victim or I can remember them honestly and add to the picture by understanding the abuse we suffered was generational, and they were enacting a previous violence already done like record stuck on repeat. It's my choice and my task to break that cycle and how it is perceived. We cannot have light without shadow; the two must come into harmony with one another. For me the answers lie in bringing the old ways forward in a new archetype; it means living in a perspective that seeks understanding across lines difference.

Researching for this thesis and reading the works of Anishinaabe writers such as, Winona LaDuke, Basil Johnston, Margaret Noodin, Gerald Vizenor, Louise Erdrich, Lynn Anderson and more controversial folks like Rupert Ross has been a source of sustenance and joy as well as pain. I feel more connected to my Anishinaabe heritage and that also brings me face to face with great personal and tribal losses. As with all things in my life, I cannot be purely unbiased. I would argue no one can. It is a mistake to think it's possible and wiser to account for one's own bias with awareness and acknowledgment. The process of othering, the portrayal of another person or group as fundamentally different and less than self, does not function in mine and other Anishinaabe experiences of pluralism; writers Winona LaDuke, Basil Johnston, and Lynn Anderson demonstrate that the wise, compelling dialogic of no "other," shown through Anishinaabe literature and through traditional Anishinaabe lifeways and social value norms, has the power to heal the Anishinaabeg Akiing (the people's land) and the contemporary Anishinaabe (the people) across lines of difference. I am aware I am showing my own bias of living in the world with the perspectives of an Oshki Anishinaabeg, a new Anishinaabeg in the contemporary world. These perspectives of living pluralistically with acceptance of no othered-ness have much to offer the world. We must first heal ourselves. In the healing of ourselves, we can help our more-than-human relatives and land to heal.

Bias, Government, and the More-Than-Human

From the Anishinaabe perspective, we are intimately in relationship with the more-than-human world. We are interdependent on one another for the good life, and the physical and spiritual are closely connected. LaDuke says, "government and industry accountants have been picking away, trying to come up with a formula to compensate Indians for the theft of their lands and livelihoods" (LaDuke 116). To heal our socio-ecological damage we must confront our

collective past, acknowledge, and rewrite history to include Indigenous perspectives and methodology so that we all may grow healthy. LaDuke makes the challenge of my first point clear when she writes, “So long as both (Native and government) remain steadfast, there appears to be little hope for a meeting of minds in the next generations” (LaDuke 116). It will take individuals facing their own greatest fears and history for the American collective to heal. America’s history and conquest are not a pretty history to claim, fraught with colonization, slavery, and wars, filled with both the oppressor, and oppressed. Can we heal? I believe we can with the courage to re-see and *own* our collective history. Part of healing is in allowing and encouraging pluralistic viewpoints, connection, non-interference, and the interdependence of the Anishinaabe worldview to be part of our thought and approach to our socio-ecological world.

My own worldview sees many things around us in the natural world as sentient, and each action, each word, for better or worse is a prayer in action. I am, however, aware that my perceptions hold their own bias. I am not calling for unbiased actions, rather, fair actions toward Native Nations and the more-than-human world and an awareness of our own biases. We cannot get away from biased partiality. Everyone has a point of view and it is influenced by his or her personal and professional history. The point here is not to condemn bias or the attempts to not be biased, but rather to be sensible and recognize bias for what it is: preconceptions of people, places, and things based on our personal and collective history. According to Basil Johnston in *The Manitous* “the Anishinaubae people championed and upheld the importance of individuality and personal independence” (Johnston xix). Translation: difference was valued. He goes on to say, “the more self-reliant and free the individual, the stronger and better the well-being of the community” (Johnston xix). This works of course because of another value is also held by the Anishinaabe, “men and women were also instilled with a sense of obligation to the community

that required them to give something back” (Johnston xix). Remember the broader definition of community applies here. An individual aware of his or her own bias can make less biased choices or choices that include another’s different set of biases. Herein lies the spice at the heart of diversity: unity in difference. In the quote above, we can see steady practical value norms at work, value norms that place value in the individual and the community at once not placing one above the other, value norms that foster connection, independent, and interdependent perceptions.

Personally, I am aware my continued life depends on the more-than-human world we live in. It is this more-than-human world that we could not live without. It is the world that completely supports our very next breath. David L. Moore writes, “Indigenous ways of knowing and being interconnected within ecosystems are emerging by default against the corruption and pollution of the dominating economic logic” (Moore xiv). Moore is correct to cite *economic logic* as part of the problem. Economic logic sees wealth and resources of a country with viewpoint of inanimacy, production, and consumption of goods and services. We live in a world where many other points of view exist. I maintain this as healthy and encourage a dialogic pluralistic way of living in the world. To be dialogic versus dialectic one seeks a conversation instead of opposing one. Pluralism holds more than one viewpoint and seeks to maintain difference and communicate across lines of difference; to have difference come into harmony with other difference. Therefore, dialogic pluralism is communicating and holding difference in harmony.

Understanding I am intimately connected to the biosphere and all in it isn’t just my perception and bias but a biological fact. The wellbeing of traditional Anishinaabe communities relies on their connection to the land and all its inhabitants. According to, Winona LaDuke, “The

last 150 years have seen a great holocaust. There have been more species lost in the past 150 years than since the Ice Age” (LaDuke 1). At first look, this claim may seem implausible, yet, upon closer research and observation the proof of it feels not only shocking but alarming.

LaDuke says, throughout this same time, “Indigenous peoples have been disappearing from the face of the earth. Over 2,000 nations of Indigenous peoples have gone extinct in the western hemisphere” (LaDuke 1). Because this knowledge is shocking and dismaying, it can feel too overwhelming to address. While it is vital we see humanity’s impact on the planet and each other, it is also just as important to keep our perspectives balanced and based in the actions we can take!

Anishinaabe and Oshki Anishinaabe Perspectives, and Relationships

The Anishinaabe peoples have a social relationship with their resources and believe in relationships with more-than-human persons living in their landscapes. Indeed, these relationships are understood as vital and reciprocal. In Anishinaabe realities, much is learned through the close observation of nature. We are not alone on this world and we are not the only species with something to teach others.

On a spring drive back from the Lochsa River to Missoula, I saw eagles feasting on winter’s shipwreck of bones in the faded yellow grass. They were full of grace, and strength, as they danced over what Spirit had left behind, and out of death came life emerging. We too are like the eagles: feeding off our relatives, nourishing our own lives through death. Yet, there is a balance and when we become greedy, it creates unappeasable hungers that work to destroy us and our world. The great birds symbolize the balance between all relations in our world. The

lesson there: we humans can destroy the sacred with our desires. If not alert to our own place in nature we will continue harming and destroying that which sustains us.

Writing from my own mixed half-integrated ancestry, the minute I put fingers to keyboard or pen to paper I struggle with unwieldy terminology that does not fully express the concepts I live and understand. There is a labeling rich in nouns and dialectic this or that perception in the dominant language paradigm that hinders inclusive approaches and understanding that allow for this *and* that. Belief in an inherent goodness in humans, interconnectedness, pluralism, relations, and healing, these are concepts this thesis endeavors to elucidate.

Remember, that community for the Anishinaabe includes human beings, and all other living entities. This includes and is not limited to plants, animals, rocks, manitous, fish, birds, insects, and more are living entities. Anishinaabe perceptions of what is alive and living differ from mainstream American concepts of what is alive and aware. Typically, in European American perceptions, animals, water, fish, etc. are things, resources: not aware individuals with a right to life and respect. Growing up in an Anishinaabe community, individuals would have according to Johnston, “a sense of obligation to the community” (Johnston xix) instilled in them. It was important that individuals recognize “That which made them Anishinaabe was considered to be owed to the entire heritage of the community and the nation and each person was bound to return something to his or her heritage and so add to its worth” (Johnston xix). Because of these perceptions of community and heritage, the actions of each individual are much more considerate of the ecological world around them and tended to be interdisciplinary in nature. These beliefs are traditionally beautifully action based; one would know the merit of an individual based on their actions rather than their words alone.

Johnston goes on to say “in 1805, the Six Nations peoples granted a missionary an interview. At the end of their colloquy, Red Jacket, a celebrated Seneca orator, on behalf of the people rejected the missionaries’ overture with the words in his language that meant “Kitchi-Manitou has given us a different understanding” (Johnston vii). It is important to notice that he did not say you are wrong; he stated, *has given us a different understanding*, and living the ideal of pluralism that difference was held for those Six Nations and other North American tribes present. Johnston goes on to state that “Red Jacket did not imply that his people’s understanding was better than those of the newcomers. Rather, the missionaries had not shown their beliefs and conduct to be superior to the knowledge and learning that Kitchi-Manitou had bestowed upon Natives” (Johnston vii-viii). Johnston says *beliefs and conduct*, in the wording here we see the clear recognition that beliefs drive our conduct in the world, the two are interconnected, they are not separate. In the Anishinaabe way, rather than redress an issue topically by focusing solely on the physical or monetary loss or harm the focus is and was placed on the bad feelings or beliefs that led to the physical. This is not to say that the physical was ignored; rather the core issue once addressed typically led to physical redress by choice not coercion.

According to Basil Johnston, in the forward of *Dancing with a Ghost*, Anishinaabe, “Men and women were expected to weigh, not reject outright, opinions different from their own, and to clarify their own ideas and enrich their general understandings” (Johnston viii). In this context, it is then obvious that difference is the platform that enlightens. The individual and tribal understandings become richer when exposed to points of views different than their own. According to Johnston, “It was expected that men and women, in so doing (examining), would find merit in the ideas of others and accord those others due credit for the worth of their ideas”

(Johnston viii). Seen in this way it is obvious then that perceptions of the world different from our own are not necessarily erring unless they prove to be damaging beyond mere opinion.

In the Anishinaabe way stories are powerful: the ones we tell and the ones we wish we didn't have to tell. We are not separate from mother earth and we are not separate from one another. There is no true other. There is a cognitive overlay that tells us we are separate, that different is threatening or bad. Woven into our history there is a cognitive imperialism that seeks to push the Indigenous perspective right off the page and out of the history books and conversations. As that has not happened, cognitive imperialism has done its best to romanticize and cast ignorant perceptions toward the Indigenous knowledge base and perspectives.

We are still here, still telling our stories, seeking to communicate across lines of difference that sometimes feel wider than the Grand Canyon could ever hope to be. If our beliefs drive our conduct in the world, I choose to believe in the value of connection, recognition, and healing across lines of difference, space, and time. In reality there is no such thing as a separate other. We are all connected, and our health and healing are contingent on one another.

Mapping the Chapters

In Chapter One, "Healing Across Lines of Difference: Pluralism in an Oshki Anishinaabe Perspective," the thesis opens with the idea of separation and what separation really means and then goes on to a personal story about connection with the more-than-human. The chapter then moves into examining the differences in worldview that permit separation from the more-than-human and each other. This chapter examines concepts of how beliefs drive our actions in the world, how we each have the potential for good or bad actions inside. The chapter looks at the Anishinaabe concept of the Wiindigoo, how they were created and how they did not disappear

with imperialism and colonization but rather took another shape in our world. This chapter illustrates the differences between cognitive diversity and the values it has to offer and cognitive imperialism and what it takes away. Then we take a brief look at how the above perspectives have led to bio-colonialism and bio-piracy. Throughout the whole chapter the thesis attempts to connect the personal with the historical and the concepts of pluralism, connection, and transcending victimhood despite the atrocities. It makes a case for bringing the old ways forward in a new paradigm and touches upon the importance of adapting. As a people, we Anishinaabeg are wholly affected by the dominating culture's imperialistic and economic logic.

In Chapter Two, "Healing, the Anishinaabe Identity, and The Stories We Tell," the thesis again attempts to connect the personal story with the bigger historical story, this time examining the colonial trauma and damage to personal and communal identity structures and policies that guide the people. This chapter tries to show to some degree how to begin not just surviving but thriving and talks of how essential it is to keep our ways alive in this new era so unbalanced and different than that of our ancestors. It discusses and clarifies how deep the traumas go and how to break from the cycle of victimhood and abuse, how to begin reclaiming one's identity in today's world.

In the Conclusion, "Forgiveness is Life, Finding Love in a New Paradigm," the thesis attempts to show how forgiveness means love and life and how holding pluralism allows for one to hold onto to their own identity structure and perspective while understanding that of the abuser or colonizer. Understanding does not condone, it means to understand, to comprehend, stand in the midst of and truly *know*. The conclusion provides some answers for what it means to live the good life in today's world. What does it mean to be an Oshki Anishinaabe in the world today? How can we honor living co-tenant-hood in a new paradigm? The conclusion examines

some thoughts on how to stand in the midst of a paradigm that does not always support our worldview and still thrive.

Chapter One

Healing Across Lines of Difference: Pluralism in an Oshki Anishinaabe Perspective

*Not to be lightly spoken of
Your species name
so common on our tongue*

*the mind's eye forgets the continued
revelation of your kind.*
-David Whyte from *River Flow*

*I hear the wind sometimes
When the pines sing "ziizigwaa"
When the doors cry
When the windows shake.*
- Margaret Noodin from *Weweni*

Moving from Arizona

There is something to be said for separation; the act of categorizing, and organizing to understand one thing, or another, is also an act that separates. When I was a small child I lived in Arizona with my mother and year-younger brother. My memories of that place are of hot sand and dust up to my ankles, a warm fuzzy beginning in the world that was lit by a bright Arizona sun. I was as tied to the land as my mother sitting in the dirt feeling how the dirt felt running through my fingers warm, and soft, filling my pores, grounding me for the change coming. In this time before cold I knew nothing of violence, nothing of my mixed blood, or of other people's perceptions. I remember this as a time close to my mother, feeling safe, and loved. The grand sweeping backdrop was always wood being chopped by my mother, warm Arizona sand, hot dust, brown, sepia, white, and red sandstone, and the smell of heat, and juniper. Then my mother remarried, and we were moved from the warmth of Arizona to a 7,000-foot elevation log

cabin with two rooms situated on a mining claim. My new father had leased 20 acres in the middle of the forest and bordering the Frank Church Wilderness area.

Worldview and Relationship with Trees

When I was four years old many men flooded into the mountain home place my mother and father had moved us to and began to fell the trees all around us. In droves, they hacked and cut and bulldozed a vast number of my closest friends to shreds, cut them in half, and ripped their limbs from them. I couldn't understand why. I could hear the trees dying and feel the catastrophic wave of energy wreaking death in its wake. I asked my mother, "Why are they killing the trees? She looked at me, green eyes startled. My dad said, "They are just cutting them down." The clear disregard in his voice disconcerted me; the blatant lack of understanding shown toward to the trees scared me. Could he see me, I wondered? The word *just* denoted an absence of understanding. I was puzzled, and I could feel my dad's unspoken anger simmering just below the surface. He wasn't sad for the trees dying.... I tried to understand. He was angry because the Forest Service had come onto his land uninvited and forced their way. For my dad it was about control and respect for him and what he considered his.

