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"But it's *our* story. Read it.": Stories my grandfather told me and writing for continuance

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Abstract
This is a story about stories. Born out of a ten-year-old request from my grandfather, Ronald Whiteduck, to help him record our family and community histories, this article explores the theoretical, ethical, and methodological considerations of writing oral history in Native communities. Punctuated by transcriptions of my grandfather's stories and my self-reflection, this essay explores Native writing in terms of the responsibilities Native writers have when we write; how writing can keep our people grounded in our homelands; the potential of writing to decolonize; and, most importantly, writing for the continuance of our nations. When we write, Native writers are responsible to our families, our communities, and the larger Native academic community. Our stories represent a fundamental love and respect for our homeland, and writing them ensures our children can return home regardless of their physical location. Through stories we can achieve decolonization by responding to past and ongoing oppression, while actively moving beyond it. Continuance manifests when we thrive in a space of our own, where our ways of being are combined with tools provided by academia to further our goals. The essay concludes by asking, "Where does it end?"

Keywords: *Storytelling; oral history; continuance; land; Màmiwininiwag*

Introduction

This is a story about telling stories. This story belongs to me, my grandfather, my brother, my great-great-great-grandfather, my cousins, my father, our ancestors, and generations to come. I am sharing it with you so that you can understand why our àdisòkàn (Màmìwininìmowin, Algonquin language, for "stories") are important to us and so that you may learn about the history of this land from the people who have been here since time immemorial. But mostly, this story is for my family.

I am writing with my feet firmly planted in two distinct arenas: my home, the place where my family and my community are, and the academy. I must be honest about this duality from the beginning because, as Kristina Fagan (2002) writes, Native writers "need to be willing to talk openly about the personal, cultural, theoretical, and institutional reasons that we do what we do" (p. 236). I will tell this story through three voices: my own, the voices of my family and ancestors - particularly that of ni-mishòmis (my grandfather), Ronald Whiteduck - and the voices of contemporary Native writers, who have for years put thought toward how stories influence our lives. I draw on Lee Maracle and LeAnne Howe's understandings of theory. Maracle (1994) writes that "there is a story in every line of theory" (p. 236). Howe (2002) uses the terms story, history, and theory interchangeably because "the difference in their usage is artificially constructed to privilege writing over speaking" (p. 42).

I am writing about the process of helping my grandfather write a book about the stories he has of himself, our family, and our community. As Anishinàbekwe (Algonquin woman), everything I do and everything I write is driven by the need to give voice and power back to my community using the gifts I have been given by kije-manidò (the great spirit). I hope I can do so by telling this story.

Òhòmisì Wàbà Pineshìnjish Ikwe nidijinikàz Mikiziw nidòdem, Kitigan Zibi Anishinabeg niondjiba. I am the daughter of Judy (Odjick) Cooko and Glenn Whiteduck. I am the granddaughter of Daisy Cayer and Allan Cooko; of Josée Dewache and Ronald Whiteduck. At the time of my birth, I had four living great-grandparents: Agnes Stevens, John Cooko, Basil Dewache, and Bertha Whiteduck. I have lived on my reserve and in the Ottawa-Gatineau area, which is traditional, unceded Algonquin territory. I am a member of a strong, resilient nation that has suffered from colonization and oppression. This is what I know about myself.

What I must admit to not knowing as well as I should, is my history, the parts of it that reach further back before the family I have known - about my community as it existed during my lifetime. Listening to my grandfather's stories of those people and those times, and figuring out what role I have to play as a granddaughter and a scholar, have become the goals of my research and writing. Others have had experiences similar to mine: "Storytelling, [Scheub] claims, 'weaves people into the very fabric of their societies.' Through speaking, hearing, and re-telling, we affirm our relationship with our nations, our tribal communities, our family networks" (Blaeser, 1999, p. 54). At this point, I must humble myself and note that my story and my experience constitute a contribution. Ultimately, the purpose of my story is to help my

grandfather record our history, so that my generation, and those to come, will know who we are as Màmiwininiwag (Algonquin people).

Critical to the larger project of helping my grandfather record our history is learning from Native writers, researchers, and literary critics who have undertaken similar projects. There is a rich body of experience to draw upon, and culturally grounded ways of doing things have been developed; "exploring what those terms and concepts are gives us the tools to do our work well and to give back to those communities to which we are indebted" (C. Teuton, 2008, p. 214). In order to have the opportunity to give back, I have chosen to write in a style that is accessible to my family and community members. Although I will engage theories throughout this article, I aim to write in such a way that those theories are woven together with my grandfather's stories and stories of my journey, so that the article reads more like a story than a research paper. Fagan (2002) warns of the pitfalls of calling "for the inclusion of diverse and marginalized voices, all the while writing in a language that effectively excludes those outside the academic institution" (p. 248).

In this article, I will explore storytelling and writing in terms of responsibility, homeland, decolonization, and continuance. I employ a mix of theory, ethics, methodology, oral history, and self-reflexivity; but, at the end of it all, it is really just a story. And, like all good stories, this one is meant to be enjoyed with a cup of tea. Whether transferring life lessons and traditional knowledge, or just having a laugh, we are a people of talk. Lisa Brooks (2006) notes, "it is a well-known secret that the kitchen is where all the stories are made" (p. 231). My grandfather says that tea, sweetened by natural things like sap, was essential to people in the old days and that they would have it with conversations three times a day.

Grab a mug and have a read.

Responsibilities of writing

Why do we write? Who are we writing for? What does our writing accomplish? How do we ensure that our writing keeps us rooted in our culture, traditions, and worldviews? I work to have my writing, and any related work I do, follow the seven sacred teachings: love, respect, courage, honesty, wisdom, humility, and truth. As a Native writer, I am responsible to three "readers": my family, my community, and the larger community of Native writers, thinkers, and activists. Being aware of our responsibilities and responding to our people when we write is crucial to being able to embark upon writing projects ethically.

