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**Wandering Spirit Survival School:**  
**Native Education & Emancipation**  
**Through the Four Seasons Curriculum**

**Sharon Berg**  
(in collaboration with Pauline Shirt)

A THESIS

submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies  
in partial fulfilment of  
the requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF EDUCATION

Primary Supervisor: Celia Haig-Brown  
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**WANDERING SPIRIT SURVIVAL SCHOOL:  
NATIVE EDUCATION & EMANCIPATION  
THROUGH THE FOUR SEASONS CURRICULUM**

by

**SHARON BERG**

a thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of York  
University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the  
degree of

**MASTER OF EDUCATION**

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**Abstract:**

This text offers an account an emancipatory process in the story of Canada's first Native Survival School. Archival research is woven with a *collective narrative* in a reminiscence of Wandering Spirit Survival School (WSSS) that draws its significance from the painful history of Native Education in Canada.

Founded in 1976, WSSS was adopted as an Alternative School by the Toronto Board of Education in 1977. Pauline Shirt, a Cree visionary and founder of the school, played a critical role in designing and reviewing the research for this thesis. It develops her narrative within the collective testimony of former students and teacher-volunteers, unfolding as a unique collaborative *methodology-in-process* that blends two cultural approaches to research.

An account of the impetus for the school's inception places WSSS in context with a) the story of Wandering Spirit (the War Chief of Big Bear's Plains Cree band), b) the 1885 incident at Frog Lake that shifted the dominant culture image of the Indian with punishing changes to Canada's Indian Act, c) a history of Native schooling that illustrates the partnership between Church and Crown in the acquisition of land in the New World, and d) the cross-border activism for Native emancipation through education during the 1970s.

Beginning with the missionary model established in the 1600s, Canada's Native education policy is explored as it shifts to acculturation-in-isolation (through Residential Schools) after 1886, then acculturation-through-integration (in provincial schools) after 1951. The failure of Native students to thrive in the dominant schooling system led to a two-fisted demand for Native control of Native education in the 1970s through the band-directed reserve schools and the Native Survival Schools.

In this text, the Medicine Wheel at the heart of Aboriginal culture is given definition as a responsive healing pedagogy that integrates mind, body and spirit. Also known as the Teaching Wheel, it guides a regionally responsive articulation of the Four Seasons Curriculum developed at WSSS. The story of WSSS is the story of a community and a model for emancipatory education which remains relevant in contemporary times.

**Dedication:**

This work is dedicated to the memory of Kahpaypamahchakwayo, the Cree Warrior Chief known as Wandering Spirit, and to the memory of Mistahimaskwa, the Peace Chief Big Bear. Though they represented separate paths during the final quarter of the 18th Century, each of these men dedicated his life to protecting the future of their band and all First Nations people through the practice of their traditions on their ancestral land.

This work is also my tribute to all of those people who have dedicated their lives to cultural revival through the Native Survival School Movement. They hold a powerful vision for the emancipation of Aboriginal people through a return to Native Way education in all corners of this continent.

**Disclaimer:**

It is often said in Native Circles that it is the student's responsibility to take great care in choosing teachers. At the same time, it is fitting to make a public disclaimer regarding my own expertise. I am a student of Aboriginal culture and not a teacher. Whenever I speak of the teachings delivered to me, it should be understood that I am offering my interpretations. Therefore, any erroneous cultural information presented through this thesis is rooted in the limits of both my personal understanding and the pitfalls of cross-cultural ethnography. They should not be attributed to either my own Aboriginal teachers or other Aboriginal sources quoted here. Please note that any improper spelling of words offered in Ojibway or Cree in this thesis must also be attributed to my error.

Sharon Berg  
Toronto, August 16, 1998

### **Acknowledgements:**

First and foremost, my thanks go out to the Creator and the Good Spiritual Grandfathers and Good Spiritual Grandmothers who have guided both my dreams and my work so that this history could be told. Meegwetch.

I cannot begin to offer my thanks to beings on the physical plane without acknowledging the trees which guided me in my dreams and gave up their lives so this history could be recorded on paper. Meegwetch.

This work could never have manifest without the guidance and collaboration of Nimkiiquay of the Bird Clan, a Plains Cree woman also known as Pauline Shirt. She calls herself a *cultural therapist*. While her methods and philosophy have received applause from some, and resistance from others, no one stands unmoved by the passion for social justice that weaves through Pauline's narrative as: the founder of a Survival School, a teacher, a woman, a mother, a grandmother, a great-grandmother, an auntie, a social activist, a spiritualist, a prison worker and a midwife (literally) to the next generation. Pauline has been present at many of the pivotal moments in Aboriginal history that brought the historical injustice of Red/White relations on Turtle Island to public attention during the 1960s and 1970s. People have called her a walking history book because she has so many stories to tell, but, to put a twist on that phrase, I think of her as a walking library. Her teachings have inspired me to revisualise my self as a *being* in the natural world, so that I could find balance through knowing my place among all my relations in the Circle of Life on Turtle Island. Pauline is so many things to me: my teacher, my friend and my adopted sister. Meegwetch.

I am also hugely indebted to Pauline's children: Deanna Schilling, Luanna Harper, Clayton Shirt, Ted Harper and Les Harper, and to her step-son, Vincent, for their support throughout my journey at their mother's side. Meegwetch.

Yet a very special thanks is due to Luanna, who answered my requests for clarification or helped me to remember the names and details of history that flesh out this thesis, when Pauline was unavailable. And another special thanks goes out to Clayton for his participation in the ethnographic portion of this history. Meegwetch. Meegwetch.

As my thesis supervisor, Celia Haig-Brown has been both inspiring and affirming, her intuition so sharp she anticipated problems that I was only beginning to articulate during my thesis proposal stage. She has been an invaluable source of wisdom on all issues related to scholarship, and her understanding of the problems inherent in cross-cultural ethnography takes root in her willingness to foster a repositioning of the researcher. I would be very remiss if I did not thank her for directing me to the work of Russell Bishop, and for acting as midwife to the unique collaborative process which delivered this history. Meegwetch.

I must also thank CarolAnne Wien for her role as second midwife in my

supervisory committee. Her introduction to both the literature on developmentally appropriate education and the Reggio Emilia approach to schooling inspired my vision of a fresh critical stance on cross-cultural research, which addresses the anthropocentrism of dominant culture as it defines emancipatory education. Meegwetch.

Additionally, I must thank Sean Kane for agreeing to bring the breadth of his understanding of human nature, culture, story and poetics to this thesis as my external advisor. His reading of the text brought it closer to its intent through subtle but critical shifts. Meegwetch.

Robert Regnier of the University of Saskatchewan also deserves a special acknowledgement for acting as a personal model for the conducting of sensitive ethnographic research, long before I began this work. Meegwetch.

As I began my MED at York, I was gifted with the opportunity to study with Chet Bowers, a visiting Professor from Portland State University. This experience had a high influence on my work. I am hugely indebted to him for an articulation of the meta-narratives that guide dominant culture's tacit understanding of the natural world, human purpose and my understanding of the teacher as a socialiser of the next generation. He points the way for educators to transcend dominant culture's anthropocentric frame of reference for the world through an Earth-responsive pedagogy. I am eternally grateful to Chet and his wife Mary for their support of my work and ideas. Meegwetch.

Joe Sheridan opened the doors at York University as my academic advisor, and introduced me, literally, to Chet Bowers. I remain indebted for that meeting, and his introduction to a library of research material on environmental education. Meegwetch.

I also owe my thanks to all of the interview participants I have not yet mentioned: the historian Hugh Dempsey, Stewart Greene, Bill Lewis, Tim Margett, 'Mary-Mary', Trevor Owen, Dora Raphael and Kathy Shirt. Meegwetch. I am hugely indebted to everyone for their candour, personal insight and reflective analysis, and for their trust that I would honour their contribution to the story. Meegwetch.

All writers know their work cannot be done without sacrifice on the part of their families. I take this opportunity to thank my daughters, Ila Danette Rae Berg and Brynna Kirsten Rene Berg, for their patience and their endurance. While Kirsten felt her concerns were eclipsed by my work in the final summer of thesis-writing she continues to support me, knowing this thesis represents only a portion of my work to record the story of Pauline Shirt, Wandering Spirit Survival School and the Native Survival School Movement. Meegwetch. Meegwetch.

Two of my teachers at Laurentian University deserve special mention. Thom Alcoze was instrumental in opening my eyes to the concept of culture as a people's response to their ancestral territories, while Jim Dumont guided me through the period of my initial awakening to the Grandfathers' teachings. Meegwetch.

I must also thank Patsy Cook for insisting that I stop volunteering in her classroom and take my own teaching degree; Maeve Kelly for her continuous counsel through the evolution of this thesis and our journey into the wilderness with only our oil pastels and trust that we will be guided; the historian Walter Klaassen for his reading of two history chapters; Lynn Miller for her willingness to become a copy editor for the thesis; and Hugh Russell for his insightful reading of an excerpt from my introductory chapter. Meegwetch.

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Philip Klaassen is not only a fellow Graduate student but my dearest friend. As we shared house during the writing of this thesis he offered companionship, technical advice, access to his extensive library and discussions of alternate perspectives on everything that ties day-to-day events to the thesis-writing process. Meegwetch.

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Finally, I offer acknowledgement and thanks to the Don River and all of the creatures of the Don Valley, who gifted me with witness to their shifting seasons. Meegwetch. Meegwetch. Meegwetch. Meegwetch.

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## Code for Reading Transcript Materials

- names indicated by first initial followed by colon, (ie) P: = Pauline
- ... omission of small portion in individual's speech, up to two lines
- <snip> omission of more than two lines in individual's speech, or omission of segment containing speech from more than one person
- <snip block> omission of large segment of transcript
- <shift block> reordering of segments of transcript
- [pause] five to ten seconds
- [long pause] ten seconds or more
- [inaudible] seemingly a word, which is not recognisable
- [inaudible phrase] what seems to be a phrase, but is not recognisable
- [name omitted] or [name of organization omitted] where indication involves legal or social issues irrelevant to understanding the point of the conversation
- [initials] first and last initials of name; ie: J.D.
- [undecipherable] indicates I was unable to decipher word or phrase in audio-taped interview

## Code for Sources

- CL Class Lecture Notes
- LC Letter Correspondence
- FN Field Notes
- NI Research Notes from text sources
- TC Thesis Consultation/feedback from Pauline's readings of draft material
- TEL Telephone conversation
- TR1 etc. 'Transcript only' record of interview
- T1 etc. Transcript from taped interview

**List of Abbreviations**

AIM	American Indian Movement
AFN	Assembly of First Nations
AKEC	Ahkinomagai Kernik Education Council
APS	Aboriginal Protection Society
BIA	Bureau of Indian Affairs (USA)
CAS	Children's Aid Society
CASNP	Canadian Alliance in Solidarity with Native Peoples
CCSC	Caughnawaga Combined School Committee
Co-op	Bain Apartments Housing Co-operative
CP	Communist Party of Canada
CPW	Canadian Press Wire Service
DIAND	Department of Indian Affairs & Northern Development (Canada)
ECE	Early Childhood Education
HBC	Hudson's Bay Company
I	Interviewer (in excerpts from Pellerin, 1982)
IRIW	Indian Rights for Indian Women
MIB	Manitoba Indian Brotherhood
MLP	Marxist-Leninist Party of Canada
NFB	National Film Board of Canada
NIB	National Indian Brotherhood (Canadian)
NNN	Native Network News
NPCO	Native Peoples' Caravan to Ottawa
NSL	Native Sign Language
NWMP	North West Mounted Police
NWTC	North West Trading Company
OCA	Ontario College of Art
OISE	Ontario Institute of Studies in Education
PM	Prime Minister of Canada
R	Respondent (in excerpts from Pellerin, 1982)
RCMP	Royal Canadian Mounted Police
SNSS	Saskatoon Native Survival School
Ss	Students (in excerpts from Pellerin, 1982)
TBE	Toronto Board of Education
TNT	Toronto Native Times Newsletter
WSSS	Wandering Spirit Survival School

**PROLOGUE**

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**Dream Diary: February, 1981**

*This dream is the strongest dream I have ever experienced, a dream which culminated in a physical sensation that I can still 'feel'. As a result, my recollection is more like a physical presence than a simple memory:*

I am travelling on foot through a sapling woods. The trees are young and slender, their trunks pale, the circumference of a broom handle but pliable, so they shift in the wind. It is spring time and dawn, the sun just rising but strong and bright. The leaves of these trees have budded out in tufts, making a green filigree on a lacework of branches.

I am focused on my journey, though I have no map and have *forgotten* my destination. Dressed in a tunic of soft leather, I carry only the essentials for surviving, which are in a small bag carried over my shoulder. Even the soles of my boots are soft. I can feel the ground through them, and this is how I find my way. I have *ken* of a path and I am filled with anticipation. It is *knowing* which draws me forward like a magnetic force. There is no visible trail through this wood, yet there is a track underfoot I cannot see but *feel* laid out before me. It is centuries old, a route that hundreds have walked on before me.

There are watchers and seers in this wood that I can only sense, somehow understanding they guide and protect me. As I walk, I feel stronger, and notice the trees around me are more mature, the forest taking up its own path of progression. Gradually, their trunks have taken on the thickness of bodies. I trail my fingers on

strong spines as I progress, acknowledging their presence, their company. It is as if I walk through a crowd of well-wishers that parts to let me pass.

The yellow light of dawn at the beginning of this journey has passed into mid-morning sun. I have travelled from sapling woods into young forest, the green filigree thickening as branches stretch to interlock overhead. The sun sends beams of light through the leaves, strengthening into thick shafts. Mid-day corresponds to summer as this journey also discovers its seasons. As I walk, the muscles in my legs begin to call out with each step, protesting. The further I go with it, the more this journey becomes a conscious project I have taken up.

The trees also call out, in the conversation of a maturing forest. Their branches rub against the trunks of neighbours, in touch and embrace. Yet they are on some other cycle, like a watch losing minutes per hour but still tracking time, their bodies slowing as they age. The canopy overhead has thickened like their waists, their voices *andante*, slowed to exaggerated syllables. At some point, far along the path, I realise the light no longer penetrates with strong shafts but pries through the foliage, reduced to a dappling on the undergrowth.

I have begun to pay greater attention to the spirits in the trees all around me, not just the journey. I feel the spirits of the plants, the grass, and hiding animals, each of them on a separate loop in the cycle of time. The forest I am walking through is ancient. I know it has been here since the beginning of this continent. I can feel the spirits of people who have passed this way before me, alone and in groups. Their presence is so strong, I can almost see them walking beside me. At first there are pioneers and *coureurs de bois*, on foot or in wagons. As I wind deeper into this ancient forest these pale faces dwindle in the crowd that walks with me, until there are just the Natives, as bands and as individuals. As I walk, I know these are the spirits of those who died along this path.

I am surrounded by a profusion of spirits who call out to me with each step, encouraging me to go on. They are the spirits of trees, the animals, the plants, and

people. I walk and walk and walk. As I am walking I grow tired and the people gone before me begin to reach up through the earth to touch the soles of my feet. I can feel their fingers just below the surface of the Earth. I can feel them touching the soles of my feet through the soft leather of my boots. They are speaking to me though there are no *voices*, only a *ken*, telling me I am on the right path.

With the touch of the ancestors, I find the energy to continue though my journey seems endless. Finally, my body is exhausted by the demands of this trip, and still, with the encouragement of the spirit-ancestors I continue. I walk and walk and walk until I think I will pass out of this world in exhaustion. Still they call me onwards.

Finally, I see light on the path ahead of me and arrive at a great clearing. An opening in the canopy overhead lets the afternoon sun cast amber light on a green oasis. I pause at the edge of this clearing to stand awe-struck, for in the middle of this clearing is a gigantic tree. I am awed by the power of recognition. Though I have never seen it before, I know this tree. It is both incredibly old and infinitely wise, a counsellor throughout my life without my conscious awareness. I wonder if it is oak, maple or pine, its trunk so dark and deeply wrinkled. The tree itself is so tall, I cannot determine species, yet I know that it slips beyond such distinctions. As I come to stand at its roots, I wrap my arms around this tree, laying my cheek against its bark. It is warm and soft, the energy of its life force buzzing like the voices of bees, a vibrating beneath my touch. I know this is the largest, most ancient tree on the North American continent, the Grandfather of all the tree people. I accept my knowledge of this fact without question, just as I understand this tree has known and counselled every person who has set their feet on this path since the beginning of human time.

I turn from my embrace of the tree now, and study the clearing, which is beautiful. A lush green meadow flocked by a rainbow of wild flowers opens before me. There is a short gentle slope to the shore of a small, calm lake. That lake reflects the blue of the sky like a mirror. As I move away from the tree to stand on its beach I can see the whole shoreline. It is shaped like a lop-sided heart, or the top of a grand piano. As I

think *piano*, a quiet voice in the great surround delivers confirmation. *Yes, Piano Lake.*

This place I have come to is remarkably serene. As I stand by this lake, I realise it is not just peaceful, but a place of complete harmony and balance. Suddenly, I am overcome with emotion, knowing this is the place I have travelled towards all my life, my *forgotten* destination. Exhausted in the midst of my wonder and relief that I have arrived, I am overwhelmed by the desire to rest and meditate between this tree and this lake. I return to the tree, lie down among the roots which have humped out of the ground, and revisit the security a child finds resting in a giant lap. There, I fall into a deep, deep sleep.

As I dream within my dream, the spirits of hundreds of people and animals who have passed-over stir in the ground beneath me. They talk through my sleep, in a conversation without words, and I do not have to explain myself. They already know me. They have been waiting for me from the moment my feet touched the beginning of this path. Despite the distance, they knew I was coming from the first rays of dawn light.

It is now late afternoon. As I dream, lulled by the company of those who passed this way before me, the thick white roots of this gigantic tree rise from the Earth to wrap me in their embrace. Awakened from the dream within a dream, I sit upright in the lap of the tree, amazed but not frightened. The roots of this tree are beautiful, smooth, and warm against my cheek as they embrace me. The tree itself is speaking to me now, saying, *Welcome. You are home.* Nothing has ever filled me with such a sense of peace as the embrace of this tree.

I open my eyes and find I am sitting up in my bed, still feeling the hug of those great white roots, the slow vibration of the tree's voice still rumbling within me.

**Chapter One:**  
**INTRODUCTION**

<<<< >>>>

Grandfather, Great Spirit -

We give thanks for this new day.  
Grandfather, this is a new beginning, another chance, Grandfather.  
We give thanks that we can all be here together, Grandfather,  
To have this Feast, that we would all become one here, Grandfather,  
That we would all remember that this food, it comes from Mother Earth,  
And she is very kind to give it to us, Grandfather.  
Meegwetch for the young ones that are here today, Grandfather,  
Because it is for them that we are doing this, Grandfather  
- The school -  
That they may all grow in these ways,  
That they may become spiritually strong, Grandfather,  
And walk that Red Road that our Elders talked to us about,  
So much, Grandfather.  
I give thanks for all these things, Grandfather.  
Meegwetch, meegwetch, meegwetch, meegwetch.<sup>1</sup>

<<<< >>>>

This thesis offers a history of Wandering Spirit Survival School (WSSS) in the voices of those who were directly involved with the school. It articulates Pauline Shirt's vision of Native Way as a model for emancipatory education which takes its root in the community. She is the Cree woman who Fasted<sup>2</sup> for guidance to

---

<sup>1</sup> This is the prayer offered on the National Film Board (NFB) documentary film called Wandering Spirit Survival School (Holdway et al. 1978).

<sup>2</sup> The practice of Fasting is also called a Spirit Quest. It normally involves four days and nights of isolation on the land without food or water. The Mide and other groups use a Fasting Lodge, but some go without a shelter

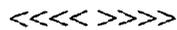
help her people and was counselled by the Good Grandfathers to found a school. Many others, including her partner Vern Harper, gathered to establish a Parent Council and the strong contingent of volunteer support which turned her dream of a safe learning environment for urban Native children into a reality. Pauline's Four Seasons Curriculum is presented as both a distinct pedagogy and as the story-within-the-story of a tiny school community which helped countless children and adults in Toronto's Aboriginal community to recover the *good walk* through Native Way.

This story begins with the desperate act of a desperate group, in the 1974 Native People's Caravan to Ottawa, but it gathers an historical focus through stories of the Cree Peace Chief Big Bear and his War Chief Wandering Spirit. During the late 1800s, these men gained renown as the leaders of the last non-treaty band in Canada at that time (Dempsey 1984; Carter 1997). WSSS was named after the Cree War Chief hanged by the Canadian government for murder and treason after the up-rising at Frog Lake in 1885. As a warrior, his life was devoted to protecting his nation, and Wandering Spirit urged his people to practise their cultural ways with his last breath through his death song. An analysis of the history of Native education in Canada broadens the foundation for a multi-faceted, collective narrative of the WSSS story. The partnership between various Churches and the Crown in the acquisition of Canada's gigantic land base is explored as a critical influence on the Indian Act policies affecting education.

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and some Fast on a platform in a tree. Traditionally, Fasts are supervised by a Medicine person though an experienced FASTER can go solo. In some cases, for the very experienced, the Fast extends to seven days (Berg & Shirt TC 1997, TC 1998).

It is followed by an exploration of the existing literature on WSSS that presents glimpses of the school in action. The narrative history is developed through the voices of the school's founder, teacher-volunteers, a parent and students of WSSS. What this paper develops is the collective memory of a community who adopted Pauline Shirt's vision as their own project. The design of this study-through-reflection is guided by the author's decade of apprenticeship to First Nations traditions under Pauline. Through a unique collaboration which facilitates the welding of critical ethnography with traditional First Nations research, this project consciously broadens the definition of ethnography. What results is an ever-evolving, cross-cultural, collaborative, methodology-in-process. This approach to ethnographic research led to strong modifications of the standard model for dialogue fostered by dominant culture institutions,<sup>3</sup> and a conscious assertion of Native voice.



As an academic text rooted in ethnographic and archival research, a thesis is a self-conscious project, focused on its own structure and purpose while presenting another's story. In order to foster the balance necessary to its cross-cultural context and its subject matter, I have presented this text in segments which are characteristic of the *teachable moments* in traditional Aboriginal education (Kelly LC 1997).<sup>4</sup> As Brody (1981), Basso (1987, 1988) and

---

<sup>3</sup> Issues of language can be sticky. Despite the continuing dominance of the Enlightenment ideology in the established global hierarchy of nations, the mobility of the world population over the past century has led to the influence of various ethnic and cultural groups on the practice of those nations. Therefore, following the practice of Chet Bowers (1993, 1995), I refer to a dominant culture ideology rather than a distinctly western one.

<sup>4</sup> Please note that personal letter correspondence is referred to in the thesis as 'LC'.

Cruikshank (1990a, 1981) have observed, the teachings often manifest as kernels of conversation with an Elder which are surrounded by the student's patient observation and silent meditation. The precedent for this format of presentation is also set, to some degree by explorations of the meaning in Australian songlines (Chatwin 1987) or Mayan myth (Tedlock 1993),<sup>5</sup> and by the contemporary call for fresh approaches in both the research and the recording of ethnographic interactions (Clifford & Marcus 1986; Smith 1987; Gluck & Patai 1991, Lather 1992, 1993).<sup>6</sup> I also introduce elements of an Aboriginal model for public address into the text, for instance, when an interview is quoted, respecting the protocol for turn-taking in speech events that prohibits interruption before the speaker relinquishes her turn (Phillips 1983), I follow the topic through large and lightly-edited segments of the speech events.

In honouring the structure of Aboriginal narratives, Pauline is given the opportunity to introduce herself in the next chapter. While her story is embellished by corresponding and contrasting threads through the accounts of other people involved in the operation of WSSS, Pauline is integral to the methodology of this project. As comments sprinkled throughout this work elaborate, she helped to design this project and had a final review of the thesis. Pauline also gave me full access to her personal collection of WSSS archives, which was mixed with archival pieces related to the activities she pursued apart

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<sup>5</sup> In either of these examples the result reads more like a novel assembled from vignettes than a standard research report.

<sup>6</sup> This includes a greater involvement of the research partner in designing the project and reviewing the data collected, and an accounting of the researchers' impact upon the research process, but it also supports a synthesis of writing genres in creating textual records and can involve text created by the research partner.

from WSSS, such as Indian Rights for Indian Women (IRIW). This mix, collected in boxes by a general date rather than a subject, placed her work at WSSS within a far broader context than I would have discovered in any other archives. For these reasons, Pauline's collaboration is considered foundational rather than supplementary to this history, while our relationship as apprentice and teacher is another important dynamic of this study.

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I want to make clear what the reader can expect from this work, and what will not be found here. This is a narrative history that offers critical analysis to explain a point of view. It does not pretend to offer an objective evaluation of WSSS's success as a school, assuming that such a thing were even possible. While Pauline Shirt established an influential model for Native education with ramifications for communities across Canada, in the USA and in Europe, this is not an account of personal triumph for the school's founder. Nor is it the story of a model school that continued past its first seven years with its founding mandate. While the story of WSSS suggests the solution to issues flowing from the Indian Act's control over Indian education is within reach of those same people, it offers no prescriptions for the design of lesson plans and does not provide a curriculum outline. As a matter of fact, the notion that any one text, or any one school, could ever deliver a prescription for education that would serve the myriad needs of the legion of Aboriginal communities in Canada is entirely rejected. Instead, the primary message of WSSS is that those solutions evolve by attending to the relationship established among a particular student group, its surrounding

community, manifestations of the Four Seasons in that specific geographic region, and the history of regional culture groups (while acknowledging both their social alliances and historical migrations).

This is a story some readers will find difficult to read. It asks members of dominant culture to consider - through Native eyes and voice - the historical model for Native education, and, to examine the role our ancestors (and our institutions) have played in disseminating cultural imperialism through educational policy. Yet, woven throughout, there is Pauline's persistent vision of the potential for re-establishing balance and harmony between First Nations and Newcomer populations. This second theme is articulated in the Two Row Wampum Belt as an ancient record of an original treaty on this continent.<sup>7</sup> Pauline is fond of explaining the symbolism in that Iroquois pact, those two rows speaking of two nations. The parallel lines mean each nation recognized the sovereignty of the other, and vowed to respect the other in their difference without interference. Aboriginal and Newcomer both pledged to walk their row in peace, without trespass against the other (Alcoze CL 1988; Berg & Shirt TC 1997).<sup>8</sup> One nation broke their contract long ago, yet, despite the tumultuous history of Indian-colonizer relations on this continent - even as Canada continues to make trespass against First Nations autonomy through political process - Pauline and other Elders suggest the Two Row Wampum Belt vision can still be

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<sup>7</sup> Wampum Belts are woven from the purple and white shells of *Dentellia*, a marine creature. They were often created to establish a record of the pledges between nations. In other words, they record Aboriginal treaty.

<sup>8</sup> Note that I draw on my prior academic training through an undergraduate degree in Native Studies. I had the privilege of studying with several Aboriginal academics: Thom, Alcoze, Jim Dumont and Joyce Pitiwanaqwat. I refer to my notes from their class lectures as CL. Also, the collaborative consultations I made with Pauline over this thesis are referenced as thesis consultations (or as TC 1997 and TC 1998).

realised.

There are those who resist examinations of our difficult national history. Some worry that recognising First Nations sovereignty will open the door on all manner of things: claims against the land our houses sit on, the displacement of millions of people, or fresh taxes on our homes, industries and the resources drawn from the land. Yet those who resist recognition of our history have missed a critical point about the indigenous attitude towards life. One of the strongest traditional teachings asks each individual to reflect on our every action by considering how each thing we do impacts on our children for seven generations into the future by looking seven generations into the past (Dumont CL 1988; Alcoze CL 1988). In the fullest expression of our humanity, both Native and Newcomer are responsible for each other's grandchildren, for generations to come.

Jim Dumont, an Anishinabe and Keeper of the Eastern Doorway of the Three Fires Mide Society, delivers another teaching, saying we are each counselled by seven Good Grandfathers in the Sacred Lodge that rests on the other side of our entry to the physical plane. In that council meeting, we are shown: our parents and siblings, our life journey and its obstacles and the land that nurtures us on our journey. The life journey of each individual is set out as a spiritual contract, and it is only upon the physical plane that the spirit can evolve. One could read Stanley Wilson's (1993) observations about DNA in light of this teaching.

While there is no evidence that the strings of human DNA resist decay, the individual molecules of DNA are returned to the land, water and air upon the death of an organism. Over time, through the conception of a new lifeform, these individual molecules of DNA are pulled back from the surrounding environment

into the ever-evolving cycle of life on this planet. In fact, as Pauline suggests the second-generation Canadians cannot be told to *get back to where they came from* because whatever their cultural background they have drawn bits of their physical matter from their surrounding environment. She insists, the land itself does not discriminate. Each person has a spiritual and genetic relationship with both the territory of our birth and the teachings delivered through that geography and can no longer be divided from either their relationship with, or their responsibility to, the territories now called Canada.

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It could be said that the story of Wandering Spirit Survival School (WSSS) reflects the whole saga of Native education in Canada, in miniature, just as the narrative of the school's founder, Cree traditionalist Pauline Shirt, reveals the experiences of all First Nations people. Yet, while there is a familiar pattern, there is also a critical difference to this tale. An old adage says the exception proves the rule, and the rule in this case was truly terrible. Pauline Shirt's reminiscences of WSSS are among an emerging collection of narratives that highlight a small pattern in relief, which overlays a larger design of social malaise flowing from nearly 400 years of spiritual and cultural suppression of Canada's First Nations people. There are the memoirs of Elise Charland and Phil Fontaine, which express a determination to overcome both the personal and the social brokenness perpetuated by the Residential School experience (Jaine 1993). As Pauline says, "That is a story all in itself, the Boarding School situation" (Regnier 1987). Or there is Beatrice Medicine's discussion of the role that Elders are taking

to foster healing in contemporary life (Barman et al. 1987). In each of their stories the theme repeats that healing begins when people accept their pain over that brokenness. Fontaine, who is now Grand Chief of the Assembly of First Nations (AFN),<sup>9</sup> suggests healing depends on risking disclosure. Despite the pressures of his political career, he practises what he preaches, revealing that he was sexually abused, along with many others, as a boy in residential school (Fontaine cited in Jaine: 64-66). As Fontaine says, some will find their healing through traditional Doctorings in a Sweatlodge, and others will find resolution in the classic, dominant culture therapies. In either case, the key to healing is the will to accept responsibility for healing, as an individual and as a community. "If tears are what are needed to heal ourselves," he says, "then that is what we must accept... We have to do justice to ourselves, our kids, and the people who are to come" (66).

The approach to education at WSSS was founded upon the same premise. The Parent Council recognized the brokenness of the Native community at large, and the focus of WSSS's mandate was not just the students but also their extended families and the community at large. They embraced healing through a return to Native Way while recognizing their reality as modern, urban Indians. A common Elders' edict calls upon each individual, in every community: *Pick up your medicine bundles and walk the good walk*. Pauline recognised that living the good life as a traditional person did not depend upon living in a natural setting. "In all the years I've lived in Toronto, since the '60s, I've always lived by my traditions.

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<sup>9</sup> The AFN was formerly called the National Indian Brotherhood (NIB).

[pause]... It's just a way of life for me" (Shirt T1: 1992a).<sup>10</sup> Yet, more than the common understanding of *lifestyle*, the ancient teachings lay the foundation for Pauline's Four Seasons Curriculum at WSSS. The Circle Ceremony held each morning is just one manifestation of the Medicine Wheel, which some cultures call the Wheel of Life. The significance of that circle rests in its symbolic manifestation on the physical plane: the Four Directions, each of which contributes specific physical and spiritual powers to the whole; the Four Seasons in their cycle; the Four Colours of humankind; the Four Sacred Elements; the teachings delivered through the sacred medicines; and the interconnectedness of all things (Benton-Banai 1988; Dumont CL 1988).

Often, especially among Canada's tribes, the medicine used to smudge a Sacred Circle is Sweetgrass. Like the Catholic's Holy Water or the Body of Christ, this medicine is infused with Sacred Powers. The dominant property of Sweetgrass is unification: spirit, mind, body. In ceremony, its incense is first breathed deeply into the lungs (spirit), then the smoke is washed over the face and head in a rhythmic sweeping of the hands (mind), and finally the hands sweep that cleansing smudge down over the torso (body). Not only does the incense of Sweetgrass unite the spiritual, intellectual and physical being - represented by the three-strands of its braid - but it is understood to unite:

*the participants with one another, the Creator, the grandfathers, and creation... [In addition,] living in harmony with the whole consists not only of unity with others but also reconciliation. Reconciliation anticipates a brokenness that needs to take place for the harmony to be realized... in an awareness that recognizes*

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<sup>10</sup> Audio-taped interviews with Pauline are referenced as Shirt T1, T2 etc. Likewise, other audiotaped interviews are indicated by 'T' followed a number.

*individual limitations (Regnier 1994: 138).*

Therefore, the story and the ceremony of WSSS, at least in terms of this narrative, is grounded in the notion that the injustices of Canada's Indian Act of 1876 and the abuses suffered in the Residential Schools cannot be disconnected from the First Nations' resistance to an imposed educational system.<sup>11</sup>

According to the Midewin,<sup>12</sup> it is the twinning of all manifestations on the physical plane: of night with day, male with female, and destruction with regeneration that ensures the continuing cycle of life, each Winter being followed by the renewal of Spring (Benton-Banai 1988). This twinning of opposites, referred to as *the twins of creation*, is a consistent metaphor in Aboriginal world view. As night precedes day, the quest is a precursor to vision and the fall of old growth trees supports the growth of new seedlings. Opposites are not considered polar and dichotomous because each is necessary to the whole in an ever-repeating cycle of life. It is in this light that Pauline insists it is time to *walk the good walk* (Berg & Shirt TC 1997, TC 1998).

The inroads of cultural assimilation cannot be separated from the path toward cultural renewal. Neither can the long journey through political and cultural repression be divided from the progress towards self-government. The social ills that have plagued the Native community were the precondition for a conscious return to the teachings that developed the bonds of communities in the process of healing. This is not justification or denial. In fact, it calls for recognition that

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<sup>11</sup> Venne (1981) indicates that the first articulation of the Indian Act was in 1868, but most contemporary scholars, including Cassidy and Bish (1989) tend to place it as 1876.

<sup>12</sup> The Midewin, collectively, are a Teaching Lodge of the Algonquin peoples. Among the Ojibway they are referred to as 'Mide', while the Cree speak of the 'Mite' (Shirt 1997a, Berg & Shirt TC 1998).

individuals, in their identity, cannot be detached from their heritage, their community or their ancestral territories. As they emerge from the ceremonial lodge, reborn, the practitioner of Native Way whispers, in prayer, *All my relations*. Yet, more than a prayer, this is a statement of recognition. The one is part of the many and cannot be divided from the whole.

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Trevor Owen, a teacher at Inglenook Alternative High School for about a decade, was also Coordinator of the School<sup>13</sup> during the time Inglenook and WSSS shared the Sackville Avenue school building. He suggests no one could have planned the unique partnership which developed between these schools (Owen T16 1997). While it was an accident of available housing when two small Alternative Schools were given residence in a single building during the late 1970s, this chance pairing reaped happy results only because each of them respected both their fundamental differences and their common interests. Each school adjusted its programme calendar and use of the facilities, not only to accommodate the other but in support of the other's differences. It is probably not unfair to say that because WSSS moved into a site Inglenook had occupied on its own for two years, the High School felt the effort to accommodate the other school more keenly. While Inglenook was forced to pull in its elbows (Owen T16 1997), WSSS experienced a newfound freedom to set its own agenda and gained an extra classroom (Harper T14 1997; Berg & Shirt TC 1998). Luanna Harper

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<sup>13</sup> This position was created specifically for the Alternative Schools in the Toronto Board of Education (hereafter referred to as TBE).

indicates WSSS had experienced pressure to assimilate with its host school in its first few years at the Winchester school site, where WSSS's students were merged with the dominant school population in some of their academic classes. So the Sackville site represented a tremendous shift towards autonomy for the tiny culture school.

It should also be noted that the partnership between WSSS and the Toronto Board of Education (TBE) was never a given, especially because WSSS began as a private school founded in protest over problems experienced by Native students within the same school board. This deserves further exploration, for it is important to place WSSS's adoption in context, not only for the precedent it set as a model for the Native Survival School movement in Canada, but also because a) it was an ethnic school within the TBE, and b) it was part of the Alternative Schools movement, both within the TBE and nationally.