My chest tightened, I felt a wave of deep sadness. "Can't we tell them to stop?" I asked. I knew then that most of the people around me didn't know the obvious reality I did. They didn't hear the trees crying. They didn't hear them. Later when the men had left I walked, and crawled through, under, and over the fallen, crying, and saying sorry repeatedly. I was the only one who acknowledged they heard the trees, and I could not stop the trees from being felled. I could not make the people see, hear, or know the truth of their actions. I was devastated. I barely had the word tree as an identifier; I knew them as my living companions who sang, whispered, and

conversed with me, and suddenly many were gone, and the violence of their passing resounded through the woods, all who were left reverberating with the loss. Branches tore at my braids, loosening long strands of dark brown hair, and my hands got covered in fresh sap. I didn't have the word blood, and I knew the sap was filled with their dying life force. Deeply shocked I daily visited the living and fallen trees haunting them, my chest tight until my parents whispered about my actions, and one day they began clearing all the fallen away. I was young; they hoped I would forget.

It was the living, swaying, rooted, in-ancient-wisdom trees, that finally reached me. They accepted the loss of their kin as a part of things. The trees gently explained to me that all things change, and they spoke with me about the human heart and its struggle to accept change, and how that was a great impediment to our species. I had difficulty accepting that the trees could accept the loss of their kin: weren't they angry? They were not angry and after the initial shock of violence and loss they resumed their peaceful ways. I struggled to understand and became angry with that peaceful acceptance. Over time I recognized that they felt deeply and accepted the loss. I didn't accept the loss. To me it was incomprehensible, and I was told that if I continued living in that way it would sever our ability to converse, that in my deepest truth I must be like the wind, water, and trees to hear them; that it was not common for them to communicate with humans so clearly.

The humans in my life censured me for feeling sad over the trees in the weeks to come and informed me that they weren't people like us. Again, I felt puzzled; did they have to be like us? What made us better? They were alive, and I could not explain this knowing of their value beyond a supposed ownership by us? Just because not everyone heard their voices or understood

them didn't mean they didn't have life, stories, meaning, and value. I missed their presence, their love, their joyous support of me; a new human walking among them.

Separation: the act that distinguishes one thing or being from another means to divide, to disconnect, to disassociate. It comes from the Latin root *separare*, which means to pull apart. My perceptions as a small child said, all adults and near adults around me were disconnected and disassociated from the living beings all around them. Over time my ability to clearly converse with the trees became challenged as I became angrier, hurt, and confused with the humans in my life. I became less connected, I could still feel the trees, their acceptance, their love, and support, but I lost the ability to clearly converse as I filled with fear and bitterness.

The Hunger of Wiindigoos

We are a lesson in contradictions: we have both the gentle and the barbaric survival instinct resting inside us, each ready at any moment to spring forth. For the Anishinaabe, beliefs are the dynamic philosophy guiding each action. A fine example from Anishinaabe tradition is the story of weendigoes and how they were created. It was greed that created the creature known as the weendigo, according to author Basil Johnston in *The Manitous*, “the weendigo was born out of human susceptibility” (Johnston 235). The Anishinaabe weendigo was once a human being until that human became selfish. Weendigoes are created by the greedy action or inaction of human beings, actions that lead to compulsive behaviors such as thievery, cannibalism, stinginess, and laziness; such *action*, or *inaction*, separates the harmony of the community. Johnston claims that the weendigo, “exemplifies human nature’s tendency to indulge its self-interests, which once indulged, demand even greater indulgence and ultimately result in the extreme—the erosion of principles and values” (Johnston 224). Note that he writes *self-interests*

not community interests. Johnston goes on to say that, “Weendigoes were driven from their place in Anishinaubae traditions and culture and ostracized by disbelief and skepticism. It was assumed, and indeed appeared, as if the Weendigoes had passed into the Great Beyond” (Johnston 235). The Weendigoes are insatiably hungry creatures; this hunger is understood as an insatiable appetite for more food, resources, money, etc. Johnston expounds upon this by saying that, “Actually, the Weendigoes did not die out or disappear; they have only been assimilated and reincarnated as corporations, conglomerates, and multinationals” (Johnston 235). Further warning readers, he writes, “But their cupidity is no less insatiable than that of their ancestors” (Johnston 235). Just like the Weendigoes of the past, the modern ones are no less frightening in their ability to destroy and consume. Their influence results in the *extreme erosion of principles and values*; again, we are back to value norms, and the need for good solid ethics to heal our socio-ecological world.

When we become separated from ourselves and our meanings in life, our interconnections with those we love, human or more-than-human, we are internally unfulfilled, and as a result become greedy. Like a drowning person we try all sorts of things to fill ourselves up: this is the anatomy of becoming a wiindigoo. Wiindigoos are the Anishinaabe cannibal who eats those people who stray too far away from the village both, literally and figuratively. Wiindigoos were once human in the Anishinaabeg tradition, humans who strayed too far and became greedy, and when they did they became something terrible and destructive, something other than human. Wiindigoos are always ravenous. Whether they take the shape of corporations and multinationals, or individuals, their hunger leads them to do atrocious things without care or thought of the future. When we live our lives from the perspective of a wiindigoo in any form we are always hungry and because we are always hungry, we are always afraid of not having enough

so we begin living our lives using fear and control to get our basic needs met. With our sense of accountability and connection, skewed, we live life just as the ancient wiindigoos did, terrifying those around us with our unending appetites and lack of care for the damage we create and leave in our wake.

Worldview, Timber and Relative

I was touched when reading “Wiindigoo” in *Last Standing Woman*, when “old man Namaybin Minnogeeshig” (LaDuke 66) speaks with the wiindigoo. What a different life I might have led had another understood the world as I did as a small child. It has taken me most of my life to reclaim parts of myself, lost and shut away, to realize my perceptions of reality are not crazy. In the section “Wiindigoo” the “Minnogeeshig family watched as the logging teams encroached closer and closer to their trapline. The animals behaved differently now, moving nearer to the Minnogeeshig family camp” (LaDuke 66). When living in close contact with our more-than-human relatives a relationship is developed, and a certain kind of trust and expectation is fostered.

The big game in the mountains I grew up in would come onto the private property we lived on in the autumn of the year, around the time of Waatebagaa-Giizis, *September*, the Leaves Changing Color Moon, and Binaakwe-Giizis, *October*, Leaves Falling Moon, my mountain home was flooded with hunters. It was as if the deer and elk knew it was a small safe zone. They behaved differently and would come closer to our cabins onto the mining claim that we lived upon, as without permission hunters were not allowed onto that land. My family couldn't sense the life in the trees the way I did as a small child. The smell of fresh running sap and sounds of the men cutting and bulldozing the trees in my early childhood didn't disturb them in the same

way as me. But my family did sense and respect the life in the wild game and just as Namaybin could see the animals behaving differently, we could. We were taught to wear greens and blues and stay close to home during this time as the hunters were considered dangerous, shooting at whatever moved without first knowing what they were seeing. My mother chose to befriend some of these hunters each year and acted as a reporter for the Fish and Game should she catch any of the hunters wasting meat from the wild game. I grew up in a world of strange double standards and connections.

Namaybin in “Wiindigoo,” “could hear (...) the sounds of the men and the Swede saws, the sounds of workhorses straining as they pulled the big logs, and the smell the timber just recently cut, wafting on the wind toward his front porch” (LaDuke 67). Where my dad was ineffectual in stopping the men from wreaking havoc around our cabin to the forest when I was small, Namaybin refused to parlay with the Lumberman and at least temporarily put a hold to the massive logging happening on White Earth. The Lumberman tells the old man Namaybin that he has papers that say he can take the timber from his land. Namaybin tells the Lumberman in Ojibwe, “There is no use to make small talk with a cannibal” (LaDuke 68). Namaybin understands there is a discrepancy in the way the Lumberman and he himself see the world, and he knows he cannot reason with the Lumberman. The Lumberman will not understand that many of, “the large white pines (...) were the grandfathers to the Anishinaabeg” (LaDuke 67). Namaybin says to the Lumberman through an interpreter, “An Indian can sit and talk to a cannibal, making all kinds of jokes, telling stories, and drinking tea, but both the Indian and the cannibal know exactly what the cannibal is thinking” (LaDuke 68). LaDuke is sharing with us through Namaybin that the white Lumbermen have no understanding of a worldview different from their own; they only understand their own worldview. It is made clear in this passage that

the Indian understands the difference in worldview and he understands the cannibal, the Lumberman but the Lumberman does not understand him. The stories that the Indian might share would not be heard for the sharing of history, cultural relevance, and meaning that would be imbedded in them. All the Lumberman understands is his own worldview as we see in this passage “The lumberman spoke now. ‘Mr. Minnogeeshig,’ he said abruptly in his harsh, awkward white man’s language, irked by the silliness of the Indian’s veiled words and secrets, ‘I have papers that say I can take the trees off your land. I have the papers’” (LaDuke 69). In this passage had the lumberman understood the Anishinaabe ways of seeing the world, he would not have been irked by silliness. He would have understood that Namaybin was telling him that he knew the Lumberman would not understand his Anishinaabe way of seeing the world, and therefore would find no value in his words.

The Lumberman has no understanding of Namaybin’s worldview nor does he really want to. He wants the timber. To him the world is separate, and the trees’ only meaning is in what they will build once cut, and what he can earn from the cutting. He becomes patronizingly rude and tells Namaybin, “‘I am only coming here out of courtesy, Mr. Minnogeeshig, he said, ‘The Indian Agent gave permission to cut the timber off your land’” (LaDuke 69). Namaybin glares when the signature on the paper is pointed out to him as the permission given. He takes the paper, tears it, and throws it in the fire. The lumberman becomes angry, “Your trees are mine. And your trees are coming down, the lumberman said coldly” (LaDuke 69). LaDuke writes, “Rousing Namaybin’s anger was a mistake, much like waking a hibernating bear prematurely from its slumber” (LaDuke 70). Namaybin and other Anishinaabe families had not given permission for lumbermen to take the trees from the land they lived upon.

In their way the Anishinaabeg made their feelings and opinions clear. LaDuke writes, “The next morning the cannibal returned. Anticipating the glory of a new clear cut, he was stunned to find his camp dismantled” (LaDuke 70). Namaybin and other Anishinaabe families from White Earth had been busy during the night. The lumberman’s foreman arrives by horse sputtering “‘Them Indians have taken over the lake. They’ve got the lake, they’ve got the lake’, he repeated over and over, stuttering with disbelief” (LaDuke 70). So, the lumberman goes to the lake to assess the situation. LaDuke writes “He scanned the faces in the canoes—maybe fifty Indian men and women armed with Winchester rifles, sturdy in their canoes on the river and holding the shores. His eyes met those of Namaybin. He winced. The Indian glared. Now, in perfect English, the Indian spoke, his voice carried swiftly across the water. ‘It is no use to make small talk to a cannibal,’ he said, and he cocked his gun” (LaDuke 71). There is so much more than the temporary stopping of logging happening in this story. It speaks to the two separate ways of seeing the world two different worldviews. It tells us the Anishinaabe understood the white man’s worldview but that the white man did not understand the Anishinaabeg. It shows us the Anishinaabe are in a relationship with the land, and the trees upon the land are relatives not simply building logs and paychecks. It also shows us how they had little say in what actually happened to the land, and the occupants of the land allotted to them: their opinion did not matter to the non-Natives arriving in droves.

Cognitive diversity is a rich bed of pluralism whereas *cognitive imperialism* inhibits communication and understanding across lines of difference. The worldview of the Logger Namaybin speaks with is a worldview that is imperialistic and only sees the Loggers sense of reality. There is no pluralism or understanding across lines of difference in *cognitive imperialism*. Speaking of difference the Anishinaabe, use and used sophisticated and nuanced

metaphor to communicate complex thoughts and understandings of their reality. When the conqueror, so called, appeared, their language paradigm indeed, their own understanding of reality prevented them from understanding the Anishinaabe worldview and language paradigm. The same was and is not true of the Anishinaabe. Gerald Vizenor says in *Survivance: Narratives of Native Presence* “Survivance stories are renunciations of dominance, detractions, obtrusions, the unbearable sentiments of tragedy, and the legacy of victimry (Vizenor 1-2). Imbedded in Anishinaabe stories and acts of survivance are sophisticated, complex, nuanced, and subtle understandings of the world. Much like the Logger, my father, and the men who cut down the trees on the land I grew up on, understood the ownership of trees and land and not relationship to those trees. My dad, in fact, found the notion of trees dying incomprehensible, to him they were just trees. His denial of my reality was devastating.

*Do you know what the eagles spoke?
Full of grace and strength as they danced over
what spirit left behind
and out of death came life merging,
and like the eagles we too are strong!*

Cellular Memory and Worldview

There is something about living in a place, subsisting from its bounty, that connects you as surely as blood. Parts of that place become part of you, and the respect, or lack thereof from which it was harvested also becomes a part of you. Some say that cellular memory plays a part in where we feel at home. In *Last Standing Woman* the “White Earth” section Winona LaDuke writes “There were many migrations that brought the people here. *Omaa, omaa*, here. Here to the place where the food grows on water. (...) It had been perhaps a thousand years since the time

the Anishinaabeg had left the big waters in the *waaban aki*, the land of the east” (LaDuke 24). Perhaps, that is why when I was growing up in those mountains I longed for big bodies of water and found small joys in little streams and trickles. When I first laid eyes on a lake, I was magnetized; when I first saw the ocean, I felt I had come home. What is it about trees and waters that connect? I once knew a maple in southern Idaho, and whenever I was blue I would go listen to the tree and come away with more peace than when I had arrived.

I once knew a man who frequently got annoyed with me for how I spoke of the plants and trees. One day he exploded at me saying that I sounded crazy, and that I had lived on that damn mountain too long, and that my childhood had been a lonely existence, and I had become romantic in the way I viewed biology as a way of surviving being so isolated from people. He informed me that I needed to wake up and see the real world. His words stung. It was clear to me he didn’t understand and didn’t care. The real world I lived in was alive, full of beauty. For me material and spiritual were never separate, and this didn’t preclude functional practicality. In “White Earth” LaDuke writes, “The Anishinaabe world undulated between material and spiritual shadows, never clear which was more prominent at any time. It was as if the world rested in those periods rather than the light of day” (LaDuke 23). The real world that man spoke of believed in a wild territory that never existed, and ideals of savagery. While he thought I had romanticized out of loneliness, I felt I was lucky, I had been allowed to see and hear the world unfiltered through society’s perceptions, and because that was so, I heard and understood the living world around me.