First and foremost, I am responsible to my family to do this work and to help tell my grandfather's stories. My grandfather is a fountain of knowledge. He has many memories of his childhood, of his grandfather, and of being told stories by his grandmother about his great-grandfather. These oral histories date back over one hundred and fifty years. My grandfather is considered an oral historian in our community; for example, at a family reunion, he was asked to explain the Whiteduck family tree. To me, he is a Màmìwininì intellectual, historian, traditional

knowledge keeper, and philosopher. To illustrate his gift as a storyteller, I will share with you two stories my grandfather told me in the winter of 2009.

First, a story of our reserve, Kitigan Zibi Anishinabeg, also commonly referred to as "Maniwaki":

> When Maniwaki first started, the Indians that came here, the first one to arrive chose the best spot you could find, right. And the reason they chose a spot near the river was for Native transportation, and also for drinking water and fishing. Those days they set a net right at the river. There was always a creek or something going into the rivers. They would set a net, so they could catch fish. So, that was one of the reasons they settled in this area. [In] this area of Maniwaki, the reserve land bought was probably one of the most fertile lands around Maniwaki. The best for farming. So, the land that was given to the reserve was good land. In fact, the lumber company at the time fought that. They said, 'Why give these Indians that good land?' You know, 'Give them scrappy land someplace.' They gave these lands. Like I said a while ago, maybe the church played a big part in there, because they wanted a piece of that land, too. That's what happened. (R. Whiteduck, personal communication, February 16, 2009)

Second, a story of the arrival of John Baptiste, my great-great-great-grandfather and the first Whiteduck to settle at Kitigan Zibi:

> My [great-] grandfather, when he settled here, John Baptiste, the last time, there, they had one daughter, Clarence Chabot's grandmother, who was born in Oka. But the rest, my grandfather included, were born in Masham… [He] was born near the river, there, and he was baptized in the church there in 1871. That's when John Baptiste came here. That's the time he arrived. He arrived in '71. The reserve was established in '53, but they had been hunting by here before. But they used to go back home because their family was there. But, there, they brought the family in '71 and he stayed here. But they didn't just come, there, because you got to remember they went around the Mont Laurier area… And, there, don't forget [in] Maniwaki they had to sleep in a tent, too. When they first got here for many years they lived in a tent. The old area, half the people they lived in tents. Some of them had built houses.

My grandfather's stories are multi-layered. While the part of me that has been educated in western institutions has categorized these stories according to the primary events that occurred within them, the part of me that ascribes to our non-linear, event-centered storytelling processes (Vizenor as cited in C. Howe, 2002, p. 162) sees beyond those categorizations. In the first story, it is clear that a story about the establishment of our reserve cannot simply name the time and place of this occurrence; rather, it is a complex story tied closely to accounts of the importance of water to our people and colonial influences on our lives. Similarly, the second story is not only about the first Whiteduck to come to Kitigan Zibi Anishinabeg (or Maniwaki); it contains a genealogical reference and mention of our family's previous connection to this land.

The language my grandfather uses as he tells stories - like "*you got to remember*" - compels me to know this history, to commit to memory the details that he describes. I have a responsibility to understand every permutation in these stories to the best of my ability, so that I may eventually pass them on to other members of my family. I have to find my own voice in order to do so. LeAnne Howe (2008) has considered her role as a storyteller for her Choctaw people: "I hope I am talking through our ancestors, the ones whose words were written down in the documents, and untangling the stories within stories within stories - and smoothing them out for the future, so that some other Choctaws will write their version of our stories" (p. 338).

This responsibility is not one that I chose, but it is one that I am happy to assume. Ever since I was a child, I have always loved to write. I remember the exact moment my grandfather decided that I would help him write. We were sitting on his back porch one summer evening and he was telling a story he'd told me many times. It was an old story about a handsome man seducing a young girl at a dance on the reserve, then turning into a half-man, half-horse devil. He said he wanted to write this story down and he wanted me to help him. From that moment on, almost yearly, he would talk about writing with me and ask for my help. Slowly, the project grew larger until it became what it is now: an all-encompassing account of our family and our community from my grandfather's perspective. I feel that my grandfather identified my gift for writing and my commitment to our family, and then gave me the honour of helping him to keep these stories. This process reflects Leanne Simpson's (2011) recognition of how "our stories draw individuals into the resurgence narrative on their own terms and in accordance to their own names, clan affiliations and gifts" (p. 41).

My grandfather has fourteen grandchildren and I am not the only one he has entrusted with the responsibility of knowing where we come from. I remember one Christmas when our gifts came with strings attached. Each grandchild received from my grandfather a Christmas card with an "ancestral trivia question" inside. We had to correctly respond to receive the prize, our Christmas gifts. I was asked what my grandfather's maternal grandmother's full name was. I was unable to answer the question (but I still got the gift). Now I know that the answer is Maryanne Brazeau. I learned that, and by "learned" I mean that the family knowledge has stayed with me after I began to work with my grandfather to record his stories. There is so much that I did not know until now and still so much to learn. I am doing this project to fulfill my responsibility as a granddaughter, so that my cousins will succeed at their next ancestral trivia game and so that our future children will not have to worry about failing like I did.

In considering the responsibility I have to my family, I find it useful to draw upon Daniel Heath Justice's concept of kinship as a theory and methodology. Justice (2008) writes, "In thinking of an ethical Native literary criticism, it seems to me to be quite fruitful to reflect on community and kinship—both in their broadly theoretical forms and in their context-specific manifestations—as interpretive concepts in our analyses" (p. 149). Theoretically, or in other words, in thinking about telling stories about stories, we must always be mindful of our responsibilities toward our kin. This manifests as both a theory and a methodology:

> the foundation of any continuity as such is our relationship to one another - in other words, our kinship with other humans and the rest of creation. Such kinship isn't a static thing; it's dynamic, ever in motion. It requires attentiveness; kinship is best thought of as a verb rather than a noun, because kinship, in most indigenous contexts, is something that's *done* more than something that simply *is*. (p. 150)

Apart from considering our kin and how those relationships drive our storytelling, we must actively engage our kin in our storytelling as my grandfather has with his Christmas cards, and as I have begun to do by retelling my grandfather's stories to younger generations when opportunities arise.