In the Exemplary Schools study, (1994), which formed the basis for Haig-Brown et al.'s Making the Spirit Dance Within (1997), it is revealed that the Saskatoon Native Survival School's (SNSS) original application to become an Alternative School was refused by the Saskatoon Public School Board. Over time SNSS negotiated a unique three-way partnership between the Parent Council, the Catholic Separate School Board and the Saskatchewan Ministry of Education in 1980, which gave the school considerable autonomy. In contrast, the two-way partnership developed between WSSS and the TBE may have been quicker to gel, but it has never been without tension in terms of the dynamics of its administration, the delivery of its programme and the development of its unique

cultural curriculum.<sup>14</sup> Like the history of Aboriginal education in Canada, the response that school boards had to requests for alternative schooling is instructive of the context that surrounded the founding of a Native Way school.

Patricia Cook's (1995) MED thesis explores "policies, practices, [and] politics" as they relate to the TBE's Cantonese Heritage programmes. Grounding her study in the demands for Heritage education from multiple ethnic and racial communities, she found careful politics inspired the TBE's tendency to provide programs as "localized changes in Board practice [even though] there was no official policy change" (Cook 1995: 9). Following Masemann's (1978) observation that "53 percent of the student population represented 50 non-Anglo groups" in 1974 (Masemann cited in Cook 1995), the TBE "had established four bilingual [Heritage] programmes in response to three specific requests from the Greek, Italian, and Chinese communities" (9). However, because those programmes were offered as language-focused instruction, the Ontario Ministry of Education guidelines (1974) restricted them to "no more than 150 minutes per week" (11). Also, because Heritage programmes were established as a supplement to the regular academic programme, they were only offered during After School hours and Saturday morning sessions. Therefore, WSSS holds a unique position within the TBE in that no other ethnic group has met with approval for a day school (Cook 1995: 9; Cook TEL 1998).

However, WSSS was such a small school that it was always housed in the available space associated with another school. In fact, during its hey-days from

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<sup>14</sup> WSSS was renamed 'First Nations School' in 1990 and continues to operate as an Alternative School within the TBE system, however, the focus of the school mandate has shifted considerably

1977 until 1985, WSSS was housed in the building occupied by Inglenook, an Alternative High School. As the School Co-ordinator for Inglenook, Trevor Owen suggests that WSSS was a culture school established within the context of the Alternative Schools movement as it manifest in the TBE (Owen T16 1997). In the general time frame of WSSS's founding, several small Private Schools (such as Hawthorne Bilingual and Inglenook High) were adopted by the TBE as Alternative Schools even as a number of new Alternative Schools were founded within the TBE itself by teachers or parent groups. This speaks to the general tenor of those times, but Trevor explains that the mere fact the Alternative Schools movement existed had thrown a different light on the options available to students throughout the regular school system. So WSSS was embraced as part of the Alternative Schools movement, within the TBE and nationally. Yet, at the same time, WSSS set the model for a separate movement of community-based culture schools across the nation. In fact, WSSS was a private, independently financed school from the summer of 1976 until February 1977 and it continued to retain independence through diversifying its financing through fund-raising efforts until Pauline's retirement due to illness in 1982. So depending upon local circumstances, the Native Survival Schools movement manifest as either community or school board-supported facilities for Native Way education.

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The story of WSSS is one of unlikely partnerships and alternative visions on more than one level. This history is inevitably defined by both WSSS's position as a culture school within the dominant school system, and the dynamics of

collaborative research that crosses cultural boundaries. In terms of the cross-cultural research that lays the foundation of this paper, it is important to note that while writing was "reduced to method" in the classic approach, "ethnography is actively situated between powerful systems of meaning" (Clifford 1986a: 2). The full implications of this are only recently becoming clear. This thesis is grounded in the assumption that "dominant culture does not have the only tools for research" (Shirt 1997a: 6). "The Native approach to spiritual teachings, through our life ways, is also an expression of a qualitative research design" (2).

As Pauline says in A Mide Quay's Qualitative Research Methods (1997a), she originally asked me to write the history of WSSS in 1987. I felt ill-equipped for the project at that time, and asked her how I could prepare myself to write this history. The answer did not arrive immediately. Pauline conducted her own research before responding. She "burned tobacco and asked the Good Grandfathers and the Good Grandmothers to give us the right answer" (3). The answer she received led me to pursue a Native Studies degree at Laurentian University with the specific intent to work with Jim Dumont, an Anishinabe professor and Keeper of the Eastern Doorway of the Mide Three Fires Society.

Pauline continues:

*I also gave personal spiritual teachings to Sharon. In 1992, I encouraged her to go Fasting (sometimes called a Spirit Quest) in order to find her own relationship to the Wandering Spirit story. There were several Good Spiritual Grandfathers who supported the school, and... Wandering Spirit was one of them. Fasting for the Wandering Spirit story would help Sharon to find her inner power in the position of a War Chief, because Wandering Spirit was a War Chief (3-4).*

To understand what Pauline means when she says I have taken up the position of a War Chief in my work on this thesis, it is necessary to understand what

the Aboriginal historian Paula Gunn Allen refers to as the moiety system.<sup>15</sup> In The Sacred Hoop (1986) she reports that many tribes had (and some maintain) a "two-sided, complementary social structure... corresponding to internal and external affairs" or the Peace Chief and War Chief (18). However, as she describes their roles the War Chief is not placed in a fundamentally aggressive. Rather, while there is occasionally a need for aggressive force to protect of the band's interests, in most situations they act as mediators who engage with outside groups.

The issue of social roles brings up another point in regards to the relationship individuals establish to the traditional teachings. While some members of Aboriginal society specialize in their training, taking their research to a deeper level as Medicine people,<sup>16</sup> both the metaphysical teachings and access to the traditional channels for involved research (such as Sacred Circles and Tobacco-burning) are embraced as part of everyone's *daily* life and traditions.<sup>17</sup> In other words, Native Way engages every individual in a daily, meditative research process distinguished by reciprocity which fosters a juncture between the physical and spiritual plane (Berg & Shirt TC 1998). As a result, it is a premise of this collaborative effort that by embracing the traditional Aboriginal research model

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<sup>15</sup> In the role of my external examiner, Sean Kane points out that anthropologists and other researchers may disagree with the suggestion that this division is distinctive of the moiety system which sanctions exogamy through exogamy. However, Pauline Shirt concurs with Allen's suggestion that (however it is labelled) stories from the Elders suggest a system of co-leadership under a Peace Chief and a War Chief.

<sup>16</sup> The role one assumes is influenced by the role defined by one's Clan, though there are numerous ways for that role to be expressed by the individual (Benton-Banai 1986; Dumont CL 1988; Berg & Shirt TC 1997).

<sup>17</sup> As Pauline indicates traditional research methods include giving thanks; "daily smudging and tobacco burning; Circles; personal counselling; the Pipe; the Four Seasons ceremonies; the Sunrise, Shaking tent, Naming and Give-Away ceremonies; Scrolls and Petroglyphs, singing and drumming; walk arounds; Sweats; Fasts; etc" (Shirt 1997a: 6).

within an academic framework WSSS's history was delivered through four main channels:

- 1/ standard academic archival research;
- 2/ a cross-cultural collaboration in ethnographic research;
- 3/ traditional aboriginal research through Fasting, the Sacred Pipe and Dreaming;
- 4/ an evolving conversational pattern for storytelling (as opposed to recitation).

The transcript excerpts illustrate, each of my interviews slipped free of the standard question-and-answer format to take the form of a dialogue. The level of interaction in the dialogue made it impossible to cull the interviewer's questions from the transcript to provide an uninterrupted rendition of the story in one voice. Instead, most notably in the interviews with Pauline, the partnering of voices highlighted the reciprocity and teaching that took place in tandem with the account of WSSS's history. So what is presented in this paper is the twinned history of the school and a collaborative research project.

As Pauline comments, Aboriginal people have "been studied to death" by all manner of researchers (Berg & Shirt TC 1997). In fact, the documentary film Margaret Mead and Samoa (Heimans et al. 1988) relates a standing American joke that asks: What is the composition of the American Indian family? The answer: mother, father, children, and ethnographer. Yet it was a happy and unexpected feature of my research process that an uncanny immediacy predominated in the relationships between me, as the researcher, and the people offering their recollections of WSSS. Whereas I had worried I might be seen as an outsider, I was accepted in my *appointed* role. This equanimity seemed to take its grounding in two things: a) the support for Pauline's process in establishing her version of WSSS's history, and b) the belief that this is a story that needs to be

told. Several times during my preliminary explanation of the research process I felt the people I interviewed had based their decision to participate on the fact that Pauline played a critical role in the design of the project and held veto power over the final draft of the entire thesis, rather than on my assurances that they, themselves, held veto power over both transcripts of their interviews and the thesis segments that draw on their interviews.

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In this thesis, I walk between the rows represented by the Two Row Wampum Belt of the Iroquois. For some people this puts me in a contradictory position. Yet even as a *shég-naa-si-kwe*<sup>18</sup> this niche is more than an intellectual stand. I am not claiming literacy in Aboriginal culture. Indeed, I have been nurtured by the teachings of both First Nations and dominant culture, but am fully embraced by neither. As one who works to build bridges of understanding between cultures, this allows me to draw upon personal experiences in both social environments. As a white Canadian and an apprentice to Native Way, my identity is bound to the contradictions and potentials inherent in the relationship Canada established with the indigenous nations. Even the two rows of that Wampum Belt are bound together, the design promising twins but the manifestation conjunctive. This is the contradiction in so-called Siamese twins. Each row is unable to manage full autonomy, each partner in that treaty equally bound to the dilemma of an unequal sovereignty.

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<sup>18</sup> This is an Ojibway (or Anishinabe) term loosely translated as 'white woman'.

Similar to the conjunctive, two-row manifestation of Native-Newcomer relations, the Survival School movement in Canada was enjoined with the dominant educational system through its initial focus on the urban Indian and issues of funding. In this narrative history, also, the tension between the world view of Aboriginals and the highly politicized social and ideological framework for scholarship manifests as a contrast between the cultural structures for dialogue. It affects both the framing of the questions and the articulation of answers as they are provided across cultures. Again, the embryo was twinned, but it remains linked by its very process of manifestation.

As we went about our work together in our first year at York, time after time Pauline and I were met by the comment, "Are you glued at the hip?".<sup>19</sup> Sometimes, Pauline was taken aside to be asked, "Why are you letting a white woman talk for you?". Her response was always the same, "You have to try to understand the nature of this relationship." The simple truth is, we were joined at the hip in our process, and neither one of us could have accomplished this work without the other. Like twins, our communication is imprinted by our joint experience of our difference, even as one finishes the sentence of the other. Our process addressed the position of the speaker, a highly controversial issue for ethnography, by a conscious attempt on the part of both researcher and the

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<sup>19</sup> It was clear that some of our professors and classmates were unsettled by our partnership. They apparently presumed one of us had been co-opted by the other, the victim depending upon their positioning on where the issue of where the greatest 'threat' lay in such a collaboration. The assumptions tended to be that either I was at risk of 'going Native', or Pauline was at risk of losing her 'voice'. In fact, Pauline and I took the same courses not only because of an overlap in academic concerns but because we offered practical support to each other in sharing the expense of our text books, the cost of parking and gas. Our hour-long trip each way was filled with discussions of the readings, issues raised in class, and reading-aloud of our papers, all of which enriched our experience of those courses.

research participant to meet half way across the bridge between cultures. It is a process that will not easily be replicated, and it is not always successful.

However, the idea is that (at least within these pages) critical ethnography and traditional Native Way research are partnered through a collaboration that defines both the questions and the answers from a position located *between* the two rows of our cultures.

In fact, the dialogue pattern established between Pauline and me features a unique partnering of voices that is founded in the depth of our familiarity as friends, even as it highlights my role as an apprentice to Native Way and her role as a teacher. The result is that our voices are separate but linked. As a result, not only in our methodology but in the *talk* that develops there is a collaboration rather than two distinct narratives. Pauline does not recite a story about WSSS and the Four Seasons Curriculum. Instead, we *participate the story*<sup>20</sup> of WSSS with the assistance of several people Pauline suggested for interviews.<sup>21</sup> This is consistent with the notion that a story is not relayed as a static *thing*, even when it is rendered to print. Rather, (whatever the numbers of people involved) story is an exchange, a participated event, with some taking up the role of teller and others assuming the role of audience.

Drawing upon the interviews it quickly became clear to me that different speakers were drawing upon the same general themes and metaphors. Yet just as

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<sup>20</sup> This term is meant to reflect the dynamics of interaction involved in the presentation of story. Not only do different people have separate versions rooted in a personal and/or cultural perspective, but new audiences and contexts reflect in the presentation of a story through their interaction with the storyteller (Narayan 1989).

<sup>21</sup> Pauline drew up a longer list than is represented in these pages; however, a number of people declined our invitation, and I was unable to locate many others.

each facet of a gem stone distinguishes a particular perspective - an orientation that simultaneously depends upon and enlarges the whole - each person's narrative contributes to a larger community saga that is riddled by parallels and contradictions. Therefore, as a *collective narrative*, this account of WSSS rises out of a community's memory and cannot present a singular version of what occurred. It does not aspire to be a definitive over-arching account but suggests, instead, a form of history-telling that embraces the individual experience. This seems appropriate to the original vision of WSSS itself. While the school was founded upon a vision the Good Grandfathes delivered to Pauline Shirt during a Fast, the manifestation of WSSS was embraced as an ever-evolving (and devolving) community project.

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Let me lay a few delicate issues of language to rest, so this history can proceed without labouring under the strain of politics. There are a number of terms used to designate the original inhabitants of this land in contemporary times: First Nations, Aboriginal, Indian, Native, Red Nations, Indigenous Peoples. Like references to The Sweetgrass Road or The Red Path, each term emerged from a particular context. No one term is completely satisfactory to everyone. In general, members of each Nation prefer to be identified by their ancestral lineage and community. For instance, Pauline is a Cree from Saddle Lake in northern Alberta. However, the general rule is far from perfect. For one thing, to designate only according to individual First Nations leaves us asking how to refer to the collective nations. For another, issues of identity and community soon get

tangled in notions of status and race put forward by the Indian Act (1876), so a multitude of people go unaccounted for.

Designations: Pauline was uncomfortable with all of the terms we came up with. Still, she cautions even the term "Indian" cannot be retired from use because the Native community is still subjected to the policies of the Indian Act (Berg & Shirt TC 1998). We arrived at no resolution, no single word to refer to all First Nations as a collective. These names are completely arbitrary and imposed, rooted in the cultural and political trends of historic periods. Yet the full list continues to impact on the lives of Canada's indigenous peoples at the present time: First Nations, Aboriginal, Indian, Native, Red Nations, Indigenous Peoples. I use these names interchangeably, to highlight how arbitrary they are, applying the term "Indian" in relation to the Indian Act and its policies. I offer my sincere apologies if this use of language offends any individual or group who is collected under these terms.

On the point of those who are refused recognition by the Indian Act, there are two main groups: the non-Status Indian and the Metis. The Metis defined themselves as a *new Nation* under Louis Riel's provisional government of the West in 1885, yet they were rejected as a nation, and forcibly suppressed by the Canadian government (Dempsey 1984; Carter 1997).<sup>22</sup> As for the second group, the Canadian government proposes there are both Status and non-Status Indians, granting official recognition to the Status Indian. The issue of status pretends to address concerns for purity of race (Venne 1981; Berg & Shirt TC 1998). Yet the

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<sup>22</sup> In contemporary times, many people of mixed blood self-identify as Metis, sometimes ignoring the political history that evolved around a specific genetic group.

colonial policies of the Indian Act imposed its definition of status in a completely arbitrary fashion. In fact, the Indian Act policies regarding status are so completely political they have nothing to do with genetics or cultural heritage, though the Act proposed to define the "Indian".

All of this makes it very difficult to separate the apparently simple issue of terminology (or language) from the more complex issues of identity, gender and self-determination. You may ask, "How did gender get thrown into the mix?" That is one of the points addressed in the mid-1970s, when a national group called Indian Rights for Indian Women (IRIW) caused this cultural fiction to implode.<sup>23</sup> In The Poverty Wall (1970), Ian Adams demonstrates Canada's First Nations are on the bottom rung of the social ladder, a point supported by Janet Silman's research in Enough is Enough (1987). As Silman illustrates through the narratives of several women from the Tobique Reserve in New Brunswick, Native women and their children were not even given access to that social ladder during the greatest portion of Canada's history. Until Bill C-31 was passed in 1985 after more than a decade of pressure from various Native women's groups and their supporters Section 12(1)(b) of the Indian Act removed Status Indian women and their children from band lists whenever they married non-Status Indians or non-Natives. "Along with her status, the woman lost her property, inheritance, residency, burial, medical, educational and voting rights on the reserve" (Silman, 1987: 12). At the same time, a white, or perhaps a black or oriental woman who married a status Indian man, was automatically granted status on the band lists, as

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<sup>23</sup> Pauline and her sister, the late Jenny Margetts, were both deeply involved with this issue through IRIW.

were her children (12).

Clearly, this was an issue of gender discrimination. The response that many Indian men had to Bill C-31 illustrated the insidious acculturative processes inherent in the Indian Act as they expressed a defensive patriarchal ideology. Recognising that it would drain their limited fiscal dispensations, many Chiefs objected to reinstatement of the Bill C-31 women to the band lists. Some members of the NIB and some Chiefs went so far as to protest it was their cultural practise to discriminate against women (Silman 1987; Berg & Shirt TC 1998). This was worse than a poor defense. It was largely a lapse in cultural memory. Paula Gunn Allen (1986) asserts that prior to contact, the majority of indigenous civilizations were either matrilineal or matriarchal, and for most tribes, children flowed from the woman's family line. While the balance of power relations was delicate and terms like matriarchal and patriarchal are probably too rigid to describe traditional social patterns Kehoe (1981:242) notes that white traders imposed their own system of recognition on Algonkian trappers and patriarchal values upset the prior social order of Indian communities. In fact, Alcoze (CL 1988) insists the Fur Trade overturned the traditional social position of women in Maritime societies by virtue of the newcomers' refusal to recognise that women were authorised to speak for their group's interest.

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Sexual discrimination also flows from another section of the Indian Act which affects the status of women and children, the section pertaining to enfranchisement. For almost 100 years, until 1969, all Indians were legally

suppressed as wards of the government. Indians were judged incapable of handling either their own affairs or the responsibilities of full citizenship, such as the vote (Venne 1981; Richardson 1993; Carter 1997). Yet this incompetence is a matter of convenience rather than a physical or mental condition, and the government often behaved like a corrupt executor-uncle who wanted control of the wards' land assets. However, when it suits government interests, such as under Section 15(1) of the Indian Act, where the incompetent wards are suddenly judged competent to manage their affairs:

*An Indian who gives away his rights... can get from the government: (a) a one-time share of money held for the band by the government; and (b) 20 years of treaty payments in one lump sum (Yorkton Tribal Council 1994: 15).*

In addition, under Section 111 (1), the Indian can sell his land on the reserve back to the band (but no one else), provided it is done within six months of enfranchisement.

The patriarchal principle that a wife and children have no true identity beyond their relationship to the male head-of-household runs throughout the Indian Act. As a result, whole families were removed from the band lists, even if it was only the male head-of-household who wanted to trade status for the right to engage in the privileges of citizenship previously denied to him, such as the vote (Venne 1981). Through enfranchisement, Indians lost the privileges granted by their status, including the right to live on the reserve. In fact, they were "no longer recognized as an Indian by law", a legal erasure of their genetic heritage that backs the acculturative policies of the Indian Act (Robinson & Quinney 1985; Yorkton Tribal Council 1994: 90). During the early years, enfranchisement must

have seemed profitable to some Aboriginal men, especially if they had no ready source of income, or were overwhelmed by debts. On the other hand, it is a matter of record that Natives were often fed liquor or otherwise manipulated into asking for their enfranchisement (APS 1839; Wilson 1986). Some of those men were tricked out of their land holdings, while others were simply robbed of their cash settlement (Wilson 1986; Richardson 1993).<sup>24</sup> When it was successfully passed, Bill C-31 was met by a century-long list of women and children who identify as Indian and desire reinstatement to their band lists. Clearly, the criterion for status is not a question of blood but one of politics, on both sides. In a disturbing twist of irony, Pauline reveals that the NIB attempted to block the attempts of Aboriginal women to present Bill C-31, and there are continuing attempts to overturn Bill C-31 by a network of Native men in the Western provinces with an investment in the status quo. Their complaints focus on the fact that the C-31 Indians swell the band lists, siphoning money away from those privileged with uninterrupted Status (Shirt T9 1993g; Shirt & K. Shirt T9 1993h).

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On the subject of language, the name 'Canada' should be recognized as a label with a political context. Cruikshank (1981, 1990a) and Basso (1987, 1988) both explore the conceptual rift between the Aboriginal *identification with the land* and the Anglo *identification of the land through naming*. Canada is a name

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<sup>24</sup> This manipulation of Indians for their land or cash became such a problem that a clause was added to the Indian Act. It forbade non-Natives to trespass on Indian lands, and forbade the sale of Native land, except to the original band (Venne 1981).

imposed upon a multiplicity of places and peoples.<sup>25</sup> Not only does it ignore the identity and experience of the multiple nations indigenous to this continent, but it deflects from a political process which suppressed the founding of multiple independent European communities as they immigrated to this continent. Quite simply, the Dominion of Canada dominated. The smaller colonies in the Northwest became like flotsam on mounting waves in a flood of French, British and Irish settlers. This is a point too often overlooked in our histories. One could speak of *lies of omission*. For instance, in March 1885, the infamous Metis rebel, Louis Riel, "announced his government would administer the West as part of Canada and that the land would be divided equally among the half-breeds, Indians, French Canadians, Irish, French, Italians, Poles, Bavarians, Scandinavians and Belgians" (Dempsey: 150). This puts the colonizing process under a different light, and begs for a study of the mechanisms which advanced and redefined Canada's borders long after the Confederation of four eastern provinces in 1867.

Even the process that placed the Canada-USA border on the 49th parallel should be seen as a completely arbitrary decision. It has nothing to do with human relationship to the hills, lakes, forests, animals, or the expression of seasons on this land. This single decision has been the focus of constant protest by all of North America's First Nations people. From "sea to shining sea", overnight, our national border cut many pre-existing communities in half, suddenly declaring the immediate family members of some Canadian citizens *foreign nationals*. While

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<sup>25</sup> All things considered, it is somewhat ironic that our nation was given this name. "Believe it or not, the term 'Canadian' was first applied, disparagingly, to mixed bloods" (Dunn 1980: 7).

early treaties attempted to address this absurdity by allowing Aboriginal people to bring their trade goods across that border without impediment, contemporary media and border officials villanise those who persist in bringing goods from the American to the Canadian side of, for instance, the Iroquois Six Nations reserve.<sup>26</sup>

Finally, beyond the issue of national borders there is the issue of citizenship. For several generations, Canada's Aboriginals were denied citizenship rights and forcibly secluded on their reserves like prisoners of war. Many indigenous peoples now refuse to be labelled Canadian nationals, rejecting that political process. Among those people there is yet another division, with some demanding the right to a dual Native-Canadian identity, and others claiming only the unbroken sovereignty of their Aboriginal nations.

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After reading an early draft of this thesis, my good friend Maeve Kelly observed I had set myself the task of "relaying aboriginal oral teachings and ideology through the white, western medium of written word... [acknowledging] as order that which is relayed... [through] opportunistic snatches," or what she referred to as *teachable moments* (Kelly LC 1998: 1). As a result, reading this thesis requires a level of patience and a reflective approach to learning that may, at first, be unfamiliar to some readers. In terms of the text itself, I have resisted

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<sup>26</sup> In addition to bad publicity over their casino, officials have identified a cross-border traffic in cigarettes, alcohol and ammunition which caused a split in this community. Much of the profit is reported to benefit non-Aboriginal crime organizations through the manipulation of corrupt Indians (Alcoze CL 1988; Berg & Shirt TC 1997). This activity must be placed in an entirely different category than the right of a Medicine person to bring a collection of Pipes across the border for Fasters, or of ordinary Aboriginal citizens to carry their medicine bundles and other goods supporting their personal needs across the border.

the formula distinguishing western scholarship, which tends to employ a field-specific terminology. Such a terminology is rooted in the professionalisation of a so-called western mode of inquiry that is characterised by its stress on thematic and *logical* continuity. This approach to research is defined by a pattern for debate that discourages obvious subjectivity while repetition is usually regarded as redundancy. The guidelines which universities present for theses often require both academic language structures and a formulaic approach in addition to imposing style restrictions. Depending on the field of study, many are submitted to a criterion for review that, again, resists subjectivity. Yet, this resistance to subjectivity reflects a cultural bias rooted in western notions of objective reality as defined by scientific inquiry before quantum theory (Polyani 1962; Bateson 1972; White 1980; Bowers 1993, 1995). Thinkers in the European tradition of rational inquiry may assume an objective existence for the thing or value under study and speak of objective reality (or truth) as if it was a universal reference point. Yet, as Neil Postman observes in *Amusing Ourselves to Death* (1985):

*the concept of truth does not, and never has, come unadorned. It must appear in its proper clothing or it is not acknowledged, which is a way of saying that the truth is a kind of cultural prejudice (22-23).*

Indeed, Bowers (1995) worries that modern western pedagogy tends to reduce teaching and learning to the creative delivery and absorption of information - as disconnected bits of data and lists of facts - rather than guiding principles and responsive systems of wisdom which provide for creative explorations of the relevance and meaning of that information.

In contrast, the gradual accumulation of teachable moments through

traditional Aboriginal pedagogy evolves through repetition, striking up parallels and developing contrasts. Knowledge is imparted as an evolving process that takes its grounding in observing and reflecting before doing (Whitecap 1988; Lightning 1993). Comprehending relationships, and the inter-related natural systems, is stressed before the accumulation of bits of data about those systems (Whitecap 1988; Bowers 1993, 1995). Furthermore, a comprehensive set of symbolic metaphors establishes links between the logic of multiple natural systems, and human development and interaction is explained through linguistic-conceptual-visual patterns which draw parallels to those natural systems. Repetition of that symbology through story underlies the evolving understanding of those symbols as an individualised process, through the life-long accumulation of teachable moments, with the result that stories - which collect a variety of symbols - also become thematic symbol-guides for higher-level learning (Lightning 1993; Wilson 1993; Sheridan CL 1995). While the exclusionary terminology that signals the specialisation and professionalisation of various fields of study in dominant culture reduces the audience that can comprehend the information they gather, Aboriginal pedagogy places the stress on inclusiveness and a free dissemination of the teachings. An all-pervasive system of symbols, in itself, is presented as a dominant feature not only of Native world view and pedagogy (Neihardt 1932; Brown 1964) but of the delivery of teachings through conversation and story (Cruikshank 1981; Basso 1987, 1988). Moreover, while there is the opportunity for specialisation, everyone who has been embraced by the teachings - even a child - is recognised in their potential to facilitate a teachable moment (Novak et al. 1983; Shirt 1997a; Berg & Shirt TC 1997, TC

1998).

The Native approach to education was historically perceived as "non-structure" or "chaos" (Battiste 1986; Kelly LC 1997: 1). Yet, far from chaos, indigenous world view accepts the tensions inherent in the *twinning of creation* as "two necessary yet opposed elements" in the universal processes (Kelly: 1) The expectations for immediate assimilation of lessons are relaxed while rote learning is dismissed in the interest of integrated wisdom (1). While patience is demonstrated in the accumulation of teachable moments, it should not be assumed there is an absence of structure, or that learning is not pursued on a regular basis. Rather, teachable moments depend on those brief interludes when the child is attentive. Allowance is made for the student's observation of a task, until the student believes he or she will succeed in executing a skill (Phillips 1983; Wild et al. post-1983). This runs counter to the dominant schooling stress on forced practise in time periods where study is dictated by another, but it does not preclude the practise of skills.

In my first career, as a poet, I was always forging the resolution of seeming contractions in meaning, disassembling and reassembling fragments of patterns through metaphoric extensions and a contrasting of themes that developed new patterns. In my present work, I find myself drawing on my *experience* as a poet in partnership with the teachings delivered through Native Way, rather than the *bits of information* collected through my degree in Native Studies. Poets are renowned for schooling themselves to a heightened sense of pattern and metaphor. They are also said to live on the edge of their society, looking backward to make critical comments. I am not sure that degree of social distance

is a requirement of the job, but the good poets - and I hope I am good enough - are skilled observers and take very little for granted, always striving to articulate the unsayable, or describe the unseen.

In Maeve's review of my thesis draft, she anticipated some people would offer an objection to the excerpts from interview tapes. This concern applies to some chapters more than others, but the point she addressed was the level of repetition. The sections of transcript I employ in this thesis at times repeat a story theme or symbolic reference for behaviour. Sometimes this occurs within the same interview, at other times as different people offer corroboration for another's point of view:

*By virtue of being oral, not written,<sup>27</sup> these things which you and Pauline are discussing are quite consistent with what I have personally observed of Native teachings... Repeat, retell, until it is a natural part of you... Repeating and linking together the teachings is necessary to retention and understanding when there is no... text to refer to (Kelly LC 1997: 2).*

In addition, Pauline often offers affirmation for a point made by repeating it. It is a distinctive speech pattern indicating a heightened level of interaction. This is a pattern I have noticed in conversation with many Aboriginal people, and it was so integral to our process that I preserved it. Also, though I did edit for comprehension, I resisted the temptation to editorialise by removing all of the verbal interjections of assent, consideration or disagreement such as "uh huh", "yeah", or "hm", indicated pauses, and retained many instances of broken sentences because, as Pauline says, these points in the transcript indicate where

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<sup>27</sup> My interviews with Pauline are first captured on audio-tape and then transcribed, so the medium of our discussion is voice. but our thesis consultations were not audiotaped.

spirit enters the conversation as a person *turns inward* to reflect on the topic of discussion (Berg & Shirt TC 1998).

As CarolAnne Wien remarked during one of our thesis consultations, the narratives collected here seem to progress in a spiral, continually cycling back over vital points in the story. In repetition, the teachings are continually applied and expanded upon and basic concepts are continually brought into fresh contexts. Sometimes reiteration indicates the significance of a teaching or behaviour. At other times, it adds emphasis, draws parallels or strikes contrasts. Repetition is used to review and to summarise. Perhaps most importantly, in its combination of applications, it lays the foundation for an individual, or a community, to progress beyond their prior notions of relationship.

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Humans are said to be a story-telling animal (McIntyre 1981). This suggests we can understand ourselves through language, a point supported by several disciplines through the work of diverse thinkers. Starting from this point, F.M. Connelly and D.J. Clandinin (1988) develop their understanding of narrative as the *whole* composed of a multitude, a whole in which the collective of stories stretching from the past to the present also suggest a future (24-25). This raises at least three issues which impinge upon this history. First, if a narrative collects stories in their plurality, it is implicit that the audience for those stories must be in constant attendance to receive the collection. Second, the story collection's ability to span time corresponds with Sean Kane's point in Wisdom of the Mythtellers (1994) that storytelling traditions manifest as a cultural memory, so we can

understand culture to account for the constancy of an audience for the collection. Third, just as we understand the whole to be greater than the sum of its parts, something more than a series of stories evolves in the delivery of collective narratives.

Connelly and Clandinin's (1988) point that the aggregate presents something not present in a single tale is supported by Neil Postman's (1989) interpretation of the social function of story. In Learning by Story (1989), Postman says that "without story our selves die" (122). Yet only in the overview can we discover meaning and/or sustaining wisdom about the births, marriages or deaths that focus a single story, or a single life. It is the collection that demonstrates "the unities, continuities, images, and rhythms" that are characteristic of the group (Connelly & Clandinin: 24). So the guiding narratives of the collective sustain not only our notions of self and purpose in life, but our relationships (Postman 1989; Bowers 1993). Dell Hymes (1983) considers the meaning of stories and suggests that *communicative competence* depends on the narrator's skill for making the story come alive by involving the audience in its evolution (Rosen 1986: 226). Indeed, John Berger (1984) insists story is more than a matter of reporting. "Events are always to hand. But the coherence of these events is an imaginative construction" (Berger cited in Rosen 1986: 230). Story establishes a pattern of relationship between events and, "It is just that coherence which we want to offer and share with others" (Rosen: 230).

Yet those life-giving stories are themselves given animation through a reciprocal relationship. Postman makes a distinction between "novels, plays, and epic poems," and the life-giving power of autobiography and stories "people,

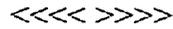
nations, religions, and disciplines unfold to make sense of the world" (1989: 122). While esthetic value and function have been separated through western notions of creativity (Gablick 1991; Bowers 1993, 1995), they cannot be divided in the Aboriginal experience. Whether one speaks of entertaining stories told around a summer campfire, sacred legends told in the winter lodges or the theatrical aspects of ceremonial mime (Berg & Shirt TC 1998). Each genre imparts meaning through the over-arching metaphoric symbolism that distinguishes Aboriginal story-telling. Even in contemporary times, Stewart Greene (TR3 1997)<sup>28</sup> insists that, beyond entertainment, Native Street Theatre supports Native pride as a new form of political protest.

While stories may proceed chronologically, Paul Ricoeur (1980) suggests that *narrative time* allows "even the simplest story... [to] escape the ordinary notion of time conceived as a series of instants succeeding one another along an abstract line oriented in a single direction" (170). Audiences are drawn into a story through its *making-present*. Therefore the *public time* of story that Ricoeur refers to is not the time our kitchen clocks track. Rather, it is the sequential (not necessarily chronological) development of a situation, and its *progression* towards a believable conclusion that is not predictable, that propels a story (172). Cultural patterns develop as distinguishing features, the conceptual templates that reaffirm the world view of a constant audience. Narratives select and organize events and memories that have themselves evolved from "social memory and social action" to transform those events into a "meaningful and significant

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<sup>28</sup> Where the person I was interviewing preferred not to be audiotaped, I have indicated the source is only the written transcript (TR) followed a number.

sequence impregnated with social values" (Rosen 1986: 230).



The past four centuries have fostered the largest human migrations in history, and these have forced at least five issues affecting the global population. First, these migrations have increased geometrically. Beginning in the 1600s, the number of people leaving their homelands in the quest for *new frontiers* has risen at a remarkable rate. Second, vastly different cultures have been forced into new patterns of relationship, with neighbours brushing elbows in huge multicultural cities. Third, greater interaction has fostered the largest racial and cultural mixing ever witnessed. Fourth, for the most part, these mass migrations have articulated the urbanization of most of the world's cultures. Fifth, the division of all cultural groups from relationship to their homelands has been reinforced by the globalisation of a western land ethic. More people are living in unsustainable relationships with the land than the ecological systems have ever endured in the history of the planet. As Chet Bowers suggests, all of this has tremendous implications for teaching, especially in urban centres. In the late 1970s, WSSS was already addressing these concerns, along with issues of identity and cultural revival, through the Four Seasons curriculum.



The themes evident in this collaborative history, the social values represented and the understanding of relationship are all bonded to issues of language and sequential progression, through a metaphoric extension of meaning developed

through a First Nations' framework for narrative and dialogue. The conceptual templates for narrative structures are both cultural and largely tacit (Bowers 1993; Ricouer 1980). This means that different conceptual templates for the structure of language, which are most obvious in cross-cultural experiences of another's *talk*, strike up an internal discord. Unfortunately, because these templates are not conscious, people tend to respond with different assumptions about *correct* speech, or the *logical flow* of ideas, rather than with recognition of the difference involved. For that reason, there is a point I want to make very clear at the outset.

It is my intention to present Pauline Shirt's story in her own voice (or the voices of those she chose to assist her), preserving the original narrative structures of speech. It is understood that something is lost when poetry is translated from one language into another. Sometimes there is simply no parallel expression for the critical concepts we wish to convey to another, even when the conversion is made by the author of the original. In these situations, the tension between language-conception templates may devolve into awkward word-substitutions or strike a baffling contrast between the language structures. Yet the contrast between languages for a second-language speaker may not be as simple as grammar, semantics or limited vocabulary.