Every year somewhere in Missoula city trees go missing, get cut down, and plowed over. When the grandfathers around the court house went missing; I was dismayed. How do we come into a right relationship with our more-than human kin in a world that by and large does not even

see them as living beings worthy of that level of consideration? To feel vibrantly, the soul must be generous because we are all connected: to stay open and feel takes a kind of courage that society seems bent on romanticizing. It isn't romantic to live in a world where most if not every more-than-human relative around is viewed as an *other*, as property, as less than human, therefore less worthy. It is often heartbreaking. What would happen if we asked ourselves to re-orient our value norms, take ethical approaches in our economic systems, our interactions with each other, and the more-than-human world? In this Anthropocene era, it is especially important to understand, and see, the influences of human beings on the biosphere, better known throughout this thesis as *Bimaadiziaki*, Earth Being, Mother earth, and more-than-human relatives. It is even more important to foster concepts and practical value norms such as service to others, interconnection, and reconnection with the reality that we are part of nature. To harm so called *others* of any shape and form is to harm ourselves.

A Surviving Indigenous worldview and Imperialism

I am not advocating extreme passivity but a reconnection, and a healthy respect for our more-than-human relatives as well as a renewed respect for ourselves. Think of respect not just as acknowledgment and honoring but also as re-seeing. Our preconceived notions influence us, and are biased, yet they form our character, and temperament, how we believe, and how we act in the world. Thus far, rarely do we question them or the foundations they are built upon. Even though it is common knowledge that the conquerors write the history the coming generations believe. Writer and Professor David L. Moore, says it nicely when he writes in *That Dream Shall Have a Name: Native Americans Rewriting America* “that Indigenous issues are ignored for ironic reasons that remain central to America’s often unrealized longings for its own true authenticity, identity, community, and sovereignty” (Moore xii). This idea of living

pluralistically, and connected, at its heart is wise, and Indigenous, not romantic. How do we Oshki Anishinaabe live a whole life, indeed, a good life in a world that dismisses the heart of who we are? As a niche culture within a majority culture that dictates its perceptions into the laws, politics, and legal limitations we are all bound by; we must find new ways to thrive in the contemporary world. It means finding a way to apply the old ways in a so-called civilized era. To that end let me state: imperialism is imperialism, no matter the clothing, whether its dressed in subjugation and massacres or linguistic and cognitive. It seeks to rule, to dominate, to have its way be the only way. Pluralism, in contrast, seeks to understand, connect, and communicate with and amongst difference.

Difference, Relations, and Apocalypse

The mindset of imperialism has led to massive loss of life, perspective, and balance in the world today. Remembering the past and moving toward the future in *Last Standing Woman* in the “Mesabe” section I could readily identify with Mesabe’s upbringing and life experience. LaDuke writes, “Each season brought new wealth to the family. The Anishinaabeg, in turn, provided their prayers of thanksgiving for their food” (LaDuke 83). Notice the idea of wealth is tied to seasonal harvest. Mesabe learned his value norms from his family who did their best to live the old ways. LaDuke says, “He followed his father into the woods on his snowshoes where they set their traplines to snare beaver, rabbits, and porcupine. He learned how to skin the animals for their pelts, clean them for their meat, and never to take more than he needed” (LaDuke 83). Mesabe learned how to harvest and take care of plants for medicine from his grandmother. LaDuke wrote, “Mesabe grew up in the world of his ancestors, but he learned as well from the world of the *Gichimookomaanag*, the white men” (LaDuke 84). Like Mesabe, my bringing up was some mix of both worlds. Howbeit mine was a little more removed and pristine

in some ways. Like the Mesabe LaDuke writes of, I too, was, “Born into a time of chaos and change” (LaDuke 84).

Thirty-eight years ago, the same year I was born, the 1980 mixed and old growth forests on White Earth were being ripped apart, and the home of the Anishinaabeg, and their relatives were decimated. In *Last Standing Woman* “The Thaw” section, LaDuke wrote, “Each spring like a religious rite, Masabe drove the backroads to the Indian Agency in Cass Lake to ask the Great White Father when he would help the Indians with their land” (LaDuke 121), and along the way what Masabe saw was “Log skidders crushed *jiibegamig*, gravehouses, as the lumberjacks rid White Earth of the forests. Chainsaws severed the *ininaatig*, the maple sugar trees, the lifeblood of the Anishinaabeg” (LaDuke 121). Not only was there a great holocaust to the Native Anishinaabeg life ways happening, but a holocaust to the ecosystems that they had lived in harmony with for so long. The new people that came to White Earth and surrounding territories could not fathom the cataclysmic shock waves left upon their entrance to the areas or in their wake. Their worldview did not understand Great White Pines as grandfathers with their own stories to tell, nor did they understand the lifeblood of the maple, and its gift to the Anishinaabeg. Reciprocal and interconnected lifeways were beyond their conception. To them, the land, Trees, and all that grew thereupon was something to be molded, dominated, and made to do their bidding. Anishinaabe writer Lawrence W. Gross might argue that I was born into the Anishinaabeg, and First Nations Apocalypse. As an Oshki Anishinaabe, I was and am displaced from my people, our heritage and value structures. I did not experience the loss of language and lifeways by degrees; I was left remnants for which to rebuild a life. The microcosm of my childhood years in Idaho reflect a massive cultural, land, value, and perception loss that proceeded those years. I would inquire how does one heal from that?

To heal, to address socio-ecological destruction; not only do we need to address our perceptions and actions as individuals, we also must address the social value norms and policies that persuade and guide us toward actions. Author Chris J. Cuomo writes in, “An Ethic of Flourishing” that “the importance of feeling oneself and identifying one’s own interests in ecological contexts cannot be overlooked” (Cuomo 130). Indeed, knowing oneself and one’s own bias is essential to see and understand another’s point of view. Cuomo goes on to say, “In fact, identifying one’s own complicated, conflicting feelings and interests may be the prerequisite to empathizing with another” (Cuomo 130). This concept of empathizing with another is vital to establish healthy relations with communities that hold differing worldviews.

We are greatly disconnected from who we really are in the world. In the Anishinaabe, way of seeing, part of the remedy would be to nurture connection and help an individual or community come back to themselves through a holistic approach. It is likely that approach would address disconnection from self, and others, and foster reconnection with self, and others, and a coming back to practical values norms that serve the whole of the community meaning *everyone* human and more-than-human. We tend to see the parts of ourselves and our lives as disconnected or separate, but they’re not separate. The past affects who we are today, who we choose to be. Opposing perspectives are the common viewpoints but they need not be and in fact these oppositional approaches hinder our progress as human beings. The devastation the Forest Service enacted upon the twenty acres I grew up on as small child was minor in comparison to what happened at White Earth and other places. But its effect, and the lack of understanding one small child’s worldview received, was similar to that of the White Earth, Anishinaabeg.

Rice Relations, Big Business and Ecological Trauma

Since social value norms help shape the laws of society it is important to not dismiss their powerful influence. The delineation between common society's preconceived value structures and those that are different from them is often cause for great individual and societal discomfort. It is so important to step into that discomfort with a compassionate questioning mind, as the notions of inferior and superior deeply influence our perceptions, social structures, and approaches to ecological systems. Yet, the Anishinaabe philosophy of interdependence, and non-interference counters the practice of genetically modified foods, and now genetically modified animals, such as rabbits that glow in the dark. On the White Earth Reservation, the Anishinaabe are concerned for the wild rice stands and for good reason. LaDuke writes "There are around 6,000 bodies of water with significant wild rice beds in Minnesota or around 60,000 acres of rice. Those lakes are within close proximity to around 20,000 acres of cultivated wild rice paddies" (LaDuke 181). The proximity of cultivated rice paddies is a threat to natural rice stands. LaDuke says, "Anishinaabeg advocates have long contended that paddy rice stands are contaminating the natural rice stands" (LaDuke 181). Because Anishinaabe concerns come from the Anishinaabe, and not European American scientists, it has been difficult for the Anishinaabe to get their concerns corroborated by corporate business. In the Anishinaabe perspective the terms for what is going on is bio-colonialism and bio-piracy. LaDuke justifiably writes, "Man thinks he can improve on something that's been developing over thousands of years. Eventually, he might end up with nothing" (LaDuke 179). This is a legitimate concern considering how big businesses have begun patenting seeds and making genetic changes such as Monsanto's (GRUT) Gene Use Restriction Technology, better known as terminator seeds, which means the plants once grown will not give off viable seeds that will grow after the initial plants dies. This concept, and act of controlling the creation of life, is indeed that of bio-colonialism, and bio-piracy. Seed

is life, and as such, control over it is bio-colonialism. Creating the so-called terminator seeds is mass genocide for a life form that has the right to exist in its own context. Potentially terminator seeds could contaminate regenerative viable food stands, and thereby eliminate those food sources permanently resulting in genocide for those relatives, and lack of a food source for all who subsist from them. It is not only practical but respectful to abstain from genetically modifying a life form that exists in its own context. Lawrence W. Gross, writes in his book *Anishinaabe Ways of Knowing and Being*, that “Native Americans experienced nothing short of an apocalypse that saw not only the individual psychological trauma Brave Heart and Durans discuss but also the weakening of social institutions and a crisis in worldview” (Gross 66). It is specifically the psychological trauma and worldview I have been and want to continue discussing here.

Work Ethics, Victimhood, and Worldview

In the old days the Anishinaabe worldview was secure. The Anishinaabe were their own people; a powerful nation among nations, and there was certain pride, and respect in that understanding. With a secure worldview before colonization, the political, and social structures of the Anishinaabe worked well for the people, and their more-than-human relatives. Life was good. There was hard work, and a pride, and pleasure in that hard work. They lived close to their more-than-human relatives, and because they did every day was reminder of the gifts they gave, and a reminder to be respectful, and grateful for the abundance. When I was young before I knew anything of others beyond my mountain family, and their perceptions, I learned what it was to live in gratitude with a strong work ethic. My mother taught me what she knew of the land, and its ways, the Deer, Elk, Bear, and other more-than-human relatives. I was raised living and harvesting in large part from the landscapes around us. My mother would spend days, weeks,

sometimes the whole of hunting season, on foot, in the fall of year to find, and harvest an Elk. When she did she would be ecstatic for the bounty, sad about taking a life, and full of gratitude for the meat provided. She taught me never to take more than needed, and never to waste food, and I could not over emphasize how important these two teachings were. Nor could I adequately express the celebratory way we gathered to help carry the Elk home, hang it to cool, skin it, and take care of the meat. I have memories of cold biting the cheeks, the smell of evergreen sharp and mild at once, the gentle covering of spilled blood upon the ground. The thanks verbally and silently given to the Elk's spirit for its gift of life and sustenance to us. The slick warmth of hair and hide giving way to a sharpened blade, the love, and gratitude in that act, or the salt and brine rising over long hunks of meat in buckets soon to be hung on thin wires in long rows in a small tarpaper covered building we called the smoke house. When that meat was smoked, and cured, and put in breathable bags someplace safe for winter the feeling of accomplishment was rewarded by eating a few pieces right then and there but even then, we were cautioned to enjoy it. The supply was limited.

This was before I knew about meat in supermarkets bought and sold separated from animal and act. I was taught to work hard but it never felt like hard work. In my early life work was something to be proud of. It meant you had accomplished something, learned something, helped complete something, helped contribute to the family in some way. We all relied on one another, and we all relied on what we could procure, harvest, and take care of preserving properly. Winter was nine months long and that left three months, four maximum, to prepare for the cold season. My mother taught me to thank any animal spirit whose body I took to sustain my own life, and that I should eat whatever I took, and be respectful of the plants, and their powers to heal or kill. I learned to love the mountains, and more-than-human relatives that I grew

up with so powerfully that when it came time to leave them I almost failed. Society and society's ways felt a little harsh, and blatant to me. It was difficult to understand why outsiders called the mountains I grew up in rugged or harsh. I felt them most kind and subtle. The granite earth that coated palms after a day cutting and stacking sap-rich dead fir wood was a blessing that helped my hands grow tough for the summer season. Despite the inconsistencies of my family, I felt loved in the 80-degree hot summer sun, or the surprise spring rain, and early autumn snow. We worked in all kinds of weather and did what needed doing. If one complained, the others teased or shamed them out of it. So, I learned to be strong, kind, respectful, silent, courageous, and work hard without those descriptors. It was just the way to be.

When I left the mountains, I had grown to love at eighteen years of age and married into the family to one of my childhood abusers. I was not only loyal to a fault I was silent in large part about my family, my opinions, or the things I had learned. People in a nearby town tended to gossip about my family in the view of dumb hillbillies. While I resented the gossip, my viewpoint was: why should I correct their ignorance. As for me, I felt safer in any deserted wood than I did on any town or city street. Living near other humans was at first almost impossible for me. My senses felt inundated and swamped with noise, smells, sights that felt harsh and loud to me. My family had no electricity or telephone, and the only way to reach them was to go visit or write a letter and mail it. I felt as if a giant hole had ripped through my middle, and there was no assuaging my grief. Retrospectively, I now understand many factors differently, and have not only the words but the ability to communicate what I once could not. I grew up in an entirely different worldview than is common; I also grew up close to the land, and my more-than human relatives, in an extremely close-knit family rife with huge dysfunctions, and terrible emotional, and physical abuse, and trauma. When I moved away at eighteen I was suffering from culture

shock, a budding sense of realizing what I had lived through in the sense of family abuse and trauma, and a great, grand love, and loyalty for the family. Despite these budding realizations, I was alone in a world that did not understand me, or my worldview. I was married to my nine-years-older step brother who in his way loved me but was also tremendously emotionally abusive, and emotionally unavailable most of the time. While I had learned many wonderful, and solid values from my mother, I had also learned very well how to keep silent, suffer, and be a victim. In fact, I was so good at it that it nearly killed me.

Living Pluralism and Transcending Victimhood

Now to the reasons I share this story; in the Anishinaabe way, telling this story functions on many levels: a reader gets to know some of my worldview, gets a picture to some degree of what my childhood was like, and imbedded throughout are some key tenets I grew up living by and some I still keep, and in telling my story I share the history, the values, and free myself from the margins of the page as an Oshki Anishinaabe (new Anishinaabe) estranged from my people. I am demonstrating a living pluralism.

What do I mean living pluralism? I am writing a thesis from a pluralistic perspective in that I am seeking to engage and communicate across lines of difference in academia. I am a product of a shattered traditional worldview that can no longer fully operate in contemporary times, therefore, I must accommodate or become a victim. While I suffered and lived through tremendous abuse from my family, I also love them, forgive them, and to some degree understand them. None of this means I condone the behaviors that caused such trauma. These behaviors and actions were enacted out of my family's own shattered history and soul wounds. They are a manifestation of an earlier violence already survived. That's living pluralism. It is

living it, being it, not just discussing it on a page. It is being the dichotomy of holding an understanding of more than one worldview, more than one perspective, adapting my peoples' traditional ways to exist in a new world because the old one was destroyed, as Lawrence W. Gross said, by an apocalypse.