Jace Weaver's (1997) concept of "communitism" (p. 3) has been a foundational principle of Native writing. Communitism has also served to ground my work, as it keeps me constantly aware of the responsibilities I have to my community as I write this, and as I help my grandfather record our oral history. Essentially a combination of the ideas "community" and "activism," Christopher Teuton (2008) characterizes Weaver's concept as "being committed to community with an activist intent" (p. 198). Communitism requires that Native writers do work that will further the goals of their communities. Teuton argues that communitism was embedded within oral traditions (p. 198). Our modern writing and its processes must adhere to community-based principles. I envision this as a method that involves three steps. First, taking knowledge from our communities in a respectful manner. Second, using the gifts that have been given to us - whether through formal education or by some other heuristic or algorithmic means - to build upon that knowledge. And third, returning the knowledge, including what we have added to it, to where it belongs: in our communities.

I do not mean to suggest that this process of taking from, building upon the knowledge of, and giving back to our communities is something new. In fact, Brooks (2008) suggests that Indigenous peoples have a history of conducting ourselves in such a responsible manner:

> Our literary traditions emphasize the power of thought in transformation. They tell us that the thinking that creates the world is an ongoing activity with which we, as human beings, are engaged. Any work we do as Native scholars operates as part of a long indigenous intellectual tradition… How can we ensure that our scholarship does not destroy our mother? What would it mean to participate in criticism, to make our writing participate in and create community? (p. 240-41)

As Native scholars, we must propel our nations further, be part of that 'thought in transformation'. Furthermore, a critical part of this process involves engaging with other Native scholars to share ways to empower our communities by ensuring that the survival of our stories is a shared project at the heart of decolonization imperatives.

Native scholars are also responsible for fostering a meaningful community amongst ourselves where we may build upon each other's ideas, contribute to one another's projects, and compare successes and challenges within our communities. We must apply principles from the

transference of knowledge in oral traditions to our current academic discourse, in order to strengthen the ideas and writing we produce. Justice (2008) eloquently describes this process:

> Together we respond to the ideas and questions of other Native literary critics; we travel through the imaginative mindscapes of indigenous writers; we respond to the driving call for decolonization that echoes through those mindscapes; we attend to many of the values and concerns of our families and tribal nations. (p. 148)

Robert Warrior (2005) articulated this idea in a straightforward manner: "what intellectuals do ought to matter and ought to make a difference in the real lives of real people living in real time" (p. xv).

My project, and that of many other indigenous academics, is to work to open up and make acceptable a space in-between; a space where my people's forms of literacy will be accepted, not deemed "alternative." In this space, literacy gained through academic education and literacy as it exists in our traditions and culture not only co-exist but build upon one another to form a rich knowledge base. Christopher Teuton (2008) characterizes this endeavor as part of "mode-three criticism" where Native scholars have moved beyond addressing issues of cultural identity and authenticity (mode-one), and bypassed the redress of misrepresentation of Indians (mode-two) to examine scholars' accountability to communities and how we work to "become who we want to become" (pp. 200-201). At the heart of this effort is

> a process of culture-building by imagining the place of critical scholarship within Native communities and by providing terms that may be used to create a space for the articulation of Native epistemologies within academia but are accessible and informative to mainstream audiences. (p. 204)

It is empowering to view this task not as one that pulls us in two directions, but as one where we are endowed with the wisdom and tools necessary to move seamlessly between both worlds, all the while working to grow our space in-between.

Writing from home(land)

The entirety of my grandfather's project is motivated by the need for his grandchildren and future generations to remember endàyàng (our home); even if we don't live on the land in the same way as he and generations before him did, his stories will tell us of the land and the places that will always be our home.

The relationship between Màmiwininiwag and akì (the land) is inextricable and I should note here that while the term "land" refers primarily to the ground upon which we stand and live, I also use it in a broader sense to include the beings - plants, animals, trees, water - that are a part of the land. The earth beneath our feet has a long, rich history and tells the story of our people

and how we have contributed over time to the sacred balance of creation. Even while living in "the city," Kitigan Zibi will always be our home. Our home is on this land. Our roots here are deep. Today I write from Kitigan Zibi, from endàyàng. Listening to the silence of the lake punctured only by an occasional loon's call, being eaten alive by mosquitoes, or staring up at the thousands of stars never seen in the city, means home to me. Life here moves slowly. I have time to take a deep breath and feel the air enter my lungs.

One winter day I pulled into my grandparents' driveway (too fast, I was warned not to run over the cats), laptop in tow, ready to start the storytelling project with my grandfather. After returning from his daily walk in the bush, he was outside in the shed removing snowshoes from his feet - the old Indian kind, made from babiche (moose or deer hide) and ash wood. It was one of those perfect winter days, sunny and cold, and the air was still. My grandfather, like all of my grandparents, has a deep connection with the land. It came as no surprise to me that, after we had settled in the living room next to the fire with tea, and after my grandfather had listed the twenty-three topics he wanted to cover in his book - ranging from genealogy to booze, from politics to social life - the first topic he wished to talk about was land.