Second-language instruction in elementary schools tends to trivialize this issue, but the contrast of linguistic experiences goes far deeper than word-order, word-meaning or word-limitation. For instance, in cases where Cree is the first language, the speaker may refer to a male third party as 'she' in English. This is not confusion over which word applies to which gender, as might be supposed.

Rather, it is a difference in conceptual-language templates. In Cree there are no gender-specific pronouns and gender is only referred to directly. In the view of a Cree speaker, unless it is critical to some point being made, the specification of gender is irrelevant (Shirt TC 1997, TC 1998). Language constructs our perceptions, our notions of what is natural or necessary, and even our concept of self, as we speak it (Bowers 1993). Those who learn a second language are still working with that first language-conception template, but, depending on the degree of contrast between languages, they simply learn to do more transparent conversions (Berg & Shirt TC 1998).

Chet Bowers argues in Educating for an Ecologically Sustainable Culture (1995) that all educators must recognize the way language develops tacit patterns of relationship which "encode the cultural groups's taken for granted moral schemata," thereby socialising the group to what is *natural* (8-9). A culture's world view is constructed through tacit metaphoric analogues and language, and the values and content of an educational curriculum also depend on language (2-3). Because language develops our orientation to the world, it influences: behaviour, identity, ideas about creative expression, approaches to technology, land ethic and relationship to the natural world, notions of social progress, concepts of human purpose, perceptions of community and beliefs about knowledge and intelligence. As Bowers says, understanding the function of language is critical to our ability to address dominant culture's contributions to the collapse of environmental systems on the global scale (4).<sup>29</sup> He also insists

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<sup>29</sup> Scientists warn an environmental collapse will be irreversible if we continue our present patterns for another 35 years (Bowers 1995: 4).

that understanding the function of language is critical to understanding both our identity and the relationships we build with other cultures.

Dominant culture's educational institutions have usually paid lip-service to a study of alternative cultural models for education, and teachers - in their role as socialising agents - have a tremendous impact on the world view and behaviour of the next generation:

*Various layers of the educational establishment carry on a highly successful process of socialising classroom teachers with a metaphoric language that sustains the 'reality' of the individually-centred view of intelligence, but carefully avoid introducing alternative language epistemological ideological frameworks necessary for a different way of understanding. But this orthodoxy must be challenged... (Bowers 1995: 14-15)*

Again, because our conceptual templates for narrative are largely tacit, and dependant upon an *internalised* conception of what is natural, the challenges to dominant orthodoxy are often perceived as personal attacks or dismissed as cultural absurdities. In some part this is an issue of translation.

In Breath on the Mirror (1993), a study of Mayan mythology, Dennis Tedlock says his approach to issues of translation was to weigh the advantages of being *less foreign* against problems associated with an absence of parallel concepts. However, even when reader and storyteller use the same language these choices impinge upon the presentation of speech segments from interview transcripts. It should be stressed, for instance, that Pauline is using her second language. Yet beyond language considerations, to edit another person's speech - even when cultural notions of validity and objective truth or the issues of translation are set aside - is to suggest that their talk must conform to the structures for dialogue and

systems of symbolic meaning intrinsic to the editor (Borland 1991).<sup>30</sup> The standard is often applied in the interest of conformity rather than intelligibility, which means that writing conventions become a way of gate-keeping. Bowers makes a point of insisting that academic institutions need to consider alternative linguistic/ epistemological/ideological frameworks for education. If we do not preserve the original narrative structures, the speech segments offered through ethnography are reduced to a rendition or caricature, rather than a presentation of authentic voice (Smith 1987; Clifford & Marcus 1986).

David Murray makes the same observation in Forked Tongues (1990).

*Indigenous voice* has been transformed to the *colonizer's voice* through western treatments of Native speeches. While this colonization of Aboriginal experience remains a concern for the indigenous community in contemporary times, the point is most easily illustrated by an example from the colonial era. In his journal, Jonathon Carver rendered a funeral speech given by a member of the Naudowessies in the 1760s:

*We will not, however, bemoan thee as if thou wast forever lost to us, or that thy name would be buried in oblivion; thy soul yet lives in the great country of Spirits, with those of thy nation that are gone before thee; and though we are left behind to perpetuate thy fame, we shall one day join thee (McLuhan 1971: 31).*

The imposition of colonial speech pattern on Native speech is obvious. We can recognise that it is unlikely the Naudowessies actually spoke in this fashion, but

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<sup>30</sup> Just as George Bernard Shaw's Pygmalion attends to differences in speech pattern related to social class, there are speech patterns connected to other differences in background such as regional dialect, level of education, or use of professional terminology. When academia insists upon a standard narrative structure for the writing of theses, or for classroom dialogue and debate, the same dynamic is true. In fact, issues of voice continue to plague ethnographers in contemporary times, even when the *subject* is a member of the ethnographer's own culture, gender, or family (Gluck & Patai (Eds) 1991; Borland 1991).

only because the King's English is no longer the tacit conceptual-language template for our talk.

Therefore, this thesis presents several chapters that focus on interview transcript as direct examples of *talk*, edited slightly for the page and interrupted by elaborations. However, I have refrained from wholesale synthesising, summarising and the collection of segments of dialogue according to topic, and any omissions or reorganisation of the transcript are acknowledged. Finally, my analysis in these narrative chapters is intended to offer support to understanding, rather than an academic critique of the story. Indeed, what I have attempted to present throughout this thesis is the story of WSSS *as it came to me*.

**Chapter Two**  
**IN BLACK & WHITE, ON PAPER**

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*The Four Quartered Circle*

Four Directions round the compass:  
beginning East and passing South  
from Saltwater Entrance to Land of Plenty,  
man continues West through the Lodge of Life  
his life progressing toward the realm beyond.  
Spiralling back, true North guides us home.

Four winds blow across the surface:  
*peaceful East Wind of gentle light and truth,*  
*generous South Wind of warmth and sacrifice,*  
*brave West Wind of courage and faith,*  
*strong North Wind of physical endurance.*

Four Medicines, gifts of the Creator:  
*Sage a curing power,*  
*Sweetgrass uniting the circle,*  
*Cedar protecting home and body from evil,*  
*Tobacco carrying prayers to Creator.*

Four Colours of Humanity:  
*Red vessel*  
*holds gains obtains seeks a Vision,*  
*seeing;*  
*Black vessel*  
*contains maintains holds a Wisdom,*  
*Thinking;*  
*Yellow vessel*  
*sustains carries bears a Patience,*  
*Feeling,*  
*White vessel*  
*encloses possesses secures a movement,*  
*Doing.*

Four Qualities of being Human:

*the kindness of Sweetgrass guiding thoughts and deeds,*

*the sharing of the Deer a model in feast and famine,*

*the strength of the Rock in the people's endurance,*

*the truth of the Great Tree aspiring to unite man with Creator.*

All Directions are born of Creator:

*all Winds blow out from the center,*

*all Races receive the same teachings*

*in different measure,*

*all Colours were sent out from Creator's bosom,*

*told, 'Seek in your direction and return' .<sup>1</sup>*

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She is of average height for a woman, with a moon face, high cheekbones, dark eyes, and long, black hair that reaches to her waist. She is heavier these days, but there is still a graceful spring to her walk and she projects an engaging energy frequently accompanied by high peals of laughter. Her social commentary has always been astute, but it is not always a matter of words. As she says, from the moment she came to Toronto 31 years ago, she was a stand-out in the crowds. She is a traditional Aboriginal woman. Everything about her, by virtue of contrast, renders comment on dominant-culture customs and dress. Sometimes she draws stares or remarks from complete strangers. "After all, Sharon," she says, "who else, here, was wearing braids ? No one. For the longest time, I was the only one" (Berg & Shirt TC 1998).

Despite this, she recently muttered she was considering cutting her hair and getting a perm. I groaned in response. Life has been very hard on this woman, though it has also rendered its gifts. "That tells me you're having a bad day", I said. "That's the pressure to conform speaking, not you" (Berg & Shirt TC 1998). I cannot imagine her without that

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<sup>1</sup> This is an excerpt from an unpublished paper (Berg 1989b) called The Great Hoop Dance (Berg 1989b), which was written as a series of eight poems.

beautiful, long, black hair. She wears it tied straight back from her face and braided; sometimes it is one thick braid, alternatively the ends of three thin braids loop up at the back of her head under a brightly beaded barrette. She has taught me that hair is an extension of the spirit. Those beaded barrettes with their traditional designs are like a signature, a statement of who she is. When she dresses up she might add a turquoise ring, or an amethyst pendant (never earrings), but she always wears a barrette. This is the woman who asked the Good Grandfathers to give her a vision in her Fast. She heard a baby crying in that Fast, and was directed to found Wandering Spirit Survival School (WSSS), the first Native Survival School in Canada.

Whenever she introduces herself, she offers her Indian name, followed by an English translation, then her clan. She gives the Cree rendition of her nation, followed by an English translation, her band, and their territory. Only then does she offer the audience her Christian name. She states her standing in the Teaching Lodge she belongs to,<sup>2</sup> her age and some details relative to her experience in life. She says:

*My name is Nim-kii-quay, Thunder Woman of the Bird Clan, Ni-hee-yaw-squell, a Cree woman from Saddle Lake, Alberta. I'm also known as Pauline Shirt. I'm a second degree Mide, Three Fires Society.<sup>3</sup> I'm 55 years old, I raised thirteen children, five of my own, and I'm a grandmother.<sup>4</sup>*

This form of address is the traditional way of her people. "This is the way to show

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<sup>2</sup> Among the Anishinabe, whom European colonists referred to as Ojibway, there are a number of different societies within each belief system. The Mide (or Mite) is a Medicine Society found among the Anishinabe and their close relatives, the Crees.

<sup>3</sup> The Three Fires are an alliance of three communities within the larger *family* of the Midewin Medicine Society.

<sup>4</sup> In my observation this form of address is used by traditional First Nations people in situations when strangers are present, even if there is only one stranger in a group of friends. It can be thought of as the formal address reserved for public speaking. However, this introduction applies to public speaking, even when the speaker is a 'participant' rather than the 'facilitator' of an event, and whether it is at a ceremony outside, in a classroom, or a board room setting.

respect to an audience," she explains. "It says who I am, my connections to the Earth plane. Then they can understand me. Then they know where I come from" (Berg & Shirt TC 1997). She is not speaking only of geographical references, though these are important. In this introduction, her clan speaks of her role in the community, while her Teaching Lodge speaks of her spiritual path and her training. Her age and her experience as a parent are levels of achievement, earned, like her degrees. With this orientation, the audience is given a context for her view point, so they can better understand the differences in her perception. This is critical. In Native Way, difference in perception is anticipated. This introduction acts as a kind of sign-posting, the equivalent of landmarks on a conceptual map for relationships.

In Native tradition, a person's Indian name is like an introduction to her spiritual core. Only the most gifted Medicine person is able to read a person's spirit and reveal their Indian name. That name is never spoken lightly. To receive your Indian name is to receive guiding information about your life journey. In an early interview, I asked Pauline how she had received her Indian name:

*P: I got my name in the early 1970s [from] this Cree Elder. She was a Medicine Woman and she came to Toronto, here, before I started Wandering Spirit. [pause] She was given my name. [pause] She gave me my name at a ceremony. She said, 'You have to have this name, because it's very important for you. Your teachings and your words are going to carry on for generations and generations.' I said, 'What teachings?' 'What words?' I thought that to myself in those days because I was just a young woman, eh, with little kids... I thought, 'Oh, really?' So she gave me that name. She gave me that name and she said, 'It's a strong name, and in the spring time, when your helpers<sup>5</sup> sound their voices, you have to go and offer your Tobacco. Offer your thanks and let that water drip onto your face.*

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<sup>5</sup> As a member of the Bird Clan, all varieties of birds are Pauline's helpers though she has a special relationship with the Red-Tailed Hawk, the Head of her Clan, and the Eagle, who is 'the Great Messenger' and intercedes with the Creator on behalf of human beings (Benton-Banai 1988; Berg & Shirt TC 1997).

*S: The Spring rains ?*

*P: Yeah, the rains. 'And face the East,' she said. 'And pray,' she said. 'That's how you'll get your blessings. That's how you'll make yourself strong for that year.' So, Spring time is a beginning time for me (Shirt T21992b).*

Clearly, names must be regarded as more than labels to distinguish one person from another. If they are signposts on a map for relationships, then it is a map that links several dimensions and is crisscrossed by trails of power. There is power in a name, but power is reciprocal rather than designated. Power is *relationship*. It is nurtured by rituals that link the physical plane with other realms.

This is neither mysticism nor allegory. Pauline's introduction of herself in public speaking situations is like offering the key to a locked door, the decoder for a coded message, or the magical glasses that allow the wearer to see some hidden image in a picture, and all of these together. Yet, though I draw these comparisons, they are worse than inadequate. They explain by trivializing the essential *differences* in perception. They are inadequate because such comparisons reinforce, rather than challenge, the dominant culture references for reality. What Pauline offers us in her self-introduction, what we must be receptive to, is an orientation to an *alternate* reality, the world of *her* experience of *what is*.

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I remember something my older brother told me when I was a child. To say I *remember* is to understate things. I was so profoundly affected by this it played a role in *making* me who I am today. Our conversation took place in the summer before I went to Kindergarten. I was just shy of five years old and he was eleven. Brian was what we used to call a bookworm, a great fan of science fiction, and he had been reading stories that

described parallel worlds. Thrown together with me as a playmate because of our physical isolation, he was eager to share what he had discovered. There were worlds that existed in the same *space* as our world, he said, but with a different articulation of *time*. He said the way to think of it was like the stations on the AM radio band. "Imagine you could tune into other worlds, just like tuning into more than one radio station at a time," he said. "There are other people standing right beside us now, or even walking through us." At first I thought he meant that people who died were still here, the way ghosts stayed behind, looking like some person from an earlier time, able to pass through walls. But that was not what he meant. "We can't see them because we are only tuned into this radio station. This world. Our time. They're totally different from us. They don't even have to look like people. And we walk straight through them, in their world, too."

On another occasion, in a second attempt to describe parallel realities, my brother pointed to a tree that stood on the far side of a field, saying, "You see that tree ? That tree is only standing there because we believe there are trees in our world. If we didn't believe there were trees, it wouldn't exist." On that point, I heard what he meant about trained perception, but an internal voice of dissension rose up against this essentially anthropocentric viewpoint. Though I said nothing that voice said, "Maybe we are standing here because that tree believes there are people in its world". I accepted what my brother told me about parallel worlds, knowing it was pointless to challenge him about his objectification of the tree.

If all of this sounds implausible, perhaps I should explain that I had an Irish grannie who introduced me to the world of Fairies, Elves, and Brownies at a very early age. Though we never received a serious audience from the rest of the family on the subject, it did not matter. In my experience, the land surrounding our farmhouse was frequented by

*watchers* and *listeners*. Though I could not see them, I *felt* their presence, sometimes catching a glimpse of their shadows in the corner of my eye as I turned. In my childhood experience of the fields, the Meadowlark would sing directly to me. If I concentrated, I could *think* a response in the language of Meadowlarks, even if I could not sing it.

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As the other voice that dominates this history - the narrator guiding the narration so to speak - my own orientation to this project is better understood by knowing I am a 44-year-old Caucasian woman, of Swedish and British-Irish descent. As Pauline would put it, I am from the Flower Path, but her reference does not mean to suggest I was caught up in some interpretation of the so-called Hippie movement. Rather, this acknowledges that an earlier generation of westerners visited the Elders of many cultures in recognition that dominant society had lost its spiritual roots. They were intent to reestablish a western spiritual progression. The Aboriginal educator Stan Wilson (1993) might say that I am of the Flower Path because the molecules of DNA do not disintegrate. On my father's side, my ancestors recognised the twin powers of Frey and Thor in gentle rains and thunder while on my mother's side they wore garlands of flowers as they did dances around the May pole for fertile fields, a wealth of fowl and fauna, and a healthy family. But I think of myself as someone from the Flower Path because in the summer before I entered school, with my face laid against pungent earth in a secret place under the bushes in my mother's garden, I watched the Lilies of the Valley open their tiny white bells one by one.

I had published two books of poetry, recorded two performance audio tapes, and developed a national literary career, long before I became Pauline's neighbour in a Toronto housing co-operative. I was also the single parent of two daughters, aged ten and

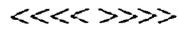
three. Yet, despite my successful career as a poet, I was a grade eleven drop-out struggling through my first year of University as a mature student in order to prepare myself for a Teaching career. Everyone commented I had a special ability to recognize the world of children. At 32, I knew I was at a turning point in my life. I wanted to teach, but my path through the world was carved by the focus of my writing.

I had the eyes, ears, mind, and heart of a poet. I understood the fractured light of prisms, variations of voice, the power in silence, nuances of meaning, manifestations of breath, pattern, rhythm and the resonant themes of relationship in the world *as a poet*. Yet I had also discovered the ability to turn from poetry as my one window on external reality to the window opened by writing book reviews. Now I plotted short stories, and visualized the parallel world of a novel through the motives and outlook of its characters. Those characters were so close at times, as I turned I saw their shadows. I thought the change I was destined for, my ability to grasp alternate interpretations of the world, might be as simple as a shift in literary genres. Pauline saw things differently.

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Though she had been trained by her Grandfather to *use her hands*, one of the healing arts from her own traditions, Pauline was studying Shiatsu and Naturopathy when we met in 1986. I was impressed by the depth of her curiosity and the humility that was partnered to a strong sense of humour. She was studying the ways of all cultures, anxious to learn as much as she could, and her aspiration was to visit with the Spiritual Elders of the Black, Yellow and White Races. All had an understanding of the Creator and a gift, she said, but perhaps they needed to compare notes. There was an immediacy to our friendship, in part because we had parallel experiences as mature students. Single

mothers with growing children, we had pursued our own paths as individuals, our children at our side.



In the spring of 1987, Pauline asked me to help her to write *her* history of WSSS, as the woman who had Fasted for a vision and received direction from the Good Grandfathers to found this school. She knew other people would tell variations of the WSSS story that appeared to present discrepancies with her version, but said that these things evolved from the differences in their experience and their interpretation of events. At first, I declined her invitation, confessing to insufficient familiarity with either the First Nations community or the cultural issues involved to do this history justice. I worried she had misjudged my accomplishment. Her project seemed so vital and significant, I told her I was sure there were other writers who were better suited to the job. However, from time to time, over tea or on a walk, she would repeat her invitation. Shy, flustered, I insisted I was not the one she wanted for the job.

In the meantime, Pauline became my teacher as well as a friend. The first thing I learned was that she approaches everything she does with a reflection upon the teachings. They enter all conversations and affect all aspects of relationship. For instance, Pauline often referred to writing as my gift, but I soon discovered this is not the same thing as a talent. According to her traditions, the Creator gave each of the Four Races gifts, in the form of spiritual teachings and tools. As the Mide teaching says, all received the same gifts, but in different measure, in accordance with their basic orientation to the world. Red is seeing; Black is thinking; Yellow is feeling; and White is doing (Dumont CL 1988). Even among different nations, one may find the same gift, but the story of its

origin will articulate some difference in relationship. For instance, among the Anishinabe the teachings say it was Waay-na-boo-zhoo, the spirit-man who first descended to the physical plane, who received the Pipe from his Father after proving himself by undertaking a long quest journey filled with many tests (Benton-Banai 1988: 49). Yet Sioux legends say a shape-changing entity known as Buffalo Woman took human form and lived among the people for a time, giving them the Sacred Pipe with instructions about its use before she returned to her kind (Brown 1964: 25; Goble 1984).

In the same way, all individuals are also given a distinguishing gift from the Creator, which they are bound to employ in service for the community. It might be cooking for Feasts, healing, painting, taking on the duties of a leader, or singing and drumming (Dumont CL 1988; Berg & Shirt TC 1998). This is a different perspective on individual talent and purpose in life than dominant culture employs. Not only is it more inclusive, but the motivating focus of all individuals is the best interest of their community, rather than desire for recognition for their personal accomplishments.

One day, I felt a shift within myself. It was like waking a second time from within a dream, to realise what I had believed was reality was perception. It was like managing to tune in two stations on the radio at the same time. An internal voice, rising in counsel, lay over the song of my being-in-the-world. I knew Pauline's reasons for choosing me would always remain beyond my understanding. My modest refusals now seemed vanity, as pride is rooted in ego. The fact was I had been chosen. It was inappropriate to question *why*. I could only accept or refuse. Yet, in accepting, I knew I was bound to honour her request to the best of my ability, transcending both my prior accomplishments and notions of my potential. What I was being asked to do was to bring my whole self to bear on my gift of writing - to take risks I never would have taken for my own benefit - in the

interest of the greater community. I went to her, and asked how I could prepare myself.



In a first step towards my *education*, Pauline decided to dodge the criticism that might come from her community, offering a relaxed training in the traditional teachings to a non-Native woman. As her *skwah-baay-os*, or apprentice helper, I worked at her elbow in a direct application of the teachings, placing the Sacred Medicines on the altar at the Cardinal points, learning the significance of the Four Directions, and the attributes of those medicines, through their use in ceremony. This is a consistent feature of Aboriginal teaching. I linked my apprenticeship with Pauline's commitment to observe the Four Seasons with Sunrise Ceremonies, for all comers, in the local park: coaching others in their observance of the protocols, smudging, *speaking for* the water or the berries.<sup>6</sup> I was often invited to participate in family Feasts, ceremonies to acknowledge birthdays, new births and those who had passed over. Pauline also brought my small family to a Fall gathering of the Three Fires Mide as her guests, and I found my place in the circle of community by considering what needed to be done: cooking, cleaning, tending to children.

Some ten years prior to beginning work on this thesis, I also decided to switch my academic major, seeking Pauline's advice regarding post-secondary Native Studies programs. That decision, and more than a decade of orienting myself to Native Way

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<sup>6</sup> To speak for the water or the berries is akin to offering a prayer meditation detailing their significance and attributes as a sacred medicine, on behalf of the group, though it sometimes approaches storytelling and newscast by drawing references to immediate concerns of the community. They serve a function similar to that of holy water and the wafer, and are distributed to the group after being 'blessed'.

under Pauline's supervision, are realised within these pages as an element of my research methodology. It made a critical difference in my approach to ethnography. As an academic, I held a Bachelor of Arts degree in Native Studies, and a Bachelor of Education at the primary/ junior level. However, my personal connection with WSSS *as a teacher* evolved out of the decision to place myself in the service of the Good Spiritual Grandfathers who had supported the school.

Attending local gatherings and protest demonstrations, over time I learned to *listen* and *watch*. I realised that this, too, was vital participation. To offer simple support to others in the community - with respect for the Earth's processes - is to be involved in the great circle dance of Life on this planet. To engage in individualism and self-concern, by contrast, is to take a step back from the reciprocal Circle of Life. Eventually, I learned to distinguish the voices that counselled, within and without; to share what I had without reservation, in recognition of need; and to recognise the limits of my own needs and resources. Yet the teachings flowed both ways, and I supported Pauline in learning the protocols for interaction with the dominant culture institutions. In the beginning, when Pauline needed to write a letter, a speech, or an article for a Native publication, she dictated them to me as to a scribe, but I also coached her in her own ability to write. She *froze* under pressure to write, paralysed by the after-effects of her experience of learning to write in Residential School. Though she is wonderfully articulate - and famous for keeping a journal of her daily activities - in public situations she relied on orality, expressing an emotional block to writing. All of that has changed over the years. She learned her *process* is simply different, not better or worse. Still grounded in a reflective approach to orality, during her graduate studies she meditated heavily on her papers until she was ready to write, and then simply pulled out all the stops to lay down a well-argued

essay in her first attempt, entirely skipping the draft stage (Shirt T1 1992a; Berg & Shirt TC 1997, TC 1998). The change, though, is one of the key teachings. All relationships in the natural world find their healthiest expression in reciprocity, and she needed support to discover her own facility with writing.

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Impressed by accounts of the school Pauline had founded, most of them offered by my Co-op neighbours, I enrolled my two daughters at WSSS for the 1987-1988 academic year. Ila was in grade five, and Brynna (who now goes by her second given name, Kirsten) was in junior kindergarten. It was a very hard year. Kirsten contracted an especially strong strain of whooping cough and was unable to shake it. Despite medical treatment, her schooling was interrupted so often I was forced to take the year off from my university studies. On top of this, Ila had run up against the public education system in our frustrated attempts to reconcile a bad program fit<sup>7</sup> with both our neighbourhood public school and an Alternative school within the Toronto School Board. By grade five, in part because poverty forces poor single parent households to make frequent moves to maintain manageable rents and we fit into that category, Ila had already attended seven schools. We had discovered that different schools proceed at different paces, or with a different ordering of topics in the standard curriculum. As a result, she missed critical concepts in many subjects and was in serious trouble academically, especially in mathematics.

The fluctuating numbers in the student population at WSSS meant their allotted space

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<sup>7</sup> I am drawing here upon a term used by Trevor Owen (T16 1997).

was used differently from year to year, depending upon need (WSSS archives 1997). In the year my children attended there were some 25 students. The Toronto Board of Education had given WSSS four classrooms and an office in its own wing on the third floor of Dundas Street Public School. They shared a Principal with Dundas Public School, had two classroom teachers, an Ojibway language teacher, and access to French language instruction through Dundas Public School. The school also had an Executive Director, a half-time secretary and two part-time cultural resource teachers, and the Toronto Board of Education had assigned a Liaison officer to assist the Executive Director on a regular, part-time basis. The student population was divided between a junior room and a senior room, with the division falling after grade three, but consideration was usually given to the children's ability rather than to their grade in the academic portion of the program. I had a daughter in each room.<sup>8</sup> One of the remaining rooms was reserved for Ojibway language instruction, which was delivered to small *ability groups* who were withdrawn from the larger class for a 40-minute period each day. One corner of the other classroom was used as an office by the Executive Director, but most of the space was kept clear of desks and furniture, and there was a large green rug on the floor. This was the WSSS meeting room, and the setting for daily Circles, monthly Feasts and the daily culture classes. Perhaps because this wing was on the third floor, the rooms always caught the sun, so the school seemed bright and airy. The walls displayed some of the children's art work, but the predominant decorations were large inspirational posters, some featuring Natives who had pursued their education to become nurses, engineers, composers, or lawyers; others displaying portraits or photographs of

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<sup>8</sup> In other years, depending upon need (dictated by the student population), there were three or more classes instead of two.

renowned Aboriginal leaders.

For my daughters, the program fit at WSSS proved both better and worse than we had hoped for. Ila's teacher, Elizabeth Mason, deserves a special commendation. She arrived late, replacing a departing teacher, and immediately brought the Board's Math consultant to her classroom. All of her students were having difficulty. Then she developed an individually tailored program that focused on *filling in the blanks* that had developed in each child's foundational Math and English concepts. This review of math curriculum took Ila back to third grade work, but she was advanced as she proved her ability. Within three months, to her own surprise, Ila was working at her expected grade level. On the other hand, there were a number of administrative issues that caused me to withdraw my children from WSSS at the end of that year. Pauline was expressing concern that WSSS's history was being re-written. Some people at the school were determined to rework the school's mandate. "Why does an Ojibway school have a Cree name, anyway?" one Ojibway-Anglo teacher complained. Of course, WSSS was not meant to be a school for any single Aboriginal nation. This man left WSSS by Christmas 1987 to become a Cultural Liaison with the Toronto Board of Education, but the seed of a Cree-Ojibway struggle had been sown by his complaints. The forces of progressive protest against the status quo in education were redirected through in-fighting. That is where the complicated saga of this Native Way Survival School takes an ironic twist and this history begins (Berg & Shirt TC 1997, TC 1998).

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In the summer of 1992, through a traditional First Nations approach to research, I went Fasting under the supervision of an Arapaho Medicine Man and his younger Cree

apprentice. Actually, I was one of seven people Fasting from both water and food in small lodges set in the woods behind Deanna Harper's home on an Ontario Reserve. Each person was confined to the immediate location of her lodge, under an edict to refrain from speech and hide from view if a stranger passed by. We were in isolation from the social world, except for the morning and evening visits of the Medicine Man who supervised us. In the twinning of creative forces, as we Fasted our supporters Feasted. Yet the Medicine Man also held daily Sweatlodge Doctorings for those who were ill. In the Aboriginal ontology, the Faster and the person who seeks Doctoring are both on a quest for information that will bring meaning and purpose to their lives. Pauline lists the traditional tools for conducting research in First Nations settings as:

*... daily smudging & tobacco burning; Circles; personal counselling; the Pipe; the Four Seasons ceremonies; the Sunrise, Shaking Tent, Naming, & Give-away ceremonies; Scrolls & Petroglyphs; singing & drumming; walk-arounds; Sweats; Fasts, etc. (Shirt 1997a).*

Each of these tools is considered a channel of communication with the greater cosmic community of relationships, which includes the Creator and the natural world. In Native Way, ideally, research and attention to the Teachings are conducted on a daily basis. An inclination towards intensive research is combined with personal identity, and expressed in a heightened level of attention. Ideally, *attention* - looking, listening and reflective thinking - becomes a feature of general outlook on life as well as world view.

Traditionally, Fasts - as a more intense quest for information - were embarked upon at critical points in an individual's development and often marked rites of passage through the Seven Stages of Life (Shirt 1997b). In fact, straying from the *Good Life*, one's true Life Path and Native Way, is considered an illness because the resulting imbalance in one's relationships indicates a loss of meaning (Benton-Banai 1988; Dumont CL 1988;

Berg & Shirt TC 1998). Illness is the obverse of the physical vigour expressed by those who pursue a Fast or Vision Quest. Fasts are undertaken from a position of physical well-being, and the whole community benefits from the Faster's effort. Each Faster is working for the well-being of the community as a whole by forging a greater balance and strength of purpose in her own relationships. Those who are ill connect to the creative force of the Fasters' quests through participating in Feasts and Doctorings during the same period.

Originally, Pauline counselled me that protocol says one must never speak lightly of one's participation in sacred events or boast of personal accomplishments. Fasters often practise a policy of complete silence, or give only limited reports to a very select audience about their experiences of Fast. Even one's Pipe bag and Sacred Medicines are covered, kept away from public view, out of respect for the private relationship that develops with the Good Grandfathers and Good Grandmothers through those channels. Yet, in this instance, I am breaking with this custom to assert that:

- 1/ 'western' methods in research have suppressed other culture's research methods;
- 2/ "In qualitative research we have to listen to the voice of our research partner" (Shirt 1997a: 3).
- 3/ Aboriginal research tools are a foundational element of my research methodology;
- 4/ Aboriginal research tools are valid and appropriate tools for ethnographic research.

In terms of ethnographic practice, using Aboriginal research tools is more than a demonstration of my immersion in another culture group. As collaborative research partners, Pauline and I had deemed my Fast necessary to this project, not only because it reinforced my relationship with the Aboriginal community, but because it established my relationship with the school itself. Pauline often speaks of several "Good Spiritual Grandfathers who supported the school," saying Wandering Spirit was one of them (Shirt 1997a: 3).

The function of a Fast, both as a research methodology and as an element of traditional Aboriginal pedagogy, is to draw the Faster into a fresh relationship with her entire Life Path (see illustration 2). Prior to conception, the spirit of each person is counselled by seven Grandfathers and develops a spiritual contract. The tests presented on the Life Path allow the individual to transcend her prior limitations, and progress is only possible on the physical plane. Each person enters life on the physical plane through the vessels she chose as parents:

*... [but] there are many distractions, what the Good Grandfathers call the 'shining objects', that can unbalance you and lead you away from your chosen life path. When you Fast, you are reconnecting with the spiritual plane, and you make a fresh commitment to that original life plan. This is why Fasting is considered research. It is also one of the tools in our educational system, because through Fasting we connect with all of our relatives in the Universe, the birds and animals, the plant life, the seasons (Shirt 1997a: 5).*

Fasting for the WSSS story was integrated with the other elements of my Life Path and I opened myself to council with the Good Spiritual Grandfathers, including Wandering Spirit (Berg & Shirt TC 1998).

The Pipe is central to Fasting. While the Pipe is used by nations from the Four Corners of the Americas, its use by the Plains Indians gives a fair understanding of its significance:

*As thread binds together, and is central to, each bead of a necklace, so is the sacred pipe central to all the Plains Indians ceremonies. The pipe is a portable altar, and a means of grace, which every Indian once possessed. He would not undertake anything of importance unless he had first smoked, concentrating on all that the pipe represented, and thus absorbing a multitude of powers. It could in fact be said that if one could understand all the possible meanings and values to be found in the pipe and its accompanying ritual, then one could understand [the] Plains Indian (Brown 1964: 24-25).*

My Fast "empowered me to protect the ways of Wandering Spirit's people and to

negotiate an understanding with outsiders because that was *his* role in life" (Shirt 1997a: 4). It also represented the adoption of a responsibility to ensure that this thesis respect those ways in its structure as well as in its function.

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By Fasting, as Pauline says, I was "brought into a more equal relationship, and was able to *hear* the Native voice" (Shirt 1997a: 4). To request the opportunity to Fast, a person *presents pipe*, which involves a strict protocol. Among the Mide, that protocol is realised through seven steps that begin with offering the Medicine person tobacco and some other gift to mark the reciprocal nature of all relationships. At any point during the presentation of Pipe, or the Fast itself, the Medicine person has the power to withdraw a person from the Fast for reasons shared only in private counsel with that Faster. Those who complete their Fast are informed at the end, after the Coming-Out ceremony, of their success or failure. They may receive an affirmative on all, or only part of their request, and for some there may be attached conditions, such as abstinence from some specified activity for a year.

I found myself in the midst of an ethical conflict, just after my Coming-Out ceremony had been completed. I had just been told that I was successful and was granted my full *Pipe*, the focus of my Fast. An Anishinabe woman came to congratulate me, but she broke down crying, saying, "I'm so jealous of you. I've been refused twice". There was both confusion and anger in her statement. Once again, I was confronted with the fact that I had been chosen for reasons that I myself could not fathom. This threw me into a blue mood, and Pauline noticed. After listening to my worries about taking something that belonged to another, she reminded me that each person walks her own path in

relation to the Good Grandfathers. As she put things then, and at several other points during my apprenticeship:

*You have put yourself in that Lodge, with the energies of this land, the Grandfathers of this land. You put yourself in there and said, 'Okay, help me here. Here I am. This is me, Sharon, here.' You know ? And, 'This is what I want to do. This is the road I want to travel' (Shirt T2 1992b).*

Though I felt he was originally dubious about my potential to succeed, she reminded me that R.H. [the Medicine Man who took me through my Fast]<sup>9</sup> had demonstrated his position on the issue of my participation by accepting me when I *presented Pipe*. Though there is no pan-Indian rule on the subject, according to his Teachings, no one can be denied access to the Good Grandfathers if she asks in a good way and is ready to listen. As Pauline put it, there is no issue of colour in the Native Way approach to life, and no call for standing apart from the rest of one's race. Through the Turtle Island<sup>10</sup> teachings the Good Grandfathers talk for the land, the territories that sustain people, not for race.

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In February 1993 (Shirt T8 1993f), Pauline and I discussed the source of traditional First Nations Teachings. Some people refer to them as the Medicine Wheel teachings (Regnier 1994), while Pauline calls them simply Native Way, or the Turtle Island teachings. These Sacred Teachings were first delivered to the ancestors by the Good

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<sup>9</sup> The Healers and Medicine People of the Aboriginal nations are already so busy tending to the needs of their community that Pauline and I decided to suppress his full name out of concern he might be overwhelmed by requests for assistance. It is understood that those who are serious in seeking assistance, or in real need, will discover a good Medicine Person by letting it be known in the community what they are seeking, though caution should be used in selecting assistance from those who present themselves (Berg & Shirt TC 1998).

<sup>10</sup> The Anishinabe and several other First Nations call the North American continent Turtle Island. In the Anishinabe Creation Story, in the time of the Great Flood that covered the Earth, it was Turtle who offered to support the creation of a second Earth on its back (Benton-Banai 1988).

Spiritual Grandfathers during Visions, Fasts, or in Dreaming. Now, they are carried forward into each generation through stories and traditions, but the Teachings are not relegated to the past. Each person can still access them through several traditional channels, and it is still possible to access 'new' teachings.