For my part as an Oshki Anishinaabe, I say mainstream society tends not to realize its science and common value norms cause harm when not used prudently with forethought. Questions need to be asked, such as whether the theories, social structures, and policies guiding mainstream social value-norms are still serving society well. Such underlying value norms like an educational pedagogy that tends to communicate mainly in dialectics can seriously inhibit healthy policies, individual growth, and understanding. The implicit notions in the governing *economic logic* that diverse ethnic pedagogies are ill-informed proliferate and influence healthy policies and growth in America today. Looking to such community systems as those of the Anishinaabeg for reconstructive examples can nurture healthier communities that can thereby live, and grow into dynamic healthier ecosystems, and communities that are life sustaining rather than life draining. America is sometimes called the great melting pot. This is not a pleasant image, because a melting pot implies everyone becomes the same in culture, belief, ways of seeing the world, and politics; in a melting pot, all differing factors coalesce into one. While I am advocating restructuring and see the need for an improved set of common social value norms and perceptions, this does not mean everything, and everyone is the same and must have the same things. Rather it advocates respect, a re-seeing of who we are, and how we operate in the world so that we can grow toward healthier, more interconnected ways of life.

Commodification and Anishinaabe Perspectives

We are interconnected to all beings and to everything. If we let *only* our basic selves (survivor instincts) rule, we will continue to harm each other and the world. Ethics such as the idea of commodification disconnect things, places, foods, peoples, and the more-than-human world from the experiences that gave these things, places, foods, people, the more-than-human world their importance and value in the first place. We now live in a society based largely on consumerism, and technology growth. There is a place for these in society; however, them being a primary focus begs the question: have we become derailed from what matters most in the flux, and shadows of a country bent on growing, proving its place in the world? Are there not pluralistic methodologies that could inform our social and ecological practices in the world?

Part of being conscious and conscientious for me is about not placing self above other life forms but to ask myself how am I in relationship to them? Furthermore, how can I continue to live and be in a relationship with more-than-human persons? If I only seek material gain without adhering to my relationship with the more-than-human world, I lack much in personal and ecological foresight. The consequences can be dire. The identity and belief structures of the Anishinaabeg contribute to the natural environments in which they live. Winona LaDuke says, “Native people continue, as we have for centuries, to always express our thankfulness to Creation—in our prayers, our songs and our understanding of the sacredness of land” (LaDuke 15). It becomes apparent that Anishinaabeg perspectives hold that land and place contain the sacred. Their sense of place is located in their language, in their mind maps, and cultural traditions. All of these inform their worldview, and understanding of land, and place, and their place within it. LaDuke says “Wherever Indigenous peoples still remain, there is also a corresponding enclave of biodiversity. Trickles of rivers still running in the Northwest are home to the salmon still being sung back by Native people” (LaDuke 1). Note she says *sung back*. In

this worldview, with Native human's help, the Salmon find their way home to the rivers. These same Salmon were traditionally a large part of their economy and communal activities, and these uses did not preclude human responsibility to both sing them back and remain respectful in their harvesting. It is this responsibility and respect that fosters interdependent perceptions, and actions, that contribute to the good of both human, and more-than human persons.

White Earth, Economic Logic, and The Wiindigoo

Winona LaDuke writes, "In 1867, the White Earth reservation was created, reserving some 36 townships of land to the Anishinaabeg, a land of natural wealth and beauty, over two thirds of which was covered with huge white pines and beautiful maples" (LaDuke 117). LaDuke says *was covered* meaning it is not covered by over two thirds anymore. What happened? Physical and cognitive imperialism, interference, and economic voracity happened, and it did not perceive nor care about its impact upon land and people. That interference and economic voracity were not fueled by a dialogic pluralist viewpoint. It could not see or value the interdependence and connection between the trees and their human counterparts, the Anishinaabe, all co-existing there on the White Earth reservation.

The Anishinaabe, like many other Indigenous people, have struggled to hold on to who they are, their way of life, and still deal with the cognitive, ethnic, and economic domination of their homelands, and their people by a dominant and culturally different group of people. LaDuke continues, "Twenty-two years later, the 1889 Nelson Act opened up the White Earth reservation to allotment and annexed four townships with the most white pines for the state of Minnesota" (LaDuke 118). She goes on to say, "Not content to take just the great pines, the lumber companies and land speculators set their eyes upon the land itself. Mechanisms were set

in place to pry the land from children at boarding school, blind women living in overcrowded housing, soldiers at war, veterans, and those who could not read or write English” (LaDuke 118-119). Apocalypse indeed. The interference, domination, and economic greed displaced Anishinaabe peoples, and changed the way they lived and functioned as a people, and the very face of the landscape upon which they live. Physical and spiritual connections were severely damaged or displaced in the wake of economic want. We humans are a dichotomy, at once fragile and resilient; this is also what makes us both a beautiful species and simultaneously, susceptible to unhealthy appetites.

In the Anishinaabe reality, the way to protect against the weendigo is to be mindful of others and have balance, moderation, and understanding of your own basic desires; much like my mother taught me about harvesting. Unlike the common examples in American society today that insist and persuade people to consistently *upgrade* their vehicles, their phones, their appliances and more, even though the original devices still work well, a kind of voracious want is encouraged through the *marketing values* in the American culture. The convincing *psychological warfare* of marketing values disguises the effects of such insatiable consumption. Under this kind of consistent influence, people begin perceiving the latest device as something that is *required* for happiness and fulfillment in life. Rather than realizing the deeper truth – that happiness and fulfillment come from within us and from our contribution to the world, the feeling of immediate gratification is overtly, and subliminally, marketed as a positive attribute. Value norms then gradually become conditioned to an acquisitive behavioral pattern that encourages momentary happiness in lieu of enduring happiness for which one must work.

Selfishness, Work Ethics, and Kindness

Remember the Anishinaabe *valued* work, as Johnston wrote, “Work was a chief ethic” (Johnston xix). Work as a value norm applies to physical, spiritual, and self-work. According to Martin E. P. Seligman, in his book *Authentic Happiness*, “It is important to distinguish your momentary happiness from your enduring level of happiness. Momentary happiness can easily be increased by any number of uplifts, such as chocolate, a comedy film, a back rub, a compliment, flowers, or new blouse” (Seligman 45). Notice how many of these transitory uplifts require purchasing something. Lasting happiness comes from how we feel about ourselves in the world, not from things we acquire, rather experiences we accrue, usually experiences that contribute to others’ well-being. Living in such a way requires an awareness of ourselves and others, a kindness extended to others. When we are kind to others and have an awareness of self, among others, two primary things happen, kindness tends to beget kindness and self-awareness make us alert to our own biased perceptions and wants which help us to curb voracious appetites.

For the Anishinaabeg there are societal concepts that view everyone in the biotic community as relatives’ co-tenants of the earth. Perceiving the whole biotic community as relatives inspires a natural normal kind of personal responsibility for the more-than-human residents and environments in the world. The Anishinaabe weendigo stand as powerful metaphors that speak directly to our failings. In the Anishinaabe reality, community members rely upon each other as well as remind each other of their place in the cosmos, and the values needed for a good life. Johnston says, “The old people repeatedly warned, ‘Not too much. Think of tomorrow, next winter. *Kegoh zaum Baenuk!* Think of others! Balance, moderation, self-control” (Johnston 223). Traditional Anishinaabe pluralistic perceptions and moral values of living in harmony with all relations are vitally important in today’s world. Winona LaDuke writes, “We are not going anywhere. Generation after generation, we look each other in the

eyes—our ancestors in the past, we ourselves today, and tomorrow our descendants. Will we look to create isolation, or will we look to create relationship?” (LaDuke 227-228). It’s a valid question for us all; one that asks us to become aware to what has been lying dormant there inside us, our interconnections to all living beings, to our more-than-human relatives, to each other. The Anishinaabeg are aware and accepting of human shortcomings but selfishness is the one they hold up as the worst shortcoming a human being can possess.

Selfishness in the social sense of value norms leads to a kind of conceit that takes away from community participation and values. The Anishinaabe consciousness understands that selfishness leads to the *othering* processes that allow human beings to dominate other human beings and the more-than-human world. Indeed, selfishness erodes the generous and fulfilled aspects of self that help keep a person and a community whole and healthy. A smaller self-seeking self that always wants regardless of how much it already has – is always hungry for more. Like the Weendigo, the appetite for more becomes insatiable. Societies and societal structures, along with their religious and spiritual traditions, are commendable in their capacity to adapt and grow to accommodate changing circumstance. It is this capacity to grow and adapt that could allow traditional Anishinaabe perspectives and methodology to inform us Oshki Anishinaabe in the world today. The solid value norms of the traditional Anishinaabe can help heal our damaged sense of self as well as address our current approaches to the natural world. It is important to understand and be aware that societal structures are created, and anything created can be modified. How the traditional Anishinaabeg live their societal value norms and the example of their willingness and flexibility to grow beyond mistaken assumptions and actions is a commendable example.

As a niche culture affected by the American society the Anishinaabeg are stretching and growing beyond their past colonized limitations and mistakes. LaDuke says, “River connectivity is a phrase that is lived by the lake sturgeon of central North America. Ancient beings whose presence graced the stories, songs, and memories of countless generations of people, these large freshwater fish, called *namewag* in *Ojibwe*, were banished by greed” (LaDuke 227). First, she tells what went wrong: that greed, a value norm that crept into their society, had made the *namewag* (sturgeon) extinct in waters near and around the Anishinaabe. Greed was not originally a value in Anishinaabe culture; rather greed as a value was abhorred as one of the worst failings in an individual. LaDuke goes on to say, “*bi azhi-giiewewag omaa* (they are returning here)” (LaDuke 227). Realizing their mistake, the Anishinaabeg began the work of taking actions to make a difference. LaDuke says, “Today, with the dreams and hands of fisheries biologists, tribal members, and some luck, they are returning to the rivers and lakes of the forest country just west of the Great Lakes, returning in their own glory” (LaDuke 227). Here they have taken actions and begun reclaiming their old ways of connection to more-than-human others. LaDuke goes on to say, “We have told ourselves that we could live in isolation from other species, not perceiving our connections to the larger world, thinking that we do not have responsibilities, and that we are not connected to each other” (LaDuke 227). She is clearly implying that denying that responsibility and becoming disconnected have been detrimental to the Anishinaabeg communities which, keep in mind, include the more-than-human relatives living among and around them. Holding to connection and respect for the more-than-human individuals, in the face of a larger society who does not share that same connection or respect, can be difficult, hence our need as the Oshki Anishinaabeg to adapt and help create some social reform that would address the vast ecological damage done and still being done. This means we must be pluralistic, we

must find ways to communicate across the lines of difference. The old world isn't coming back, and its loss is incomparable, yet if we wish to heal we must bring the traditional ways forward into the new paradigm.

For the Anishinaabe the *Namewag* (Sturgeon), serve as powerful teachers and reminders of how destructive humans have been on the ecosystems which they inhabit. The *Namewag* (Sturgeon) have also been an entity of future hope. The Anishinaabe are making progress in re-introducing the *Namewag* into their river systems. This however, leads to larger concerns and questions about how to deal with related issues such as, coal plant pollution, paper mills, and dams, all damaging the water quality and preventing and or inhibiting the fish's health and movement. Note all the above-mentioned challenges are directly related to economic growth. How then do we re-see economic growth? The answers, I believe, lie at least in part in the traditional perspectives and ways of the Anishinaabe. The long life of the *Namewag* (Sturgeon) and the Anishinaabe connection to their water relatives have many things to teach them and society. If we contaminate the world we live in and teach our children narrow hierarchical thinking, that is exactly what they will reflect into a world that is full of multiplicity.

The effort to earn more and make work easier by mechanizing many aspects of how we work has had detrimental effects on both humans and the more-than-human world. This is not to say mechanization must be bad – it too could grow into something healthy. The point here is that for that to happen there must be a shift in perspectives: a regaining or reestablishing of healthy value norms based on more than acquiring and growth of the gross domestic product. This is a viewpoint that does not acknowledge what is sentient and deserving of recognition as an entity in and of itself. LaDuke's suggestions for understanding and healing are filled with the power of recognizing and living with the sacred all around us. The *Namewag* imbue us with a sense of

river connectivity that teaches us about the interconnectedness of all living beings. How societal value norms are taught can allow us to live in harmony with all our relatives.

For the Anishinaabe “There (...) (are) realities and presences in life other than the corporeal and the material. The spirit, the manitou, the mystery, were part of everyday life and could not be separated from it” (Johnston xviii). Pretentiousness, the irreverence of life, and of sacred and spiritual matters is not a value in Anishinaabe reality. To preserve for the sheer sake of concern of “resource depletion” is and was not the priority, the concern lay in not offending the manitous or the animals’ spirit, and it lay in respecting our relatives who deserve the good life as much we do. These pluralistic value norms contain dialogic approaches that seek to communicate and or to understand all our relatives. Pluralism is the mechanism that allows us tolerance as individuals and cultures not only to coexist with each other but also actively seek to understand across lines of difference. It does not mean we give up or lose our own identities or perceptions but rather we seek engagement and dialogue with those cultural, cognitive, and ethnically different than ourselves, rather than dominance. Until we see the limitations of our own culture and language paradigm, understanding each other is problematic. It is this very difference amongst us that pushes us to grow beyond previous boundaries and that can give us that advantage of living pluralism. A willingness to own our biased perceptions and to understand another allows us to appreciate a worldview different from our own.

Back to L.W. Gross’s apocalypse, in *Life Stages and Native Women: Memory, Teachings, and Story Medicine* Lynn Anderson writes “Two colonial tools aimed at dismantling traditional kinship systems were particularly devastating: residential schools and the child welfare system” (Anderson 30). Kinship systems were and are a fundamental part of how Anishinaabe communities operate. The “residential schools” Anderson refers to were much more damaging

then their name implies, Anderson writes “Operating from 1879 to 1996, residential schools ripped the heart out of communities by taking their children to institutions where many were physically, sexually, emotionally, and spiritually abused (Anderson 30). Had I been born on the reservation I would have had to go to one of those schools. The harm this caused is understood better, when we know that for the Anishinaabe healthy society, and healthy communities start with family, *even* before a child is born. For example, Mosôm Danny says in *Life Stages and Native Women* that “healthy communities began with the care and celebration of each individual from the earliest stages. He pointed out that pregnancy was generally considered a sacred time; a time to honour the spirit that was coming as well as the mother who carried that spirit” (Anderson 42-43). Imagine how different our modern families would be if mother and child were so fully loved, supported, and appreciated from the very beginning.