Ways of doing things on the land is a common theme amongst Native storytellers. Craig Howe (2002) notes that oral histories are told in relationship to the land, the water, and the sky. Rather than being linear, these stories are "event centered: here something happened and a particular person or being was present… Often, as the storyteller is reciting an account of an event, another trigger is tripped and another narrative begins" (p. 162). I found this to be absolutely true of my grandfather's storytelling. As demonstrated in the following story, there is a natural progression from one topic to the next as my grandfather speaks of hunting, life and death, reciprocity, and crafts:

> So [in] the morning, us kids there - me, Riel, Mark - we used to get up as soon as it was daylight and look for deer all summer. Well, during the month of June, maybe. And if we'd see one, sometimes there was three, four of them, there, we'd wake my grandfather and he'd put on his boots, half dressed, and take out his gun. It was always ready, his gun. And he'd go there and we could see everything. It was sort of a hole. We could see him come and go to the hole and everything. We could see him aiming, there, and when he'd shoot we could see the deer falling. He never killed more than two because the meat would spoil…
>
> Anyway, the reason why I'm telling you this is because my grandfather never missed. I seen him kill a deer anywhere from ten to fifteen years, every year, you know, [when] we were teenagers growing up. And the year he died, he missed. He missed and in November he died. It was say, June, there, and in November he died. We were shocked when he missed, there, he never missed. And he'd aim long… I don't know if there's anything in aiming long, but he'd aim that rifle a long time. We were all tense waiting… Sometimes there was three or four deer together. The other deer would just look, wondering what happened, then he'd shoot another—one shot, too.

> Another thing too, we always gave the meat away. It was a big occasion when they'd kill a deer, too. There, my uncle Sam would come, and my job was—me, I was maybe eight, nine that time—I would run to get my uncle Sam, who lived maybe a mile, two miles away. [If] he was eating breakfast, he'd leave his breakfast, there, and start to come, you know, all excited because they loved it, deer meat. All that wild meat, there, it was fresh. All the uncles would get some, the brother-in-laws, what have you. It only lasted maybe a week all that meat, because we didn't have a fridge that time either. We didn't have an ice house. A lot of people had ice houses; we didn't. So, we sort of gave all the meat as fast we can. When you gave it to people everybody was glad because they all ate that meat. Most of them would rather eat deer meat than steak, beef. It's an acquired taste that, venison they call it.
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> And the skin there, the hide, my grandmother would make crafts. And roughly, I don't know, eighty percent of the Indians on the reserve used to do the same thing. Kill a deer, they'd make crafts. Or, these people will bring crafts for him to kill a deer, maybe from Mishòmis, bring the hide to them.

The central point of the story was my great-great-grandfather's (Solomon Whiteduck) hunting skill and how one missed shot was an indication of his imminent death. Yet, it is evident that this story is made up of multiple events, most taking place on the land, that blend easily into one another. My grandfather could not tell this story without moving between his memories of "the deer falling" and of watching the scene unfold with his cousins; without painting a picture of the excitement and pleasure generated amongst the family and community at having fresh meat. Finally, the story ends a long way from where it began with brief mention of the trade system between hunters and craftspeople. As my grandfather describes the hole that his grandfather shot from, and running a couple of miles to go and get his uncle, our "tribal lands are thus enriched by accounts that link events to places rather than to a chronological narrative" (C. Howe, 2002, p. 164). Through describing both the tangible (the hunt and the use of hide for craft) and the intangible (the love for meat and the sharing with loved ones) ways of life in those times, I am able to re-imagine my home and how the land that I stand on today was used all those years ago. Hearing my grandfather's stories and imagining future generations reading them affirms that we are part of our homeland.

Values such as respect for other beings, generosity, and reciprocity are apparent in this story my grandfather told. Only hunting as many deer as you reasonably need, a value common to many Indigenous nations, demonstrates how we respected animals. Generosity in sharing meat with family members, and the happiness this act bred, comes across clearly. Reciprocity between hunters and craftspeople for their mutual benefit is displayed in their trading of crafts and hide. This story has multiple purposes, including to ground future generations in our ideological and physical home and to teach us how to live a good life using the fundamental values by which our ancestors lived. My grandfather offered these stories to me and I see similarities in the way Neal McLeod (2007) describes his own grandfather's stories and the purposes they serve:

> Stories were offered as traces of experience through which the listeners had to make sense of their own lives and experiences. My grandfather told stories about what he knew; he derived his stories from his experience, and he told stories in which he, or his ancestors, were participants. (p. 13)

One of the fundamental values in the stories my grandfather tells is love. Love is in everything we do, whether it involves hunting only the number of deer you need or using your education to help your grandfather record his stories. Love, as a western concept, is something that is personalized and oftentimes kept behind closed doors. Love as it exists within the Native worldview is ever-present and connects all beings. I was having these thoughts as I was reading "Interior and Exterior Landscapes: The Pueblo Migration Stories" by Leslie Marmon Silko. I decided that I wanted to use the word and concept of love in my article as a guiding principle. After jotting down some initial thoughts, I returned to Silko's (1998) article and read:

> The antelope merely consents to return home with the hunter. All phases of the hunt are conducted with love: the love the hunter and the people have for the Antelope Peoples, and the love of the antelope who agree to give up their meat and blood so that human beings will not starve. (p. 4)

To me, this was a sign that I was heading in the right direction generally, and in this article specifically. Any sliver of doubt I had about including love as a concept in my research had vanished. But more than that, I believe this was a message from kije-manidò to continue in this way.

The message in Silko's writing, that a love exists between the people and the animals, was reflected in my grandfather's stories. His perspective reveals that he thinks of animals as beings who are neither below humans in any hierarchy, nor useful only insomuch as they provide nourishment to the people. Rather, his descriptions of animals reflect a fundamental respect. Throughout the course of his storytelling, he referred to lakes as places "where the beaver would hang out" and oats as "a delicacy for deer." Speaking of animals with characteristics or actions that one would typically associate with humans is reflective of a shared Indigenous worldview where humans, animals, and other beings have equally important roles and responsibilities.