It is commonly assumed that the teachings are delivered to a specific people, a race; and I was still putting my own access to the Sacred Teachings into perspective:

*S: Fasting... takes it into my own, personal relationship with the Grandfathers, right ?*

*P: Um hm. Right.*

*S: Well, [pause] to Turtle Island ?*

*P: Um hm.*

*S: And then , out of that -*

*P: To the Grandfathers of Turtle Island. You say, to the Grandfathers of Turtle Island. Because there's specifically grandfathers for this land, specifically. In the Cosmos [pause] Turtle Island is [known as] North and South America. Okay ? Into Europe, there's certain Grandfathers for [that land]. And when you go beyond - [pause] There's certain Grandfathers [who] only work at the Earth... with the Earth. And there's certain Grandfathers at work in the cosmos. You know ?*

*S: Right.*

*P: ... People think - They think grandfathers are here, and there, and all over the place, but there are only certain Grandfathers who come to the Earth here. You know ? There's specific-*

*S: Are there also certain Grandfathers, particular Grandfathers who work with - you're suggesting this - You say, Grandfathers of Turtle Island -*

*P: Yeah.*

*S: - so there are Grandfathers for Turtle Island, Grandfathers for Europe -*

*P: Uh huh.*

*S: - Grandfathers for the Eastern lands -*

*P: For all the races. For all the races. And that's - Okay, you've hit on something. You've hit on something really, really important.*

*S: I'm thinking in terms of the relationship to specific regions of land -*

*P: Yeah. Um hm.*

*S: - rather than race.*

*P: Um hm. Yeah. It is [pause] the land.*

*S: Oh !*

*P: Races is land, races is language and land.*

*S: [laughing] Oh, there's something novel.*

*P: You know ? Yeah.*

*S: No one has said races are land, but of course! [half laughing] That's what it means.*

*P: Yeah, that's what it means. But see - [making indication on the table top, as if it were a map, to indicate four locations] Okay, say the Red man, the Yellow man, the Black man, and the White man [are] over here. Okay... The Grandfathers are of the spirit world.*

*S: Right.*

*P: And the Grandfathers are the ones who are the creator's helpers. So... there's specific Grandfathers for the Red man, who have the energies, who know about this [land] here. <snip> And the [Elders] here, I've heard them... in the night Lodge, saying, 'The White man has theirs', the Black man has theirs', the Yellow race has theirs', all the races have their teachings and their helpers. Specific helpers.*

*S: But, you see, I don't really feel - I mean, I have some connection, and I acknowledge that connection to the Grandfathers of the White race, because I am White.*

*P: Yeah.*

*S: I don't actually feel a wrestle with that. But, at the same time -*

*P: But you're here !*

*S: - because I was born here. I feel like a Turtle Islander -*

*P: Yeah. Well, that's it.*

*S: - specifically, of the Eastern Woodlands.*

*P: You are. You are of the energies of this land. That's what I keep saying to people.*

*<snip> But, when you go on a deeper level... [into] yourself, you are a White woman and I am a Red woman. When you go on a deeper level and question yourself, 'What are my Teachings ? ...What kind of Teachings did the Creator give me ?'... You know ? And that's not a rejection... I wouldn't be rejecting you or the Grandfathers wouldn't be rejecting you. That IS. We're all, in essence, we're all spirits. We come from the same, same, same source. <snip> [Inside the Lodge] the Creator is showing you, God is showing you, your whole spirit. [We're] all one...*

*S: And that's why you have to recognise the Grandfathers are connected to the land ?*

*P: Yeah, to the land (Shirt T8 1993f).*

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In 1982, Pauline had been visiting friends in New York with Vern and their five children. She went out for a walk, because she wasn't feeling well. Suddenly, she collapsed on the sidewalk, overcome by pain. She did not see a doctor until she returned to Toronto and was rushed to the emergency room of a nearby hospital. The doctor's diagnosis was cancer of the stomach. He told her she had to begin a regime of

chemotherapy and radiation immediately. She declined. In his shock, the doctor insisted, blurting out that she could only expect to live two or three weeks without medical intervention, a year if she took treatment.

Instead of accepting her doctor's diagnosis, Pauline signed herself out of the hospital, got on the phone, and arranged to receive Sweatlodge Doctoring from the most powerful Medicine man she could locate (Berg & Shirt TC 1997). "That was Edwin Tootoosis of Poundmaker's Reserve. He had taken over Raymond Harris' place, temporarily, after his death" (Berg & Shirt TC 1998). Then she climbed on a plane to Saskatchewan. However, her diagnosis with cancer marked her retirement from WSSS and her marriage also ran into trouble. While she was absent, Vern established a relationship with the young woman Pauline had hired to cook and clean for her family. When she returned home from her Doctorings, though in a sense he had already moved on, she put Vern's moccasins outside the door (Shirt T2 1992b).

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After Pauline's retirement from WSSS in 1982, though she sometimes attended special events at the school, with each year's class of graduates the Parent Council members who knew and supported Pauline had moved on. As a result, the invitations to remain involved with the school declined. Vern had married the young housekeeper, and he also grew less involved with the school as each year passed. In 1987-1988, while my children were attending WSSS, he was finishing his term on the Parent Council of WSSS and taking up a different role in the community. A number of issues quickly came to light during that year. The link between the Four Seasons curriculum and interaction with the local First Nations community had atrophied, and the replacement of the WSSS

Parent Council with the Ahkinomagai Kemik Education Council (AKEC) marked a dramatic degeneration from the guiding mandate. Though it was called a Council, this new governing body was modeled on commercial business boards rather than the traditional First Nations approach to governing reflected by the original Parent Council. The internal politics at play in the AKEC even resulted in a plan to change the name of the school.<sup>11</sup> Pauline considered this change of name an insult to both the founding Parent Council and the Cree Warrior Chief the school had honoured. In addition, the school no longer followed the Four Seasons curriculum, the reception for non-Native volunteers had become hostile, and the handling of funds for materials and programmes had met with challenges (Shirt T1 1992a, T3 1993a; Shirt & Nahwegechic T11 1994a).

Pauline expressed concern that the history of WSSS was being lost, while the mandate was being reworked by people with very little connection to either its founding or the initial seven years of the school's operation. I was still not ready to write this history at the time, so she attempted to address her issues directly to the AKEC. However, between 1987 and 1993, progressively, the AKEC a) ignored her presentations to general meetings, b) refused to put her on the agenda at meetings, and c) barred her from attending the monthly General Meetings which were supposedly open to input from Toronto's Native community. Most of these dynamics developed in the 1986 to 1988 time frame. The loss of history was so dramatic that, in 1990, when I introduced School Trustee Pam Goosen to Pauline, she did not recognize either her name or WSSS's name. The irony in this event rests in the fact that Goosen was Chair of the Toronto Board of

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<sup>11</sup> When WSSS became First Nations School in 1990, according to Trevor Owen, many people in the TBE lamented the change, saying, "a spirit was lost there" (Owen T16 1997). That sense of 'a spirit lost' was quite literal for Pauline.

Education's Consultative Committee on Native Education. This was a Committee I had been attending, off and on, for several years. While it dealt with issues such as First Nations language instruction across the school board and held anti-racist workshops for all of Toronto's teachers, the needs expressed by First Nations School were a primary focus of all meetings. Goosen had chaired this committee throughout the period of my participation, but this introduction made it abundantly clear that she was unaware of the extended history of First Nations School. To her credit, she confessed embarrassment. Yet for Pauline, and for me, this meeting emphasised the need to establish a narrative history of the school from Pauline's perspective.<sup>12</sup>

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By 1992, Pauline and I had begun to work collaboratively on a Native Curriculum Project. Ironically, the AKEC had appointed Pauline Head of its Native Curriculum Writing Team for First Nation School. During one of our sessions, we made plans to hold a Thanksgiving Feast for WSSS; in part, to recognise that the school's mandate shifted upon its re-naming; in part, to acknowledge the many people who had contributed to the life of WSSS; but also, to mark closure on that part of Pauline's life (Shirt T2 1992b). The re-naming of the school had, in essence, released the founders of WSSS from responsibility for what took place there, but she had accepted this assignment out of concern for the children. In a flip-flop pattern of response to Pauline's work that was all too familiar, however, our work on this Curriculum Project was later scuttled by the

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<sup>12</sup> While these issues are addressed in my conclusion, very briefly, and while they deserve to be addressed in an academic study, they are not fully explored in this thesis because they followed the period of Pauline's direct involvement with WSSS (from 1976 to 1982).

AKEC when it withdrew Pauline's appointment. Subsequently, our work together was refocused and our audio-taped sessions contribute to the foundation for this thesis.

During one of our meetings, Pauline expressed a unique perspective on both her own life work, and our partnership:

*P: This here [tapping the draft notes of our Curriculum guideline] is all the work that I've done and Fasted for. This is all my Fasting, right here. It's written in black and white.*

*S: The results ?*

*P: The results are here, you know ? The seeds have blossomed into something so beautiful. And you're part of that beauty, you know, with your words, with your writing... with your writing skills and your perception. You're clear. You're clear on things - your involvement with Native education, and your teaching, and... You know ? I mean, you went Fasting, you've done Native Studies. What other person would have done it ? What other person could I have worked with, could I work with ? I mean, I've been looking for a person like that. Remember, I told you I was?*

*S: Well, that's partly because I had good teachers, and you were the one who directed me up there [to Laurentian University in Sudbury, Ontario]...And then you, again, you know, have been my teacher, informally and sometimes formally, for a long time.*

*P: Yeah.*

*S: So, I should be clear by now. [laugh]...*

*P: We have to say that. Okay ?... This is an example, okay? This is a living example of a teacher, plus a student, okay ? And you've... Well, just exactly what you were saying... You came to me for some help and I directed you because you, as a person, as a being, as a Turtle Islander, you wanted to know your role and responsibilities to this land, and what you should do, in the proper direction in your life. You wanted to know which Native Studies would be the best one, so I directed you to that school... And there you met with one of... the best available teachers ... So Jim [Dumont] was one of your teachers, and Thom Alcoze.. And then, your on-going teachings. The Fasting, the on-going teaching, and then you helped me. You helped me put this together on black and white, you know, on paper. We helped the seed, because the seed had grown into this beautiful entity, this beautiful [pause] this beautiful flower... for all the people to enjoy, in the world. You know ? ...It's a vision of a First Nations [woman], an A-nish-in-a-be-qwe, or Ni-hee-ya-squell,<sup>13</sup> and that vision is your gift to the world. It's your sharing and your gift to the world, basically. That's what it is. But you, as the student, were part of that and here you are, you graduated. You know ? ... And you, as a*

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<sup>13</sup> Anishinabequay and Niheeyasquell are, respectively, the Ojibway and Cree terms for 'Native woman'.

*student, are helping the teacher (Shirt T2 1992b).*

This conversation acknowledges that we went through a process together, articulating several stages in our relationship to each other. Within the framework of this thesis, it helps to articulate the fact that our vision of this book-writing project also went through stages, and at times it appeared that the book would assume a very different form. As I see it, the process this study expresses draws parallels between aspects of my core development (my training to First Nations traditions and my academic studies) and the shifting visions of what this book could be. Originally, it appeared it would be a simple narrative account given by Pauline. Then we thought it would be a curriculum guideline based on Pauline's experiences at WSSS. At one point, as Pauline's life appeared to move away from work with children, we even visualised something closer to a biography.<sup>14</sup> However, our partnership on this story has continued to develop in ways that neither one of us could have predicted at the outset. In 1995, we entered the Master of Education program at York University together, each supporting the other through our work on our separate projects. Pauline has often said a person must review her moccasin trail to prepare for the future. We put that concept into practice as a team through the Masters program at York University. My thesis records the *history* of her first urban school, even as Pauline conducts research for her *future* project, a rural Teaching Village modeled on Native Way, the distinct First Nations model for education she first developed at WSSS as the Four Seasons Curriculum.

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<sup>14</sup> During the early 1990s, Pauline worked for Ontario's NDP government Employment Equity Branch as a Cultural Counsellor.

All things have their timing. In 1992, our version of the history of WSSS was like an embryo. Pauline was still waiting for me, and still trying to deal with the AKEC directly, but she had decided to shift her tactic in order to "set the record straight" (Shirt T2 1992b). She talked to me about making a presentation to one of the monthly Board meetings at the School. I was concerned she would be met with more resistance:

*S: You're going to have to fight like crazy to get a toe in the door, let alone a foot.*

*P: Yeah, but the thing is, I want to make my voice heard in there, and I'm going to have it in black and white... I'll say, 'You changed the name because my Grandfather's name wasn't good enough for you. But not only did you change the name, you took every thing! It's like coming into a home. You came into my home, into my lodge. You didn't like the name of that lodge. That lodge wasn't good enough for you, with those Grandfathers, those helpers and everything'... So I'm going to tell them that thing, you know, about them taking that. Going into the lodge, [with] all those Grandfathers, all those gifts, the sacred gifts that I left behind as the 'mother' <sup>15</sup>... it's like thieves coming in the night... I'm not going to allow anybody to say, 'This is what she said,' or whatever. I'm going to have it in black and white. I'm going to fight them with paper (Shirt T2 1992b).*

However, while the AKEC members had named her the school's honorary Grandmother, an Elder position which denotes tremendous respect, they continued to stonewall Pauline at their meetings. Over the years, I had watched Pauline's health decline each time she picked up that heart-breaking struggle to bring their attention back to the school's original mandate. Yet, in the end - though it took me more than a decade to prepare for it - our original contract was that we partner a book on WSSS's history, which brings Pauline's reminders of that original mandate for the school to "paper, in black and white" (Shirt T2 1992b).

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<sup>15</sup> Pauline is often referred to as *the mother of the school*, both by people from the community, and by her own children. The phrase is used in the manner of a title - in recognition that she was the one who was granted that vision, and its founder.

### Chapter Three

## THE RED CARAVAN

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WSSS was founded in August 1976, in the Toronto living room of Pauline Shirt and Vern Harper (Regnier & Shirt TR2 1987b; Shirt T1 1992a). At the time, Pauline and Vern were residents of the newly formed Bain Avenue Housing Co-operative in Toronto, and there were many social activists in the Co-op who offered support to the fledgling school through extensive voluntarism.<sup>1</sup> Beginning with six students, four of them the Harper's older children, the parents simply pulled their children from school and began holding classes (Berg & Shirt TC 1997). The school was still without a name when Pauline applied to the Ontario Ministry of Education for status as a Private School:

*At that time, I was the one that was providing everything: the organizing part, hiring the teacher, getting supplies together. People were really scared. They were scared to get involved because of what the educational system might do, and what the neighbours might think. They were really scared. The parental involvement was there, the verbal support was there, but the parents were really scared (Regnier & Shirt TR2 1987b)*

She soon discovered there was a number of regulations to meet to qualify for a license :

*We had to make certain applications to be a school... By that time we were looking*

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<sup>1</sup> Interestingly, Bain Co-op members have been active in the founding and operation of several other Alternative schools in the Toronto Board of Education, most notably the Phoenix and Quest schools of Ward Eight. Many Co-op parents are also active in the local Home Schooling Association. Originally, the school focused on Native children. In the second year, some non-Native Co-op supporters also registered their children at WSSS (Berg & Shirt TC 1997).

*for credible board members. The first Board members weren't necessarily the founders, they were people from the community. Some people are saying they are the founders of Wandering Spirit, which wasn't necessarily true. You had to have six people to form a board. We chose some people we knew had some credibility in the Native community (Regnier & Shirt TR2 1987b).*

Pauline had received her Early Childhood Education (ECE) training in Edmonton through a Street Project, one of the first "social development" programmes offered to Native people in an era when "the new term was Native Development", but this Certificate only qualified her to teach Kindergarten (Regnier & Shirt TR2 1987b). The school needed to find someone with an Ontario Teaching Certificate. While Pauline later delivered language and culture courses to all grades at WSSS as a resource teacher, Ministry regulations stated that she had to be accompanied by a certified teacher (Regnier & Shirt TR2 1987b; Berg & Shirt TC 1997, TC 1998). Pauline and Vern scraped together a small fund and hired an Aboriginal teacher named Nancy Woods, who would continue to work without pay in later months (Regnier & Shirt TR2 1987b; Shirt T1 1992a).

*I did all the work with the Ministry. I met with them and got the 'okay' to start a private school. In order to start a private school you had to have ten students, so we got ten students for the Centre. It was really hard. In those days, it was really hard to motivate the parents... 'We want our own children going to an Indian school. We want to control our own education. We want to control our destiny.' Although they said that, verbally, it was very hard for them to put that in practice. That was one of those things. I had to more or less coax them and say, 'Hey, it is alright to think this way. It is alright to act this way. It is alright to bring your children up the way you see fit, [to] educate our children the right way.' I was continually doing this in the beginning stages, getting support from the parents, never mind the children. The children were so eager and happy to get away from their regular schools. They were in a safe environment, they were happy, they were learning about themselves as Native people. It was harder on the parents. In those days it was the mother-led families. I worked with those people, particularly through Nellie's [a Hostel for Battered Women]. Also through my association with the other organisations in town (Regnier & Shirt TR2 1987b).*

As my interviews with Pauline and a volunteer named Bill Lewis revealed, in the first months of the school's life, they all jumped with every knock upon the door, afraid that the Children's Aid Society (CAS) would appear at any moment to seize their children (Shirt T2 1992b; Lewis T12 1996a). This was not a far-fetched notion, given that the CAS was seizing many children in Indian communities at the time (TNT 1978; Joffman 1979). Pauline had also had trouble with the staff in her children's previous schools. For instance, in 1974, first the school Nurse, and then the Principal from the local Public School arrived on her doorstep with concerns about the journal stories her children had written after they participated in a Native protest that took its concerns directly to Ottawa. She felt harassed at the time, but it was only years later that she discovered the school had presumed to register a report listing its concerns with the Hospital for Sick Children (Shirt T3 1993a). Ultimately, the efforts the group made to conform to the Ontario Ministry of Education's regulations must be seen under this harsh light. These parents had no desire to capitulate to the status quo, but a certain degree of conformity was necessary to insure that efforts the parents made to take control of their children's education did not result in an even greater loss of control through seizure of the children by CAS (Shirt T2 1992a; Lewis T12 1996a).

In order to meet the fire codes and accommodate a growing student population, Pauline was forced to search for an alternate home for the tiny school (Regnier & Shirt TR2 1987b; Shirt T1 1992a). Two months after the school was founded, the Toronto Native Friendship Centre, formerly a Bible College, agreed to provide a furnished second-floor classroom.<sup>2</sup> WSSS moved into the Native Friendship Centre

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<sup>2</sup> The Friendship Centre on Spadina Road would undergo a name change shortly after this, and is now referred to as the Native Canadian Centre.

on September 20, 1976 with ten students (Novak et al. 1983: 5; Regnier & Shirt TR2 1987b). It was called a *Survival School* in honour of a cultural schooling movement that began in the USA (Lyons 1979: 11). It was named *Wandering Spirit* to honour the Cree War Chief who gave his life to secure the future of his people in 1885 (Novak et al. 1983; Shirt T3 1992b).



Many members of the WSSS Parent Council had close ties with Three Fires, a Mide Medicine Society of the Anishinabe. Three Fires has members in a territory that mainly covers a territory from northern Ontario into Minnesota, but the Mide (or Mite in Cree) also stretch to Montana and Wyoming in the southwest, and Alberta in the northwest. Though there is no direct link between any single Native *church* and any single activist organization, people involved with WSSS were drawn into contact with members of the American Indian Movement (AIM) such as Edward Benton-Banai, Grand Chief of the Three Fires Society, an Ojibway Teaching Lodge (Berg & Shirt TC 1997). Schooling had been identified as an issue of top priority for Indians across North America during the 1960s and 1970s. When the first Native Survival School, Little Red School House, opened its doors at the St. Paul, Minnesota, headquarters of AIM in April 1972 (Lyons 1979: 12),<sup>3</sup> it created both an impetus for Canadian activism, and the primary model for WSSS. Pauline fondly refers to The Red School House as "Eddie's school", in tribute to Benton-Banai's position as its Director (Shirt & Nahwegeecheic T11 1994a).

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<sup>3</sup> The American Indian Movement (AIM) formed an Advisory Board in 1970 because of concerns about Native education (Lyons 1979: 10). In 1973-1974 there were three Survival Schools in the USA (11).

As for AIM, the organisation received a mixed response from both the general public and Aboriginal communities, in part because their activities manifest on two levels: pragmatic activism and spiritual revival (Fleet 1997: 157). While AIM began with work to address the desperate conditions faced by urban Indians in Minnesota, its mandate soon expanded to include direct action protests that brought public attention to issues of abuse, neglect and corruption on a national level (157-158). The national plane of AIM's activism pivoted on the belief that direct action must be taken to ensure the physical and cultural survival of First Nations communities. Yet, while some traditional Chiefs were hesitant to support activists who flirted with violence in their confrontations, it was the despotic, federally-appointed Chiefs and their supporters who declared themselves enemies of AIM (Fleet 1997).<sup>4</sup>

The split in dominant society's response followed the Aboriginal split in response to AIM. In part, this was because while some members of the organisation strained to maintain a strong spiritual focus, its detractors and the media ignored its pastoral work in the ghettos of Minneapolis to promote direct-action protest. Detractors of AIM, the media and government officials characterized the entire organization as militant. Despite constitutional guarantees of freedom of speech, they also labelled many of its peaceful protest activities illegal. AIM's protests exposing incidents of neglect and abuse perpetrated through the constitutions of Canada and the USA proceed from a traditional understanding of the term *warrior* but the media and government officials have made a poor show of presenting AIM's *warriors* in their

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<sup>4</sup> The internal politics of the Aboriginal community were drawn into opposed camps by the elected Chief system imposed by the federal governments of Canada and the USA. In both countries, the federal government attempted to suppress traditional governing and community interests by placing men who had capitulated to federal will in positions of power (Fleet: 166; Berg & Shirt TC 1997, TC 1998).

full cultural interpretation through the moiety system (Allen 1986; Fleet 1997: 157; Berg & Shirt TC 1997, TC 1998).

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Paula Gunn Allen (1986) sees the moiety system as the root of cultural misunderstanding about the traditional social organization of First Nations people<sup>5</sup> that has carried over into modern times. In fact Allen suggests that, prior to contact, in most tribes there was a "two-sided, complementary social structure" that placed both men and women in positions of power (Allen 1986: 18; Fleet 1997: 79). These positions corresponded to inside and outside chief and their duties were respectively internal and external affairs (Allen: 18). Allen insists many nations operated as gynocracies though the subtleties in male female relations probably were such that the organizational power structure likely offered more balance than this term suggests. However, as Kehoe (1981) says, the Fur Trade "discouraged the traditional matrilocality" among the Algonkians in the Great Lakes region (242) and among the Iroquois internal affairs were handled by women known Clan mothers with the authority to give direction to or unseat the male chief who operated in the arena of external affairs (Allen 1986: 19).<sup>6</sup> However, misunderstanding the governing system was not as simple as turning a blind eye to the status or roles women held in Aboriginal society.

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<sup>5</sup> While there are other understandings of 'moiety system' than that offered by Allen (1996), I am working here with Pauline explanation that the traditional governing system is more involved than the practise of exogamy through the Clan system because it recognises the balance achieved through the co-leadership of a group (Berg & Shirt TC 1997, TC 1998).

<sup>6</sup> With the cultural revival, there is a return to gynocracies in contemporary times. "In February 1981, the Albuquerque Journal reported that 67 Indian tribes had women heads of state" (Allen 1986: 31).

It is a feature of traditional governing among the Algonkians that the locus of decision-making shifted according to the situation the band was facing, war or peace (Dempsey FN 1993).<sup>7</sup> While the traditional organisation of indigenous groups generally acknowledged the contributions of women through important positions, some groups used a co-leadership model that did not organise under women leaders (Allen 1986; Dumont CL 1988). For instance, Big Bear was the Peace Chief for a Plains Cree band that often followed the buffalo migrations from northern Alberta into Montana and back again until the late 1880s. Yet in those times when the band faced conflict, the warriors moved their tepees together and Wandering Spirit assumed power as the band's War Chief (Dempsey 1984, FN 1993; Carter 1997).

While this explanation continues to place emphasis on words like *war* and *peace*, again, the War Chief is the person who deals with external affairs and negotiates relations with outsiders and the Peace Chief handles internal affairs and maintains harmony within the group. In fact, Allen insists the didactic structure of this social system "emphasizes complementarity rather than opposition" in relationships (19). Yet dominant culture misinterpretations of traditional roles are difficult to address because they take their grounding in assumptions about the nature of human relationships in general, and impose problematic conceptions of 'the other' upon international relationships in particular (Bowers 1993). Allen suggests:

*...traditional war was not practised as a matter of conquest or opposition to enemies in the same way it has been practised by western peoples ... it is not a matter of battling enemies into a defeat... Warfare among most traditional American Indian tribes who practised it (went on the warpath) was a ritual, an exercise in the practise of shumanism" (21).*

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<sup>7</sup> Personal conversations undertaken during the course of field work are attributed to the research partner and noted as 'FN'.

Though killing was certainly not unheard of and some groups honoured their fallen enemies, harnessing their spiritual power by eating their hearts, the focus often fell on counting coup rather than counting corpses.<sup>8</sup>

In modern contexts, also, it is clear that a nation's external affairs involve more than war. During the period of initial contact, also, European and Aboriginal peoples each understood that the other group needed to negotiate passage over occupied territories and, where possible, build trade relations. However, both the difference in cultural relationship to land and the difference in internal social organization often proved difficult to comprehend (Van Kirk 1986):

*'Where are your women?' asked Chief Outtacity on meeting a British delegation to treaty negotiations in the early eighteenth century. The British were at a loss: What could he mean? Their women did not involve themselves in military and government affairs. This was one of the major differences in the contest of cultures... Non-Natives who became familiar with the indigenous cultures realized that their women had a position of equality and respect unknown to 'civilized' societies... (Fleet 1997: 79).*

In fact, Allen (1986) suggests Europeans actively suppressed the female-led governments of Aboriginal nations, whether they were matrilineal, matrifocal, or matrilineal:

*The invaders have exerted every effort to remove Indian women from every position of authority, to obliterate all records pertaining to gynocratic social systems, and to insure that no American and few American Indians would remember that gynocracy was the primary social order of Indian America prior to 1800 (3).*

Kehoe (1981) also identifies a shift away from traditional Aboriginal social patterns as one that was orchestrated by a patriarchal European bias rather than accidental:

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<sup>8</sup> Counting coup is the practise of gathering spiritual power in situations where one 'could' have killed enemies but did not. Instead, coup is collected by touching them with a coup stick or cutting off a specially prepared 'scalp lock' (Kehoe 1981; Allen 1986).

*Changes in social organization came about through the European trader's imposition of their own hierarchal organization upon their Indian customers. Traders found it easier to deal with a single representative of a group of trappers (241)... traders selected a man... and presented to this leader a decorated coat and a hat which would mark him as the 'captain'... [This] transference of the European model of a patriarchal family to the northern Algonkians encouraged trap-line partnership of fathers and sons and discouraged the traditional matrilocality (242).*

In other words, a dramatic renegotiation of existing tribal order was instigated simply because European traders had refused to deal with the indigenous peoples on their own terms.

These elements of the historical Native-Newcomer relationship impact on this history in at least two ways. First, classical historians have characterized Wandering Spirit as a rebel, a warrior who broke ranks with the peaceful Chief Big Bear. As Dempsey (FN 1993) says, classic historians failed to account for the band's recognition of Big Bear and Wandering Spirit as co-leaders. Neither leader held full authority, and neither was assumed to be equally skilled in all areas of governing. In fact, they often kept each other in check. This gives a fresh focus to the controversy that surrounds the man WSSS was named after. However, the second level of impact centers on the way dominant culture assumptions impact cultural institutions. Through a division of labour and social roles characteristic of Aboriginal government, Wandering Spirit was in charge of external affairs for his band. It was his manner of executing that role that determined the name of WSSS. Simply put, as a Cultural Survival School, WSSS was negotiating the future of Aboriginal people with outsiders. As such, the school itself was regarded as an entity that manifested the personality and social function of a War Chief.

In the first half of this century, political rights groups in Canada and the USA addressed the suffering perpetrated through the reservation system by petitioning their federal governments to honour their treaty promises. However, though these groups laid the foundation for further action, Aboriginal activists of the 1960s and 1970s expressed dissatisfaction with their methods. The federal governments of the USA and Canada both planned to liquidate the Indian reservations (Fleet 1997: 155-156) and this raised considerable opposition to Canada's so-called White Paper in 1969. Politicians recognised this as a bad idea only after thousands of indigenous people had been relocated to urban centres. In the mid-1960s, college-educated Aboriginals in the USA founded the National Indian Youth Council, which mobilized those who had been displaced to the slums of various cities (Fleet 1997: 155-156).<sup>9</sup> AIM began as a native-run, non-profit corporation responding to police harassment and brutality directed at Indians living in ghetto conditions in Minneapolis, Minnesota (Lyons 1989; Fleet 1997: 157). Founded in 1968, the *AIM street patrol* was backed by several churches. Its members scouted incidents of crime to ensure that those arrested were aware of their basic rights. The Patrol was so successful, Time magazine soon took note that, after the patrols began, for 22 consecutive weekends, no Aboriginals were arrested in the city of Minneapolis. In 1972, AIM took direct action to address the future prospects of Aboriginal youth by founding a Cultural Survival School that quickly became a model for progressive Native education (Lyons 1979; Shirt & Nahwegeechee T11 1994a).

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<sup>9</sup> Following their model, a few years later Pauline Shirt founded the Canadian Native Youth Council in Edmonton, to instill a sense of purpose in urban Indians who had been forced to live in the streets. She was a grade twelve student (Shirt T1 1992a, T2 1992b).

AIM also expanded its focus to address the issues of self-determination, sovereignty and cultural survival on the national level during the time its National Director, Clyde Bellecourt, shared the leadership with Russell Means and Dennis Banks (157-158). They organized peaceful protests as a way of forcing Native issues into the public eye, and chapters of the organization began to form across the country (158).<sup>10</sup> Pauline Shirt was present at the initial ceremonial meeting between AIM and the Oglala Sioux in early February 1973. Public opinion, even among Aborigines, was split over the value of direct action. It soon became clear that, when Indians gathered, there was a potential for violence in the police response to public disturbances. AIM's profile on the Pine Ridge Reserve became highly controversial because of its conflict with the corrupt Tribal Chief Dick Wilson. His impeachment hearing was terminated in 1973, and Wilson and his Guardians of the Oglala Nation

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<sup>10</sup> In First Nations, Firsthand (1997), Fleet offers a list of memorable *warrior coups* counted by AIM:

- 1/ November 1969 - seizure of abandoned prison on Alcatraz Island, and delivery of a Proclamation by 78 people who held the island for seven months (159);
- 2/ Thanksgiving Day 1970 - Plymouth Rock is painted red (159);
- 3/ July 4, 1971 at Mt. Rushmore - protest of USA seizure of Black Hills by breaking Fort Laramie treaty just four years after it was signed features AIM members scaling the faces of USA Presidents who broke treaties (159);
- 4/ 1972 - mobilization of Indians across the USA in march from west coast to Washington DC called 'The Trail of Broken Treaties' as a comment on the 1800s relocation march known as The Trail of Tears (160);
- 5/ November 2, 1972 - 500 demonstrators seize Bureau of Indian Affairs Building in Washington DC, rename it the Native American Embassy, and deliver a 20 point list of demands centering on broken treaty rights, in a siege that lasts 6 days (160-161);
- 6/ February 1972 - family of Raymond Yellow Thunder asks for AIM's assistance, when his murder by two white youths is labelled a suicide, coffin is sealed, and they are denied access to autopsy results... a caravan of 200 cars to the courthouse convinces authorities capitulate to the family's requests (162);
- 7/ January 1973 - family of Wesley Bad Heart Bull seeks AIM's help when his murder by a white businessman is deemed involuntary manslaughter... 200 march to courthouse but riot breaks out and fire is set, causing authorities to place 65 marshals on Pine Ridge Reserve to *keep the peace* (162);
- 8/ 1973 - traditional Oglala Chiefs request AIM's assistance, leading to February 28, 1973 takeover of Wounded Knee (site of 1868 massacre of 250 fugitive Sioux by the 7th Cavalry on the morning of their surrender). Several hundred Lakota and AIM leaders (with 11 hostage-supporters) involved in a violent siege that lasts 73 days. Armoured cars surround and many rounds fired despite presence of children and several pregnant women. Mary Crow Dog gives birth during the fracas. Natives Buddy Lamont and Frank Clearwater are killed (163-165).

(GOONs) declared a war on AIM (162). The situation was complicated by FBI harassment of the Lakota Sioux that was so strong it was recognised by Amnesty International (166). On June 26 1975, the FBI ambushed an AIM camp on the reserve and two FBI agents were killed. The AIM members fled under fire but Leonard Peltier was eventually extradited from Canada and found guilty of murder in a trial that sparked its own controversy (166-167).<sup>11</sup> However, as Fleet says:

*If AIM's tactics were controversial, their results were beyond doubt. In addition to placing native American issues firmly on the national agenda, the organization kindled a new sense of pride in a generation that had almost lost touch with its spiritual heritage, and helped revive the ancestral traditions and beliefs that had been driven underground for a century (168).*

Events below the border inspired activism in Canada, but both the level of protest and the police response in Canada, though brutal, fortunately did not result as often in death. For instance, among a series of protests that reflected events in the USA, the Native Youth Council held a rally in front of the Peace Tower in the summer of 1973, which led to the seizure of the Indian Affairs building and an occupation that lasted 24 hours.

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A number of newspaper articles from the late 1970s suggest that WSSS either typified a celebratory recovery of First Nations culture and ethnicity, or that it represented a spontaneous parental response to an immediate crisis in their children's education (TBE 1977; Brydon 1979; Hamilton Spectator 1979).<sup>12</sup> The story revealed

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<sup>11</sup> Luanna Harper remembers writing letters to protest Peltier's imprisonment in composition classes (Harper T14 1996). Though it has been 33 years, a strong support support network is still working to reopen Peltier's case.

<sup>12</sup> Robert Regnier dealt with the Survival School Movement in educational journals during the mid-1980s, but it was left to the popular media to consider the relevance of the Survival School movement to the field of education.

in this thesis, through the words of those who founded WSSS or participated directly in its day-to-day operations, resists either description of the school's purpose, or the impetus for its inception, as too simplistic. For instance, Pauline acknowledges she was forced to take immediate action to deal with a family crisis that centred on schooling. Her son, Clayton, (who was in grade two) refused to return to the local school after a series of racially-motivated incidents in the school yard went unaddressed by the principal (Regnier & Shirt TR2 1987b). However, whenever she is asked to provide a context for the founding of the first Canadian Survival School, Pauline says that her concern for "taking care of the children" pivots on the violent reception that the Native Peoples' Caravan to Ottawa received, when they arrived on Parliament Hill in 1974 (Berg & Shirt TC 1997).<sup>13</sup> Again, there is a complicated background for the simple answer, and Pauline is quick to say she participated in the Caravan to draw attention to the abuse, poverty and neglect that Canada's Indian Act perpetuated for more than 100 years:

*The main reason why we organised the Caravan was the way Native people were being treated, to draw people's attention to that... it was the first time that the Native organisations came together and spoke to the Canadian government... We were on the Parliament steps (Regnier & Shirt TR21987b).*

In other words, the immediate concerns that motivated her decision to found a school, like the background to the Native Indian Brotherhood's (NIB) demand for Indian Control of Indian Education (1972), were developed out of a long and painful historical context.

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<sup>13</sup> The Native Peoples Caravan to Ottawa is hereafter referred to as 'the Caravan'.

In 1961, at eighteen years of age, Pauline was expelled from Blue Quills Residential School for *non-cooperation*. However, she was determined to pursue her grade eleven and twelve studies, enrolling as the only Indian in an upscale Catholic girl's school<sup>14</sup> in Edmonton. As she says, it was at this point that she realised how different life on the reserve was from the lives of other Canadians. Always outspoken and forthright, in the late 1960s she started the first Native Youth Group in Canada because she was concerned that most of Edmonton's Natives were living on the street (Regnier & Shirt TR1 1987a). Later on, she would become the youngest Secretary-Treasurer (to that date) to serve the Alberta Native Federation.