In traditional Anishinaabe settings, there was collective responsibility toward children brought into the world that included the whole community not just the biological parents of a child. In that setting “Children were raised as autonomous individuals who were given a lot of freedom while also being expected to maintain responsibilities to family and community” (Anderson 66). This allowed the parents time to contribute to the community as well as their children and it allowed the community to contribute to the children of the next generation. As stated in *Life Stages and Native Women* “All children belonged, and ‘everybody had a kind word” (Anderson 70). While it is true the whole community participated in the raising of children and worked to foster positive character by their own examples, there were distinct roles in childrearing applied throughout the family and community. Physical punishment was not encouraged. Rather, an expectation of an individual held by most peers and elders was what held adults and children alike accountable for their words and deeds. Today we might use the more

familiar words: peer pressure. Note accountability and lack of violence are both strongly held values. In the Anishinaabe world children learn family law, and community law, and these two are interdisciplinary, and in harmony with each other rather than opposing ideals. Remember community for the Anishinaabe includes the more-than human world. Nurturing a dialogic conversation in each individual throughout the community, promotes Anishinaabe values, and the feeling that each individual is irreplaceable and of inherent value to the community. When we lose sight of the interconnections, we lose a part of ourselves. When we remember our interconnections, we seek to communicate across lines of difference because in truth there is no other. We are all in this together.

Chapter Two

Healing, the Anishinaabe Identity, and The Stories We Tell

“We are never so poor that we cannot bless another human being, are we? So it is that every evil, whether moral or material, results in good. You’ll see.”

— Louise Erdrich, *The Round House*

Othering

We too easily want to *other* those who have hurt us. Let us not become that which we have turned away from all along. Many leaders in the U.S. government, federal and state, have historically embraced the “kill the Indian save the man” philosophy. Actions were taken to present Native Americans to the public in a diminished and subverted light. Those actions filled the coming people with twisted stories, weaving their magic, blinding many the newcomer to the validity of the Native presence in a land that was their own. The newcomer was presented with the ideology of a “new world,” an unoccupied land. Native people were marginalized and

presented as much less than they were, and that perception still affects us. These things are true but they are not this story.

We know internal fear and greed ran rampant and that many of the coming people historically were disconnected from themselves, from others, from the more-than-human world. We human beings can so easily make an *other* of those who have hurt us. But if we listen to the stories, we Anishinaabeg knew in advance. LaDuke writes, “There were stories all along. The same prophecies that directed the movement of the Anishinaabeg told of the coming of the light-skinned people and the hard times for the Anishinaabeg. Those same prophecies spoke of the Oshki Anishinaabeg, the new people, who came later” (LaDuke 18). For the Anishinaabeg there was a fluidity and pluralism in the very beginning and we can see how these values shift with the time progression and colonial occupation. Perhaps we Oshki Anishinaabeg can begin to have compassion for the atrocities prophesied and witnessed, while still holding to our own Anishinaabe value norms in the wake of such incredible destruction. If we can do this, it will help us move into a healthier future.

We must be careful in our resistance, in our survivance, that we do not become that which we resist: full of greed, spite, hate, and a great ignorance. We must be careful not to become too disconnected and so lost in the pain and trauma that we forget who we are. LaDuke writes, “The white man’s government would have flicked the Anishinaabeg aside, flicked them all aside with the stroke of a pen on a sheet of paper. Except the paper, the *masiniaigin*, was not the land and it was not the people and it was not the magic. It was just the paper” (LaDuke 24). The truth of this statement holds power. With the repetition of what the paper was not LaDuke makes a powerful statement about the Anishinaabeg, about the US government, about the Anishinaabe resilience, tenacity, connection, and love. It all comes back to stories. Anything can

be said and written. It is the first act of creation and whole generations have grown up being taught lies about who Natives are by the ignorant absence of curriculum or by choice. This story works to not only move Natives into the margins but to remove Natives from the page. In the end it's our stories that break down boundaries, it's our stories that connect us, it's our stories that heal us. Let's keep telling and writing our stories for in so doing we rewrite removal and marginalization, we reconnect and heal in a new paradigm.

Speaking Our Stories

Telling our stories in the present heals us; writing and speaking our histories gives us the power to name and claim. In speaking, we break bonds, boundaries, and complacency. Words matter regardless of the language they are written in. To have a common language for which to share and distinct languages within lends a beautiful variety and plurality to the conversations between culturally distinct peoples, their worldviews, and ruling governments. There is a magic in the old stories, in the communal stories, that reconnects us to ourselves as well as to community members if we allow it to enter our hearts and reside there.

My mother said “we are part Chippewa and Ute maybe some Choctaw.” People always ask how did those two get together? My own family history is as fractured and damaged as a rez car on its last leg. No one quite knows where it came from or how many more miles it has. I have spent my life rollicking from one extreme to the next, never quite feeling I belonged except in the forest. There I feel at home. Near any living source of water my soul quiets and I can breathe.

My husband said.... ”your thesis is not your thesis....I do not know what it is but there is more going on with it than just your thesis.” I only nodded acquiescence, unable to explain, fear the block as visceral as any iron tight hand over the mouth squeezing back words that tumbled in

my mind chaotically. There is a pain in connection because we understand we are not separate from any other person human and more-than-human. In connection, we must recognize the truth no matter how ugly or beautiful. It takes tremendous strength to stay connected in a world so filled with so many in need of healing and so full of disconnection. How do we find our way as the Oshki Anishinaabeg that were prophesied? How can we turn the prophesy of hard times and Oshki Anishinaabeg into a positive fuel to regain our sense of personal power as individuals and as communities?

The partial and full assimilation of the Anishinaabe, indeed the native, diaspora since occupation has been tremendous. It has left behind a world shattered within an imperialistic paradigm. The imperial worldview sees anything different from what it knows as a threat, as wrong. It is a worldview that cannot fathom a true individual within the community, because its own perceptions say that this is impossible to have and maintain unity. It is a worldview that does not gracefully recognize different as beautiful, as the very thing that inspires, and asks us to grow into our full selves.

I grew up mostly near the top of a mountain, in the Idaho mountains beginning in 1984. Before that my world up to four years of age was a thing of love filled with warm Arizona memories mostly of my mother and then my brother. My mother remarried when I was four and our new Dad moved us from Arizona to 7,000 feet elevation into the Panhandle Mountains of Idaho. My formal education was sketchy, almost non-existent, until I turned nine and learned to read. Before age of nine, I was taught to haul water from the spring a mile away from the small log cabin we lived in, to hunt wild game, to harvest wild plants and herbs, and fruit wild and domesticated in summer, and process it for winter. I was taught to read the weather with the same ease of reading a book, shoot a gun, field dress wild game, chop wood, smoke jerk meat,

drying and canning fruits and veggies, build a fire, cook from scratch, survival skills in the wild. I was taught a kind of generous and knowing arrogance for city dwellers. My Dad taught me hardcore Christian ethics with the odd Diné belief mixed in here and there. My mother did not claim an organized religion but said she believed in God the Creator. She taught me to respect all life. My mother's connection to land and place was her individual medicine, her strong point. She said it was in her DNA, that she might look mostly white, but she connected more strongly with her native heritage. She taught the love of the land and its meanings well. She taught me to have respect for my Native Ancestors even though we did not know their names. She told me I could ask my great great grandfather for help if needed. My mother, green eyed, high cheekbones, auburn haired, light skinned, would have been born decades earlier if she could have had the choice. Though she was lacking in formal education and graces she made up for that in her sincerity, striving for honesty, and her amazing sensitivity in a world that tried to squash it out of her.

Ishkwegaabawiiwes' Story and Mine

When reading LaDuke's *Last Standing Woman*, "The Border 1862," I was drawn in almost like there was magic in the Anishinaabe words at once foreign and familiar. This section of *Last Standing Woman* is rich in Anishinaabe and Lakota history; it is powerfully lyrical and poignant, telling of the main character Anishinaabe woman Ishkwegaabawiiwe, her history, her first marriage, and her healing in a time of great upheaval. I could relate to Ishkwegaabawiiwe. LaDuke wrote, "Perhaps the magnetism of the border and the battles of others came to her because she was a veteran of her own battle, her own war" (LaDuke 25). My battles came when I was too young to understand they were battles. My battles were mostly with two brothers each fighting over what neither could truly have, and later my battles for the safety of my nieces and

nephews were with the one brother's wife. The war was taking back myself, my personal power, my integrity in a family dark with secrets. My burning shame was the shadow I hid behind for many years. My story is different from Ishkwegaabawiiwe's, yet I understood when LaDuke wrote, "He had captured her with medicine, but he did not truly want her. He liked her by his fire and in his bed. But he did not care for her soul, did not truly care for her. She was just his possession, one of many" (LaDuke 26). I was caught by a dark kind of magic when I was four and my mother married the man I call father and moved deep into the forest and up into the mountains with him and his sons. His son took my hand and led me alone over the hill. I felt the warm splashes of sun upon my skin turn cool as down deep into the dark damp forest he led me, where the moss grows next to ferns. He was quiet, and his hands shook when he turned me to face away from him and pulled down my pants. My skin goose bumped, and the forest no longer seemed magical. I was cold and suddenly terrified. Later he took my hand and walked with me silently up the steep hill through patches of shade out into the bright sunlit day. Telling me as we got close to the cabin and home that I was not to tell anyone what *we* had done, or *we* would get into trouble, we would be whipped. I did not understand his emphasis on *we* except to know somehow, I had become complicit in the actions he took. I asked him what whipped meant and he explained it was when someone took a belt or stick and hit you with it to punish you. I had never been hit up to that point and the thought scared me. Later many times his younger brother took me into the woods alone. The first brother broke my trust in the world, the second wove his magic and my young self had no defense from him or how his words and actions wore away at my soul, my sense of safety, and self-value. Unlike Ishkwegaabawiiwe, it wouldn't be until I was a grown woman that I learned how to use both my words and my skinning knife to serve and protect me.

In my late teens I married the second brother unable to say no, unable to break my long silence, unable to claim my voice and personal power. I spent five and half years with him until I no longer was able to live with the mistreatment and my body, without my permission, started shutting down. I had to choose, choose life and get out or stay and die. I felt, like Ishkwegaabawiiwe's husband, mine didn't care for me either. Also like Ishkwegaabawiiwe, when his magic was first used we were deep in the forest alone and later I kept my silence not for pride but shame. It took me a long time to know it wasn't my fault. He hurt me to my very soul and the wound would not go away, and it left me powerless until the very last when I broke free. When I did break free, I was unaware of my own true powers and feeling powerless, life was not balanced or in harmony for some years.

Just as I cannot fully separate the personal from family, community, and academic, there is both a personal and a larger story being told in "The Border 1862" and LaDuke deftly brings to life the beautiful, complicated, and painful history of that era. The two stories being told through "The Border 1862" are the personal story and the other is part of the story of the Anishinaabeg. In the personal story, Ishkwegaabawiiwe takes herself back. LaDuke writes, "She reclaimed first her hands, the soft touch. Moccasins she still made for him: it was the duty of a wife, the example for the family. But leggings and shirts he could fashion himself" (LaDuke 28). In taking back herself while still living with her husband, Ishkwegaabawiiwe demonstrates a living pluralism. Pluralism seeks to understand and communicate or coexist with difference. In living pluralism, she is demonstrating an understanding of her husband, and his failings, and her wounds from it, and healing herself while in the same space she was first wounded. She sees his point of view even though she does not agree with it and in fact voices her own opinion, yet she still makes him moccasins, as it is the duty of a wife. In healing herself she denies his greed and

violence and transcends victimhood. Ishkwegaabawiiwe takes back her power while still in the situation that took it. This stands as a powerful lesson to contemporary Anishinaabe living in a postcolonial era. For me the story reminded me that I can reclaim those broken parts of myself and heal them. Our stories connect us in powerful ways and *Last Standing Woman* has served the important role of reawakening me to my own personal power and self-will. The stories have reminded me on a new level I am not alone, reminded me that what I survived growing up, while grim, could have been worse, that the boundary between reservation Indian and non-reservation is perception and I have a choice in my perceptions.

Mixed Blood and the Oshki Anishinaabe

Alanis, daughter to Jim Nordstrom and Maura Coningham, is a mixed blood Anishinaabe character in *Last Standing Woman* I identify with for many reasons. Two of which are, she is of mixed Anishinaabe and Irish descent and she did not grow up on any Anishinaabe reservation. Because of her upbringing and mixed blood, she could choose how much to participate with her Anishinaabe identity. Like Alanis's in *Last Standing Woman's* "Veterans of Domestic Wars," I have always been able to sit on the side lines. Until recent years I saw myself outside the tribe. There was an invisible boundary for me because of my own perceptions about being of mixed descent and I grew up far outside reservation borders. I was like Alanis when she is shot at in "Veterans of Domestic Wars," LaDuke writes, "The bullets had not hit her, had not torn into her physical body and shattered bones and spilled blood, but the bullets had hit her just the same, hit her somewhere else deep inside" (LaDuke 187). Reading *Last Standing Woman* had a similar effect on me: reading the Anishinaabemowin (*Anishinaabe language*) calling to parts of me at once foreign and familiar, the stories bringing up my own past and echoing in my soul in a way I cannot ignore. There has always been a boundary in my perceptions keeping me from connecting

with my human relatives because I am not a reservation Native. I am not a full blood. I only know some of my family history, and I cannot even name my clan. I know some old values, but not powwow etiquette. My family life was twisted and a painful mix of love and abuse. Therefore, I have always held myself on the side lines too insecure in myself and my identity to participate, yet longing for the connection. For Alanis in *Last Standing Woman*, half Irish, half Anishinaabe, she could always choose how to present herself, and being a reporter helped her stay objective. Like Alanis, I have had a choice. LaDuke says, “Alanis adopted a survival strategy, one that suited her well: Alanis was conveniently Indian. Powwows, yes, but from the bleachers. Political events and rallies, yes, if the weather was nice and if interesting speakers or her friends were attending. Ceremonies, only when she was really in a bind. Occupations definitely not” (LaDuke 183). Alanis could choose to not be uncomfortable, choose how involved she wanted to be, but these were not the choices left to her relatives on the reservation White Earth. If they wanted a better life they had to work at it, even fight for it. Just as, “The bullets had destroyed the boundaries in her mind, and the ricochet reverberated through her very soul” (187 LaDuke), Alanis could no longer stay completely objective. She returned to White Earth for the annual Powwow, “she rested on the bleachers, sitting with Elaine. Together, they admired the dancers. She felt more at home than she had in a long time” (LaDuke 220). Alanis had distant memories and a feeling of something missing for all her life until coming home to White Earth, home of her father. She had in her own time and way come home. Just as the people of White Earth have to work for things to be better, so too does each of us if we want to heal and be whole.