What I find most promising about these stories is the ease of transmission of the teachings within them. While some of our people experience panic, believing that the stories will die with our Elders, I find solace in witnessing how stories persist. Knowing ourselves means knowing our home, our ancestors, and where we came from; accomplishing such a feat is both the first and the final step toward decolonization. Brooks (2008) reflects on the simplicity of this process:

> Simple enough, really, and certainly the most central of the values my own father taught me: honor the spirit that runs through all beings, don't abandon home, remember your mother. So, for me, as an Abenaki student and scholar, certain

> questions emerge from these foundational principles. How can we keep our writing home? (p. 235)

The journey to come to know my grandfather's stories, my family's and community's stories, and my own story has brought me home. This causes me to stand a little taller and speak a little louder. Similarly, McLeod (2001) reflects on the dignity felt in his Cree people's stories:

> As Nehiyawak, when we listen and tell our stories, when we listen and hear our language, we have dignity because we are living our lives as we should. We are living our lives on our own terms; our stories give us voice, hope and a place in the world. To tell stories is to remember. As Indigenous people, we owe it to those still unborn to remember, so that they will have a "home" in the face of diaspora. (p. 33)

As peoples who have been oppressed and colonized, it is an unfortunate reality that we must work to get to the place where we belong. But, fortunately, the ways in which to do so are clear. We must know our stories, our language, our history, and ourselves. This is the way to decolonization for our nations.

Decolonizing through stories

Decolonization, for me, rests in the ability to know my home. We choose our work to meet the needs of our people. Decolonization includes pressing forward, bearing in mind the strength in our culture and traditions, and the "post-"colonial history of relations with settlers on this land. Although I do not necessarily think of my people as "colonized," since such a description effectively erases our many and continued acts of resistance and history of resilience, it is evident that our communities have suffered, and continue to suffer, from the ongoing effects of colonization.

Thus, our efforts to achieve decolonization must take place on two interconnected levels: 1) where we fight back (or write back) and resist oppression; and 2) where we forge paths into the future and empower the next generations. Much current Native literary criticism focuses on both resisting colonization and establishing ways to move forward in light of its history. Womack (1999) writes: "I will seek a literary criticism that emphasizes Native resistance movements against colonialism, confronts racism, discusses sovereignty and Native nationalism, seeks connections between literature and liberation struggles, and, finally, roots literature in land and culture" (p. 11).

I work to resist ongoing colonization by knowing my own stories and ensuring that the stories my grandfather tells about colonization are not forgotten. The witnessing of certain acts of colonization has been passed down through generations. Remembering the conditions upon which our community was formed, as my grandfather describes in the next story, is essential in order to understand our history, and how we arrived at this place. Bird (1998) points to the

importance of such a process: "Thus both witnessing and testimony become, for me, viable tools that serve the purposes of decolonization by providing details of individual processing of the complexities of inheritance that living in the aftermath of colonization provides" (p. 29). It has been important for me to understand the history of my community and the ways in which its formation was born out of a colonial order:

> And this piece of land was given - this reserve here, which was probably five thousand acres, which is pretty good size land - with the idea of all the Algonquin that settled [in] other places [would] come here. This is one of the reasons why this reserve was fairly big compared to other reserves up there, which were small reserves.
>
> This reserve was given with the idea that all the Indians that were trapping and hunting, because it was an enterprise, they would come here and start farming. This is why this land was chosen, good fertile land for farming, and they encouraged that. In fact, at the start they gave them seed. Every spring they would give them seed. And also, they didn't give it to them, but they sold them machinery, like ploughs and things like that. And you know, you could pay by payments. In fact, that wagon you're looking at there was bought in 1945 in sort of that installment idea. Twenty dollars down, maybe, pay five dollars a month. A wagon like that would cost one hundred and twenty dollars. But they encouraged the Indians to buy farming tools. (R. Whiteduck)

When our ancestors lived at Lake of Two Mountains, or Oka, Quebec (McGregor, 2004, pp. 88-89), they would also hunt on the land that would eventually become our reservation. In this story it is apparent that pre-Confederation Canada wanted my ancestors to stay in one location, most likely so that we would not pose a threat to European settlement. In other words, our respectful use of multiple spaces and our subsequent "ownership" (by the Eurocentric definition) of certain areas of land, were perceived as a threat and were forcefully replaced by the settlers' unlawful claiming and mapping of our lands. Additionally, newcomers perceived the need to "civilize" us by "teaching" us how to farm, tacitly discouraging the pursuit of our traditional forms of sustenance.

In the words of the late Algonquin Elder, William Commanda, our people are born into politics[1]. Knowing my history leaves me no choice but to pursue efforts to reclaim what is rightfully ours and to fight for recognition and for sovereignty. Fagan (2002) reiterates this point in terms of scholarship: "Indeed, for many scholars, especially perhaps Native scholars, we cannot separate academic work and activism" (p. 242). It is also worth noting that much of the work Native writers and other artists produce, is not art for art's sake. Blaeser (1999) writes that, "Native stories have goals beyond entertainment just as their predecessors in the oral literatures did. They work to make us into communities, form our identity, ensure our survival" (p. 65).

[1] C. Commanda, personal communication, February 8, 2010.

Working with my grandfather to record his stories is one project that is part of a "push among Native literary critics to move toward a deeper analysis of and sovereignty over Native literature, with a focus that is more tribally specific and much more entrenched in the study of our own systems of knowledge" (Brooks, 2008, p. 234-5). Telling my family's history and a part of my community's history from our own perspective works to assert our sovereignty. Our story is one that has been deemed worthless by Canada's colonial project and working with my grandfather to write it down is a decolonizing act. It is important for youth and the next generations to hear their own stories in their ancestors' voices. Indigenous peoples have always had a large body of "our history" told in voices that are not our own. Literature that is nation-specific is crucial to decolonizing through stories. As demonstrated by my grandfather's stories, our histories are rich not only with information about where we have been but also with implications about where we should go. It is our responsibility to seek out meaning within our stories since "the stories we tell are, above all, moral stories, and the strongest ethical position that Native scholars and writers can take is one of dedication to the exercise of political, social, spiritual, and territorial sovereignty" (Cook-Lynn, as cited in Justice, 2008, p. 161).