It was during her time at the Alberta Native Federation that she met Vern Harper, a tall, pale, Saskatchewan Metis. Pauline and Vern began to participate in several social activist projects, including the Street Project to found a Native Kindergarten in Edmonton (Berg & Shirt TC 1997). They started a family, and by 1970, they had four children of their own, plus Vern's son from a prior marriage. It was at this point that they decided to move to Toronto, where Vern had been raised in Cabbagetown. He went ahead of the family and secured work as a Nurse's Aide at Mt. Sinai Hospital. Pauline followed on the train with their five children, once Vern was settled. The journey east was difficult for Pauline because she was alone with four children in a sleeping car and pregnant for her fifth child (Regnier & Shirt TR1 1987a).

The first few months in Toronto were also very lean and lonely. They knew no one, and had arrived with literally nothing but suitcases (Berg & Shirt TC 1997). However, Vern's call to an open-line radio show soon led to his employment as a Court Worker for the Native Canadian Centre. Once again, they found themselves in

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<sup>14</sup> This was St. Joseph's Catholic High School, which became a co-educational facility in 1963.

the thick of social activism and Vern became involved with the Centre's newsletter, *Toronto Native Times* (TNT), which was edited at that time by Jim Dumont. Pauline Shirt and Vern Harper each gained considerable notoriety and political experience through their activist involvement in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

In 1972, Vern joined Local Five of the Ontario Metis Association, and the family moved closer to the organisation's headquarters in Thunder Bay when he was elected Vice-President. Life in Thunder Bay was even harder than it had been in Toronto. Their two girls, Deanna and Luanna, and Vern's son from a first marriage, Vincent, were all meeting with violence on their school playgrounds. Moreover, there was serious trouble between Pauline and Vern, and, though a close friend counselled her to leave him, she decided to stay. However, it was after this point that Pauline's determination not to be oppressed developed as a feminist theme in her activism. She helped to found both a hostel and the Ontario Native Women's Association while she was in Thunder Bay (Regnier & Shirt TR1 1987a; Berg & Shirt TC 1997).

Then, in 1974, the Harper family followed the relocation of the Ontario Metis Association headquarters and moved back to the Rosedale neighbourhood of Toronto. Pauline was soon working with a number of women to establish Nellie's, a hostel for battered women. However, neither Vern nor Pauline was content with single projects. Together, they turned their attention to the establishment of a Native Canadian Pavilion for Toronto's famous multi-cultural festival *Caravan*. Pauline indicates they saw the Native Pavilion as a way of promoting cultural pride among Toronto's Aboriginal people, even as it increased the public visibility of Canada's indigenous nations as people who had maintained their distinctive cultural traditions

(Regnier & Shirt TR2 1987b; WSSS archives 1997).<sup>15</sup> At this time, Pauline was heavily involved in Indian Rights for Indian Women (IRIW). In fact, she speaks of a group meeting in 1973 at which, as Toronto co-ordinator, she introduced the idea of charging the Government of Canada with human rights abuses against Native women, saying IRIW should take the Sandra Lovelace case to the United Nations. This single case paved the way for the passing of Bill C-31, a revisioning of the Indian Act which promised to end sexual discrimination against Indian women in 1985 (Berg & Shirt TC 1997, TC 1998).<sup>16</sup>

Over the years, Pauline and Vern developed strong connections with activist organizations in both the non-Native and the Native community. Pauline's strong feminist concerns allowed her to see beyond colour lines in her work to resist the oppression and abuse of all women. In addition, Vern and Pauline were both interested in the Marxist-Leninist Party of Canada (MLP) at this time, feeling that the MLP's concerns about oppressive governments echoed the Aboriginal experience, while socialism was (in the loosest sense) related to traditional Native society.<sup>17</sup> For Pauline, the persecution they experienced in response to their social activism suggested paranoia on the part of the Canadian government. In fact, the RCMP put cars outside of their home, and even tapped their phone (Regnier & Shirt TR2 1987b; Shirt T3 1992b). In 1998, she could laugh at my teasing over the radical threat that

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<sup>15</sup> Pauline was also the primary organiser for the Native Canadian Pavilion of Toronto's Caravan festival in 1986, which featured both traditional and contemporary performers from the Arctic circle to South America, along with a contemporary Native Fashion Show, and a variety of indigenous foods.

<sup>16</sup> The Indian Act revoked the status of an Aboriginal woman and her children when she married either a non-Native or non-Status man. This abrogated a number of her rights, including the right to live on-reserve. The enfranchisement decision of Indian men also revoked the status of his spouse and children, with the same loss of rights to them (Venne 1981).

<sup>17</sup> As did other Native leaders, Pauline and Vern would change their minds about their involvement with CP after the NPCO in 1974.

she and Vern posed to the Canadian government:

*S: Oh, you guys ! Redder than Reds !*

*P: What ?*

*S: The Redman gone over to the Reds, that's just too much !*

*P: Oh yeah ! [laughter] Redder than Red.*

*P & S: [laugh together] (Berg & Shirt TC 1998).*

But it had been no joke at the time. Not only did they suffer constant surveillance by the RCMP as a result, but their involvement with the Communist Party (CP) scared the Native organisations too. In 1974, AIM was in the process of establishing its Canadian branch. Though Pauline and Vern had friends in that organisation, and AIM asked to use their huge Rosedale living room as a meeting place, in an ironic twist on the general public's perception of AIM's activism, it was precisely because of their political activism with the CP and the Caravan that Vern and Pauline were refused membership at that time (Regnier & Shirt TR2 1987b; Berg & Shirt TC 1997).<sup>18</sup>

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*Manifesto:*

*We are here to talk about violence.*

*We are against violence.*

*The violence of racism, poverty, economic dependence,  
alcoholism, land theft and educational warfare.*

*This is the violence that has hurt our people.*

*We say it is time for the democracy of Canada to end  
its political and social violence against our people.*

*The Native Peoples' Caravan to Ottawa, 1974  
(cited in Ticoll & Persky 1975: 15. )*

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<sup>18</sup> The stamina, breadth and extent of the social activism Pauline and Vern engaged in was legendary. Even as they were operating WSSS, they were advocating for the release of indigenous prisoners such as Leonard Peltier, and Pauline was working with Indian Rights for Indian Women (Berg & Shirt TC 1998; WSSS archives 1997).

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In a 1987 interview, Pauline revealed that she and Vern were far more than participants in the Caravan (Regnier & Shirt TR2 1987b). Not only were they instrumental in the organising of the event, they also maintained constant telephone contact with its leaders, offering strategic advice during the 3,000 mile trek across the country, and physically joined the group (with their children) as the Red Caravan passed through Toronto (Ticoll & Persky 1975; Regnier & Shirt TR2 1987b). There were detractors for the group's efforts,<sup>19</sup> from within the Aboriginal community and outside, at the time and in the aftermath. As media accounts indicate, the Caravan was led by popular leaders, rather than elected Chiefs, and the Canadian government refused to offer them recognition. Some of those elected leaders considered this mobilisation of several hundred Aboriginals in a descent upon Ottawa far too radical. Yet, as Pauline makes clear, for its leaders and many others across Canada, the Caravan marked the transformation of Native organisations in Canada into a political body with a voice (Regnier & Shirt TR2 1987b; Shirt T1 1992a). The Red Caravan was the coalescence of an activist leadership that had previously been fractured by both distance and dissidence in its efforts to have its concerns recognised by the federal government. The Caravan, and its reception on Parliament Hill, focused the organisers of the march for a brain-storming session which developed new strategies to address their issues.

During the Caravan's long trek from British Columbia to Ottawa, the media had

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<sup>19</sup> Pauline indicates the group was variously called The Caravan, The Red Caravan or The Native Peoples' Caravan to Ottawa (Regnier & Shirt TR2 1987b). Occasionally, people refer to it simply as '1974'.

shifted their focus from the issues addressed in the manifesto to the motives of the tag-along Communist Party (CP) supporters of the Caravan (Ticoll & Persky 1975: 20). The relationship between the Native Caravan and the CP was uneasy from the start; however, as Ken Basil put it, there was a sense that they were "all struggling for the same cause because we're all controlled by the same government" (20).

Unfortunately, tensions between the two groups mounted over time. At one point along the route, the Caravan's leaders posted a sign on a door during a strategy meeting, denying entry to non-Native supporters. In addition, as Pauline points out, the press not only fanned the flames of a general public suspicion for congregating groups, but when they did seek quotes from the assembly they tended to focus on two very vocal men from AIM who had joined the Caravan (Regnier & Shirt TR2 1987b). On both counts, they effectively diverted the public's attention from the Caravan's stated purpose: to make Canadian citizens aware of the deplorable conditions being endured by Aboriginal people, both on the reserves and in urban centres.

Upon their arrival in Ottawa, the Caravan immediately sought lodgings for some 200 men, women and children, moving into a large, abandoned, 100-year-old mill (CPW 1974: Oct. 1; Ottawa Citizen 1974: Oct. 2).<sup>20</sup> While the Ottawa Journal reported "the Native Peoples' Caravan has an open lease on the... National Capital Commission building" (Avery & Cobb 1974) other media reports of the day pandered to the public's distrust of demonstrating crowds and congregating Indians. Numerous reporters suggested, through omission or misinformation, that the Caravan had *illegally* occupied the building. Bad press was not their only adversity. While they

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<sup>20</sup> The building, which the NPCO dubbed The Native People's Embassy, is identified in news reports of the day, variously, as "an ancient stone federal building" in CPW, Oct. 1, 1974, and the "old Carbide Mills plant near Portage Bridge" in The Ottawa Citizen, Oct. 2, 1974.

had shelter, electricity and heat, the mill was not really suitable as living quarters for this large group as, for instance, there were no kitchen facilities. Despite all of this, once their housing was secured, they christened their lodgings The Native Peoples' Embassy (CPW 1974, various: Oct. 1-2). The group's leaders then invited Prime Minister Trudeau to visit their Embassy, to discuss the issues raised through their Manifesto.

The name of their lodgings, The Native People's Embassy, was a conscious political statement. From the Aboriginal perspective, it was rooted in a 100-year history of ignored petitions for recognition. As a political statement, this name said Aboriginals were a people - or more correctly, a collective of nations - with their own land base, nationality and a sovereign governing system that would meet Canada as equals. Whatever was intended, the act of naming the old mill an Embassy did nothing to persuade the government to offer a friendly reception to the group. Both the Prime Minister and the Minister of Indian Affairs declined the Caravan's invitation to visit. The Minister of Indian Affairs relayed a message suggesting a meeting on the Hill in the days to follow (CPW 1974: various Oct. 1-2). As the headlines declared, "He'll meet Indians but on his own grounds" (Avery & Cobb 1974). This time it was the Caravan leaders who declined.

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It was September 30, 1974. There were many families with children in the Caravan of 200 people who decided to take their Manifesto to the Prime Minister in person. Trudeau was scheduled to attend ceremonies for the Opening of Parliament that day. Accompanied by the beat of their sacred drum, the troupe marched over to

the Hill, carrying hand-painted placards addressing the issues that had drawn them to Ottawa. Their protests read: "Decent Health Care for Indians"; "Better Education" and "Better Housing - More Land" (Ticoll & Persky: 1975). Both CP and MLP supporters of the Aboriginals joined them in a critical three-hour period on Parliament Hill.

The police were also on the Hill to maintain order among the crowds attending the ceremonies. Shortly after the Caravan arrived, there were several small shoving matches between the police and several Natives in the Caravan. The doors to the Parliament buildings had been barricaded by the police, and it was here that the altercations took place. The group sent messages to Trudeau, demanding that he come out to discuss their Manifesto. Once again, Trudeau refused to give the Caravan leaders an audience. People in the Caravan called out, repeatedly, demanding his audience. When he ignored them, they made several lame attempts to push past the police barricades and enter the building. No one denies this, though the Caravan and other observers insist that the dispute between police and Natives at this point was largely verbal (CPW 1974: Oct. 1-2) The Caravan began to sing songs of protest, accompanied by their drum. They also burned copies of their Manifesto which Trudeau had refused to accept. Then, in their frustration, an "inverted Canadian flag, which had travelled with the Caravan from Vancouver as a symbol of people in distress, was set afire" (Ticoll & Persky 1975: 16).

After this point, according to numerous reporters, participants in the Caravan and other witnesses, it was the CP supporters of the Caravan who precipitated a violent response from the police. In fact, as Doug Small reported the next day:

*[Indian Affairs Minister] Buchanan attached much of the blame for the violence that*

*marred the normally-sedate opening of a new parliamentary session to a group of Communist Party of Canada Marxist-Leninist agitators. 'The Maoists were out in fairly substantial numbers,' he said. 'And I don't think the Indians were happy to have them.'* (CPW 1974: Oct.1)

For their part, the soft-capped police involved in the fracas claimed that stones and steel spikes were thrown at them, and insisted it was the Natives who threw them (Forster 1974). The police pulled out their batons and began to use them. As if this were a signal they had waited for, "bus loads of Mounties [who had] waited all day..." descended upon the NPCO wearing hard helmets, masks, shields and raised clubs (Winsor 1974). As one reporter said, "an RCMP riot squad pushed [the] group of 200 demonstrating Indians off Parliament Hill... in one of the most violent incidents ever witnessed in the capital" (Lam 1974). Later, it was learned this was the first time the riot squad, which had been created in 1967 during implementation of the War Measures Act, had ever been pressed into action (Forster 1974). The result was a scene the Globe & Mail called, "Ugly. Frighteningly ugly" (1974).

Afterwards, Edward Burnstick, the Canadian Director for AIM, said the Indians of the Native Peoples' Caravan trying to present grievances to Parliament were caught between the RCMP riot squad and Maoists who were pushing from behind" (CPW-Ottawa Journal 1974). One reporter revealed, "About 400 members of the CP demonstrated with the 200 members of the Native Peoples' Caravan" (Koenig 1974). Yet reports on the Canadian Press Wire Service of the day reveal a tremendous discrepancy in opinion on the numbers of CP members present. In some cases, there was clearly an attempt to downplay the CP's contribution to the violence that erupted, some reporters saying only *a handful* was present.

Unfortunately, the issue that should have captured the public's attention was

swamped by futile attempts to discover who shoved whom first. The NPCO vainly tried to bring public attention back to the question reporters should have been asking. Was a reasonable degree of force used in the police response to the situation ? "Louis Cameron of Kenora, Ontario, one of the leaders of the Native Peoples' Caravan, would tell a news conference [the next day]...'The RCMP had the guns, the bayonets, and the tear gas...We had a drum and a sheet of paper with our demands' " (CPW 1974: Oct. 1). Yet the RCMP riot squad had surrounded the protesters, who tried to run as officers raised their batons against the crowd. As Pauline remembers the incident, "Vern [was] one of the first ones they went for because he was one of the leaders" (Regnier & Shirt TR2 1987b). Though he was carrying his youngest child in his arms as he ran, he was struck over the head by one of the blue-helmeted officers. Pauline's voice still shakes as she reports that Vern lay on the ground, unconscious, as the panicked crowd ran over him.

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Pauline's second daughter, Luanna Harper, remembers that clash between the RCMP riot squad and the NPCO on Parliament hill vividly, though she was only seven years old:

*L: There were people running all over. I remember this camera man, no, this reporter, he was a white reporter - getting beaten up. Right ? And I -*

*S: Beaten up by who ?*

*L: By the riot squad. They had their big shields, right ? And they were trudging through us and I was s-s-s - I lost my family! I didn't know where they were ! ...I just ran across the street, and I was standing there crying and crying and crying, right ? I didn't know where my family was. And then this Indian woman, she was a young woman, she grabbed my hand and she brought me back! (Harper T14 1997).*

The memories Luanna and Pauline carry of the so-called *Riot on the Hill* are filled

with such violence that, 24 years later, Pauline's voice still break with emotion as she recall the scene:

*They didn't listen... They didn't understand what we were trying to do. The discrimination was so blatant, how the state thought of us... I saw the children of the Caravan just being hurt...I will never forget that time. For a second, I just felt that was the end for us, after beating everyone on the Hill there... We grabbed all the children. The women picked up the drum... People were falling all over, we just kept that drum going. People were limping and crying. People were really hurt, [and] Vern got a concussion. My heart went out to the children. Those were the ones who really got hurt that time. That is when, then and there, I said I was going to do something for the children... That would be the beginning, there, being thrown down the steps [of the Peace Tower]. That was the beginning of the whole thing (Regnier & Shirt TR2 1987b).*

Pauline's response to the excess force used to quell that fracas reveals the same perception of violence that focused the NPCO's Manifesto. It is a protest that political and social violence, the violence of racism, is more painful than the welts raised by the RCMP batons in this riot. In fact, the Aboriginal community's requests for retribution would continue to focus on the same list of grievances, "The violence of racism, poverty, economic dependence, alcoholism, land theft and educational warfare" (Ticoll & Persky 1975: 15).

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In the aftermath, some members of the press continued to use purple prose, describing the group as "militant Indians" (The San Antonio Light 1974). PM Trudeau played up to the same misleading stereotypes, offering an ironic comment during his press conference the next day. Ignoring the actions of the riot squad, he claimed it was the Natives who had been violent, while "our whole society is built on civil dialogue" (press statement 1974). Dismissing the points made by the NPCO

manifesto, Trudeau added the Caravan was not representative of Canada's Native people because these were no elected officials among them. Yet this statement ignores decades of petitioning from the traditional Native leadership, which claimed the federal government's insistence on elected Chiefs was the imposition of a foreign governing system.

Despite this official dismissal of both their legitimacy and their Manifesto, the Caravan stayed on in The Native Peoples' Embassy, eventually negotiating the release of some 17 members who had been arrested during the so-called riot (Forster 1974). As a group, they were nursing many injuries (Regnier & Shirt TR2 1987b). A day later, a spokesman for the NPCO told reporters, "the Caravan had to take three carloads - mostly women - to the emergency wards of Ottawa hospitals" (Nagle 1974) and one of those woman had suffered a fractured skull (Forster 1974). Indeed, in a stark contrast to the official response from the Hill, Ottawa's local businesses demonstrated both a moral and a generous practical support for the Caravan through their donations of food and other supplies. They even delivered several stoves to make the group more comfortable (CPW 1974: Oct. 1; CPW-The Province 1974). Inside the Embassy, there was a flurry of planning. There was talk that the building would either become "a multi-culture centre", or that some members of the Caravan would stay on to ensure that The Native People's Embassy become a permanent feature of the Ottawa cityscape (CPW-The Province 1974).

Like that twist on an expected outcome that brings resonance to a story of adversity, the story of the NPCO which Pauline and Luanna narrate ends with a simple message of hope and determination. Luanna has fond memories of the Native People's Embassy, even after that awful violence on Parliament Hill. The Embassy

seemed a safe place to her, a place of communal living where all of the adults shared the responsibility for everyone's child. Yet it is the recognition of her own innocence as a child, her own lack of political perspective, that she finds ironic:

*I used to call it an Embassy. I thought it was an Embassy! That's what [the adults] called it, an Embassy. And it was just a big old factory, or whatever it was... There were Native people there, and we stayed there like we were living there (Harper T14 1997).*

In other words, in that place, the NPCO was living out what the Embassy itself had meant to foster: a collective leadership with a vision of communal harmony, whose politics had its foundation in concern for the well-being of the larger Native community.

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As a parallel to Luanna's recollections, which contrasted with the media's emphasis on the three hours spent on the Hill, Pauline suggests the most important consequences of the NPCO encompass both the long trek across the country, and the weeks spent at the Native Peoples' Embassy after that day on the Hill. She mentions three main accomplishments: an increased public awareness about Aboriginal issues, the political contacts the group developed on its journey across the country, and the fact that assembly in one place offered the opportunity to strategise for a united future activism.

*It gained Canadian support. It did. There was a Native Embassy. It was an old, abandoned mill, and that was where we stayed for quite some time... We stayed and formed committees. We organised what our next steps were going to be. That is what we talked about. One of the things was survival schools, and then control of Indian education. At that time, we said we would go back into our communities and do that kind of work (Regnier & Shirt TR2 1987b).*

But it is Luanna's account that places the group's planning sessions in perspective. Her observation is unsettling, like an after-shock of the violence on the Hill. It throws this idyllic picture of optimistic activism into sharp contrast, striking a discord between Native hope for the future and the official attitude of the day.

*L: There were reporters all the time, coming to take pictures. And I was on the front of The Toronto Star!*

*S: Yeah ?*

*L: Yup, with these other kids. I was seven, yeah.*

*S: I should try to look up the pictures of you guys.*

*L: Yeah.[pause] They burnt down that building, yeah.*

*S: When ?*

*L: Just after -*

*S: Just after ?*

*L: Yeah.*

*S: To make sure it wouldn't happen again ?*

*L: Yup. They didn't want it, you know - people to be reminded of it (Harper T14 1997).*

The fire that destroyed the Native Peoples' Embassy was not the only sign that there was trouble ahead for the people who had participated in the NPCO. Though they had strategised, though they had decided to go back to their communities and devote themselves to projects that would provoke change, they would continue to face obstacles. The hardest part was the resistance that grew within the Native community itself:

*A lot of people were ostracized from their communities because of their association with [the Caravan]. Vern and I were, too, here in Toronto. Every time we would walk down the street, our so-called friends would walk down the other side of the street. It [meant] a lot of weeding out of who was who, who was serious and who wasn't, at the time (Regnier & Shirt TR2 1987b).*

Yet as far as Pauline was concerned, that was precisely the point. It was a time to get serious and put words into action. Vern and Pauline were both busy after the NPCO, but Vern would handle things in a different way than Pauline did.

Though they had both made themselves known as vocal, hard-working advocates for social justice, Vern's speeches and negotiation with outsiders led to his greater recognition as a spokesperson. In 1993, when we were visiting Pauline's sister, Kathy, in Edmonton in 1993, Pauline mentioned that Vern had published a book following the Caravan to Ottawa (Shirt & K. Shirt T9 1993h). I turned to Pauline in surprise:

*S: Vern wrote a book ?*

*P: Um hm. NC Books, NC Press. Yeah.*

*S: What was it ?*

*P: Follow the Red Path. [In] 1974.*

*K: Vernon didn't do it.*

*S: What ?*

*P: Well, we were going to. We were going to do it together, and then when he started telling the stories - See, I was the organizer, the main organiser for the whole thing, from Toronto. And I said, 'Uh uh, that's not the way it happened. We've got to choose so many sides?' I said, 'Forget it. You have it,' I says. 'I don't want it.' I [inaudible] the book. We got a Canada Council grant for that. You know ?*

*K: [inaudible]*

*P: They are. A hundred dollars each, or something like that. Yeah. He did it on tapes and trans - You know, this woman transcribed it. Norm Zlotkin's wife. It's really- I don't know, it's Vern's version of, you know, his involvement. Not mine, because mine is different.*

*S: His involvement with WSSS ?*

*P: No, his involvement with 1974. You know, when the RCMP attacked the NPCO at Parliament Hill (Shirt & K. Shirt T9 1993h).*

In contrast, Pauline stuck with her decision to devote her life to the future of Native children, to put her words into action. Accordingly, she was directed to found a school.

A lot has been said about the dynamic team Pauline and Vern made. The energy that they dedicated to the school is legendary. However, while he was very supportive of WSSS in its initial phases, Vern did not actually join the school until he left his employment as a Counsellor at Pedahbun Lodge in December 1977. As that reporter put it, he was "taking some of the work-load from his wife Pauline, who has worked

there since its inception" (TNT 1977: 8).

The organisation of WSSS, and its curriculum, were designed to instill a sense of personal dignity, cultural confidence and competence in the skills required to succeed in the dominant culture. Yet, this focus for learning was not limited to the student body. It included the parents, in recognition that it was parents and extended family who supported the children on their learning path. At WSSS, the adults found an environment where they, too, could admit that they had much to learn. As a cultural teacher and spokesman for WSSS, Vern Harper would say:

*When I wrote my book, Following the Red Path... I couldn't read or write. I did it all on tape. But my wife is teaching me to read, and I watch Sesame Street, and these kids are a great help (Slinger 1980).*

This echoes a point often made by Aboriginal educators, that learning is rooted in a reciprocal partnership between the teacher and the student (Shirt T4 1993b).

**Chapter Four:****1885: WANDERING SPIRIT AND FROG LAKE**

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Frog Lake is fifteen miles long and connected to the Saskatchewan River by a creek. In 1885, the land surrounding it was wooded and dotted by small lakes between rolling hills and bog. The primarily Metis settlement beside this lake sat at the centre of a reserve belonging to three bands. The buildings, scattered over a three mile radius, were collected into three main groups. There was a store belonging to an independent trader, a Hudson's Bay trading post, a Catholic mission and a one-room shack referred to as the poor house. Then there were the Indian agency buildings, and separate residences for a farming instructor, an interpreter, the two storekeepers and a blacksmith. The blacksmith had a shop and stables, and there was also a six-man NWMP station with barracks. Finally, a grist mill was under construction, a project drawing on Aboriginal labour and supervised by the Indian agent and the farming instructor (Erasmus 1976 in Berg N1 1993; Dempsey 1984; Carter 1997: 53-61). In the late 1800s, one spoke of Districts in the west:<sup>1</sup> the modest block of Saskatchewan stuck between Assiniboia to the south, and the huge tract of Athabasca stretching across the northern Prairies to cap the Alberta plains. But the District boundaries were abstractions, arbitrary lines on a map and nothing you could read on the land. Frog Lake was a heavily wooded territory where the indigenous

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<sup>1</sup> The current boundaries defining the provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan were not drawn until 1905. In addition, Manitoba was a small southern parcel until the huge district of Keewatin - covering the northern two-thirds of Ontario and Manitoba - was absorbed in a redrafting of provincial boundaries during the mid-1900s (Miller 1969).

population outnumbered the settlers two-to-one. Scandinavians and other Europeans were making frontier homes in the North West (Dempsey: 150), but most of the settlements were dominated by the Metis (Carter: 21).

In 1884, the most famous hold-out from the Canadian treaty process, Mistahimaskwa, the great Peace Chief called Big Bear, brought his long-suffering band of Plains Cree to the Frog Lake Indian Agency. The Eastern government had issued a demand that he take a reserve six miles from there. Fear that his followers would starve to death that winter had compelled Big Bear to sign a treaty at Fort Walsh on December 8, 1882 (111), and he was determined to make the best of this unhappy capitulation. As Big Bear understood things, negotiating the site of his reserve was the last true power he held as a treaty Chief and it is a Chief's duty to secure the future prosperity of his people (Dempsey: 112; Carter 1997). True to his old pattern he demanded the right to choose his own site, but each time he rejected sites the government offered as inappropriate for the band's needs and chose an alternative site the government denied his request (Dempsey: 111-125).

The name the band used as a collective is lost to the gaps in standard histories, so this narrative continues the practice of calling it Big Bear's band. He was Head Chief, so Wandering Spirit's role might be understood as that of Vice-Chief, though the band was actually collected under several sub-Chiefs. In accordance with a pattern for social organisation called the moiety system, a type of co-leadership, the group took guidance from its War Chief Kahpaypamahchakwayo - also known as Wandering Spirit - during times of conflict. This government placed the most appropriate person in charge of band affairs, depending upon whether war or peace times prevailed (Allen 1986; Dempsey FN 1993). From time to time, the sub-Chiefs registered support for, or a lack of confidence in, the political decisions of their head-Chief through a practice known in Indian country

as *voting with one's feet* (Alcoze CL 1988; Berg & Shirt TC 1998). As a result, the size of this band - like all bands on the Plains - was somewhat fluid. In 1878, Big Bear's band consisted of 400 lodges camped close to Chief Crowfoot's Blackfoot and Sitting Bull's renegade Sioux in the Cypress Hills region of Alberta (Dempsey 1984: 81-82). Assuming there were four people in each lodge - a conservative number - Big Bear led 1600 people. However, at Fort Walsh just four years later, Big Bear had 114 followers (Dempsey: 145; Carter: 55). This fluctuation in membership of Big Bear's band is significant because it reflects the events leading up to the North West Rebellion of 1885, and impacts on the personal story of Wandering Spirit, as the band's collective response to their larger political context.

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In 1884, regarded as the last non-treaty holdout in the Northwest, Big Bear's band relinquished its independence and traditional lifestyle to move on to a reservation.<sup>2</sup> Though he was the Peace Chief, Big Bear was regarded by the government as the Head Chief of the band. This stance ignored the influence of the War Chief, Wandering Spirit. The Canadian government's representatives had framed all relations with the band in terms of hierarchies, and co-chieftanships were something western politicians found virtually unfathomable (Dempsey FN 1993). At times, this forced Big Bear into the position of negotiating the band's external affairs, a role that properly fell to Wandering Spirit in accordance with the moiety system. Contemporary historians recognise a mounting tension between Big Bear and Wandering Spirit, especially when the War

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<sup>2</sup> In the eyes of the Canadian government, both his attitude of resistance and his decade-long efforts to dissuade all nations on the Plains from engaging in peaceful non-cooperation with the treaty-makers meant that Big Bear was unruly (Dempsey 1984; Carter 1997).

Chief gained support from Big Bear's son Imasees in the late-1800s (Dempsey 1984; Carter 1996; Berg & Shirt TC 1998). However, this rift in the band is often expressed in terms of the two Chiefs' personalities rather than their roles. As a result, historians looking at the Frog Lake incident of 1885 fail to consider this disruption of the moiety system as a contributing factor to the split in loyalties that drew power away from the Peace Chief. This is a critical point, because classical historians and themedia of the day have also portrayed Big Bear's band as participants in the 1885 Rebellion, even though Big Bear had refused to align himself with Riel on several occasions. Likewise, although Wandering Spirit appears to have been prepared to negotiate with representatives of whichever government would recognise his band's best interests, his primary concern was to protect the livelihood and autonomy of his people (Dempsey 1984; Berg & Shirt TC 1998).

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Our first interview for this history of WSSS takes place on November 11 (Shirt T1 1992a). Neither Pauline nor I recognise the irony of beginning on a day dominant culture refers to as Remembrance Day. It only strikes me as synchronicity as I analyse the transcript, too much of a coincidence to be insignificant. Yet deciphering the relevance of that date is a function of the process we are engaged in, rather than academic analysis. To tell a history *is* to engage in a remembering.

Pauline arrives late, slightly breathless, the smell of crisp autumn leaves arriving with her. It is going to be a late winter. She laughs through her apology, explaining someone phoned just as she was leaving the house, knowing full well this is a standing source of amusement among people who know her well: Pauline and the phone. We laugh together,

say it is a good thing to work at my house, uninterrupted while both of my children are in school. We catch up on personal news as I make tea, chide ourselves as we slip into gossip. Then we settle on either side of my round dining table with a tape recorder between us.

Before we begin the interview, Pauline takes a bundle wrapped in a bandanna from her coat pocket. She opens the cloth to reveal a pouch of tobacco, a small ball of wild women's sage and a small metal bowl. Ours is a collaborative project, involving strict cultural protocols on both sides. She holds the pouch of tobacco in her left hand, close to her heart. As she speaks, the energy of her words and thoughts impregnate the tobacco, her brief speech filled with poetry and prayer. She asks for my assistance in writing the story of WSSS, which honours the great Cree War Chief Wandering Spirit. She asks for my help because this history has been misunderstood. She says everyone is granted a gift by the Good Spiritual Grandfathers, and she wants to acknowledge I bring my gift for writing to this project. Her story of the school needs to be imparted in black and white, so no one can speak as an unbidden representative or misrepresent the process of the school. This will be a spiritual contract between Pauline and me, to insure it is done in a good way. Then she lays the pouch of tobacco in the middle of the table. She waits. It is understood that I can accept or decline her request, with no hard feelings should I feel I cannot agree.

This is how informed consent is garnered for a contract according to Native Way, with an exchange to establish reciprocity in the relationship. In some circumstances, it might be some other gift. It one of the highest honours to be acknowledged with a gift of tobacco in this way. Though easily available, its value as one of the most sacred medicines is not diminished. The smoke from tobacco carries prayers to the Creator. I

meditate on all of this and her proposal for the hundredth time before making my decision. Touching the pouch, I nod my head with thanks.

Pauline sets the metal bowl on the table before her, and rolls the ball of sage between her cupped palms to compact it for better burning.<sup>3</sup> Saying she picked it in the foothills on her last trip to Alberta, she holds a match to the underside of the ball and sets it in the bowl. A thick grey smudge of smoke drifts upward. First Pauline, and then I; we engage in a ritual cleansing. One: breathe the pungent incense deep into the lungs; two: cup and wring the hands together, washing with the smudge; three: sweep the smudge over the head in rhythmic waves of the hands; four: cast the smudge down the length of the body in long strokes. Our ritual is physical, our meditative focus on cleansing and healing measured by active-intent: breathe in for the spirit, wash over the mind, wash down the body.

I smudge the tape recorder, and light a small white candle at the center of the table, symbolic of the central fire in our spiritual lodges. The Midewin teaches that a personal history and a person's Life Path may not correspond. Each person enters the physical plane with a spiritual contract known as the Life Path (see illustration one). It twists and turns with many side-spurs, each one leading to a worldly distraction. An interview is a sacred exchange because one person (spirit) is addressing another (spirit), conferencing about the juncture between a personal history and a Life Path. The story of a life is also a manifestation of that life, an intersection between the physical and spiritual realms (Dumont CL 1988; Berg & Shirt TC 1988). Speech manifests. What is said *is* like a

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<sup>3</sup> The soft, dusty-silver stems and leaves of indigenous Sage are lacy and delicate, seeming to become interwoven if rolled. They retain the pliant quality of *everlasting* plants when dried, are woolly and very aromatic. Women's Sage is more thickly flowered than Men's Sage.

template for what may become. The old-timer Indian carefully considered consequences before putting thoughts to words. The answer to a question might take a week or more to be delivered (Brody 1981; Basso 1987, 1988). At other times, an answer arrives unbidden over a span of generations to suggest the question (Wilson 1993). Spiritual helpers and guiding Spiritual Grandfathers of each person gather close for interview exchanges: whether parent speaks to child, neighbour speaks to neighbour, Elders speak to their community, or an ethnographer speaks to her field partner.

The ritual of smudging acknowledges those entities that come to an exchange, and insures the interview proceeds with respect for each person-in-their-process (Shirt 1997a, 1997b; Berg & Shirt TC 1998). The spirit of a person sometimes takes a side-spur from their Life Path, the story of their life revealing failed attempts to navigate their contracted journey on the physical plane. Yet even then, progress can come through reflecting on that contract and their detour. Story, it has been said, is the true wealth of First Nations (Sheridan CL 1995). It is a double legacy, enveloping the twinned cosmic powers: creativity/ degeneration, apathy/ enthusiasm, discouraged ambition/ affirmation. The potential story of a person's life - which also manifests in telling - runs parallel to the story of seduction by worldly distractions. That other story, with its promise of healing and *walking the good walk*, is ever-present no matter what circumstances an entity succumbed to.

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Known as Wandering Spirit, like his name, Kahpaypamahchakwayo's story is

evocative.<sup>4</sup> Even as a child in Residential School, Pauline found herself reading between the lines in standard history books to recognize this Cree War Chief as a guardian of his people (Shirt T1 1992a). Her family's stories - passed on in the course of his spiritual training by the Elders - reveal Wandering Spirit gave his last gift to his people through his death song (Shirt 1997a: 2). However, David Murray (1991) suggests that early records of Native speeches tend to "textualize the Indian out of existence" through omissions and problems with translation (3). Certainly, the family tales of Wandering Spirit strike a sharp contrast with the official reports of his execution for murder and treason against Canada. There, he is the War Chief who led Big Bear's soldiers on a murderous revolt at Frog Lake on April 2, 1885 (NWMP 1885 in Berg N1 1993). The two stories run parallel in this country's narrative, as the two rows followed by sovereign nations, or the two sides of a history. Wandering Spirit shot one man at Frog Lake. There is still some question as to whether the shot was fatal or the man was killed by another warrior (Shirt T1 1992a; Dempsey 1984; Carter: 60), but nine people died that day in a tragic and avoidable uprising at Frog Lake (Dempsey: 214-215; Carter: 90).