The Power of Self Reclamation

When I took back myself, first I took back my body, and then my space, as the man I was married to was family, I felt it my duty to be certain others didn't punish him. I didn't want a family war in regaining myself and I contacted each one of our ten brothers and sisters, stating that I hoped they would be kind and not take sides or make he nor I talk about and blame each other for the dissolution of the marriage. The marriage I knew to be sham, but I had held my silence and secrets so well for so long no one knew. Most were dismayed and shocked by the dissolution of the marriage. In my family, we are some powerful mix of partially assimilated Indian and non-Indian and the worldview can shift dramatically from sibling to sibling. It would take me years to reclaim a sense of serenity in my soul, the whole of myself and my sense of value in the world. Indeed, I am still reclaiming parts of myself; the stories and reading the language of Anishinaabemowin in *Last Standing Woman* has shaken me from some strange kind of numb wandering loss. For me Giiwedahn (*coming home*) is a reclaiming of myself and healing all the damaged pieces, telling my story and hearing others, healing the shame and pain of an abusive childhood. Reading and hearing Anishinaabe stories, hearing Anishinaabemowin in online courses has touched that part of me buried and begun to set it free. In reading LaDuke, Vizenor, Johnston, and Anderson I could feel in myself a kind of Giiwedahn, *coming home*. Many of Anishinaabe stories are like mine. There was and is no boundary though I had perceived one. Just because I did not grow up on the reservation didn't make me any more or less Anishinaabe. One can maintain their own identity in a larger network of identities while living amongst a prevalent worldview that is not your own. Maintaining connections with those of similar mind helps, more importantly remembering the old ways of seeing the self in other. Not making an *other* of another person different than ourselves can help us in that endeavor. Not

losing ourselves to the very thinking we understand as different from our own can be a delicate and challenging dance in contemporary times with such a wide spread Native diaspora.

Anishinaabe identity is traditionally pluralistic and fluid held within a steady moral framework and they were not dogmatic. Identity structures are not static entities but fluid moving structures that grow with a person and a people. For the Anishinaabe they understood worldviews different from their own and held a respect for the difference while still holding to their own ways and language. For example, the Anishinaabe were a forest people but beyond their forest lived the Lakota a plains people with a different language and lifeway. As always with peoples there were altercations but there was also respect and intermarrying; there was a border between them and they respected it.

Pluralism Across Border Lines

We can see evidence of this in *Last Standing Woman* especially in the older stories and as the book moves toward the future. We can also see how colonialism, and the Nelson Act of 1889, and boarding schools changed and affected the Anishinaabe identity, perceptions, relationships with land and people and community structures. An example of pluralism early in *Last Standing Woman* is when Ishkwegaabawiiwe travels with her brother again to the border of Anishinaabe and Dakota Territory during Little Crow's War. LaDuke writes, "The *Anishinaabeg* knew that the white man would punish all Indians for the actions of a few. The white man chose not to tell the difference. The *Anishinaabeg* also knew that the Dakota would need help, that there would be refugees. They were the *Anishinaabeg's* most honored enemies, centuries of a border meant generations of war, retaliation, trade, hostages, love, and marriage" (LaDuke 33). The generous acceptance and pluralism brought to life in these few words remind us we are not

separate from one another. That Ishkwegaabawiiwe and her brother chose to travel to the border of their enemy to help them illustrates choosing one's own path while still honoring another's different path. She writes, "A sorrow for the Dakota would be a sorrow for the *Anishinaabeg*" (LaDuke 33). In these few words, she expresses the interconnection of the two distinct peoples, they are different in tribe and culture and yet still deeply connected with each other.

Another act that illustrates traditional views of interconnection and compassion in the novel is when Ishkwegaabawiiwe and her brother find the *Bwaanike*, the Dakota woman. Ishkwegaabawiiwe says to her brother, "I will take her." Ishkwegaabawiiwe spoke boldly before she even knew if the woman was alive. Her brother looked at her in surprise. 'I will take her with us,' Ishkwegaabawiiwe said again. 'I will take her in'" (LaDuke34). Ishkwegaabawiiwe takes in her most honored enemy and offers a home and friendship. In so doing, she is living in compassion and plurality. She holds to her own identity but honors another's way of life and the loss thereof.

I have spent much of my life trying to understand what 'normal' is. The values my mother taught were in conflict with many of my father's and the family's deep denial of its own defects has not aided my understanding. When I first began studying Anishinaabe life ways and hanging out with Indians at my University, it was the first step to a kind of coming home. A young Blackfoot man didn't look at me like I was crazy when I spoke of the more-than-human world in terms of respect and communication with a living force. The Crow poet in another class understood my poetry. I began to reclaim bits and pieces of my heritage, history and its meanings; it is an ongoing work. Though I am working to untangle the family knot to know what clan I hail from, I am not enrolled. I do not want to be enrolled, not because I am not Anishinaabe but because blood quantum is a tool of colonialism that arrogantly assumes it can

say who is Indian and who is not. It matters not to me what the U.S. government thinks of my Indian-ness. It matters what I think of it and my relatives. I would be one of those Oshki Anishinaabe, new people, adrift from my clan but steady in my relations with the earth and the more-than-human world with a growing hope for future interactions and healing with my human relations yet unnamed.

Anishinaabeg Diaspora

If we shift our perspective to viewing times' passage in a cyclic fashion, the field of possibility opens up. There is no longer an unknown end date looming, a push against time to complete. Perhaps in the grand cycle there is space for infinite possibility, infinite creation, and because of that years become just a rudimentary measure of times' movement. Who are the Oshki Anishinaabeg? The Anishinaabeg living in the present standing steadfast in Anishinaabe life ways and values as the cycle continues. Some of the Oshki Anishinaabeg, like living seeds on the wind have drifted beyond reservation borders, some by choice, others the younger seeds of generations past estranged from their peoples, culture, language, ethics, even worldview, and others still remain close to the traditional homelands and great lakes. They seek to heal themselves and the world around them. In *All Our Relations: Native Struggles for Land and Life*, LaDuke says, "There is no way to quantify a way of life, only a way to live it. *Minobimaatisiwin* means 'the good life'. Used in blessings, thanksgivings, and ceremonies, it refers to the lifeway, evoked in the words of Fish Clan elder and Scholar Jim Dumont" (LaDuke 132). Just what is the good life? Part of living a good life is being able to live in plurality and share histories and stories as Jim Dumont says,

Our ways are still there, our way of life. Here we are in the dying moments of the twentieth century, almost into the twenty-first century, and we say the reality that we live within is totally different from anything we ever knew. It is just a different environment, a different context. Not a very good one, not a very harmonious or balanced one, not a very healthy one, but this is the environment that we live in today. The lifeway that spoke to our people before, and gave our people life in all the generations before us, is still the way of life that will give us life today. How it will manifest itself and find expression in this new time comes as a part of the responsibility of how we go about the revival and renewal (LaDuke 132).

Part of regaining ourselves, our individual, clan, and tribal identity in a new paradigm involves remembering who we were, understanding who we are, and not losing ourselves to the very mentality and ethics our ancestors found so cannibalistic. To live *minobimaatisiwin*, live the good life, as the Oshki Anishinaabeg we must see the reality we live in and consciously choose another worldview, a less assimilated worldview, a worldview that is rigorous in its ethics but also a generous open minded dialogic pluralism. There are strong examples of this kind of worldview in LaDuke's *Last Standing Woman*, "The Border 1862". When reflecting upon her situation with her first husband Ishkwegaabawiikwe thinks, "It was not right to strike a woman. No one would have dared to do so then. No one but he. Foolish, he did not care, and he had no remorse" (LaDuke 27). Note the ethic "It was not right to strike a woman" she goes on to say "In those times, a woman's relations would have avenged such an act. A husband would have been banished" (27). LaDuke is pointing us to a clear ethic of non-violence on how to treat a spouse. At the same time it is Ishkwegaabawiikwe who is drawn to the border to battle, it is she who takes in her most honored enemy the Dakota woman and becomes her sister, her friend,

throughout the rest of their life. In this section of *Last Standing Woman* LaDuke shows us clear examples of morally acceptable behaviors and dialogic pluralism. The Dakota and Anishinaabe were enemies yet these two women from differing tribes becomes each other's best friend. The tribes intermarried with one another, the Anishinaabe remained the Anishinaabe, and the Dakota remained the Dakota, the worldview was one of dialogic pluralistic connection built into a steady moral framework. Talk about infinite possibility. Life and the world we live in is not a set of perfectly aligned nouns that label everything in a right/wrong, black/white fashion, the world is much more than this narrow field of vision. It is rich with the diversity of many differing relations, worldviews, ethnicities, and ecosystems, all defined individual yet intimately connected with each other.

The things we live through can teach us, bring us deep spiritual meaning and understanding or they can embitter us and wear away at our souls until we become that which harmed us most and repeat the cycle over and over again. Shame cannot live in a secret told; I have balked at my awakening, flinched at what others might think or say about what I have written. For in writing this I have broken a boundary, broken a deepening silence and each tear drop that falls in its pain is beautiful, each teardrop that falls is a stair step upward and I can see the light, truth will not hide. Forgiveness means life. Forgiveness isn't condoning past wrongs. It is letting go of the pain, not holding on to the sickness in the soul that destroys joy, love, hope, and energy to heal ourselves and bring about a new future. By telling my story I heal estranged and broken parts of self and identity. By owning my past, I get to name and reclaim myself. In owning the sorrow, the coldness, the violence, the loneliness, I get to reclaim the good buried under the soul sickness. By owning my individual story, healing happens and then I can remember how sweet the spring water tasted, how the bright yellow glacier lilies thickly covered

the hillsides in spring, the sweet pungent smell of arrow leaf arnica in the sunshine or see the humor in how I practiced stalking my relatives to hone my childhood image of Indian in self. I had the idea that Indians were silent, stalwart and uncomplaining, that Indians were at one with the woods and could choose to blend into the shadows or be seen, so my child self stalked my siblings and parents practicing being Indian, trying to connect with that part of my identity. I fancied myself some kind of lone wolf girl *ogichidaa*, warrior, quietly defending myself and other family members from the injustice of yet other family members. It's a strange kind of awakening layers upon layers of memory, history meaning. To see those that took and took some more, wreaking havoc on my childhood self and soul, to see them with compassion became my goal.

Boarding School, Stripping Self Identity, and Moral Direction

Boodoo Graves is the father of later White Earth tribal council member Fred Graves abuser of daughter Frances Graves. Boodoo and granddaughter Frances connect how abuse is a generational disease. Sometimes in reclaiming self and community damaging patterns of abuse and neglect must be broken for healing to happen. Assimilation policy and bordering schools wreaked havoc on community and individual identity, making it difficult for Anishinaabe and other tribal children to escape the unhealthy overlays being forced upon them. Sometimes the soul sickness that happens from enduring abuse is as deadly any bullet or knife. Sometimes people steal and take by force another's sense of self. The abused person can lose their way, their soul, their self; they walk around the world barely alive.

Boodoo Graves was someone like that. When Boodoo was young the world was alive and vibrant even though great changes had occurred and were occurring all around him. He was

vivacious until the priest father came and stole him away and forced him with other boys of his and other various tribes into a boarding school. There his sense of self, community, and dignity were stripped from him and in a final act of atrocious conduct a priest repeatedly sexually abused Boodoo and beat him and put him isolation until Boodoo gave up the physical fight. Boodoo, a young child, was essentially stripped of his sense of self, wellbeing and rightness in the world, his sense of *Minobimaatisiwin*, the good life, was altered perhaps even destroyed. For Boodoo life was pain-filled and his sense of powerlessness sickening. Between the ages of 1 and 7 children's brains do not sort out lies. They are in an almost fully receptive state, vulnerable. When we are young children we have no defense emotionally or mentally to what happens to us, we take it in until some part becomes numbed or trained to behave a certain way. It takes a strong will and help to overcome a particularly abusive childhood. We are given the impression Boodoo didn't heal, that he, in fact, repeated the cycle of abuse one and two generations down of his own free will. Except that free will part, when a child is abused and groomed to be a victim, they can forget they have other choices as an adult. Boodoo was damaged, his brain, and emotions stuck in a soul-sickening cycle of abuse for him; choice very well might have been a relative term.

Breaking Free, Reclaiming Self Identity

When I broke out of my marriage to my childhood abuser, it was because a power greater than me said, you stay, you die. If you want to keep breathing get out. I was forced to choose, and I had to discover who I was to relearn some ethics, to reclaim my voice. I did not even know what kind of food I liked. I attribute these things to the way in which we are caught and trapped as if by magic when we are young. Later people on the outside looking in wonder why don't we choose something different. We are trapped as securely as if we had manacles on our feet. We

quite literally do not know or feel we have a choice. It has taken me years to unravel why did I marry that man, why did I when I so desperately did not want to. Why did it take me staring death down to move and even then I felt shaky, unsure. So I had some understanding when reading about the Oshki Anishinaabeg, the new people, the “Ogichidaaweg, The Women’s Warrior Society 1995” in *Last Standing Women* began taking back their rights as humans and as women it was no small thing to begin breaking the cycle of abuse. They took back their prayers and ceremonies and in so doing their identities and women’s power. Recovering the drum Mesabe hid in the church rafters, these women began keeping the traditional ways. In the third moon of the Full Moon Ceremony the The Women’s Warrior Society did something tremendously just and brave. Women from the Warrior Society had taken the time to ask school age Frances Graves about her wellbeing. They knew and were convinced that Fred Graves was abusing his daughter. LaDuke wrote, “The truth was Fred Graves abused his daughter. It was an awful secret women spoke of in hushed voices and men pretended did not exist. Graves had been on the tribal council for three terms and now had a firmly entrenched base of power” (LaDuke 232). To reclaim power an individual or community has to face the ugly truths right along with the beautiful ones. In the case above tribal people know the truth but they are afraid of confronting Graves because he is in a position of power and confronting him could mean losing jobs and positions as well as dealing with potential payback. Ogichidaaweg, The Women’s Warrior Society, discuss the problem at the Full Moon Ceremony they discussed how, “Speaking out meant losing your job. ‘Besides’ most people figured, ‘the girl seemed OK, and she wasn’t the only one who had been through it’” (LaDuke 232). The first reason is direct; the decision to take no action on Frances behalf is made out of fear. But the second reason that is the beginning process of *othering*, an individual and making it ok by stating she wasn’t the first, this othering

process allows appalling things to continue to happen in community or family, and even society at large. LaDuke continues, “Most had survived, and some men actually said that ‘the experience was a rite of passage’” (LaDuke 232). This statement made by some men is yet another *othering* made worse because it does more than *othering* it is condoning a violent, harmful, body and soul sickness that is passed on through generations by repetition. By not taking action and condoning, these individuals are almost at the place of having this sickness themselves. LaDuke writes, “Gorgette did not think it was a (...) rite of passage, and neither did Kway or the other women. There had been a suicide the year before. A fourteen-year-old girl who had been molested by her uncle had blown off her head with a shotgun” (LaDuke 233). Here we get a glimpse of how harmful molestation can be made more real by the fact that an adolescent would rather die than go on living after such violation of self. Molestation is one more layer of stripping personal identity from an individual. In order to survive the victim's mind has to do some dramatic leaps, begin repressing the memory or make up a twisted story of why what's going on is ok, and even then sometimes that does not work and a life is completely lost. At the Full Moon Ceremony, Anishinaabe women discuss the issue they “acknowledged that the sickness existed, but that did not make it right. It was even worse if they let it continue. They prayed, rested, and planned” (LaDuke 233). Note they prayed first, then rested and planned. They decide to make the situation right so on one of the coldest nights of the month they stake out Fred Graves house and lay in wait to catch him red handed after coming home from the day. They watch him order his scared daughter into the house, they close in and listen and watch until they see him enter his daughters darkened room, even then, they wait timing themselves, hoping not to be too late. They sneak into his house and crouch outside the girl's window and at the right moment, “Elaine pushed open the door to the bedroom and flipped on the light switch. Suddenly the darkness in the room

was banished in the glare of the overhead light. Elaine was stunned for a moment at the sight of the man as he tried to force (...)” (LaDuke 234). The language LaDuke uses here through the rest of this passage make the scene real. The reader is as stunned as Elaine at what she is witnessing. The *darkness being banished from the room* is a signal to a larger darkness being banished from the Anishinaabe people. The *glare of the overhead light* paints a dramatic and harsh scene. As LaDuke writes about these women rushing in and purposefully catching Fred Graves in the act of trying to force himself on his daughter, the reader is caught in the scene as well. It is unusual, what we typically see are hints and after the fact accounts of what happened, but here we are flooded with the brutality of the scene visually, its impact on his daughter and the woman and the aftermath the woman have chosen for Fred. Using their ricing sticks:

“The women herded him toward the front door, raining down blows and prodding him with their ricing sticks. Lucy signaled with the porch light, and as she did so, Charlotte Oshkinnah, Kway’s mom, and another elder, waiting in their cars, switched on the headlights, illuminating the housing project block. ‘Get moving!’ Lucy screamed at him as she kicked the naked man out his front door. The man stumbled into the snow, covering his head from blows as the women herded him into the street. Fred Graves was greeted by the cars lights and the sound of car horns. The residents of the project were awakened by the light and noise and appeared on their front porches, wrapped in blankets and coats. The women chased the naked man through the housing project with the might of their ricing sticks. As he ran down the street, each family came out to look at their tribal council representative” (LaDuke 235).

Fred Graves tribal councilman had been raping and molesting his daughter, thinking he could get away with it in his position of power. Thanks to the Ogichidaaweg, The Women’s

Warrior Society, he no longer was able to continue causing pain and passing on the soul sickness to the next generation. They took his daughter in and helped her heal, helping her regain her sense of self and identity. Fred Graves faced “a sexual assault trial for abusing his daughter. Owing to his own smugness, Fred Graves made a crucial mistake of underestimating his daughter. He thought Frances would never testify against him” (LaDuke 238). Had it not been for the Ogichidaaweg and their intervention and support of her healing he might have been right. But they had helped her heal, helped her regain her sense of self and identity; these were things Fred had almost destroyed in abusing her. *Minobimaatisiwin*, the good life, is a thing one cannot live without truth, healing and healthy connections. At the trial for Fred, “Everyone could agree that there was no worse crime than stealing innocence” (LaDuke 238). During the trial LaDuke writes, “Fred was reminded one of the unfortunate things about Indian country is that everyone is related. As a consequence, when he entered the courtroom, the front three rows of observers were filled with women who were related to the family” (LaDuke 238). When the priest at the boarding school repeatedly violated young Anishinaabe Boodoo Graves he passed on an ugly illness that got passed down three generations and it was not until the third generation that some healing was to be established. The act of stealing innocence is an awful crime in and of itself but when viewed through the lens of stripping away self-determination and cultural identity structures it becomes a particularly ugly form of forced assimilation. That Fred thought his daughter would not oppose him in court speaks volumes as to the power of this particular kind of abuse and how it undermines self-determination. Just as I couldn’t claim my voice and say no to marrying my abuser in my late teens, Fred counted on his daughter not having a voice or the courage to use that voice. Frances had something I did not have at my disposal; she had a community. She had the Ogichidaaweg.

The Ogichidaaweg

Now before we start thinking in assimilated terms of the label Ogichidaaweg, The Women's Warrior Society, let us take a closer look at the word. Ogichidaa loosely translated means warrior. However, as LaDuke writes in "The Militarization of Indian Country" the meaning of "The word is perhaps better translated in the plural as Ogichidaag, which means 'those who defend the people.' Ogichidaa or Akicita is also a word shared between the Anishinaabeg and the Lakota, our 'most honored enemies'" (LaDuke 3). The Anishinaabe definition of a warrior is the definition given by Sitting Bull, Lakota chief and Holy man.

LaDuke says,

"The warrior is not someone who fights, because no one has the right to take another's life. The warrior, for us, is the one who sacrifices himself for the good of others. His task is to take care of the elderly, the defenseless, those who cannot provide for themselves and above all, the children, the future of humanity" (LaDuke 3).

Woven into this system of belief is the tenent that *no one has the right to take another's life*. This idea is contrary to popular belief of what a warrior is. The Anishinaabe warrior was a person who did their best by those in the community who could not protect and provide for themselves.

Frances Graves fell into the category of *future of humanity* and *defenseless*. The Ogichidaaweg, Women's Warrior Society, put themselves at risk to rescue Frances and to begin reclaiming healthy Anishinaabe identity, life ways, and value systems. When reading this section of *Last Standing Woman* I was again deeply moved. I have a personal understanding of the courage it takes to heal and face status quo dysfunction, putting oneself and connections at risk in so doing.

Not all Fiction, and The Good Life

Part of the reason *Last Standing Woman* is a powerful novel is because of the author's note which gives the novel a different context for the reader to relate to the material than it might have without the author's note. Winona LaDuke wrote, "This is a work of fiction although the circumstances, history, and traditional stories, as well as some of the characters, are true retold to the best of my ability" (LaDuke 10). Therefore, though it is a work of fiction *Last Standing Woman* holds lessons and history for the contemporary Anishinaabe reader. As a mixed blood, Anishinaabe, *Last Standing Woman* had the effect of obliterating many emotional and mental boundaries, helping me reclaim more of my sense of Native identity, individual identity and it was reaffirming reading of others' connection to the mother our earth. In the larger society beyond reservation borders, in which I did not grow up, people have seen my Indigenous perceptions as erroring and a touch crazy. It helps to connect with others in the Native community and I found the readings of my own people had a profound effect on my sense of rightness and direction in the world. *Last Standing Woman* opens with Ishkwegaabawiikwe as the main character and closes with her namesake's journal entry. An Indigenous view of time is most often cyclic and this is important to note in the effort to understand worldview. Whether on purpose or a misprint it is interesting to note the copyright for *Last Standing Woman* was in 1997, an important year to remember. When reading Ishkwegaabawiikwe's journal entry at the last of the book, it is signed 2018.

I have learned through my journey in life that for as much pain and grief as I have experienced and felt I can also feel that same depth of joy, love, and compassion. It is a truth that has helped me understand my past. I can now create a new personal boundary that insists on asking for respect for my individual person rather than operating from the boundary-less option I

was given as a child where even my thoughts and body were not treated as mine. I have learned through understanding myself and reclaiming parts of my identity to have compassion for my relatives, all of them. I want to live *minobimaatisiwin*, the good life, and in order to do that I must not become that which has harmed me in life. This is a tall order for a mixed blood Anishinaabe far from reservation and community, a mixed blood that refuses to be distinguished by the U.S. government's blood quantum measurements. I believe to heal our communities, land, and identity we need to learn from our history not just the mistakes but the positive lessons and value structures which are strong. Our ancestors lived by these value structures in close-knit communities in often challenging circumstances by contemporary standards and they survived and not only survived but thrived. With the advent of colonization and empire, insurance, governments, and corporations, the glue that held communities together successfully was damaged and deconstructed. In telling our stories we remember our history. We also remember who we are and the way to walk in the world. Telling our stories connects us. It gets us off the margins of the page and helps us rewrite the history that was penned by a colonizer's hand.

Connection and being Anishinaabeg

White Earth is but one beautiful part of a whole biosphere, this planet. This earth mother is alive and communicating with us if we listen. The waterways, her arteries and veins, connect us all intimately to one another for better or worse. What are we going to do about it? Water knows no boundary. Why do humans persist in thinking and acting as if we are separate, as if we have no power to change, as if there is a boundary between distinct groups of humans and the more-than human world and us? Nothing and no one is completely separate from those and everything around them. A traditional tenet of the Anishinaabe was contribution, service to others. In so serving others we are brought happiness a full and complete life. Martin Seligman,

in his book *Authentic Happiness* makes the claim that giving to others or to a cause greater than ourselves brings enduring happiness. It is not a new concept but people like Seligman can perhaps help people to take the tenent more seriously.

For those of us who are Anishinaabe, we must reclaim our identity to heal. Part of that reclamation is living with the traditional values, of not taking more than needed of anything, a sense of plurality in the world, being principled in all our actions, in a new paradigm. George Aubid, Sr. from White Earth says in *All Our Relations*,

We do not lead a life of ease nor do we live in luxury. We do not own the land upon which we live. We do not have the basic things of life which we are told are necessary to better ourselves. We do not have the tools to be self-sufficient. But today, I want to tell you that we do not need these things. What we do need, however, is what we already have. What we do need has been provided to us by the Great Spirit.... We need to realize who we are and what we stand for.... We are the keepers of that which the Great Spirit has given to us, that is, our language, our culture, our drum societies, our religion, and, most important of all, our traditional way of life....We need to be the Anishinaabeg again. (LaDuke 126).

Aubid is saying that while we have been scattered, colonized, and assimilated we still have what we need to reclaim ourselves and heal. The challenge then is to live as an Anishinaabe in a world where the majority isn't of the Anishinaabe worldview and hold to that identity, language, culture, and lifeway. Our ancestors did it in a world not colonized but alongside other distinct cultures. Indeed, they demonstrated an open minded steady dialogic pluralist viewpoint. Our

ancestors did not condemn others for being different in skin color, culture, or sexual orientation, rather the things that were seen as the worst in humans was selfishness, greed, abusiveness, avarice. These things always disconnected a person from their true self and community and most often created a wiindigoo. In our contemporary world, we, the Oshki Anishinaabeg, must be careful in our resistance, in our survivance, that we do not become that which we resist: full of greed, spite, hate, and a great ignorance. For it is these things that disconnect us from each other and the more-than-human world.

In *Last Standing Woman*, Ishkwegaabawiikwe's namesake wrote in her journal entry, "There are many stories here. And, there is much to learn for the future. For all the pain and heartache we have felt, there has been and will be, an equal amount of joy. That is how everything works. There is always a struggle to maintain the balance" (LaDuke 299). LaDuke and Ishkwegaabawiikwe's namesake are saying time is cyclic and that there has always been the tussle to walk the good life to live in harmony and balance with all things and people. The only thing that has changed is perhaps the scale of the harm and its face in the form of empire. She goes on to say, "That is why we keep the names, and that is why we keep the words (...) We always give thanks for what we are given. What carries us through the relationship we have with the Creation and the courage we are able to gather from the experience of our aanikoobijigan, our ancestors, and our oshkaabewisag, our helpers" (LaDuke 299). For as long as I can remember I could hear the wind, I listened to the trees and water speak and they did much to ease my journey in this life and help me come to a place of peace in the present. Telling our stories helps us to heal, writing and speaking our histories gets us off the margins of pages and gives the power of choice to individual and community. In speaking, we break bonds, boundaries, and complacency. In the end it is our stories like water that cross borders, and surpass coerced and

ignorant boundaries, it's our stories that unite us, it's our stories that help rectify. Let us keep telling and writing our stories for in so doing we rewrite exclusion and marginalization. We reclaim dialogic pluralistic worldview and reconnect and heal in a new paradigm.

Conclusion

Forgiveness is Life, Finding Love in a New Paradigm

Love won't be tampered with, love won't go away. Push it to one side and it creeps to the other.

— Louise Erdrich

Stories are powerful, so powerful they create realities. We can get lost in those realities, forgetting who we are, or we can know the power of stories and use them to help us heal, reconnect with ourselves, our life purpose, our peoples, our meanings in life. When trauma and abuse happen they always happen with another meaning; there is more than oneself present. In healing once we become aware we have a choice it is also important to remember it takes a community to heal. Trauma generally is not self-inflicted. The spirit, the mind, the self, must experience something other than abuse from community, from another other than self. To know what it feels like to be loved, accepted, supported, to feel whole. On some level one must be witnessed to feel seen, to feel valued in the world. What greater gift can we give each other than to hear our stories and see the individual, the collective, and love them anyway?

The American society we live in is often fear-driven to prove its place in the world. However, at what cost? In its drive for wealth, freedom, and a booming economy, America has subjugated untold ethnically different others, those that were here before them and those they brought on slave ships from Africa. This is difficult history to claim, to redress, yet I maintain it is necessary to heal our socio-ecological world. As Winona LaDuke skillfully puts it, “Debates

on how the past is understood and what the future might bring have bearing on genetic research, reclamation of mining sites, reparations for broken treaties, and reconciliation between descendants of murderers and their victims” (LaDuke 11). Our individual interpretation of the world and ourselves, is alas, a deeply subjective one. No matter how hard we try to remain objective our view is tinted with our knowledge and experience base, which can be very removed from the hard realities. How then do we become a healthy pluralistic society that includes Indigenous dialogic interdisciplinary approaches to our social-ecological problems? I believe it starts by having a voice and reclaiming it as one’s own sacred song in the universe. In *One Story, One Song* Richard Wagamese writes, “Love expresses itself most fully in community. So does spirituality. What binds us together as a human family is our collective yearning to belong, and we need to share our stories to achieve that. Stories build bridges to undiscovered countries—each other” (Wagamese 18). I have not yet been to White Earth or any other Anishinaabe reservation or reserve. Yet, I have felt more connected, more validated in my worldview reading other Anishinaabe stories and sharing part of mine.

Living the Good Life

In Chapter One the thesis looked at how beliefs drive our actions in the world. We must live a principled life of ethics to help return balance to the earth, ourselves, and our more-than-human kin. The care underneath Anishinaabe ethics guides their society and communities with respect, reverence, and personal discipline. Deeply imbedded in the psyche of the traditional Anishinaabe is the understanding that the inner world of feelings, senses, and spirit must be addressed for things to be right in the outer world. To live a good life, one must live a spiritually clean life in one's sense of self and in one's sense of community. For the Anishinaabe the sacred was and is a place lived in and worked with everyday rather than a distant concept. For example,

wild rice is understood as important for its life sustaining economic uses as well as respected as a gift from the creator and a life force to be respected. The care, respect, and relationships with the more-than-human entities such as the namewag and wild rice cannot be overstated. In modern American worldviews, plants are not seen as powerful, sentient alive beings with choice, awareness, or feeling. However, in the Anishinaabe world they are very much alive, sacred, and feeling beings. To my way of thinking this is obvious. To a differing worldview it isn't. In fact it seems fallacy to some and quite out of the box thinking to others, while for me it is my life, and has always been. Differing worldviews can be the springboard for growth and understanding or they can be the dividing line of separation.