Writing has the potential to temper the pain of past wrongs and rewrite our history. Through our writing we can assert our sovereignty and decolonize our stories. Our writing can bring together our families and our communities, and help us to know ourselves. As Bird (1998) claims, "writing remains more than a catharsis; at its liberating best, it is a political act. Through writing we can undo the damaging stereotypes that are continually perpetuated about Native peoples. We can rewrite our history, and we can mobilize our future" (p. 30). For some writers, such as Jeanette Armstrong (2001), this is the whole, beautiful reason for this act:

> The purpose of my writing has always been to tell a better story than is being told about us. To give that to the people and to the next generations. The voices of the grandmothers and grandfathers compel me to speak of the worth of our people and the beauty all around us, to banish the profaning of ourselves, and to ease the pain. I carry the language of the voice of the land and the valour of the people and I will not be silenced by a language of tyranny. (p. 106)

According to Brooks (2008), "writing is both a social experience and a political act. The imagination, and the imagination of nations is an embodied experience, a part of the 'process' through which sovereignty is enacted, a necessary part of the communal 'journey'" (p. 257). Current efforts among Native writers focus on finding ways to move forward regardless of how our lives are being affected by colonization. Justice (2008) believes that "this is the heart of the decolonization imperative of indigenous literatures: the storied expression of continuity that encompasses resistance while moving beyond it to an active expression of the living relationship between the People and the world" (p. 150). We must have the courage to press forward and continue as nations.

Writing for continuance

> The whole idea is to publish a book. It's not to try to sell it, but just to leave it there for the other Whiteducks… Some of them don't [know]. I remember when we had that gathering, there, some of them had no idea who this one was and who that one was. Even though some was their grandmother or uncle! They didn't know who their uncles were and all that. There, you'd fit in the pieces together. Maybe have some published, there, and if you want to read it, here, go for it. [Some might] publish themselves hereafter, but it's not to try to sell it. It won't be that exciting of a story. And our story too, we're not really covering new ground… The Tenascos could probably write almost the same story as us and the Commandas. You know, we almost did the same things, all those little farm like deals. But it's *our* story though. Read it. You know, how the future generation is going. (R. Whiteduck)

My grandfather's hope, his entire reason for embarking upon a writing process, is for continuance. The concept of continuance here is taken from Ortiz's (1998) use of it as a "hope and wish that this voice will have Continuance as the land and people continue to have Existence" (p. xvii). And, it is impossible to engage continuance without simultaneously referencing Vizenor's concept of survivance, described in his words as the

> will and power to resist and live. Not to live in an absence, but to create a presence. Its definition, though archaic and unused, is the right to inherit something. That works pretty well, and I didn't have to damage the original meaning much to promote it, and expand its meaning to resistance, to humour, to challenging and overcoming the absence of Natives that is created by victimry and is created almost unconsciously by historians and social scientists… I wanted a word that emphasized the creative presence of Natives.[2]

Never having read Ortiz or Vizenor, or any other Native literary theory to my knowledge, my grandfather articulated the need for continuance and the role he would play in its manifestation. My grandfather, although he does not necessarily put words to this process, recognizes the damage colonization has had on our ways of knowing ourselves. He believes that every Whiteduck, both living and unborn, has the right to know who their family members were. He wants us to know how our community was formed and who the first Whiteduck was who lived here. He knows that the ways our ancestors lived have implications for future generations. And he wants to tell *our* story. So, he will write.

There is a sense of urgency to work with our Elders on projects that ensure their knowledge and stories are not lost. Engaging our "collective memory," which Neal McLeod (2007) describes as "the echo of old stories that links grandparents with their grandchildren" (p. 11), is critical. My grandfather and I come from different generations yet we both realize that it

[2] G. Vizenor, personal communication, February 27, 2010.

is important to record these stories. Collaborations like ours are essential, particularly as we move to and from periods where disengagement occurs, as my grandfather alluded to in the fact that some of our relatives don't know their own family tree. As my grandfather neared seventy years of age and realized that many young people didn't know their family history, a spark was ignited within him that brought him closer to his goal of recording his stories. He senses the urgency:

> …because it's going to the point where both of us will disappear. [When] my mother's gone, I'm the oldest one left. It falls pretty far back after me. After Gerard - Gerard is not that well - it falls back almost ten years after that when you hit Jean Guy and all that. You know, there's a gap there.
>
> Me, I lived with my grandfather in the same house from the day I was born 'til the day he died. And he lived with his father, John Baptiste. And my grandmother lived with his father with her husband at the house of John Baptiste. They were at the same house for four years, so she told me a lot of stories about him. How he was Catholic and he used to sing hymns every Sunday, and during mass he used to take out his envelope - he had an Indian envelope - and sing. Those days the mass lasted for two hours. He didn't go to mass, but he'd sing hymns for two hours. Put his book away 'til next week.
>
> You know, things like that. When they went to the [Maniwaki] exhibition, you know, they had a big garden, [and] they used to bring their fruit and compete in the exhibition to win prizes. I don't know if they ever finished first, but they did win second and third prize… And picnics, we had picnics in June, too. Not as big, there, but it's something that they did. But they had dances, too. It wasn't just stay at home every night. We had dances, had house dances, too. And when people die they'd wake them. If you die here, they'd probably wake you in your own home. Or if you had a small shack, maybe somebody close to you. When it was a woman, they'd put a certain wreath; a man they'd put a certain wreath, too.