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What Pauline didn't know when she named the school is so ironic it seems impossible. Wandering Spirit was her own great-great-Grandfather, but she was not told for years:

*...[When my mother] was telling me that story she gave me - It's like a thunder, it's like the fire from Wandering Spirit has been forgotten and all of a sudden my mother... hands it over to me like a bundle. And I said, 'Hey, that's my Grandfather !' Well, you know, I've got to do something about it !'...[People have] got to realise what actually happened in*

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<sup>4</sup> Asked for the meaning of his name. Pauline explains: Wandering Spirits are entities that maintain a special connection to the spiritual realm even while on the physical plane. They have the ability to 'rise above' and decipher the dynamics of a situation through their visions.

*there, in history books, in our history (Shirt T1 1992a).*

The reason Pauline did not know her relationship to Wandering Spirit is that this War Chief's name had been *unspoken* on her reserve at Saddle Lake, Alberta for generations:

*In Cree you say 'your-Grandfather-killed'. Now, if someone says that in our society... your reputation - [sigh followed by a pause]. You're a nobody, you're disgraced. And my family was disgraced for a long, long time. <snip> Now... the story can be told. And the unfortunate part is, when I started the school and I named it after Wandering Spirit, I didn't even know he was my Grandfather. Because at that time his name was - well, it couldn't be spoken (Shirt T1 1992a).*

Even among family members, there was no mention that Kahpaypamahchakwayo was a relative:

*P: < shift block > My parents didn't tell me. My father didn't want to tell me.*

*S: That's so amazing... I mean, there has to be an incredible stigma attached to that name for them not to say, 'Boy, look at that coincidence' -*

*P: It is a coincidence. I mean, here I am, thousands of miles away. I didn't even know who he was, then I read about him in the history books and say, 'Oh, wow ! This is somebody great. He did some thing'. You know ? It hit me... <snip> You read between the lines... and say, 'Hey, what did this man really do ? What was he actually doing ?' But it's been turned around by the State.*

*S: The interpretation ?*

*P: The interpretation... It's like I've been under a - suffocated with this dark blanket and now, [miming the throwing back of a blanket] 'Hey, hey ! Here's me !' [pause] Because I'm tired of that. I'm tired of that whole thing (Shirt T1 1992a)*

On Pauline's reserve, the cultural prohibition against being the first to raise a weapon (Dempsey: 129; Carter 1997), and a greater taboo against killing relatives, was partnered to the War Chief's "black-listing by the RCMP" (Shirt T1 1992a).

Wandering Spirit's story is a dynamic portrait of contradictions and persistent misrepresentations further complicated by several generations of secrecy. The community-wide taboo against speaking his name among those on the Saddle Lake reserve flowed from reports that he had committed the greatest crime possible against his

nation. In Cree, custom requires that such people be referred to as *a-killer-of-their-own*. The name of their crime obliterates their personal identity, cutting social ties to both family and band members. This is one of several indigenous versions of a practise dominant culture understands as shunning.<sup>5</sup> In either culture, shunning involves the entire community. Pauline knew she had a relative whose name was *unspoken*. She had no idea he was the War Chief she admired in the dominant culture's history books (Shirt TI 1992a).

Pauline reports that members of Wandering Spirit's family settled on several reserves in western Canada. At Saddle Lake the family was publicly shamed by reports of his crimes, and took new surnames (Berg & Shirt TC 1997). In high contrast, on the Rocky Boy Reserve in Montana,<sup>6</sup> Wandering Spirit is honoured at the annual Pow Wow (Berg & Shirt TC 1998). Far from being labelled a *killer-of-his-own*, he is recognised as a great Warrior Chief who sacrificed his life to protect and preserve the future of his people. These two reserves offer a reflection of the oppositional split dividing Big Bear's band in the last months of his leadership, even as they reveal a divided opinion on Wandering Spirit's role and responsibility for the events at Frog Lake in 1885:

*P: To us he was a hero... He fought for the rights of his people. He fought right up to the end, to the last... breath, about maintaining Native rights... <snip> [His name] was repressed because he was very unpopular, and in the Native community we were disgraced. So, that's where my mother's illness is. That's where her thing is... I had to tell her, 'Your Grandfather was not a traitor, he was not. He was a hero. He was a good man.' <snip> You see, we've all got to realise that all of this oppression, from the Catholic Church, through the Christian faith - [pause] All these years, all those great*

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<sup>5</sup> Other examples of an indigenous practise of justice are discussed in Rupert Ross's discussion, Returning to the Teachings: Exploring Aboriginal Justice (1996).

<sup>6</sup> Big Bear's son, Imasees, split from Big Bear's band before the Peace Chief surrendered to the NWMP in 1885, and led a large group to Montana. There, he eventually negotiated a reserve called Rocky Boy. Carter (1997) offers the alternate spelling of Imasses name: Ayimasis.

*Native spiritualists, those great Native leaders, they had to go underground. Everything had to go underground. Everything had to be suppressed, go under. So, as a result, we couldn't talk about it. Nobody could talk about it, it was just whispered.*

*S: Even in your own family ?*

*P: Yes. It was just whispered in the Sacred Circles. In the Circles, when the men smoked their Pipes, they'd say, Okay, let's call on him because he's great. [pause] He had a great mind-power. He had the mind of a rock! Can you imagine? With his mind, he broke the chain of the RCMP and escaped. That's one of the stories.*

*S: He broke the chain ?*

*P: Yeah. He was captured by the RCMP and he broke the chain from a big boulder. They say he escaped along the Saskatchewan River and left. You see, these stories have been told to me, on and on. But [pause] it was mostly these fairytales that we were brought up with. You know, like Little Red Riding Hood. I could talk about that. These stories were just whispered. [pause] Even my memory of those whispered stories is just coming back. You see, my one Grandmother, she didn't like me. She would say in Cree, 'her-Grandfather-was-a-killer, a murderer'.*

*S: And 'you' were implicated by that phrase, the indication that 'he' was a murderer ?*

*P: Yeah. Uh huh.*

*S: What was his treachery supposed to have been ? How was he supposed to have betrayed his people ? Or was it that he had somehow betrayed the Canadian government with this murder?*

*P: The Canadian State, yeah. See, it was the Canadian State who said all that stuff. They said: 'No way, Wandering Spirit is not a hero. No way, Big Bear is not a hero !' Ta-da, ta-da - All those things. And these were 'all' my Grandfathers ! And yet, the [official] stories were not true. We know the true stories, but they've only been whispered. [pause] I remember that. As a child, they were whispered. One time, when my mother had a nervous breakdown, I asked, 'What's the matter ?' 'Ah -' she said, and she was crying - 'my relatives are murderers'. She really suffered because of that stigma. [pause] But then, it's filtered down to me. (Shirt T1 1992a).*

In Pauline's view, part of the purpose of the school was to honour Wandering Spirit as a man who put his life on the line for the sake of his people, in their struggle to maintain their traditional way of life (Shirt T1 1992a). In developing a curriculum for WSSS, Pauline, Vern and the Parent Council were all adamant: it was necessary to re-examine Canada's history from an Aboriginal perspective. Luanna Harper recalls that Native Canadians were forced to look below the Canada-USA border for cultural heroes like

Geronimo, Sitting Bull and Crazy Horse until her mother and father brought Canadian names into the public ear again. Students at WSSS were learning the history of Wandering Spirit, Big Bear, Crowfoot and Poundmaker from an Aboriginal perspective (Harper T14 1997). They were introduced to historical Aboriginal leaders from every region of the country. The Parent Council and staff at WSSS had recognised what later studies confirmed: Native students needed Native role models - both in their daily lives and in their cultural history - to develop either their cultural pride or a sense of self-worth (Lewis T12 1996a, T13 1996b; Harper T14 1997; Pellerin 1982).

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Frog Lake has been called an uprising in concert with the North-West Rebellion, but this is a deflection that suppresses the Aboriginal perspective. While the band was highly politicised by the treaty process, its members consistently avoided violence in conflicts with the NWMP and settlers, despite annual migrations covering hundreds of miles on hunts that followed the buffalo herds into Montana (Dempsey: 102-105, 129-131; Carter 1997). Throughout his decades-long influence on the Plains tribes, Big Bear spoke only for peaceful resistance of the treaty process. He refused Riel's direct invitations to other forms of protest in 1879 (Dempsey: 94), and twice more in 1884 (139-140), each time counselling other bands not to engage in violence. The western movies got it wrong (Dumont CL 1988; Alcoze CL 1988; Berg & Shirt TC 1998). Among many tribes there were strong cultural prohibitions against being the first to fire a weapon. As Fine Day, a member of Big Bear's band, said, "An Indian is despised who commits murder without being attacked" (Dempsey: 129).

Though government officials worried about reports that Riel was meeting with reserve

Indians to encourage their participation in a Northwest Rebellion, the provocation for revolt was supplied by their own priorities. In fact, my own reading of the NWMP Annual Report for 1885 revealed that the police in the field had sent warnings to officials in Ottawa before the provisional government of the West was announced. They claimed the trouble brewing could be averted if the bands were given sufficient rations, but the bureaucrats ignored the advice of the police on the front lines of negotiation with the indigenous nations. In fact, the story of buffalo herds massacred on the American Plains is the story of sudden starvation among the Assiniboine, Sioux, Arapaho, Blood, Blackfoot, Cree and other tribes, because the herds migrated south over the Canada-USA border every year. The Canadian government supported the American slaughter. In their biography, John Tootoosis (1987), Jean Goodwill and Norma Sluman recount events leading up to the Rebellion of 1885 and the tragedy at Frog Lake (1-79). Rumours flew that grass fires on the Prairies in 1877 and 1878 were set by settlers, with the intention of killing small game the tribes hunted. It was thought this might force Sitting Bull's Sioux and other bands from the region for lack of food. Famine is certainly what those fires accomplished, both on and off reserve (14).

The supplies granted to reserves were not equal to either treaty promises or the bands' needs, so even reserve Indians were forced to fish and hunt small game (Dempsey 1984; Goodwill & Sluman 1987; Richardson 1993). Following on the heels of the famine sparked by grass fires came the recession of 1882. Treaty rations were halved for 1883, and halted in 1884 (Dempsey 1984; Carter 1997). The number of deaths by starvation in that period was so dramatic Indian agents worried about revolt. They asked permission to give out more rations, but the government repeatedly denied the agents' requests (Dempsey: 135-137). The Assistant Commissioner of the NWMP told his superiors that

the Natives in the Battleford area were discontented because of rumours that they would no longer be allowed to "beat their drums and dance, [or] paint their faces" (NWMP 1885: 7 in Berg FN 1993). He advised they should:

*...not to be deprived of all the privileges and pleasures which exist for them... discontent is very apt to lead them to acts of recklessness which, if not leading to a general Indian out-break will at least cause a most unsatisfactory and unsettled state of affairs in the country (7).*

Inspector Cuthbert at Prince Albert found cause for concern lay with the handling of rations:

*The half-breeds are in want and will require a great deal of Assistance. [Yet,] no trouble need be feared from them... Some danger has been apprehended from the Indians at Duck Lake who were engaged in the recent outbreak. These Indians were not payed their treaty money and I believe are not receiving much assistance (7).*

In other words, those in personal contact with the Metis and Indians were sympathetic to their plight. They offered seasoned advice so the threat of confrontation might be avoided, but their advice was largely ignored.

Another aspect of the story behind the Rebellion of 1885 indicates that officials in Ottawa were indifferent to the plight of the Aboriginals as expressed by Chief Pakan at Saddle Lake Reserve, Poundmaker, Big Bear and several others. These chiefs had learned that while the government denied them rations with protests of poverty, Canada had paid the Hudson's Bay Company 300,000 pounds sterling for their own ancestral hunting territories (Dempsey: 125). Big Bear was chosen as spokesman for the Plains bands, and he confronted government officials with their hypocrisy, saying the Chiefs felt this money belonged to the Indians, and should provide for new treaties (138). Clearly, they wanted to negotiate new terms, but just as clearly their message indicates they had accepted the inevitability of the government's imposed treaty process. However, the

Chiefs' request was denied. Rationalising indifference to the poverty and desperation of the bands, concerned only that there was a greater potential for revolt if the seven bands in the Cypress Hills region were allowed to congregate, government officials ordered Big Bear to move his band north to Fort Pitt (Dempsey: 123)

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The Frog Lake incident was raised again during an interview in early March of 1993 (Shirt T9 1993g). This conversation took place as we planned for a trip to Alberta. She suggested a visit to the archives room at the Glenbow Museum in Calgary. Pauline had concerns about the way dominant culture histories have connected this event to Louis Riel and the 1885 Rebellion. Big Bear's band was the last holdout from the reserve system in Canada, she said, but had never participated in Riel's movement:

*P: You know the emphasis is so much on Louis Riel... <snip> [But] Big Bear has a lot to do with it. And, Wandering Spirit was the War Chief... he did all the strategies. He was the one with the great mind, eh ? <snip> Without Wandering Spirit those guys never would have survived. Because he had the vision...*

*S: But that was also - That's something Paula Gunn Allen talks about, in terms of 'inside chiefs' and 'outside chiefs'.<sup>7</sup> <snip> It sounds like this is the same.*

*P: This is the same stuff, exactly the same stuff...*

*S: <snip> So, was Louis Riel chosen as spokesperson because he 'was' more acculturated?*

*P: Yeah !*

*S: So, therefore, he could speak to those people [government officials].*

*P: Of course. Yeah.*

*S: Yeah. That makes sense.*

*P: Yeah. And to this day, it still stands with stuff like that. But the thing is, we have to look at Big Bear's story. Okay ? The truth (Shirt T9 1993g).*

She was doubly upset that Riel's ideas were presented as the focus of Big Bear's resolve

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<sup>7</sup> As mentioned earlier, when the moiety system was acknowledged, the titles given to the 'inside' and 'outside' leaders by Europeans were Peace Chief and War Chief.

to resist the treaty-reservation system, because they trivialised the vision and leadership of the traditional Aboriginal leaders.

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The last quarter of the 1800s was a period of tremendous political upheaval and change for both the western settlers and the Indians. The government aim was to bring all the Plains tribes onto reservations, and Indian Department officials persuaded sub-Chiefs to break from large bands and take treaty at every opportunity. In 1878, Big Bear led a band of 1600 people, but most of the life-sustaining resources and territories of the Natives were torn from them by treaty and treachery over the next seven years (Dempsey 1984; Goodwill & Sluman 1987; Carter 1997). On a western tour in 1879, Indian Commissioner Edgar Dewdney persuaded several sub-Chiefs and some 500 followers to leave Big Bear (Dempsey: 90). The Peace Chief still had 260 lodges in his summer camp at Fort Walsh in 1882, something over 1000 people.<sup>8</sup> However, 133 people - including his son Twin Wolverine and his daughter, the wife of French Eater - left him to take treaty soon after this. Interestingly, his son-in-law, French Eater, stayed with Big Bear. When he finally signed treaty on December 8, 1882, Big Bear had 114 faithful followers (110-112). The buffalo that had afforded the indigenous nations autonomy by providing food, shelter and clothing had been reduced to remnants of the huge herds that covered the Prairie, shaking the ground for miles around on a stampede (Hux et al. 1987: 263). Yet voting with the feet can go both ways. A few sub-Chiefs who left in desperation to secure food and shelter for their personal retinue returned to Big Bear's fold when he proved

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<sup>8</sup> This modest figure is based on the assumption that there were four people in each lodge.

himself capable of negotiating exceptions to the blanket cuts in rations in 1883 and 1884 (Dempsey 1984: 113). At the treaty payment for 1884, the band under Big Bear's leadership numbered 504 people (Dempsey: 145; Carter: 55).<sup>9</sup>

It deserves reiteration that Big Bear was the final hold-out in the Eastern government's ruthless campaign to force treaty upon the Western tribes (Dempsey: 90, Carter, 1997). Dewdney, who had met him in 1879, clearly respected Big Bear, reporting that, while he was small in stature:

*I have not formed such a poor opinion of Big Bear as some have done... He is of very independent character, self-reliant, and appears to know how to make his own living without begging from the government (Dempsey: 90)*

Whatever Dewdney's personal regard for the Peace Chief, Big Bear was an outspoken detractor of the reserve system and a model of persistent resistance for several decades. That made him a problem figure on the northern Plains, gathering thousands from various nations for spiritual Thirst Dances in the early 1880s. The government discouraged large gatherings while the media propagandised, saying he had organized 300 tribes for war (89). Ironically, though they were a type of insurgence, Big Bear's Thirst Dances were designed to impress the need for peace on all tribes (127). They fortified the Plains nations in peaceful resistance as they affirmed their territories, their freedom to roam and their traditions.

Wandering Spirit's position on treaty and reserve issues did not always mirror Big Bear's judgement. Still, while he publicly criticised the Peace Chief (122), he also stood by his co-leader in an effort to avoid physical conflicts during the band's most desperate

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<sup>9</sup> There were 58 men, including the aging Chief. The rest of the group consisted of 135 women, 149 girls, and 162 boys. It is worth noting the records show they were not particularly well-armed, with just 15 Winchester rifles and 20 muskets (Dempsey: 145; Carter: 55).

times, until that fateful day in April 1885. Like Big Bear, Wandering Spirit was convinced the band could not preserve its traditions on a reserve (Dempsey 1984; Goodwill & Sluman 1987; Carter 1997). Yet starvation drew out factions within the band (Dempsey: 102-137).<sup>10</sup> Despite his resolve to maintain independence from the government by resisting the pressure to take a reserve, Big Bear was a man caught between those who called for treaty, others who favoured armed resistance, and the loyal supporters of Big Bear's efforts to resist capitulating to calls for either violence or submission (Berg & Shirt TC 1998). In 1881, the same year the Canadian government denied Sitting Bull and his Sioux further amnesty from the American military (Hux et al. 1987, Dempsey 1984, Goodwill & Sluman 1987, Carter 1997), a NWMP Comptroller and a physician named Augustus Jake made a visit to Big Bear's camp:

*They are literally in a starving condition and destitute... [We saw] children in this inclement season, snow having fallen, who had scarcely rags to cover them. Of food they possessed little or none... It would indeed be difficult to exaggerate their extreme wretchedness and need (Jake cited in Dempsey: 109).*

Imasees, one of Big Bear's sons, split with and returned to the fold several times, gathering a stronger following within his father's band as each year passed. Still others were looking to Wandering Spirit for direction (Dempsey: 110, 147; Berg & Shirt TC 1998).

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In an attempt to forestall the possibility that Big Bear might be persuaded to help Riel gather support for the West's provisional government among the Indians, officials in

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<sup>10</sup> "At the end of the Civil War in 1865 there were 15 million buffalo west of the Mississippi River. By 1885 there were only 25 left" (Hux et al., 1987: 263).

Ottawa told the Indian agent at Frog Lake that the band was to receive full supplies and gifts of clothing when it arrived at Frog Lake in the summer of 1884. He was also told to wait until after treaty payment to apply pressure on Big Bear to choose his reserve site (Dempsey: 141). Yet, contrary to instructions, Thomas Quinn took delight in taunting the band members (Dempsey: 157-159; Erasmus 1976 in Berg N1 1993; Carter 1997). Quinn had been notified more than once that his account books did not match his inventory, suggesting he had substituted inferior supplies for those sent by the government (NWMP 1885 in Berg N1 1993; Carter 1997). However, he continued to abuse his Aboriginal charges with an apparent sense of impunity, and the government failed to intercede.

On October 19, 1884, Big Bear appealed to the NWMP at Fort Pitt for assistance. The mounted police slaughtered one of their own steer, out of concern for the starving band. Big Bear made a speech saying that Captain Francis Dickens (the son of the famous British novelist) was a good man, but he also let it be known the band was upset this beef did not come from the cattle sent to Quinn in their name (Erasmus 1976 & NWMP 1885 in Berg N1 1993). The incident caused Wandering Spirit to lament the disappearance of the buffalo, as "the Indian's one friend" (Erasmus 1976 in Berg N1 1993). The NWMP's Annual report for 1885 contains a warning to Quinn of a possible riot, after his mistreatment of Big Bear's band.

Known locally as *the Sioux speaker*, Quinn was apparently a man difficult to like. His heritage included Sioux, Irish and French, but he "was inflexible, lacked tact, and had an explosive temper. Despite his Cree wife, Quinn regarded the Cree with contempt and enjoyed saying no to all their requests", even taunting Wandering Spirit over his marriage to a relative of the War Chief (Dempsey 1984; Carter: 57). The band suffered greatly during the winter of 1884-1885. "There was never enough food that winter, and in order

to receive the meagre rations, debilitating work had to be performed in subzero temperatures and in threadbare clothing" (57). The NWMP found he traded healthy government cattle for sick, other goods were substituted for inferior supplies, and the band was denied necessary medical supplies and warm clothing (NWMP 1885 in Berg N1 1993). The farming instructor was apparently in partnership with Quinn on real estate speculation, and they forced the Agency bands to clear land (Dempsey: 147). Unfortunately, Big Bear's band had "camped on land from which the two men had hoped to profit" (Carter: 58).

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Talk of an alliance among the western tribes in the mid-1880s was predictable, given the government's neglect of its treaty promises. However, to speak only in terms of rebellious tribes, or even of a Metis revolt, is to ignore the fact that many non-Native residents in the North-West also felt exploited by the government (Carter 1997). Canada was indifferent to protests from the Red River Metis and Manitoba Indians in 1869 (Robertson 1992). Now, just as the Hudson's Bay Company parcel known as Selkirk's Grant, (which became the original province of Manitoba), was absorbed without consultation, Canada bought the Northwest Territories from the trading company and refused to negotiate with its current residents (Marsh 1990; Robertson 1992; Richardson 1993; Carter 1997). Though some "grievances were directed at the railway" (Dempsey: 135) - beyond the involvement of Louis Riel - there is reason to draw a political parallel between the Rebellions of 1869 and 1885. The North-West Metis, poor white farmers and Plains tribes were being stripped of their land and political process, and denied the opportunity to engage in "the Confederation debates that prevailed in other regions"

(Carter: 20).<sup>11</sup>

Carter (1997) indicates that Riel participated in the North-West Rebellion in response to an invitation from the Metis and "a handful of treaty people" (21), because "requests of the Metis of the Batoche and St. Laurent (in present-day Saskatchewan) for land guarantees had largely been ignored by the Canadian government" (8). Pauline supports this view, saying Riel was selected as spokesman for a collection of people who felt his education, experience and facility with the language of the government made it possible for him to articulate their demands to the government (Shirt T9 1993g). A provisional Western government was struck on March 3, 1885, but far from being a Metis government, the proposal was:

*[to] administer the West as part of Canada and that the land would be divided equally among the half-breeds, Indians, French Canadians, Irish, French, Italians, Bavarians, Scandinavians, and Belgians (Dempsey 1984: 150).*

In the main, this democracy opposed Eastern Canada's plan to acquire the region by force and treaty, without constitutional negotiation. However, Riel did assure Ottawa that "he would receive support from thousands of people in the United States" (150).

The government of Canada soon dispatched 500 NWMP to the region with the specific task of destroying the West's provisional government. On March 18, in preparation for attack, Riel and his followers broke into the stores at Batoche for supplies, taking several hostages (151). Their first confrontation with the NWMP, including the Prince Albert detachment and volunteers, occurred on March 26 at Duck Lake (Dempsey 1984; Carter 1997). The police were forced to retreat and Riel took

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<sup>11</sup> When the veils of government subterfuge are removed, the so-called Riel Rebellions - like the Upper Canada Rebellions of 1837 and 1838 - were a result of Canada's land policies and a concurrent denial of political rights in suppressing the common residents in those territories (Marsh: 280; Dempsey: 135; Carter: 20).

action in a way that labelled him a madman thereafter. He rode into the fracas carrying only a crucifix to demand that the violence against the retreating police cease. If he had not, the result would undoubtedly have been worse than "10 dead, two near death, and eleven wounded" (151). News that the NWMP in Battleford "were being mobilized to move north" arrived in Big Bear's camp by Frog Lake on March 28 (151-152). The NWMP at Fort Pitt, who first heard of the deaths at Duck Lake on March 30 (152), "suggested that the whites at Frog Lake ought to move to the safety of the Fort" (Carter: 58). However, the residents felt no threat from the Indians and sent their own detachment of NWMP away, saying it was their presence that "exasperated the Indians" (Dempsey: 152; Carter 1997; Berg & Shirt TC 1998).

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He resisted all attempts to take his photograph or otherwise represent his likeness (Dempsey FN 1993; Berg & Shirt TC 1998), but several people offered verbal descriptions of Wandering Spirit for his trial, and others appeared in the newspaper articles and books published in response to the Frog Lake murders. Pauline reports:

*Dr. Peter Charlebeau... wrote a book on Louis Riel... [with] an accurate description of Wandering Spirit and what he was, and there's a drawing of Wandering Spirit. He never wanted his - He never wanted to be photographed. <snip> I may have [Charlebeau's book] because we did the launch for it, Vern and I... (Shirt & K. Shirt T9 1993h).*

Hugh Dempsey offers a drawing of the War Chief in Big Bear (1984), and reveals there was Ojibway blood in Wandering Spirit's veins that links him to the powerful eastern Medicine Man called Black Powder (Dempsey: 58; Berg & Shirt TC 1998).

In 1885, Wandering Spirit was in his late thirties, tall and lean, with long black hair falling in loose ringlets. His eyes, which received the most comment, were unusually

large and his gaze was intense. Wandering Spirit had dark bronze skin, a long straight nose and heavy seaming around his eyes. While his mouth was wide, he was thin-lipped and his cheeks were deeply sunken (Dempsey: 104). In terms of his temperament, he was described by some as a man prone to quick fits of temper and a thirst for war (59), while others said he always spoke with a soft and gentle voice. Still, that voice could ring in council meetings (105). Still more witnesses acknowledged the War Chief had great strategic skill (Carter, 1997; Shirt T9 1993g). In fact, the Cree's success in the avoidance of armed conflicts was credited to Wandering Spirit's quick decisions and evasive action, which seems to contradict reports that he thirsted for war (Dempsey: 105; Berg & Shirt TC 1998). However, his alliance with Big Bear as an outspoken detractor of the treaty system during gatherings designed to bring the Western tribes onto reserves in the mid-1800s, and his position as Big Bear's War Chief, attracted the government's attention (Dempsey 1984; Carter 1997; Berg & Shirt TC 1997, TC 1998).

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The distortion of Wandering Spirit's story is a painful subject for Pauline, but one she returns to like a knot to be worried loose. In February 1993, Pauline suggests that Canada took a hypocritical position when it addressed the massacre at Frog Lake. She feels the government manipulated Wandering Spirit's trial, which had no jury (Shirt T6 1993d):

*P: They called Wandering Spirit [Cree word for 'killer-of-his-own'] because he was a Cree, he was a War Chief... Wandering Spirit took it on his hands... to go and break into the store [at Frog Lake] and get the rations. To feed the people, and kill the cow. You know? ...And that's what they crucified him for. They killed him for that. <snip>*

*S: I know. It's all a matter of whose side you sit on, right ?*

*P: That's right. I mean, at that time, being a Native person was such a - They even had a hard time with... Louis Riel, accepting him, for having Native blood and all that (Shirt T6 1993d).*

Whatever Wandering Spirit believed about the potential for the American government to invade and seize the northwest from Canada (Dempsey: 167), it was the starvation experienced by Big Bear's band that precipitated the incident at Frog Lake rather than the mesmerizing speeches of Louis Riel. As Pauline reports, family Elders told stories of Wandering Spirit,<sup>12</sup> saying he asked the Indian agent at Frog Lake for the keys to the supply shed three times. He even fired bullets at the agent's feet to demonstrate that he was serious (Berg & Shirt TC 1998). However, transcripts of the eye witness accounts at Wandering Spirit's trial suggest Quinn precipitated his own murder by refusing to comply with the War Chief's repeated orders to move to the Indian camp (Dempsey 1984; Carter: 40). Rather than a premeditated slaughter, Wandering Spirit appears to have led the band's warriors to Frog Lake in a predictable protest against the agent's abuse of his people. Apparently, Quinn persisted in his belief that he was invulnerable until his last moments.

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In late March 1993, Pauline and I made a trip to Alberta and took time to visit the Glenbow Museum in Calgary with her youngest sister, Kathy Shirt (Shirt & K. Shirt T9 1993h). In the Archives Room, we spent the morning conducting three separate searches for information about Wandering Spirit. I viewed several of the NWMP annual reports from the mid-1880s and skimmed through an out-of-print book by Peter Erasmus called Buffalo Days and Buffalo Nights (1976). Somehow, Pauline managed to secure a brief

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<sup>12</sup> As previously discussed. Wandering Spirit's name and family connections were erased from public use on the Saddle Lake reserve. While he was recognised as a great War Chief during the secret ceremonies held by the Shirt family Elders, they did not draw attention to the fact his name was meant to be 'unspoken' and Pauline remained ignorant of the family connection to this man (Shirt T1 1992a; Berg & Shirt TC 1997).

interview with the historian Hugh Dempsey, the author of Big Bear (1984), who works at Glenbow. She motioned for me to join them. Dempsey was very supportive of Pauline's desire to uncover the truth about Wandering Spirit's part in the Frog Lake incident and he agreed there had been a distortion of the event at Frog Lake in early histories. Pauline and I were both impressed when he shared information about the less obvious sources he secured during his own research, as well as the standard advice he might deliver to anyone engaged in research (Dempsey FN 1993). We finally emerged from Glenbow in the early afternoon and ordered lunch at a restaurant across the street from the Museum. I asked Pauline and Kathy for permission to use my tape recorder to gather their immediate impressions after our excursion to the museum:

*K: I found it quite emotional in there.*

*P: So did I.*

*K: Yeah, I wanted to cry.*

*P: Me too. Actually, I wanted to cry when I saw - I mean, I'm so in tuned with Wandering Spirit... Wandering Spirit and I are so enmeshed, together, so - You know ?*

*S: He was portrayed so badly !*

*P: I know !*

*S: He's portrayed as an evil -*

*P: 'Demon'. They called him a demon !*

*K: Who ?*

*S: In that one book, Wandering Spirit is called a demon, 'a diabolical demon'.*

*K: A-a-ah.*

*P: And these - These are the men who are describing our ancestors.*

*S: Um hm.*

*P: Terrible.*

*S: That man they killed - That first man they killed, Quinn ? <snip> I was reading [that]... leading up to that [incident] people were starving. They kept demanding some food that they'd been promised -*

*P: Well, that's the thing.*

*S: - and he was laughing at them... So that's why they had such an anger. They had a long anger with that man.*

*P: Um hm.*

*S: Because, I mean, he's part Sioux... So, in a way, he's one of them but he's denying*

- them. So, this is part of what went into that situation, eh ?*
- P: Well, you can say that now, in the modern situation, with these people, [pause] these Native leaders. Okay ? They're starving our people -*
- S: Yeah.*
- P: You know ? For their own benefit. [name withheld] and all those guys. You know ?*
- S: The abuse of power... <snip> But what did you think about the information we found in there ? Have you found new directions for looking ?*
- K: That's why I had to get away from there for awhile - to think about it-*
- P: See, for dates and all that information... Okay, fine. That's what I wanted to know. Okay? Now, we've got this information here, now all we have to do is ...*
- S: Balance that information ?*
- P: [nodding] Balance it (Shirt & K. Shirt T9 1993h).*

Though we had gone straight to the Archives Library, and straight out again, we had to pass the artifacts, clothing and sacred tools of First Nations people in the display cases which lined the halls. Kathy said she found the atmosphere of the museum somewhat eerie because all of these artifacts were someone's belongings, and they belonged with their families. There were tools that showed the wear of daily use, soft leather tunics and moccasins that continued to shape themselves to bodies that had long ago passed out of the physical plane. What was disturbing, as Pauline put it, was to see them locked behind glass, "being suffocated" (Shirt & K. Shirt T9 1993h). We could sense the tools in the hands of those who had used them as if each item bore a spiritual presence, a signature. It was a deeply moving experience, and not altogether pleasant. While we were at lunch, one of the museum guards approached us. He had overheard our conversation and offered a story. Apparently, some of the security personnel swore not only that they saw ghosts but that they also heard the drums and eagle whistles as they did their rounds on the midnight shift (Shirt & K. Shirt T9 1993h).

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In her paper [A Mide Quay's Qualitative Research Methods](#) (1997a), Pauline indicates

that dreams are considered channels for guidance by the Good Spiritual Grandfathers, and one of several traditional Aboriginal tools for conducting research (see Appendix F). This offers a context for consideration of Peter Erasmus' interviews with Pauline's paternal great-Grandfather, Peter Shirt. It also explains why Pauline's intimate family had immediately treasured a hard covered copy of Erasmus' book Buffalo Days and Buffalo Nights (1976) as a family heirloom upon receiving a copy (Shirt & K. Shirt T9 1993h).

Erasmus describes Peter Shirt as an old hunter-trapper in the Lone Pine and Whitefish Lake area, and reports that Peter once told him of a troubling dream he had had in March 1884. What follows is a paraphrasing of Peter's account built from my field notes:

*An old man took me to the top of a hill and told me to look East. There, I saw huge black clouds which churned and rolled, making queer shapes. These clouds were not drifting, but seemed to cover the area. The old man said this meant there would be bloodshed and troubled times for many people. Then the old man told me to look to the West. There was a big valley along the Saskatchewan River in that direction, with many tents, wagons, and police. The scene was very busy, and I noticed many horses were tied to one rope. Finally, in the distance, I saw buildings and the Church in Victoria [at Smoky Lake]. The old man told me to take my people to that place, saying, there they would be safe from the trouble and death which would come from the East. At this point, I turned to ask when I should take my people to that place. "How would I know?" the old man replied. "Your family will own a white horse, and the horse will die. The trouble will already have happened!" (Erasmus 1976: 271 in Berg NI 1993).*

Though it gave him reason to worry, Peter admitted he failed to understand the dream's prophecy until the very moment in time it referred to was upon him.

This dream account had attracted my attention as I skimmed Erasmus' book on our visit to the Glenbow Museum in March 1993, but I likewise failed to comprehend its relevance to this historical project immediately. Pauline, Kathy and I had each assumed the responsibility for looking at specific books and documents that Pauline had identified as important to our research. The Erasmus' book was one that Pauline believed held a key

to the story of 1885, but it was not until we settled in a restaurant across the street to take our lunch that we could discuss what we actually discovered in the museum. While Pauline and Kathy explained the relationship between family members to me, the conversation turned to the inter-relationship of Saddle Lake and her "sister reserve" at Whitefish (Shirt & K. Shirt T9 1993h). I didn't understand why they used the term "sister reserve" until she explained the family connections:

*K: Goodfish Lake is a Sister Reserve to Saddle Lake... < snip > That's what they call it, and it's so close together that families... just integrated back and forth there, you know? Our family, on my Dad's side, and on mother's side, we're all integrated...*

*S: ...Well, that's where Peter Shirt was. And do you know what I found out through my reading [at Glenbow], Pauline? He was Chief, for two weeks.*

*P: Who?*

*S: Peter Shirt.*

*K: Yeah, we used to laugh about that.*

*[all laugh together]*

*S: Cardinal was shot, and he took over for two weeks until this other guy stepped in. They wanted him to remain Chief -*

*P: Yeah.*

*S: And he said, 'No. Two weeks is enough for me'.*

*[we all laugh together]*

*K: I think it's hilarious.*

*P: ...That's so cute.*

*S: ...Apparently, it was bad. Other people who wanted the power were really hard on him.*

*P: That's one of the reasons my Dad [Felix Shirt] never became Chief. They did ask him. He had a chance to... Not in Saddle Lake.*

*S: [Peter Shirt] only did it because Cardinal had been killed and there was no one else. But as soon as the other guy came along and vied for power, he let him have it. [all laugh together] (Shirt & K. Shirt T9 1993h).*

During our conversation, two things became very clear. From the Shirt sisters' perspective, Peter Shirt's dream foretells the 1885 Rebellion and the incident at Frog Lake. Dominant culture researchers might dismiss this as mere coincidence, pointing to the history of trouble in the region and the NWMP predictions that there would be

trouble. However, Peter's dream pinpoints a very specific timeframe for, Peter was only in a position to employ that dream warning and lead his people to safety at Smoky Lake, during the two-week period he was Chief. The conversation of Pauline and Kathy revealed something else that reflects on the rocky relationship that Big Bear and Wandering Spirit held with their band. The role of a Chief is complicated by the need to placate various conflicting interests within the band at any given moment. Though there are always some who will vie for the status and power attached to that role, the Chief is not necessarily in an enviable position with the band.