The Labels We Use Can Connect or Separate

As a people, we Anishinaabeg are wholly affected by the dominating culture's perceptions and logic. Recognizing and addressing our own bias can profoundly open the doors to recovering connection and communication. I'll risk going off topic here by acknowledging the linguistic issue attached to the labels of Native, Indigenous, and Traditional. The bias attached to the labels can often hinder progress because there are conscious and unconscious judgments of the meaning of those labels, a mainstream American societal overlay that often makes these labels be seen as backwards and negative. While it may seem prudent to change the labels, I'd advocate examining those underlying biases and judgments of those labels and where they come from instead. Examining our own bias and preconceived notions of self and others and the world is essential to growth and healing. We in large part do not respect difference. We judge it or view those who are different much like differences were once viewed at circuses: in a horrified negative and fascinated light.

I grew up high in the mountains of Idaho. Primarily I lived with my immediate family parents and siblings. Our nearest neighbor was some 27 or more miles away. People in the nearest town, some 60 miles away, viewed us with mixtures of suspicion, fascination, disdain, and judgmental attitudes steeped in the projection of the label Hillbilly, a term I still dislike. However, I grew up close to land and still remember what it is to rely on the land and family for survival. While my history is fraught with dysfunction, it is also full of land knowledge and love despite harsh and disparate worldviews within my family. In large part, our current ecological issues are a problem because of the lack of respect for differences in social, ethical, and spiritual, spheres. We in American society have become driven by our basic desires to the detriment of not only ourselves and the living world around us and any who remain interconnected with it.

Difference in Perceptions

Difference in worldview can make us grow or keep us stuck in harmful ruts. For healing, a conversation and an understanding must ensue. LaDuke says, “We have a problem of two separate spiritual paradigms and one dominant culture—make that a dominant culture with an immense appetite for natural resources” (LaDuke 14). The dominant culture LaDuke refers to is mainstream America and its appetites. I would add it is more than two different spiritual paradigms; it is two differing sets of values norms driven by the feelings, and perceptions of those two different spiritual paradigms. The overlays that judge Indigenous, Native, Natural, Traditional, as less than, feed perceptions such as *change is impossible short of global disaster*. This kind of societal thinking separates the human and more-than-human world from one another; these kinds of perceptions instill a sense of powerlessness and hopelessness in the young people of any class, race, or gender. The young people who might otherwise be making huge differences with their youth and drive are disheartened before they begin. The Anishinabek’s

dialogic conversations and pluralistic practices would do a lot to inform the critical approaches of American ecology.

Anishinaabe seek out social relations with the more-than-human entities in the world. What modern Americans think of as supernatural is all just part of nature and life for the Anishinaabe. Animacy of the more-than-human world is a way of life, a truth, rather than seen as a romanticism or fallacy in logic. In the traditional Anishinaabe worldview, we human beings are dependent on all other living species, and, because we are, it is important not to offend these other more-than-human entities. Jim Dumont quoted in Chapter Two says, “Our ways are still there, our way of life” (LaDuke 132). We are in relationship to all more-than-human entities. Not only do they fulfill our physical and economic needs, we hold a responsibility to care for them and their wellbeing.

Wagamese wrote in *One Story, One Song*, “I belong to a web of life that needs all its parts to sustain itself. The ancient teachings are not a romantic throwback to a vanished lifestyle but a resonant reminder of our contemporary responsibilities” (Wagamese 26). Not only is Wagamese beautifully poetic in his claim, he is clear, concise, and correct. The contemporary times, the traumas suffered, the holocaust of native peoples, the personal and tribal massive losses are not an excuse to refuse our responsibilities to one another and to the earth being and our more-than-human relatives. We and the more-than-human world in the best of circumstance contribute to each other’s wellbeing. We are interdependent.

The Sacred Is a Place of Substance

What does it mean to reclaim the sacred and how do the Anishinaabeg peoples using their phraseology understand sacred? Indigenous peoples tend to find their identity truths, guidance,

and connection in the living lands and the beings living within those lands which are home to them. In essence, their meanings in life are found in their landscapes and how they relate to everything in them. By living sacred, I mean to say that the sacred for these peoples is not distant, historical, or removed from them but found in connection with each other, connection with other living beings, and landscapes. For Anishinaabe the sacred is not an ethereal term but a place of ecology, economy, and spirituality that sustains life, and in fact is inextricably connected with daily life. The sacred is a place of substance, meaning, and renewal. As such, the land and all that lives there with it, then, is core to the identity and lifeways of the Anishinaabe. To reclaim the sacred then is to heal ourselves and nourish healthy communities, reclaim the land, re-build healthy value norms and ecosystems by taking actions to understand difference, embrace it, and encourage value norms that support cultural and natural biodiversity. This can be challenging in a world that has been exacting and rigorous in ridding many tribal peoples of just such connections and meanings.

The heart of pluralism is in acknowledging and understanding another way of being and deciding, after critical analysis, to hold to or modify your own. It is to be in conversation with other worldviews and perceptions different from one's own. From a non-dualistic understanding there is not necessarily a confrontation meant in holding to one's own way. Pluralism fosters the understanding and respect that each person and community have the inherent right of choice. Through dialogic pluralism, the Anishinaabe, have held onto their relationships and connections with the more-than-human world, and their ideals of a healthier human and more-than-human ecological future.

We Natives have a recent history of terrible subjugation and colonization. We must live with the pain of that history and rise above it. It is helpful to endeavor to suspend judgment and

to hold ethics that promote reciprocal relationships with each other. The descendants of our colonizers also need to heal from a history fraught with the atrocities their ancestors enacted upon our Native ancestors. Native writers help us understand one another and our collective history and current challenges. It can be difficult to see the good in someone who has harmed you. Sometimes one can be so damaged that their identity is eroded, and they do not know they have other choices in the world. The pain of our history is great. I am not saying it isn't. I am saying we have always strived for more balance in the world. That we live in a cycle of time that is so painful and disconnected does not change that; rather it becomes paramount to remember the ancient teachings and allow them to lead us forward. Indigenous writers and stories share of their lifeways and support us in our endeavors to have the courage necessary to re-see history's rough truths, the strength to feel and implement the knowledge we hold collectively to heal our societies. Binaries too often become hierarchies. Rather than seeing one another as defective or incomplete, our focus can be on addressing that which is out of harmony and seeing the good in each other.

Suicide Isn't a Statistic

One Spring morning in the not too distant past I dragged my exhausted body from the layers of bedding on the floor that was my bed in a studio apartment. I made myself walk into the bright white undecorated sterile bathroom and had my morning discussion with myself. It went something like this: "Dying is the easy part. It's the living that's hard." They were words I had heard my older brother Jared use when we years before had talked about suicide. I was no stranger to suicide. My cousin/niece of my step sister Joy blew her head off with a shotgun the year we both turned 17. She told no one her plan and waited until the house was empty. She, alone in her bedroom, put the barrel in her mouth and pulled the trigger. The morning my part of

the family got the news was the same morning my four-year-old niece, daughter to my stepbrother, Thomas, died of severe dehydration from being ill.

On this quiet morning in Montana, this was my morning pep talk as to why I was not going to get out my firearm and blow my own head off. I had spent the last year barraged with suppressed memories of my childhood. The pain of them was so great that I could find no logical reason why I should even take the next breath. My life seemed a series of abuses and being unwanted. On this serendipitous morning I was at my ultimate bottom and yearning to just be done. I still don't know where the words came from standing there in front of that mirror, but out of my mouth they flew following the words of my brother Jared: "Dying is the easy part. It's the living that's hard," and they made such a sliver of light in my darkness that I wrote them down with a permanent marker on a blank sheet of paper and posted them on the wall for me to see. They were a literal life line for me. They were simply, "You are not your story!" The realization that my identity, who I was in essence, was not this series of awful misfortunes but rather experiences that I had accrued, allowed me to leverage myself out of severe soul sick depression that was killing me as surely as the bullet through the brain would have. Trauma and the experience of it can become like one's identity, and we wear the story like it's who we are.

I have felt as far back as I can remember that life is a precious gift. I have felt profoundly that my life ought to be a contribution rather than a burden to my family, to my relatives human and more-than human. That contribution is mine, and not necessarily what my family, or my peoples would choose. Further back than any trauma is my relationship to the earth being. In every joy and every sorrow of my life she and my more-than-human relatives have been there to share in the experience, to teach and listen to me, a human, tell my story and share my understanding of them and their ways as accurately as I can. Some of my readers may be familiar

with the Stockholm Syndrome. It is a reality I used to live. Specifically, it is in that extreme loyalty and inability to see threat and danger for what it is after getting out of a hostage situation. Victims feel intense loyalty and defend their captors. It can bind a person surer than any handcuff on the planet. I spent years married to my childhood abuser out of a mistaken sense of loyalty. Loyalty I felt to him even before marriage. There was no need to bind me or convince me. My sense of personal power was stripped from me as a small child after repetitive abuse. I was not protected by the adults in my world; they were either abusers or ignorant of the abuse. The greatest act in my eyes that my ex-husband ever did was own his past abuses to me, tell me his reasons, and understandings during the time he enacted them, and apologize. His gift in this regard allowed me to truly understand, stand in the midst of that knowing and let go of any ill will. This allowed me to heal. These few written words make it sound simple and easy. It wasn't. I have watched most of my family play out the role of victim and abuser over and over again. The soul sickness is real and generational. That I can even write this and choose something different is a miracle. I believe in personal choice and responsibility to heal, to grow and contribute, to live a good life. But a person must first know that they can. I Spent 5 ½ years of my early adulthood in a marriage because I didn't know I had a choice, didn't feel I had a choice. My saving grace was a group of musicians that met once a week to jam, and I wanted to play fiddle so badly I stood up for myself and chose to attend those once weekly sessions. But what happened was it broke my isolation from non-family members. I got to see another reality and it was very different from mine. Someone once said to me, in group loyalty people are like crabs in a barrel. When I asked what she meant, she said, when one crab tries to climb out the others pull it back into the barrel. Trauma can function like this. People become secret keepers and get their sense of connection from shared wounds and victimhood.

Contribution

As a fragment of my people, an Oshki Anishinaabe, I understand to some degree the soul sickness and wounds we must heal from on both a personal and societal level. I have seen my relatives of Native diaspora struggle with what it means to be a Native in the world today. They struggle with getting an education in a system that does not support our worldviews. They struggle to break out of generations of abuse. The contribution that is my life work, my great work of art, is to do my best to live a good life, to be an example of transcending victimhood and claiming my voice in the world and telling my stories so others may know they can tell their stories, too. Our Stories show we are not alone, not separate from one another, not separate from our more-than-human relatives. There is a way home, a way to healing, and it is through living pluralism, through our stories. Our Anishinaabeg stories have healing power that connects us to one another, to the land and its inhabitants. We need only to open our hearts and listen. The love of my life once said to me, we are only as sick as the secrets we keep. This applies to suppressed trauma, suppressed history, suppressed stories. Despite the backdrop of abuse, my story isn't about how abusive my family was or is or how bad I had it. It is meant as a ray of hope, a flash in the dark, and a signal to talk, share, break free, be ourselves in the world. It is an attempt to add value to the whole of humanity.

The old ways are not a faded memory unless we stop living them. Richard Wagamese, writes in *One Story, One Song*, “The old ones say that humility is the foundation of everything. Nothing can exist without it. Humility is the ability to see yourself as an essential part of something larger. It is the act of living without grandiosity. Humility, in the Ojibway world, means ‘like the earth’” (Wagamese 22) My Story is meant to show that the sheer width and breadth of the human spirit is much more than the abuses we suffer or have suffered. We are

more than our stories, and sharing our stories can heal us. Telling our stories gets us off the margins of the page, rights (as in make right/correct) a history suppressed, untold. When we become like the earth, we know, understand, stand in the midst of and accept while moving toward something healthier, more whole. To bring even a spark of harmony and balance is part of my life journey. I cannot not do that in silence. My story speaks of transcending victimhood and claiming one's identity and personal power in the world.

In the end we are all connected and not separate. I cannot linger in the pain of the past and look toward tomorrow. Forgiveness and love isn't a repetition of the same abuses I suffered or allowing my children to be harmed by those in my family still stuck in the cycle of trauma. I choose to forgive, meaning to hold no ill will toward those that hurt me most in life. Love is the way forward. I look to building strong foundations in the hearts of my children, teaching them love, respect, kindness, steady persistent work ethics and forgiveness. Forgiveness isn't forgetting or letting go. To the contrary, forgiveness is understanding and not holding resentment which eats away at the soul. While I do not condone many of the actions toward me, there was something to be gathered from every experience, something good. I have in my time been listener and viewer to tremendous pain and trauma. I can only be the steady witness I have learned to be and truly see another because of what I have experienced. People most often don't need "fixed." They need to be seen and heard for who they are and loved anyway. It is in that contrary space that healing can happen. There is an incredible healing power in the act of witnessing and it is a gift from my pain.

There is a great deal of my story and my people's story that this thesis does not touch upon. I have done my best to be honest with the stories herein mine, and those I have quoted. I have because and despite the challenges built a beautiful life, with a fine man and three amazing

children. Our household is some mix of Anishinaabe, Jewish, and Irish heritage. To some this would seem impossible. To me this is life. Finding, seeing, appreciating, and participating with difference is a living pluralism. It isn't one or the other but together. The family that caused me so much pain is also the family that taught me love, solid work ethics, tenacity, courage and so much more. For every dark shadow there is an equal portion of light. Living pluralistically, one must not only see that but embrace it. One cannot exist without the *other* in its fullness; indeed seen rightly there is no *other*.

The mountains I grew up in have been burned black by massive forest fires, and just as I could never go back home, we Oshki Anishinaabe can never go back to yesteryear. Time is a linear construct of the human mind. But the reality I know sees it as cyclical in nature. Change is always occurring with beauty and grace like the budding green of willow and maple in spring and the dawning gold and blushing reds come autumn that bloom bright and then let go of the trees and fade and fall to make new earth to nurture those selfsame trees and so much more. When we Oshki Anishinaabeg remember our ancestors and the traditional ways of seeing and understanding the world and find a way to live in the present of today we transcend the limitations placed upon us and those we placed upon ourselves. When we remember the heart of who we are and share our stories with one another we connect across distance, space, and time. We open the door to a new future that beckons us with hope. When we recognize we are more for what we have suffered, we are more for what we have lost, for every absence there is a fullness and way forward.

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