My grandfather also realizes his unique position to tell these stories. The oral history he carries is older than Canada. And he is the only person in the world who knows some of these stories. While not everyone will see value in the stories he has to tell of his great-grandfather's way of praying and of community wakes, I do and I know others in our family will. For my grandfather, helping our family in this way is reason enough to do this work.

Within these stories are other seemingly small cues that have for generations indicated to us the ways to live our lives. As my grandfather said:

> The Whiteduck family, from John Baptiste down, [it] was almost what they did, we did. It was handed down. The way they preserved the thing… The way they cooked it, it was almost [like] it didn't change too much from 1850, or something, 'til now. Fish was cooked the same way. So, certain fish were always boiled, like catfish was always boiled. Pike was always fried. You know, they cook it a certain way.

The spirit behind this story that is crucial. Beyond cooking fish, my grandfather says that almost everything was handed down: "what they did, we did." This means that our people had mechanisms to ensure that our ways of being were maintained across generations, across space and time, and in the face of oppression. We must remember "what we have at stake is not only the recognition of the validity of our knowledge, but the sustenance of indigenous epistemologies" (Brooks, 2008, p. 235).

The survival of our ways of being is not in question at this point. It is the continuance of our stories into the future that concerns us. McLeod (2001) asserts that "to 'come home' through stories is to anchor ourselves in the world" (p. 33); my grandfather will drop that anchor to the ground when he publishes his book. In explaining his intent to publish a book, my grandfather places his focus on future generations. He imagines that he will publish a number of copies for our family and that in the future it will be another Whiteduck's responsibility to re-publish the book for their generation. Most importantly, the book will have been written, the stories will be there to be told and heard, and the ideological "anchor" will have been dropped.

McLeod (2001) writes that "part of surviving is through remembrance: when you remember, you know your place in creation" (p. 16). Continuance, or put simply, remembering your place in creation, is an active process. It is practiced in a range of methods, whether by listening to one's grandfather's stories over a cup of tea, or by reflecting on why it is important to know one's stories in research. It is the act of listening. What we hear when we listen gives us meaning. As LeAnne Howe (2008) writes, "[Listeners] link the stories they've heard about their ancestors with the stories they are living. This linking of the narratives breathes meaning into their world (as well as breathing life onto the pages of written stories)" (p. 331).

Our communities and nations have a long history, in literature and in our daily lives, of making ourselves adaptable and creating hybridized objects and understandings from the best of our ways and the ways of the western world. Brooks (2008) restates Womack's observation that "we now have a written oral literary tradition - often the stories that have been recorded, or versions of the stories that are recorded, are those most likely to be recovered and retold" (p. 242). We cannot deny the usefulness of the written word for the continuance of our nations and we have many accomplished writers who will not allow us to forget its power. In fact, Brooks argues that our ability to honour our oral traditions and use the written word is at the very heart of continuance: "it is the intertwining of the oral and the written, and the utilitarian value placed on writing as both tool and resource for community continuance, that forms the root of an indigenous American literary tradition" (p. 255). Part of that tradition involves applying our own terms to the work we do. As such, I like to think that the story I am sharing here fits LeAnne Howe's (2008) definition of "tribalography," a term she created since she "didn't agree that American Indians tell strictly autobiographical stories, nor memoir, nor history, nor fiction, but rather they tell a kind of story that includes a collaboration with the past and present and future" (p. 333).

Our people have always found the means to combine our ways with what was suddenly required of us in the western world. Here, I share a story my grandfather told, which I affectionately refer to as the "Muskrat Savings Account":

> [When] something big would happen, like my grandmother's sister died… We had to take the train to go to Ottawa, she lived in Ottawa, [so] we sold a muskrat hide. Twenty dollars for it or something, that was the money she [used] to see her sister in Ottawa. It was reserved, like for emergencies. Other people did the same thing. First of all, you'd eat the meat. Muskrat meat was good, you'd eat it all. And you had the fur, besides that, to fall back on. It was a slow process. You had to hang that up there and skin it up there with care. After that put it on a… branch and stick it there for the hide, upside down, to dry.

We had to adapt to a society that required money from us. In order to do so, we used our skills - hunting and trapping - and produced items that had monetary value to those who demanded it. But, we bested the system. We did something we liked to do anyway: hunt for muskrat, which was a delicacy to eat, and save the fur in our version of a savings account. Our ways have not disappeared. Our people have simply adapted to overcome barriers placed in our paths.

I am continually amazed by the knowledge my grandparents have and how they find ways to relate contemporary events to their memories and oral histories. Some of the most memorable moments I have shared with them through this process occurred in the form of simple, everyday dialogue or "anecdotes" added to my grandfather's stories. While these stories may not constitute "official" history, they illustrate the intersection of old and new. These stories concern eggs and mail, and both took place as my grandmother was coming and going from the house, listening in on the tail ends of a couple of stories. It is essential to know, as you read these stories, that my grandparents have been married for more than fifty years and have had, since I can remember, a relationship that is based on teasing, particularly mock exasperation with one another.

In the first moment, my grandmother was on her way to the grocery store, and passing through the living room where my grandfather and I sat talking by the fire. She piped in about her father and how he used to tell both funny stories and not-so-funny stories about survival. While she was continuing on her way out, my grandfather called, "Bring omega eggs!" She scoffed, "Orders!" I laughed, thinking back to the stories I had been hearing mere moments earlier and pointed out that they didn't have omega eggs back in the old days. While my grandfather went on to explain that these eggs have less calories and less fat than regular eggs, my grandmother caught my drift and said, "Omega eggs, huh. *Au naturel* in those days!" She left and my grandfather proceeded to note that, amongst other "superstitions" in his time, cracking an egg to reveal a double yolk meant something.