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Dempsey's account of the incident at Frog Lake, in Big Bear (1984), includes a description of the day before the murders. A warrior named Little Bear, who was hunting at a distance, was summoned to Frog Lake by news of war on April Fool's Day. As it turned out, he was the victim of a prank. Big Bear's band had joined the settlers in their merriment for *Big Lie Day*, playing practical jokes on everyone. Even Wandering Spirit had played a joke on the Hudson's Bay Company clerk (152). But Little Bear's grandson, Jimmy Chief, insists the mood shifted dramatically that evening and Wandering Spirit incited the warriors to join him in murdering the white settlers at Frog Lake the very next day (153). Indeed, newspaper accounts said they arrived in Frog Lake at daybreak, "fully painted for war" (154); Wandering Spirit wore his "war hat... and his face was daubed with yellow paint" (156). However, during the trial, residents at Frog Lake reported they recognized the band's looting as the desperate act of a desperate group (Dempsey 1984; Carter 1997). The band operated under a very strong cultural protocol against being the first to use a weapon, a protocol that ensured there was no bloodshed on many previous

occasions when Big Bear's band confronted obvious abuse (Carter 1997; Dempsey: 129). While intent is impossible to determine, given that protocol and the witness reports, it is necessary to place Jimmy Chief's comment in perspective. Not only were the people at Frog Lake unarmed, but also Little Bear was executed as a warrior who had committed several of the murders at Frog Lake on April 2, 1885 (Dempsey: 213). However, like Wandering Spirit, his actions cannot be positively determined. Though eight men were executed for the murders at Frog Lake, or on the fugitive foray that followed, eye witnesses gave conflicting reports regarding the actions of most of them (Dempsey 1984; Carter 1997).

Various sources cite a review of survivor reports, trial transcripts and eye witness accounts clearly indicating the warriors intended to secure rations for their starving band (NWMP 1885 in Berg NI 1993; Dempsey 1984; Goodwill and Sluman 1987; Carter 1997). These accounts affirm that the warriors took the villagers from their beds, gathering them under Wandering Spirit's guard while Imasees and the warriors looted the stores (Dempsey: 155; Carter: 58). However, Pauline says family stories indicate the warriors took the villagers as hostages even as they entered the stores. The government had dispatched troops to their region after the incident at Duck Lake, when Riel had raided those stores. They worried they would be massacred, and felt the police would be forced to negotiate with them as long as the band held hostages (Berg & Shirt TC 1998). Contemporary histories agree with this perspective on the initial rationale for hostage-taking (Dempsey 1984; Goodwill & Sluman 1987; Carter 1997).

Big Bear heard of the raid after it had begun and rushed to the village. Though a Peace Chief has far less political power in the height of a conflict, the warriors initially listened to him and ceased their looting in the Hudson's Bay Company storeroom (154). Big Bear

and Wandering Spirit then escorted the hostages to Church, so they could observe their "holy day" (155), but the young warriors who remained outside had found alcohol in the stores and this changed the tenor of the event (155-156). As the warriors became rowdy, Big Bear sent for the Woods Cree Chief Kehiwin and his warriors. He hoped Kehiwin could assist in diverting further trouble, but the Woods Cree arrived too late (156).

According to the trial witnesses, Quinn's murder - the first that morning - was precipitated by his refusal to leave the settlement when Wandering Spirit ordered a move to the Indian camp (Dempsey: 156, Carter 1997). The Indian agent argued with the War Chief and appealed to Big Bear, indicating "he had no appreciation of the political structure of the band" (Dempsey: 156). Wandering Spirit gave three warnings that he intended to enforce his order to march with violence. Each time, Quinn refused to comply. After the third request, Wandering Spirit followed through (Dempsey: 157; Berg & Shirt TC 1998). However, it is from this point on that witness accounts conflict. Some people who testified at Wandering Spirit's trial said that he killed Quinn on the spot; others said the War Chief only wounded him and Quinn was finished off by another warrior with a grudge against the agent (Dempsey: 157-159; Carter 1997). Yet everyone indicates that pandemonium broke out with that first gunfire. Other shots rang out among a clutch of panicked, running people. As Pauline says, the fact that something went terribly awry cannot be, and is not, denied. "The main thing is, Wandering Spirit had a struggle with one of the agents there... and whether he killed that person or not I don't know. We don't know. Okay ?" (Shirt T9 1993g). In fact, the identification of the warriors who shot any of those nine people at Frog Lake remains obscure, and even the

number of dead has been called into question (Dempsey: 213; Carter: 60).<sup>13</sup>

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Newspaper accounts and government reports of the day linked the Frog Lake incident to the series of skirmishes portrayed as the North-West Rebellion of 1885, with suggestions that the execution of Louis Riel and other *leaders of the Rebellion* (including Wandering Spirit) saved Canada from an invasion through a Native-Metis collusion with the USA (Dempsey 1984; Carter 1997). Canada's cash-strapped government said it had suppressed the up-rising because it preferred building a railroad to waging a costly war with its southern neighbours (Goodwill & Sluman 1987), but this misrepresents both the Indian and Metis positions. The government was clearly concerned about Big Bear's demonstrated ability to draw together large numbers from different tribes for Thirst Dances in the early 1800s, especially because he could appeal to groups below the Canada-USA border (Dempsey 1984). Yet, this ignores the evidence Big Bear rejected Riel's invitations for more than a decade, and his consistent counsel of other bands that they should not resist the Canadian invasion of the west with violence (94, 139, 140).

As Pauline says, it is unclear whether Wandering Spirit killed Quinn, but the Canadian government was clearly determined to find some reason to suppress him:

*P: ... That's the way they dic' away with him. [pause] But the main reason why - For me, the main reason why they did away with him is that he... was the commander-behind-the-scenes. He was the one who knew the situation, because he had his vision, he had his dream. He had his [spiritual] helpers telling him what was happening. You know? [pause] Our people were starving because they'd been put on these reserves. And Big Bear was one, he said, 'No way they're going to put me on a reserve'. Big Bear was the*

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<sup>13</sup> Dempsey (1984) says it is impossible to determine how many bodies were discovered at Frog Lake. So many people claimed to have given them burial that, if there were nine, they must have been dug up and "buried more often than a dog's favourite bone" (214-215).

*Chief. But Wandering Spirit was the War Chief, and he was the one who was instrumental in saying, 'Okay, do this and then this'. What do you call those people ?*

*S: Strategists ?*

*P: Yeah, okay, and he was the main one. That's why the government zeroed in on him and said, 'We've got to get rid of this guy'. You know ? (Shirt T9 1993g)*

Her distrust of the government's motives runs deep, and she intimates that, if not for Quinn's death, another reason would have been found to suppress the War Chief. Yet Ottawa was not the only one looking for villains:

*There is a priest that ...distorted this story. Okay ? That priest who participated in that, who was one of the participants. ...[lived] in that settlement, where they had the cache of all the ammunition plus the food... He was the one who told the story after ...but he distorted it. [N.C.] said the same thing... She told me, 'Get ahold of [J.P.], [C.D.]'s sister'... And she said, 'She tells a story of how this priest was distorting all the facts for the history books'... (Shirt T9 1993g)*

In all, six members of the band were executed for the deaths at Frog Lake, one more for killing a Constable at Fort Pitt, and two others because they "killed a cannibal woman on their march" (Dempsey: 183). As War Chief, Wandering Spirit is an easy target for blame. As a Chief, in a trial without jury, he was found guilty of treason against Canada, as well as murder (183). In fact, Wandering Spirit was only one of several Plains Chiefs charged with treason.<sup>14</sup> It was later affirmed that - far from supporting violence - both Big Bear and Poundmaker were simply unable to subdue their young warriors. However, they were subjected to trial and prison sentences as participants in the North-West Rebellion:

*P: And so, the biggest tool the government, the state has is their writing. You know ? The books and all that. That was their biggest tool, to black-mark, not to tell their story, the true story of what was happening.*

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<sup>14</sup> Riel was also found guilty of treason against Canada, in both the Western Rebellion of 1869, and the North-West Rebellion of 1885.

*S: Well, their legal system, too.*

*P: Their legal system, yeah. Their legal system. Yeah. (Shirt T9 1993g)*

A number of the Plains Chiefs were long regarded as traitors to both their indigenous nation and Canada in standard Canadian histories. In some cases, even factions within their own bands were convinced of this perspective. Yet, while Pauline insists true justice requires that the Canadian government clear all of their names of treason, she believes Wandering Spirit's story provides the key to unravelling the blanket indictment of Western bands following the Northwest Rebellion (Shirt T1 1992a; Shirt T9 1993g; Berg & Shirt TC 1997, TC 1998).

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The Northwest Territories, including the prairies, "were governed as a colonial dependency of Ottawa" in the 1880s (Carter: 20). During the 1870s, the government began to isolate all indigenous bands in the west on Crown-controlled land reserves:

*By the late 1870s... the emerging elite in the North-West, as well as advocates of British settlement, were anxious to establish a society that was not founded on any mingling of European and Aboriginal people and culture (5).*

Canada's cultural manipulation of the Indians reached its peak in response to the capture of two white women on April 2, 1885. (Carter: 49). An ironic fact of that manipulation - at least for readers of this thesis - is that these women were taken captive at Frog Lake while Big Bear's band was under the direction of its renowned War Chief, Wandering Spirit.

In April and May, 1885 - while Big Bear's band was fugitive in the northern woods - the newspapers reported that two white women, Theresa Gowanlock and Theresa Delaney, had been captured by Indians. However, the simultaneous capture of both the

Metis men, women and children at Frog Lake and the small Woods Cree band of Chief Kehiwin was virtually ignored. The volunteer surrender of 44 civilians at Fort Pitt, who were likewise largely Metis, also received much less attention than the predicament of the two white women.<sup>15</sup> Yet that attention was largely sordid speculation. Newspapers offered details of crimes that Big Bear's band reportedly committed against the white women, including gang rape, torture, dismemberment and cannibalization by the *dark women*. These accounts were partnered to other *true* stories of white female captives in a sensational journalism that incited hatred among the colonizers (Carter: 71-72).

Yet even as the Indian Commissioner Edgar Dewdney dismissed rumours about the fate of the white women captured by Big Bear's band (76), these stories justified "the largest mobilisation for war on Canadian soil" (Carter: 8). After the NWMP fell at Duck Lake, the eastern government sent "5,000 troops and 500 Mounted Police" to suppress the uprising in the Northwest (Dempsey 163; Carter: 74). The proliferation of captivity tales also served to fortify the resolve of NWMP troops sent to the region. The 65th Division tracking Big Bear's group was inspired to endure a two-month march of 500 miles through the heavily wooded, swamp-riddled terrain on foot, dragging their heavy cannons (Carter: 76-77). When the Fort Pitt scouts told of the two white women being repeatedly gang-raped until their bodies were no longer warm, the newspapers demanded the capture and murder of each "man, woman, and child" in Big Bear's band (77). In fact, Wandering Spirit had negotiated the *escape* of the 23 NWMP at Fort Pitt and helped himself to their supplies. Then the 44 civilians - worried about marauding Indians - asked

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<sup>15</sup> By early June 1885, Big Bear's band had reportedly collected 750 'captives' consisting of the two white women, the Metis from Frog Lake and Fort Pitt, a small group of Saulteaux, and Chief Kehiwin's Woods Cree (Dempsey: 179. Carter (1997) suggests some were willing captives and it is implausible the band could have herded them through swamp and woods, many being children, without some level of co-operation.

to be taken under the band's protection now that the NWMP were gone (Dempsey: 170; Carter: 63-69). That group included the Chief Trader, W.J. McLean, whose wife was in advanced pregnancy for her ninth child and wanted the Native women to assist her birthing (Carter: 63).

Two and a half months after their capture, the two Therasas walked out of the woods to tell a very different story of their experience as *captives*. However, just five months after their return, the widows from Frog Lake had capitulated to various social pressures in the interest of protecting their social standing as virtuous women and receiving the government pensions awarded upon the death of their husbands (Carter 1997). While the manipulated story of Theresa Gowanlock and Theresa Delaney received attention throughout the 1885 Rebellion, timing was key to the popularity of Two Months in the Camp of Big Bear: The Life and Adventures of Theresa Gowanlock and Theresa Delaney (1885). The widows' account - highly editorialized by family members who helped to write it - was published in November. It is no coincidence that Louis Riel was hanged in Regina on November 15, 1885 (Carter: 115), or that on November 27, 1885:

*a public spectacle of repression was staged at the Northwest Mounted Police (NWMP) barracks at Battleford. Eight Cree convicted of murder, including those at Frog Lake, were hanged in the largest mass hanging in Canadian history" (21).*

Pauline's great-great-Grandfather, Wandering Spirit, was among the eight men who stood on those gallows. Taken together, these events signify a dramatic revisualization of *the Indian*. "Whereas before [1885] they were regarded as *nuisances* but relatively harmless, afterwards they were depicted as a distinct threat to the property and lives of white settlers" (21).

"By 1884 the Plains Cree had begun to organize a strong alliance aimed at the revision of the treaties, due to the desperate conditions on the Indian reserves" (Carter 1997: 20). The NWMP were sent to the Frog Lake region in 1884, giving everyone reason to "believe that the treaty along the Saskatchewan [River] would be negotiated the following year" (Dempsey: 61). Instead, Louis Riel announced a new Metis provisional government in mid-March 1885. This reflected heavily upon opinion about the eastern government's ability to suppress either the Indians or the threat of a western government. There was considerable fear that Riel would align with the USA in claiming that territory.

Though the government and media presented the incident at Frog Lake as a direct result of Riel's announcement, it was both a spontaneous altercation, and the predictable outcome of a history of abuses and neglect suffered at the hands of a neglectful government and a corrupt Indian agent. This reading of the event has been virtually ignored until the publication of recent histories by Dempsey (1984), Goodwill & Sluman (1987), and Carter (1997), all of whom consulted Aboriginal sources, studied the recorded evidence from the trials of Big Bear and Wandering Spirit and reviewed the annual records of the NWMP.

The Frog Lake altercation occurred only a week after the NWMP confrontation with Metis settlers at Duck Lake on March 26, 1885. That skirmish had resulted in the death of seventeen people (Dempsey: 58) and a number of serious injuries, as well as the displacement of the surviving Metis settlers (Carter 1997). While Big Bear held his men in check after news of Riel's provisional government reached them, the Canadian government linked them as provocation for the dispatch of 5,000 NWMP to the region (75). Carter indicates the mythologizing of Indian captives helped to swell the regular

troops with eastern volunteers in support the westward wave of Euro-Canadian settlers. They were descending upon a territory where the indigenous population far outnumbered them and most settlers were Metis (21).

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Two months after they were taken hostage, "The world learned... that Mrs Gowanlock and Mrs Delaney were safe" (Carter: 80):

*In their initial statements, the women announced that they had been well-treated, had had plenty to eat, and had been subjected to no cruelties or 'indignities'... They had cooked and laundered [to occupy themselves] but had not been forced to do these tasks... Their principal problem had been loneliness, since neither spoke Cree or French. Unlike most of the others in the constantly moving camp, the two women did not have to walk [but rode in a Metis wagon]... Mrs Gowanlock even retained her jewellery (82).*

Fortified with provisions by women in the band, a troop of 43 captives (mostly children) had lagged behind Big Bear's band on its travels through the woods and *escaped*. This group included the two Therasas. However, it was difficult to subdue the speculative accounts of their torture, even after the two white women had safely returned. They now became the focus of invitations to deliver accounts of their experiences, but they also came under considerable pressure to recant portions of their story. News that the Woods Cree band and Big Bear had insured their safety, or that they were guarded in their tents nightly by two Metis men from Frog Lake, or that they had escaped on their own rather than being rescued, or that they were found by ten Metis scouts after the NWMP troops had long abandoned hope for their rescue was all less than welcome (61-82). Politicians certainly wanted to divert attention from Mrs Delaney's criticism of the Indian Affairs Department and the government's broken treaty promises as a cause for Indian unrest in the territories (86). In fact, Carter suggests there is evidence the two Therasas changed

their story because it was unbelievable, in those times, that they had been untouched while captive, so their original story meant the loss of their status as virtuous women and forfeiture of their widows' pensions.

The press had made Riel party to the capture and abuse of these white women by Big Bear's band (Carter: 98), but the trials of Big Bear and Wandering Spirit revealed Riel's messenger had actually urged Big Bear's band to take care of their prisoners (Dempsey: 173). So the white women's safe return "was used as a pretext for both congratulating and condemning the government" (Carter: 91):

*Even though there was no evidence of any white women meeting 'the fate worse than death' during these months of conflict, it was often stated in the press that the 'savages' of the West had embarked on a campaign of rapine, rape, and murder (93).*

Factions of the public who had developed a thirst for captivity narratives<sup>16</sup> and, when bona fide captives did not deliver tales of white women's abuses at the hands of red-skinned savages, others manufactured whatever stories the market would bear (Carter 1997, Berg & Shirt TC 1998).

Riel had surrendered in mid-May. After the battle staged at Frenchman's Butte on May 28, the members of Big Bear's band retreated so quickly they abandoned most of their supplies (Carter: 175-177). Their captives were allowed to escape and the white women returned to civilization on June 8. Hungry and exhausted by their constant travel to evade the NWMP, Wandering Spirit and the Wood Cree surrendered at Fort Pitt in the first week of June, and in late June, Big Bear's son, Imasees, withdrew with a large party and fled to Montana (Demsey 1984; Carter: 179). The rest of the group, including Big Bear's

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<sup>16</sup> The captivity narrative became a popular literary genre in the mid-1800s, and continued to exert an influence on popular culture into the 1900s (Limerick 1988; Namais 1993, cited in Carter 1997).

wife, separated from the Peace Chief enroute to Carlton to surrender at points of their choice. Big Bear remained fugitive until July (Carter: 61-70):

*Depicted by the press as the Artful Dodger, after the Oliver Twist character... Big Bear finally surrendered of his own accord at... Fort Carlton on 2 July, 1885,<sup>17</sup> about a month after Major General Middleton had abandoned the blundering pursuit (62)*

Discouraged and fatigued, Big Bear was virtually alone except for his personal counsellor and youngest son when he finally surrendered (Dempsey: 180; Carter: 62).

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Bowers (1993, 1995) stresses the need for making recognition of the power invested in the unconscious cultural metaphors of language a conscious project. Carter's (1997) review of the literature about the image of women in the Canadian West<sup>18</sup> examines our cultural notions of *woman* and *race* and suggests they were heavily manipulated by those who wielded social power on the Canadian frontier. In fact, that manipulation was employed in the dramatic suppression and displacement of the Northwest's Metis and Aboriginal populations at the end of the 19th century in the interests of both the missionary project and an escalating federal interest in acquiring land during the 1800s. Not only were campaigns launched to entice women west with appeals to their sense of national duty in the interest of "race making" (7), promises of marriage and security (4, 7), but women who added a dozen or more children to the national registry were celebrated in newspapers (6) for their "civilising" influence (6-9).<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Dempsey (1984) on this detail, saying that Big Bear surrendered on July 4 (180-181).

<sup>18</sup> Carter's review includes references to Levesque 1994, Hall 1991 & 1995, Ware 1992 and Carby 1987 and numerous other sources.

<sup>19</sup> Remnants of the cultural employment of women for colonizing-through-race-making persisted in Canada's *baby bonus* cheques, which increased with each contribution to the national population (Dumont CL 1988; Alcoze

This manipulation of the images of *woman* and *race* has played heavily in the colonial pattern wherever there was an early history of inter-marriage, such as India, the southern USA, Indochina, Mexico and Cuba (Carter: 14).<sup>20</sup> In North America, knowledge of the critical contributions Native women made to the survival of the European newcomers has been suppressed along with the social reality and practical contributions of the white women to the pioneer settlements (Van Kirk 1978, 1986). After all, as Carter says, "Abused victims were required for heroic avengers" (16). The popular media, politicians, land speculators, religious leaders and certain individuals influenced the writing of governmental policy and early histories:

*to create and sustain concepts of racial and cultural difference, to legitimize tough action against indigenous people, and to convey the message of the necessity of policing boundaries between different peoples... (Carter: xiv).*

In Canada, Theresa Gowanlock and Theresa Delaney were turned into icons of victimised womanhood by the press, placing the Queen's Own Rifles in the role of the white race's heroic avengers. Though they abandoned the project to rescue the two Therasas in the field, the public was schooled to the idea the NWMP *always got their man*.

The white women who repopulated the west travelled to their new homes on the Canadian Pacific Railway (4) and it is no small irony that the Canadian government's

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CL 1988). In the 1990s, this monthly allowance was converted to a Child Tax Credit for income tax purposes.

<sup>20</sup> In the case of the red man - just as with the black man - cultural projections of the 'civilising qualities' of white women worked in concert with projections of their vulnerability to the predatory sexual advances, abduction, dismemberment or death at the hands of coloured men (Carby 1987; Ware 1992 cited in Carter). In each case - red and black - the image of coloured women was also drawn in sharp contrast to the virtue of white women (Van Kirk 1978, 1986; Carter 1997). In fact, because dark woman were reputed to possess the power to seduce otherwise virtuous white men, so white men were relieved of any moral, financial or social responsibility for their 'country women' or the mixed children they fathered (Van Kirk 1978).

project to build a railway linking the country from the Maritimes to the West Coast was realized in 1885. Acclaimed as "the longest railway in the world... [and] one of the greatest feats of engineering of the day", it had been built in just five years (Marsh 1990: 271). The indigenous population in the Northwest suffered through severe cuts to treaty rations, the massacre of the buffalo, displacement onto reserves without sufficient hunting territories and a tremendous loss of life due to starvation and disease in the same five-year period that financed the building of this expensive railway.

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On April 18, 1885 the MP John Christian Schultz was quoted in the Montreal Gazette when he scolded the government for behaving irresponsibly in the treaty-making process.

*Our laws declare him a minor... and yet we drive us hard a bargain with him as though he were a land-jobber, and when other arguments have failed to make [the Indian] accept the terms, we plainly give him to understand, in a spirit of civilized barbarity, that might is right, and that we will have his lands (Schultz cited in Dempsey: 60).*

Carter insists that - more than any other incident during the Rebellion of 1885 - the published accounts of the incident at Frog Lake were manipulated by the government, real estate agents, religious factions and the media and cannot be ignored as an influence on either the 1885 Electoral Franchise Act or the Indian Act following the events at Frog Lake in 1885 (Carter 1997). While the Indian Act "reduced all Indians to the status of minors" (Renaud 1974: 38), the 1885 Electoral Franchise Act had promised to deliver the vote to anyone who possessed sufficient property to meet its criterion, including landholding women, Indians and the west's Metis settlers (Carter: 78). The rampant captivity fictions of the day encouraged suppression of all of these these groups by portraying women as victims in a hostile world, unable to cope with burdens such as the

vote, while Indians and Metis were presented as uncivilised, lawless and undeserving of the vote (79). As a result, the response to the incident at Frog Lake represents the most punishing shift in the history of the government's Indian policies.

From this point, Indians were incarcerated on reserves as wards of the Crown and travelling without an Indian pass became a criminal offence (Venne 1981). The government claimed Natives were isolated for their own protection, but that isolation was partnered to an abusive programme of acculturation through schooling (Dumont CL 1988; Richardson 1993). Pauline finds the idea of an entire race being declared wards of a foreign monarch ludicrous:

*Can you imagine ? The King was so far removed from his spiritual foundation! And our people still had their visions. The Grandfathers were still talking to them and giving them directions. You know ? They were really in tuned [pause], in touch with themselves. But that's the reason the [Canadian] government had to do away with them... They were a big threat to the development of their plans (Shirt T9 1993g).*

Yet the isolation of the Indian was so complete that generations of Canadians were rendered ignorant of the poverty, disease, schooling practices and cultural genocide that people of indigenous nations endured on reserves until Native veterans of World War II helped to publicise those conditions (Adams 1970; MacLean 1973; Urion 1993). As Pauline suggests, any reconsideration of the political, social, economic, spiritual or educational plight of First Nations people in contemporary times must demands the demystification of both Wandering Spirit's story and the story of the 1885 Rebellion.

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Several daughters of the trader at Fort Pitt who became a willing hostage of Big Bear's band published accounts of their time as 'captives' and they all stress that the Native

women watched out for the girls. In fact, they were encouraged to take their escape when the women gave them "moccasins and four pounds of bacon" for their journey (Carter: 119). The Maclean family's story did not receive the attention bestowed on the white widows' tale in 1885, in part because the Macleans represented the Hudson's Bay Company (117-118). In a 19th Century version of 'damage control', the Canadian government had shifted responsibility for many of the issues which sparked the Northwest Rebellion onto the trading company. Elizabeth Maclean gives a sympathetic account of Wandering Spirit in a three-part memoir of the 1885 events published in the 1940s (Carter: 116-124). Her memoir reports, "Wandering Spirit is a man racked by remorse over his actions" (cited in Carter: 118). As an indicator of the impact the events had upon the War Chief, she reveals:

*...His hair turned from jet black to grey and then to white during these weeks, and he was anxious to know how the Christian God would punish him. He was so sad and dejected that Mrs MacLean took pity on him and he 'was accepted as one of our camp' (118).*

At the time, Wandering Spirit was a man in his late 30s.

An older sister of Elizabeth, Amelia MacLean Paget, wrote The People of the Plains (1909). Her portrait is likewise so sympathetic to the Aboriginal life ways and world view that the publisher offers a foreword that apologises for her "tone of companionship for all Indians" (Carter: 122). However, reports on the incident at Frog Lake by the NWMP who had the most direct contact with the band in the period just prior to the revolt are also sympathetic. They indicate that while Big Bear and Wandering Spirit both sought to execute peaceful resistance:

*... their influence [did] not appear strong enough to successfully inoculate the younger men with such a train of thought, and it must not be forgotten that the younger men played the most important part in this rebellion (NWMP 1885: 5 in Berg NI 1993).*

All of this suggests that, far from being a plot hatched to support Riel and his rebellion, the murder of nine people at Frog Lake was a regrettable, local revolt and the predicted consequence of Quinn's tyranny in previous altercations with the band.

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It was the early morning of November 27, 1885. Eight men stood on the gallows at Fort Battleford, sentenced to die for their part in the so-called Second Riel Rebellion (NWMP 1885 in Berg N1 1993). Just before Wandering Spirit was to be hanged the Cree Warrior Chief made his final request, asking permission to sing a love song to his wife, Spotted Calf (Berg & Shirt TC 1998). The NWMP could find no fault with this. Wandering Spirit was known as a talented singer, and composed his death song on the spot. Yet Wandering Spirit's song was more than a tribute to his wife. As Pauline reveals:

*This song encourages our people to continue strong through living our cultural ways. He passed this song on through his wife because woman is the keeper of all traditions in creation. This is a song of hope and love for the Universe that was passed on to me six years ago. When I feel discouraged, or when I'm with a group of people that need extra help, I sing this song. This great inheritance of song from Papamacheykway,<sup>21</sup> or Wandering Spirit, is an example of intergenerational communication. It is a rallying call that has passed from my Grandpa through three generations to the present, sowing the seeds of wisdom and love that will be passed on into the next generation (Shirt 1997a: 2).*

In later years, Spotted Calf would speak of being brought to tears by the power of her husband's death song. As a woman she was the Keeper of Traditions and she taught Kahpaypamahchakwayo's song to their children. That song became part of a sacred family legacy. However, what Wandering Spirit delivered through his wife was not

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<sup>21</sup> This is an alternate spelling of Wandering Spirit's name, in Cree, which is phonetically recorded. In my thesis his name is offered as Kahpaypamahchakwayo. In the Algonkian language families, the 'p' or 'k' are often applied according to regional dialect.

simply a metaphorical song of love for Spotted Calf and their children, or even his people and his culture.

The old-timers' teachings say that an ancestor's life energy is recycled to the physical plane from time to time. Wandering Spirit's love song for his people is a manifestation of his energy, and his traditions manifest on the physical plane in 1976 as a Survival School that projected a vision of emancipation for all Aboriginal Canadians. Pauline and the staff at WSSS often spoke of picking up Wandering Spirit's moccasin trail through their work with the children (Shirt T1 1992a; Berg & Shirt TC 1997, TC 1998). From an Aboriginal perspective time is not linear, so history is understood to cycle forward and impact upon both the present and the future of a people. So Pauline tells me:

*The thing is, this research, this book is the thing [pause] the way I see this: the true story, the real story. When I really think about it, the one who holds the key to turn this Indian self government - [pause] to turn history onto a good ground, is Wandering Spirit. Once we tell the true story, the 'true' story, then we can... look at all those connections, all the interconnectedness. You know ? [Even] what's happening with the constitution (Shirt T1 1992a).*

In the great circle of interrelationship that manifests on the physical plane, it is only by placing the present moment in context with seven generations of history that we can "turn history onto a good ground", thereby finding a context for our present actions and their impact upon the future through the next seven generations.

**Chapter Five****BIBLES, MAPS & INDIAN SCHOOLS**

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Writing 25 years ago, just as a strong wave of Aboriginal activism was launched to regain Native control of Native education, Andre Renaud (1974) offered a critique of Canada's relationship with her indigenous peoples that cut through national pride "in not being a former colonial power like France and Britain nor a colonising one in disguise like the USA or the USSR" (37). Renaud is only one of the voices that has challenged Canadians to see this nation in its full historical complexity, from the Report of the Aboriginal Protection Society (1839) to Richardson (1993), Robinson and Quinney (1985), Sioui (1992), Van Kirk (1978, 1986) and Wright (1993). Why? Acknowledging that Canada's historical practice was discriminatory - exposing the colonial skeletons in the closet - will move present-day policy and practice beyond the influence of those skeletons. As Renaud says, while Canada eventually managed to assert its independence from the founding nations of France and Britain, the "cultural inheritors" of those nations remain prevalent among those "in charge of decision-and opinion-making" in this country (Renaud: 37).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Chet Bowers (1993, 1995) indicates deep cultural change is slow (4) because "peoples' lives are based on cultural analogues" (180) and "the languages of a cultural group encode at a tacit level the shared assumptions about how relationships (human with human, and human with non-human) are to be conducted" (8). On the Team Canada business-drumming trip to Korea in January 1997, PM Chretien claimed "Canada has never seen a war within its borders" (CBC News). This is a cultural lapse of memory that denies Aboriginal reality. There were several rebellions and a number of bona fide wars involving Canada's indigenous peoples on this soil, initially as friends, and later as foes. As recently as 1990, Canada was denounced by the UN for human rights abuses during a 78-day siege near Oka, Quebec. The army brought out troops and armoured tanks against Aboriginal

The impetus for the Survival School movement sinks long roots into historical policies that affect land, as well as education, for the Aboriginal was literally *schooled on the land* (Shirt T1 1992a). Earth is called 'Mother' in Aboriginal speech, highlighting the focus on that primary relationship. Indeed, Earth is called the "first mother" (Benton-Banai 1988; Dumont CL 1998). Pauline created the Four Seasons curriculum for WSSS so urban Native children could form their sense of self through a traditional relationship to land (Shirt T8 1993f). The dominant culture approach to schooling Indians had worked to sever that intimate relationship for centuries. In fact, the missionary vocation of the Churches, land acquisition by the Crown and Indian schooling were all linked in the interest of acculturating the indigenous nations in North America from the moment Duc de Montmorency (1605) informed Sier de Monts, his agent in the colonies, that submission to the Crown was the primary goal of education (Jaenen: 46; Robinson 1993).

In New France, acculturation was achieved by *francisation* of the Native. The Crown employed the Church to recruit Indian children and promote intermarriage, in order to establish the early Christian colonies without either great expense or "depopulating the mother country" (Jaenen 1986: 45).<sup>2</sup> The reservation system was well established in the late 1800s, and the Indian Act of 1876 "formalised the inferior status of Indians" (Richardson 1993: 96). Canada continued to fund the Residential School system operated by the churches to continue the project of assimilating the indigenous population. These

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citizens who protested the extension of a golf course onto a hand-planted woods and their ancestral burial grounds. To put this event in perspective, the American siege at Wounded Knee in 1873 last 71 days (Crow Dog & Erdoes 1990: 130).

<sup>2</sup> In the 1600s, Jesuits operated *reductions* (said to be the model for Canada's reservation system which emerged in the 1800s) on land grants from the Crown and European benefactors. Other religious orders soon followed suit and were given similar parcels of land (Jaenen 1986: 56).

schools were patterned after the USA's Industrial Indian Schools, when N.F. Davin's 1879 study suggested that their "aggressive civilisation" tactics were more effective than the day schools (30). However, the final symbol of political and cultural conversion was enfranchisement and various religious orders continued to effect this political shift in partnership with a religious conversion (Venne 1981; Richardson 1993).<sup>3</sup>

Compulsory attendance in segregated Indian schools was backed by truancy laws long before Egerton Ryerson's Ontario model was transformed from a municipal option into a universal public education system with similar legislative powers (Hodgins 1845; Venne 1981).<sup>4</sup> Yet the historic testimonies of Aboriginal leaders in Canada and the USA, collected by T.C. McLuhan (1971), suggest that where there was an outward placability there remained an internal resistance to the assimilative pedagogy of those schools (McLuhan 1971: 54, 103, 108). Usually the Indians' desire for instruction in "the white man's magic art of writing, the *talking paper*" (Barman et al. 1986: 7), was met by the desire to promote religious conversion and cultural assimilation rather than concern for the students' enrichment (Jaenen 1986; Battiste 1986; Richardson 1993). Indeed, as Celia Haig-Brown (1988) suggests, the complex forms of resistance expressed by inmates of the Residential School system are a "microcosm of the ongoing struggle of Native people with the [settler] presence" on this continent (26).

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<sup>3</sup> Enfranchisement is the legal exchange of Aboriginal heritage and treaty rights (including territorial rights) for certain dominant culture privileges. First Nations are the only group required to renounce their cultural heritage to obtain Canadian citizenship, and enfranchisement was the primary means of attaining that privilege before 1969. In the imposition of an imperialist patriarchal model, as Indian men were enfranchised, even if their families did not want to relinquish their status as Indians, their wives and children were also erased from band lists (Venne 1981; Robinson & Quinney 1985; Alcoze CL 1988).

<sup>4</sup> In 1871, Ontario passed The Schools Act, which created funding for education through property taxes, although attendance was not compulsory (Hodgins 1847: 299).