Similarly in the second moment, my grandmother was also on her way out the door, this time heading to the post office. She came into the living room to find my grandfather telling me about old methods of transmitting messages. She contributed to the storytelling, pointing out that sometimes it was as simple as a person or messenger, going to the recipient who was often

hunting in the bush, to deliver a message. She added that in the winter they had dogsleds. Halfway out the door, my grandmother turned to me and asked if I could bring some mail down to my aunt in the city. I responded, "I'll be the modern day messenger," which garnered some laughs. "Yeah! Real modern!" my grandmother exclaimed. "Grandchild bringing the mail."

These moments, occurring apart, from, and within the storytelling process, illustrate changes that have taken place in my grandparents' lifetimes and how they have adapted to them. Our people have a history of flexibility and my grandparents' generation exemplifies this. I recently taught my grandfather how to use e-mail. In fact, some of the information presented here was confirmed with him via e-mail - something, to be frank, I did not think possible only months earlier. Warrior (2005) refers broadly to this process in terms of our scholarship: "Native intellectual history works for me in much the same way, as Native intellectuals participate in going out from and coming back to the places from which they came, learning along the way new ideas that inform the creation of new knowledge" (p. xxxi).

These stories may not seem important to everyone. Those outside of my family and community may not find value in knowing that lumber companies contested the land that is today our reserve; that when hunting, my great-great-grandfather never missed a shot until the year he died; that my grandfather's grandmother kept a "Muskrat Savings Account"; or, that my grandparents eat omega eggs. And that is okay. These stories belong to my family and I am doing this work for my family.

What I hope everyone can understand is *why* writing and recording our stories is important to my family, my community, my nation, and me. I am writing to fulfill my responsibilities. I am writing so that my family always remembers our homeland. I am writing to do my part to achieve decolonization. And I am writing so that our people and our ways will continue.

Where does it end?

My research and writing are driven by the love I have for my grandfather and the love we share for our family and generations to come. We all have the right to know the history of our ancestors and our community. I believe that this work chose me. I hope that this spirit comes through in my work, as Cardinal and Armstrong (1991) write:

> Consciousness continues and knowledge continues unfolding from one generation to the next. The immortal spirit and mind of the human exists only as long as the fragile physical human life form exists. Our people refer to this collective human past and present as 'the old one who speaks to us all'. The old one is present in all that we share as human beings. It is present in our wonderful variety of arts, our languages, our ceremonies, our customs and our histories. (p. 82)

As Native scholars whose teachings include love, our writing and our work is influenced by the love for our people and all of creation. This love will always be here.

Sean Teuton (2008) observes that when Native scholars witness anti-Indianism in society, we "awaken politically and begin putting [our] ideas to work" (p. 107). He calls this response "the callout." Justice (2008) adds that for Native scholars "there can be no higher ethical purpose than to answer 'the callout' and tend to those kin-fires; it's a sacred trust. It's what we do for family" (pp. 166-167). I have made a conscious effort to focus more on our peoples' accomplishments and potential, than marginalization and oppression. I aim to "refocus our work from trying to transform the colonial outside into a flourishment of the *Indigenous* inside" (Simpson, 2011, p. 17). However, the history of colonization is difficult, if not impossible, for Native writers to omit from the work we do. I wrote about the importance of recording my family's oral history, my own experiences along this journey, and other Native writers' stories about stories (or "theories"). I have answered "the callout" by responding to the colonizer's, or mainstream society's, perspectives on my people with what makes us strong, proud nations: our àdisòkàn, our stories.

"Every Indian I meet is writing a story," writes LeAnne Howe (2002, p. 46). In my experience, this could not be closer to the truth. I have told you how my grandmother, on my father's (Whiteduck) side, added to my grandfather's storytelling from time to time. She is looking forward to an opportunity to tell her story: "I'd tell a wicked story, but it's not my [turn]. See, it's not all good things that happened! Things happened that were rough. We could tell you stories of only good things that happened, but we could tell you of bad things that happened to people, too"[3]. Towards the end of the digital recording, she said that after forty-eight years of marriage to my grandfather she has "a good story" to tell. (My grandfather responded by teasing, "A horror story?") My grandmother on my mother's (Cooko) side, just recently opened up to me about her experiences in residential school. She also has an important story to tell.

The ability to tell these stories, through writing or other methods, in ways that are empowering for our families, communities, and nations may necessitate new means to express ourselves. As Brooks (2008) writes:

> If we think of writing as a tool of the political imagination, it may mean that we need to expand the boundaries of what we define as literature… In expanding our view of literary production—geographically, temporally, and stylistically—we reimagine the bounds of the relationships that Native people have to writing. We are challenged to consider how multiple kinds of texts might serve the multiple needs of Native communities; we are moved to contemplate how writing can operate as a living force of change and sustenance in the landscape. (p. 256)

Simpson (2011) reflects on steps that can be taken to bring about resurgence for Nishnaabeg:

> Building diverse, nation-culture-based resurgences means significantly re-investing in our own ways of being: regenerating our political and intellectual traditions; articulating and living our legal systems; language learning; ceremonial

[3] J. Dewache, personal communication, February 16, 2009.

> and spiritual pursuits; creating and using our artistic and performance-based traditions. (p. 17-18)

In dedicating this work to considerations of our storytelling traditions, and the power and potential of writing for our people, I have only just begun to explore this process and my role within it. The real challenge for me comes as I conclude this writing. I must now embark upon the story writing process with my grandfather and potentially help my grandmother's find ways to tell or record their stories. And, in working with them and through the voices of our ancestors, I will learn more about myself as Anishinàbekwe. This is continuance in practice.

I suppose now is the time when I must "end" this article. Blaeser (1999) writes that in oral traditions, Native authors' "goal, ultimately, is to destroy the closure of their own texts by making them perform, turning them into a dialogue, releasing them into the place of imagination" (56). As we were wrapping up one evening and discussing what the end of the book would look like, my grandfather contemplated: "Where would you end it though? Let's say you write from the start, where would you end it? What generation? Would it be our generation? Your generation? Do you stop there, or do you…?"

Or do you…?

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