There is a strong contrast between the idealised vision of government assistance presented by treaty-makers and the historical hardships delivered through undersized land parcels, short rations and the cultural oppression of the Indian Act policies (MLB 1971; Alcoze CL 1988; Richardson 1993).<sup>5</sup> Those hardships continued to impact upon the provisions for schooling Aboriginal children into the 1970s, as the Survival School movement was launched on this side of the Canada-USA border. The government's inadequate provision for self-sufficiency through land base or access to resources; the oppression of cultural and linguistic autonomy; forced capitulation to dominant culture political structures; failure to honour treaty provisions for shelter, health services or education; and the neglect of infrastructure responsibilities such as access to safe water and sewage treatment continue to impact upon Aboriginal communities to the present day (Alcoze CL 1988; Dumont CL 1988; Berg & Shirt TC 1998). In fact, the Metis journalist Marty Dunn (1980) insists:

*The Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (DIAND) is seen by most Canadians as the government agency responsible for Canada's Native people. But from the point of view of most Native people, DIAND, historically, has been 'the fox in the chicken coop'...The administration of Indian Affairs has always been assigned to whatever area of government had the most to benefit from the exploitation of Indians and Indian lands" (10).*

Land rights are a difficult issue in Canada, perhaps because the urbanization of the population drew the majority of us into an intimate relationship with our backyard and neighbourhood parkette rather than watersheds and hunting grounds. Theodore Miller offers a visual illustration of the fluctuating political boundaries defining this country

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<sup>5</sup> The Indian Act declares Natives wards of the Crown from their birth until their death, attributing a legal and social incapacity based on heritage which ignores age, ability and many basic human rights. Until 1969, most members of this genetic group were incarcerated on reserves, and denied access to the courts to protect their property, belongings, education, or the custody of their children (Venne 1981; Robinson & Quinney 1985).

from pre-Confederation times through the late 1960s in A Graphic History of the Americas (1969). In People of the Terra Nullius (1993) Boyce Richardson explains that the European newcomer saw the vast territories of the New World as both an *unpopulated* continent and their own so-called promised land. When Richardson's observations and the maps delineating the pre-contact territories of Aboriginal nations in Canada (Waldman 1985; Dickason 1992: 65) are contrasted with Miller's maps of an ever-expanding newcomer presence, the colonial encroachment on an empty landscape is revealed as a progressive pattern of displacement. Addressing the newcomer's notion of *divine destiny* as an avarice for territorial conquest Chief Joseph of the Nez Perce said:

*The country was made without demarcation, and it is no man's business to divide it... The Earth and myself are of one mind. The measure of the land and the measure of our bodies is the same... Perhaps you think the Creator sent you to dispose of us as you see fit. If I thought you were sent by the Creator I might be induced to think you had a right to dispose of me (McLuhan 1971: 54).*

Bested only by the USA in collecting land parcels and territories through treaty, royal proclamation, war and rebellion, the Dominion of Canada acquired the second-largest land base in the world in just 350 years.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Starting in the Maritime region, France had taken the lead in settlement but, like Newfoundland, Nova Scotia was a British acquisition after 1713, and it soon expanded into Acadia. The Acadian region was known as New Brunswick after 1784, while the French Isle St. Jean would become Prince Edward Island and a British possession in the late 1700s. Most Canadians are not aware that the Canada-USA border was not defined by the 49th parallel until the treaty of 1818; or that it remained in flux on its western extremity, with Oregon being partitioned at the 42nd parallel in 1846. The northern section of the Oregon territory was called New Caledonia until 1861, though we now know it as British Columbia. On the eastern end of the Canada-USA border, there were disputes over a jagged line running from Isle Royale to Lake of the Woods, just as the northern boundary of New Hampshire was not definite until the mid-1800s. In other words, the present-day provincial boundaries were not drawn at Confederation in 1867. Even the provinces of Ontario and Quebec hung close to the St. Lawrence River and the five Great Lakes while they disputed their northern borders, respectively, with the huge Districts of Keewatin and Ungava until 1912. The region presently known as Labrador was also in dispute until 1927. While the Manitoba Act of 1870 assumed control of a land parcel west of Lake of the Woods known as Selkirk's Grant, the huge District of Keewatin held the northern two thirds of present-day Manitoba until the mid-1900s. British Columbia joined the Dominion in 1871, but the Alaska Boundary Tribunal of 1903 would finally define the line around the *panhandle* which had been in dispute since 1825. Prince Edward Island joined the

Selkirk's Grant lay west of Lake of the Woods, stretching from the 49th parallel north to the middle of Lake Winnipeg. Louis Riel came to prominence in Canadian history when it was sold back to the Hudson's Bay Company in 1834. Selkirk had established the Red River Colony in a region known as Assiniboia, making treaty with the Metis, Cree, and Saulteaux tribes who lived there. The Hudson's Bay Company decided to sell its possessions known as Rupert's Land (including Selkirk's parcel) to Canada. The early encroachment of surveyors, and Canada's refusal to acknowledge the Metis and other residents of Selkirk's parcel led to the Rebellion of 1869 (Robertson 1992). Louis Riel was elected to lead a *provisional government* on December 8, 1869, but the Canadian NWMP took up arms against the Metis at Fort Garry in February 1870. Indeed, Canada established Manitoba by force in July 1870. There is a direct relationship to the story of Wandering Spirit here. Though Riel was banned from Canada in 1875, he was elected as Manitoba's Première *in absentia* three times over a four year period. He stayed below the Canada-USA border until he became involved in the Northwest Rebellion of 1885 (Marsh 1990; Dempsey 1984).

European crowns had engaged in a race to make territorial conquests in the New World since the 17th Century (Jaenen 1986), and that race was not only territorial but

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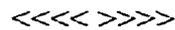
Dominion of Canada in 1873, and Britain transferred the Arctic Islands to Canada in 1880. This Arctic region was known as the District of Franklin after 1895. The District of Saskatchewan was a modest rectangle sandwiched between the Districts of Athabasca on the north and Assiniboia on the south, while the District of Alberta stretched only as far north as Athabasca until the present prairie province boundaries were drawn in 1905. Canada's Northwest Territories had absorbed the Districts of Yukon in 1898, and Mackenzie in 1905, and eventually enveloped the most northerly portion of the District of Keewatin in 1912. Finally, Newfoundland joined the Dominion of Canada in 1949 (drawing on maps by Miller 1969; and text sources by Marsh, 1990; Robertson 1992; Richardson 1993). It should be recognised that the map of Canada is not static. In fact, that map has been in flux since the first permanent European colony was struck and it is still changing. The gigantic band of land stretching across our northern regions, known as the Northwest Territories, will be split to allow the establishment of a new Native-directed territory called Nunavut on April 1, 1999.

also political, economic, spiritual and social. While the NIB's policy paper called for Indian Control of Indian Education in 1972 as a means of recovering political and cultural autonomy, the resistance to an imposed education system was always present in Native-European relations (McLuhan 1971; Maclean 1973; Richardson 1993). On the other hand, the Native Survival School movement represents both the most radical rebuke of the dominant education system (Regnier 1987; Lewis T12 1996a) and the most radical reclamation of Native identity, values and world view through the traditions Pauline calls Native Way (Regnier 1994, TEL 1995; Shirt T4 1994a).

When the analysis of Native education provided by Renaud (1974), Haig-Brown (1988) and Richardson (1993) is complemented by Miller's cartography they establish a clear social and political context for the birth of Native Way schooling in Canada. Ironically, the movement was perceived as dangerously radical even within the Aboriginal community. Some Indians had managed to negotiate sufficient adjustments to the dominant culture to feel they had an investment in maintaining the status quo.<sup>7</sup> Also, a number of Native organizations were dependent upon government grants and felt they needed to protect their interests by disassociating themselves from any Indians who demonstrated in opposition to the dominant culture during the late 1970s (Regnier & Shirt TR2 1987b; Shirt T1 1992a). As Regnier (1994) observes, the ironic reception to these activists was further compounded when many of the Native Survival schools - in an effort to address their own survival - were forced to seek both funding and approval of their governing structures from the very public education systems that failed to meet their students' interests in the first place (42).

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<sup>7</sup> In the terminology of traditionalists these are the 'apples'; red on the outside and white on the inside.



There are many versions of any single story (Archibald 1990; Narayan 1989). The Huron scholar George Sioui (1992) endites disease epidemics as the most unacknowledged and pervasive agents of *the American apocalypse* (3).

*Over a 400-year period beginning in 1492, the aboriginal population of the American continent shrank from 112 million to approximately 5.6 million...As for North America alone, of its 18 million Amerindian inhabitants at the time of European contact, by 1900 only 250,000 to 300,000 descendants remained" (3).*

As Sioui says, this remains the greatest loss of human life in the history of the planet (3), and - to give Europeans credit for their naïveté, if not their avarice - the epidemics sweeping ahead of the newcomers along trade and settlement routes contributed to notions that the North American continent was largely unclaimed, if not uninhabited. As early as 1640, the Jesuit Jerome Lalemant wrote, "wherever we set foot, either death or disease follow us" (6).

Yet the epidemics sweeping over this nation do not absolve the colonial powers of responsibility for "the physical, moral, and spiritual atrocities committed against Native peoples, some of which are still taking place in the last *wild* confines of the continent" (Sioui: 3). Rather, North American colonization can be explored from another angle. The fundamental clash between Aboriginal and settler interests has often been expressed as one founded on a difference in the human relationship to land (Allen 1986; Richardson 1993; Wright 1993). Whereas "those who grew up listening to Sto:lo stories became accustomed to the transformative relationships among nature, the human and animal kingdoms, and the spirit world" (Archibald 1990: 346), the European orientation towards land as an inanimate source of equity, physical resources, or social and political status is rooted in imperialist values and a form of territorial imperative that have contributed

heavily to our global ecological crisis (Bowers 1993, 1995). First Nations traditions are famous for promoting harmony with the environment, and, as Sioui says, their homelands were not swept by disease until Europeans arrived in the *New World* to foster the same dislocation from the land that destroyed European forests. Sioui asks: Did the Europeans' cultural dislocation "from the living forces of nature" cause them to be inundated by the plagues that swept across their homelands ? (3). In fact, he asserts that both Euro-American and Amerindian populations "have been on trial" by disease since the 15th Century, and the jury is still out in terms of our final sentence (Sioui: 4). On the side of optimism he suggests, "a study of why such a fertile bacterial culture was present in one of two worlds... could lead to a rediscovery of the laws that govern a healthy relationship between human societies and nature" (4). Indeed, Chet Bowers (1993, 1995) suggests that our global ecological crisis makes the human relationship to the Earth's biotic processes the most important issue that can be addressed in classrooms, from primary through adult and teacher-education.

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While the pedagogy of the Indian Act schools is identified as a major contributor to the social, economic and physical decline of Canada's Natives through a deliberate, cultural and linguistic genocide (Maclean 1973; Battiste 1986), there is also no doubt that federal policy was at times opportunistic and generally neglectful in its response to disease epidemics. Blankets infested with smallpox and tuberculosis were given or traded to Natives, and the elimination of entire bands or nations by this means was not always accidental (Robinson & Quinney 1985; Fred 1988). Disease was also left untreated in the Residential Schools. As late as 1905, a federal study showed that 24% of children

attending Indian day schools had died from untreated disease, while in one case in Manitoba it was reported that "75% were dead at the end of sixteen years since the school opened" (MIB 1971: 68; Adams 1970; Robinson 1993).

The regular provincial schools also contributed to the *disappearance* of the Native on a cultural level. As Renaud (1974) says, First Nations in this country were as absent from the organisation of the public education system as they were from our social world. When we did not slander them in movies, school textbooks and our child welfare policies as "savages, degenerates, [and] dangerous to their children," we overlooked them in our history lessons as "the fauna of the territories explored by glorious adventurers" (Renaud: 38; Maclean 1973). For generations, Canada's indigenous population - exoticised and rumoured to be virtually extinct - was rendered prehistoric and irrelevant to the lives of ordinary citizens. All that remain of *once proud nations* are the names written in chrome on automobiles; the many places names that survive with mispronunciations; the ghostly woodland figures in our romantic literature; and an occasional wilderness guide. Contradictory images of noble spiritualist, savage, and ghetto drunk are thrown together and, failing to serve as a portrait, they represent a disturbing pastiche.

The historian J.R. Miller (1987) suggests that the few representative Aboriginal figures who became political leaders, rebuking the oppression of Canada's First Nations during the 1960s and 1970s, serve to prove the irony of the residential school experience. After all, he says, it was the residential schools that delivered the necessary skills to develop their leadership ability, allowing for a rebellion from within the system. This might be read to suggest Canada served Aboriginal interests honourably, if only through a few cases. Yet the suggestion that the assimilation effort ultimately served to empower Native peoples only proves the depth of Miller's immersion in western culture's empirical

myths. In high contrast, both Celia Haig-Brown's study, Resistance and Renewal: Surviving the Indian Residential School (1988) and the collective narrative of cultural resilience in this thesis suggest that it was the bonds of community and the healing manifest through a return to Aboriginal traditions that sustains the Indian's constant pattern of resistance and survival.

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The history of Native education records several shifts in policy that manifest as changes to Canada's Indian Act. My research draws heavily on the work of Cornelius Jaenen (1986), Dianne Persson (1986) and Carl Urion (1993) to distinguish five distinct phases in Native education before 1951. Briefly, and with very broad strokes, those stages are:

- 1/ **1600-1640s** - two main education patterns: mission field and elite converts trained in Europe;
- 2/ **1640s to 1876** - 2 main education patterns: isolating bands on reserves and isolating youth in residential schools (a few individual students in white schools attended voluntarily by special arrangement);
- 3/ **1876 to WW I** - all bands settled on reserves (isolated after 1886), compulsory attendance at day or Residential Schools with stress on religious & industrial/agricultural training;
- 4/ **WW I to WW II** - federal studies of conditions on reserves and in schools find problems but reduced funding results in increased overcrowding, fewer services and high drop-out rate;
- 5/ **1945 to 1951** - more studies and media attention to conditions spark public alarm, so federal government legislates educational guidelines.

The changes to Canada's Indian Act in 1951 provided for Aboriginal students' integration in the existing provincial schools as a joint federal-provincial responsibility. Designed as a liberating shift, the original policy was flawed by a lack of foresight that caused decades of frustration on both sides of the governmental arrangement while it

continued to fail the Indian students sandwiched between them. Four main phases developed in Native education from this point, expressed in two stages:

- 1/ **1951 to mid-1960s** - integration of students in provincial schools (not compulsory) and no effective program support while residential schools continue with poor conditions;
- 2/ **1960s to 1969** - residential school system gradually dismantled; large migrations to urban centres but local school integration still not mandatory; residential school conditions continue as buildings to billet Native students for their distant education in specific provincial schools.

In 1969, the Canadian government proposed shunting its remaining treaty responsibilities for Native people onto the provinces through the White Paper. PM Trudeau's suggestion that the indigenous nations be virtually dissolved as a distinct society was met with protest right across the nation.

- 3/ **1969 to 1976** - negotiation of first 'joint' band/government school, protest activism across the nation in both the Aboriginal and non-Native population; while problems continue in *joint schools*, the NIB demands Indian Control of Indian Education (1972), resulting in Out Reach programs, Native curriculum projects, community teacher-training and many fresh studies of the 'problems';
- 4/ **1976 to the present** - rise of the Native Survival School Movement and emergence of band-directed schools, plus increased integration in provincial schools and continuing stress on development of curriculum and community teacher-training, the creation of university programs and increased funding to post-secondary education (cut backs in the late 1980s).

The Native Survival School movement usually manifest in urban centres, while a shift from federally-operated to band-directed schools occurred on the reserves. This two-fisted demand for community control of education was part of a universal revival of Aboriginal traditions and world view.

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Cornelius Jaenen (1986) cites four education models employed more or less

sequentially between 1603 and the mid-1600s in New France (46). These approaches can be roughly characterized as: the mission field, elite converts, reservation day schools and isolation in Residential Schools. Jaenen claims that by the 1640s, the *mission field* and *elite convert* approaches had been abandoned as failures.<sup>8</sup> The wandering tribes proved too difficult to collect (48), and the few elite converts who did not die from diseases contracted during their studies in Europe were trapped between cultures upon their return, unable to resume life in their communities and relegated to the lowest social status in the settlements (51). In the 1660s, Governor Denonville observed that efforts made to teach "these people to live like us and to become instructed in our religion" failed because, through interactions with Europeans, they learned instead "all that is bad and vicious in us" (Jaenen: 53). At this point, the Churches assumed a paternalistic guardianship role, isolating bands from colonial society on land grants from the Crown called *reductions*. In addition to religious induction, the priests trained the young in European trades, and wealth-sharing, co-operative trade, and agricultural projects were attempted among adults as early as the mid-1600s (Richardson 1993; Jaenen 1986).<sup>9</sup> The social, spiritual and political conversion of the indigenous population was thereby orchestrated through a cultural break, the converts required to abandon their traditional life ways. The Seneca Chief Red Jacket was moved to comment in 1824:

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<sup>8</sup> In many regards, these approaches were only modified. Various religious orders adopted the conversion of specific groups as their vocation, though the boundaries of their mission fields were now defined by the reservation system, and Pauline Shirt suggests pampered religious converts joined with the Indian Agent in putting pressure upon more traditional factions to abandon their practises (Shirt T2 1992b).

<sup>9</sup> Some efforts to address student failure led to fresh pedagogical approaches, including purportedly modern techniques such as: dramatic use of colour, small group activities, the development of syllabics and phonetic writing systems and translation of texts into Aboriginal languages (see Battiste, Jaenen, and Wilson in Barman et al. 1986).

*If we had no money, no land and no country to be cheated out of, these black coats<sup>10</sup> would not trouble themselves about our good hereafter... The black coats tell us to work and raise corn; they do nothing themselves and would starve to death if someone did not feed them (McLuhan 1971: 63).*

He was articulating a centuries-old concern of Aboriginal peoples about the depth of hypocrisy inherent in the colonial project to teach them self sufficiency on small plots.

Canada's federal Indian Schools system - generally referred to as the Residential Schools - operated from the mid-1800s into the late-1970s ( Alcoze CL 1988; Johnson 1988; Pitawanaquat CL 1988). These schools have been characterized as *Victorian* in their view of childhood and human relations, which manifest in their programmes (Wilson 1982; Persson 1986), yet their pedagogy actually evolved from a much earlier model for schooling, and their repressive regimes were dominated by the shadow of the colonialism.<sup>11</sup> The Loyola Jesuits had established education as the vocation of a "diffusive" religious body in the 16th Century (45-46) and, in the process, created the missionary model for schooling. Placing themselves in service to the Crown, the Jesuit's vocation expanded from territories claimed in European wars to colonies in the *New World*. The missionary project, then, developed in partnership with the military exploits of several European empires. The Jesuit's success in Brazil (1549) and Paraguay (1588)

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<sup>10</sup> As many members of the religious orders wore black frocks, this comment is understood as a reference to the missionaries.

<sup>11</sup> Rev. Thomas Hughes' (1892) history of Loyola Jesuits indicates that formal schooling was attached to a Church until universities (at first annexed to Churches) were established in the 1500s. Europe was a scene of "political and religious crisis" (14) when Ignatius Loyola, "a cavalier wounded on the ramparts of Pampeluna"... [became] a soldier for Christ" (19). The Loyola Jesuits broke with a long academic tradition in the mid-1500s, offering free education to downtrodden survivors of Spain's military campaigns in the mid-1500s (14). Still, far into the 1700s, education and nurturing were considered the sacred duty of parents rather than Church or State (8-9), except among those fallen to military conquest (69-70). It was several hundred years before La Chalotais's suggestion to secularize education shifted attitudes and all citizens became "chattels of the state" (Hughes: 44).

prompted other religious orders to partner spiritual training with social and political assimilation in the interest of fostering allegiance to the European Crowns among indigenous conquests (Hughes 1892; Jaenen: 53). As a result, religious conversion had a direct impact on the establishment of a European *presence* in the colonies (Hughes 1892; Jaenen 1986; Barman et al. 1986).

Until the mid-1800s, when they were suddenly shunted onto reserves, Canada's Indians were valued for different reasons during different periods. They initially inflated the colonial presence as the earliest settlements were struck (Jaenen 1986), they helped to protect the early colonies against invasion (Richardson 1993) and because they were dramatically underpaid for their effort they also provided a kind of slave labour for the gigantic trade system in furs, sugar and rum (APS 1839; Dufty 1975: 32-40). However, when a partnership with the indigenous nations no longer served Euro-Canadian interests, the posture of equality in the Indian-settler relationship was abandoned and "settlement assumed priority", even as their nationhood continued to gain recognition through treaty-making (Barman et al. 1986: 4; Miller 1987; Robertson 1992).

The European avarice for a monopoly interest in Indian land and resources began with a trickle of United Empire Loyalists from below the Great Lakes but these colonists were joined by a wave of Scottish settlers and other immigrants from Europe, expanding the population of Canada more than ten-fold in the first half of the 1800s (Wilson 1986: 10). The swelling of the newcomer population was matched by a demand for land to settle. The religious orders were given funding and land grants to develop the now infamous boarding schools, which were designed to force the spiritual and cultural surrender of the Native. In 1830, Sir George Murray, Secretary of State for the colonies, told the House of Commons:

*If on the one hand there existed a disposition in the Indians to cling to their original habits, there was a proneness also in the new occupants of America to regard the natives as an irreclaimable race, and as inconvenient neighbours, whom it was desirable ultimately to remove (House of Commons papers 1834 cited in APS 1839: 44).*

The vocation of the Churches remained missionary work, but their service to the Crown was realised through their assistance to the government's project of clearing the land for settlers.

By the late 1800s, agricultural and industrial training were virtually forced upon the residential school students. In some measure, this training was initially well-intentioned; however, their students were only trained for low-paid, menial labour in Euro-Canadian trades, and it soon became clear that success in agriculture was no longer the primary goal of Indian schooling. In the late 1800s, when Chief O'Soup's band demonstrated not only self-sufficiency but a talent for farming on the Prairies - even clearing their own land and building their own houses while they won ribbons for their cattle at local fairs - local farmers complained that their livelihood was threatened by competition in the market (Richardson 1993). A number of changes were made to the Indian Act, backed up by fines and jail terms. Aboriginals were now denied the right to sell their goods and livestock, and the public was denied receipt of Aboriginal goods or livestock, even as gifts. The Indian Act also required that Indians use only hand-made tools to farm, and even outlawed the use of nails in building those tools (Richardson 1993; Venne 1981).

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There was an increasing shift from an apparent placability towards active demonstration against the federal government's Residential School system after WW I. Public support increased after WW II when Indian veterans, who gained public acclaim

as volunteers upon their return, helped the early Native organizations to publicise conditions experienced on the reserves and in Residential Schools. From 1931 until 1945, a period Diane Persson (1986) identifies as the first of three phases in the existence of the Blue Quills Residential School in Alberta:

*Concern over morality and modesty pervaded every aspect of school life. As recalled by one woman: "When we had a bath we had to wear a bathing suit"... a grey flannel gown... Another student [reported] "When we were 12 and over, our busts started to grow. They used to make us wear this real tight binder... They'd be so tight so they'd be no bulges on the apron, because that was a sin" (152).*

The children were taught to hate their bodies, and the lack of discussion around gender relations made them ill-equipped to deal with either marriage or social interaction later in life (Persson 1986). This hysterical suppression of the outward indicators for physical and sexual development, and the strict segregation of genders, continued long after co-ed classrooms were established in the school.

Pauline attended Blue Quills from grade one in 1951, when she was eight, until she was expelled from grade ten in 1961 for "refusing to be Catholic" (Regnier 1987a; Berg & Shirt TC 1998). During her residence, children were punished for simply looking at someone of the opposite gender, and paired with this anachronistic morality the children endured a demanding schedule of chores and militaristic inspections. As she describes their morning schedule, Pauline counts off time-checks on her fingers (Shirt T1 1992a):

6 am - rising, praying on hands and knees  
 6:30 - wash up, clean sinks, dress, and make beds (with inspections on every point)  
 7 until 7:30 - breakfast "always porridge with powdered milk and hardly ever any toast"  
 7:30 until 8:45 - chores, often scrubbing concrete floors and the stairways and inspection  
 8:45 - line up and file into classrooms  
 9 am - classes begin

They lined up for each transition in their routine, which was strictly enforced by the

priests and nuns. While harsh punishments for non-cooperation were exacted in bitter measures, the children from unpopular families suffered even more severe punishments (Shirt T1 1992a):

*All activity was subject to the time-table and to staff regulation, including the rules calling for silence when eating, the making of beds in a certain way, the manner clothes were to be worn, and the form in which requests for toilet paper were made... Punishments existed for every offence, minor or major... [but] punishments for running away or 'deserting' were especially severe (Persson: 153).*

Randy Frank's (1988) recollections of life in the Alberni Residential School in British Columbia reveal both the depth of the children's trauma when they were subjected to this harsh environment, and their strategies to survive the experience. His description of their *coping mechanisms* offers support for the suggestion that some members of subordinated groups respond to their violation with lateral oppression:

*The student society was strongly hierarchial; powerful students became leaders of clusters of students, in a process similar to socialization inside Oakalla Prison. In fact many people I know who have been to Oakalla Prison tell me that doing hard time was easier than doing time in Alberni [Residential School] (Foreword to Haig-Brown 1988: 19)*

Celia Haig-Brown (1988) collected from former students of the Kamloops Indian Residential School numerous accounts of injustice met by *resistance and renewal* among the Secwepemc students. Sun Chief, a Hopi, says:

*I had learned many English words and could recite part of the 10 commandments. I knew how to sleep on a bed, pray to Jesus, comb my hair, eat with a knife and fork, and use a toilet... I had also learned that a person thinks with his head instead of his heart (McLuhan 1971: 108).*

Basil Johnson offers stories of "rough camaraderie among the boys" during his own Indian School Days (1988). In fact, Johnson paints a comparatively forgiving portrait of the domineering priests who were frustrated in all of their attempts to suppress the

spontaneous antics of the children in their charge (Johnson: back cover).

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It is November 1992 (Shirt T1 1992a). We have been discussing Celia Haig-Brown's (1988) book, and Pauline says she appreciates the term *resistance and renewal*. There is laughter in her voice as she describes her own brand of resistance as a student at Blue Quills Residential School:

*P: I rebelled against everything, you know ? Against their teachings, the Christian teachings. I was excommunicated... They thought I was the Devil's daughter and everything, but it didn't matter to me. You know ? Because that was my freedom - being the Devil's daughter, being taunted, having that stigma.*

*S: So the slander ends up being a type of freedom ?*

*P: Yeah, it was freedom for me. Because I didn't care what they called me...*

*S: Because they're accepting that you're not playing that role that's been designated for you ? In calling you that name, it means an acceptance ?*

*P: Yeah, it is a freedom. Yeah, for me, that was a great freedom (Shirt T1 1992a).*

Yet the story of her experiences at Residential School is not as simple as finding freedom through rebellion. The dynamics of resistance expressed among those who attended the Residential Schools are complex, spanning the scale from subtle to blatant. Ultimately, the positive result of resistance is the community's ability to foster its cultural metamorphosis through the healing pedagogy of the Medicine Wheel (Regnier 1994).

Pauline's first memory of fear coincides with her first experience of the bumpy, eighteen-mile trip that took the children from the reserve to school. The Indian agent, a priest and several nuns arrived at the reserve with large flatbed trucks. She remembers thinking they were cattle trucks, because the men who drove them wore overalls, like the white farmers surrounding the reserve. Year after year, that scene was repeated:

*P: They would have this book, and they would have all of our names in there. They would*

*call on us... Oh, I remember the grandmothers and the mothers, they would be crying. Everybody would be crying. Ah, such a sad time, sending your children to school ! ...That was the first sadness I ever experienced, being pulled away from my mother... It was so sad going into the truck, nothing to sit on, just hanging onto the truck, hanging on to your big sisters so you wouldn't fall down. That's the way we were herded, literally herded.*

*S: How many would be in each truck ?*

*P: ...Oh God, let's say there were 300 boys and girls [at Blue Quills], most of them came from our reserve... <snip> [There were] 50 to 60 in the back of each truck (Shirt T1 1992a).*

When they finally arrived at the school, it was a great red-brick building, the largest, coldest place Pauline had ever seen. On the steps, they were divided into groups and assigned to the care of nuns, like small flocks to several shepherds. Then they were gathered in the main room, the so-called play room, and given a bundle of clothes. Their uniforms were itchy, with shoes like army boots. Next, segregated by gender, they were lined up and marched to the shower rooms and stripped in groups:

*P: The first thing, this was the most horrible thing, was they would put this kerosene in our hair. Everybody.*

*S: Whether you had lice or not ?*

*P: Whether we had lice or not. That was the first thing. And then we'd have to put this ointment on our body. I don't know what it was, but something to disinfect our bodies.*

*S: So the first message is that you're unclean ?*

*P: Unclean. Yeah, it's true. The first message is that we're unclean. And then, you know, the cutting of our hair. That's where we lose our spirit, our power, and I remember the girls who had long hair -*

*S: They cut the girls' hair, as well as the boys ?*

*P: Oh, exactly ! Everybody. The boys had crewcuts <snip> They cut [the girls'] hair up to our ear and at the nape they would shave the hair. Or else, they would cut it off really short for the ones who had bugs... or the ones who weren't from the right family... But anyways, we'd go for our showers after we had our hair cut. [pause] And we looked terrible. Oh, God ! And I remember the girls crying... The nuns would sit there, watching us, eh ? They sat in there watching us take our showers. Can you imagine ? (Shirt T11992a).*

Once again, they were lined up in groups. This time they were taken to their

classrooms, where Pauline recalls meeting her teacher for the first time:

*P: ...I thought, 'Oh, what a beautiful teacher !' She was really, really beautiful. But the thing was, she looked at us and [with a gruff voice she extends her arm to point, mimicking her teacher] 'You !' she said. You know ? We had to sit so straight with our hands folded on our desks <snip> The thing that scared me was that she had a ruler in her hand. And I thought, 'How could this beautiful, kind-looking lady be so mean ?' Because she took the place of my mother ! And she had a ruler, and right away she went up and down the aisles [she mimes the teacher delivering sharp slaps with the ruler] -*

*S: To rap the hands of the people who didn't do it ?*

*P: Yeah. 'That way,' she said. And that's when we started holding our breath, because of the fear. Everything just gathered in our breast. We were made to feel fear. Just fear, fear, fear. Fear was written all over us. And we were assigned some books, and I remember these big, big pencils with our little fingers. And she would hit us [with the ruler]. 'Not that way.' It would have to be, 'This way'. And some of the students couldn't do that. I think by the third day we had to write our names (Shirt T1 1992a).*

Though she was only eight years old, Pauline's sense of justice was challenged by these experiences. She lay down a pattern of resistance on that first day. Her teacher called her name, as it was written in her registry, "Rose Shirt":

*P: ... I said, 'No, that's not my name. My name is Pauline...Every time she called out 'Rose', I said, 'That's not my name.' I was so mad at her. But she never liked me, anyway, that nun.*

*S: So that was your Christian name, but that's not what your parents called you ?*

*P: My name is Rose Pauline, but I never answered to that. I used to get her so mad (Shirt T1 1992a).*

Pauline's back still gives her trouble, from an injury suffered when she was pushed down the stairs during a wrestle with one of the nuns. Yet she takes pride in the fact that the nuns were so agitated by her non-compliance. "I refused to go to mass, and kneel, and all that stuff. I said, 'Hey, I'm not a Catholic. I've got my own way'. Oh, they were mad" (Berg & Shirt TC 1998).

The literature on Residential Schools acknowledges a general pattern of resistance

among the students. Pauline's behaviour was often interpreted as open rebellion, however, that level of resolve was not widely reflected in the student body even at Blue Quills. One incident makes the difference in her approach very clear. Though the students in residential school were subjected to lock-down, she and her cousin made a daring escape by clocking the routines of the supervising nuns and the janitor. Then they slipped past the guard dogs, which were set loose on the grounds at night, and hitch-hiked six miles into the closest town. However, unlike thousands of Native children in the history of the residential schools who ran away, they had simply slipped away to the movies, determined to see the new Elizabeth Taylor film, Butterfield Eight. Again, unlike other runaways, after their forbidden excursion they crept past the guard dogs and supervising nuns a second time, returning to their beds in the huge third-floor dormitory (Berg & Shirt TC 1988).<sup>12</sup>

Why, once she escaped, would she go back to the school? Like the majority, she suffered greatly due to years of long separations from her family. She found the forced acculturation and religious studies stifling. She abhorred the chore schedule, the poor quality of food and the inequity which allowed their guardians to eat well while the students went hungry. The answer is not that Pauline's experiences at Blue Quills were *radically* different from those of other students. She suffered like the rest. Rather, it is that her experiences were *critically* different. Pauline's narrative reveals she possessed a powerful sense of her own worth, and a clear sense of social justice at an early age. Unlike many of her fellow students, Pauline was raised in the full embrace of her cultural

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<sup>12</sup> Runaways were usually desperate to escape situations of abuse and neglect in the Residential Schools, sometimes leaving on the spur of the moment as they saw the opportunity. This meant they were often ill-prepared for their long journeys home. Some lost toes and fingers to frostbite (Adams 1970), or worse yet, were hit by trains while trying to hop a ride home to their families (Haig-Brown 1988).

traditions until she entered school. However, the Shirt children were also given some preparation for beginning school by their parents. Louisa taught her children to speak both Cree and English, while Felix introduced them to his love of books and music. He even bought the family an old piano and a gramophone so they could play and listen to classical music. Also, frequent illness during her childhood gave Pauline long and welcome respites from the classroom as she lay in her sickbed, alone in the huge dormitory except when her sister brought her a bowl of soup (Shirt T1 1992a).

Pauline's rebellion also needs to be placed in context with the fact that her Uncle Alec was the Metis Master at Blue Quills and a supervisor in the boys' dormitory. This put her family in a somewhat special position. For one thing, her parents found it easier than most to make the eighteen-mile trip from the Saddle Lake reserve for their allotted once-a-month visits.<sup>13</sup> Other families had to camp out in a field down the road, and the journey was very hard because very few had cars. The fact that Pauline's mother became a cook for Blue Quills in later years also helped the Shirt children to survive their time in Residential School (Shirt T1 1992a).

In contrast, many of the Aboriginal children entering school had no English language, and only saw their family during the summer holidays. Tears fill her eyes as Pauline remembers the Mountain family. They gained everyone's sympathy when the children were orphaned by an accident during the school year. Indian Affairs would not permit them to return to the reserve and the security of everything familiar for the summer holidays. They could not be taken in by their relatives. Instead, they were packed out by train to an adoptive family in British Columbia:

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<sup>13</sup> No one was able to come every month, but perhaps four or five times a year, Felix and Louisa Shirt stayed overnight at Uncle Alec's house on the school grounds (Shirt T1 1992a).

*P: At that time they never accepted the extended family [as guardians]... I thought, 'Gee, we'll never see those kids again !' I thought they went to the other side of the world ! ...*  
*S: So, did they ever come back ? Or, did they only go for the summer holidays ?*  
*P: For the summer, yeah, and then they came back. They were such a sad family, though. Really sad. (Shirt T1 1992a).*

Pauline provides one of those rare reminiscences from First Nations people that - though it is offered as a reflection on oppression and resistance - articulates a small pattern of relief within the larger pattern of spiritual and cultural suppression. Her own behaviour as a student only proves through its exceptionality, that the rule was truly terrible for most of the children attending the Residential Schools. Recent reports reveal:

*So many eyewitnesses to murder and other wrongs at the native residential schools have come forward recently that two additional public forums will be held in March [1998]... 'I saw my little sister beaten to death in front of me', a Native woman told a crowd of 300 at a Vancouver forum on February 9 [1998]. 'The church people threatened to kill me, too, if I told anyone'... [Others] described similar killings at west coast residential schools in the 1950s and '1960s' (Annett EM 1998).*

Obviously, the degree of rebellion Pauline demonstrated at Blue Quills sometimes culminated in a tragedy far worse than excommunication or expulsion from school.

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*That was history, we have to move on.* So the old adage goes. Pauline and the original Council heard all of the standard objections to the founding of their culture school, and the opposition was strong. However, the assistance provided by individuals who supported the Parent Council's efforts proved critical to the success of WSSS.

Pauline shivers as she recalls the meeting on February 21, 1977, when she made a presentation to 21 trustees at the Toronto Board of Education offices on behalf of her tiny cultural school:

*The coordinator of the Alternative Schools, Dale Shuttleworth... was one of the best supporters that I ever came across. He really helped me a lot, in showing me: 'This is the way to do it.' The contacts. 'This is what you need.' And 'This is what I can do for you' (Regnier & Shirt TR2 1987b).*

The only WSSS teacher who came to support her application to be adopted by the Board was so nervous, he hid in the gallery. Pauline couldn't even see him:

*I will never forget that meeting... I was alone with all these trustees. I made the presentation and Dale Shuttleworth helped me. I was scared. I will never forget some of those trustees. They were just pounding on the table. 'How dare these Indians.' 'Who do these Indians think they are, anyway, wanting their own school?' I remember the one Trustee saying that; all the remarks. 'How can we support this thing? We'll have to get some more money' (Regnier & Shirt TR2 1987b).*

This was the beginning of the Alternative schools movement, and the TBE had been flooded with applications. Pauline suggests alternative schools "were not really accepted... [but] the demands came from some of the most prominent people here in Toronto" (Regnier & Shirt TR2 1987b). After her presentation and a discussion, the Trustees proceeded to cast a vote:

*I said, 'Dale, I can't stand this. I have got to go out.' I went out to pray. I prayed so hard... because that was the whole basis, the spiritual thing, the spiritual part. I said, 'Please, Old Men, let us have this school'. I just told them what we needed and what we wanted. I said, 'You give us the school for seven years and I will work for these little people for nothing. I will give my life to these little people for nothing, for seven years. I will not accept any money.' I came back in [to the meeting]. It was a tight one, but we got it: thirteen to eight. So there was the next seven years lined up (Regnier & Shirt TR2 1987b).<sup>14</sup>*

Despite her Residential School experiences, Pauline does not see Indian control of Indian education as an issue of colour, or one of retribution for the abuses committed in colonial

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<sup>14</sup> As an aside, it is important to note Pauline warned me during my training to Native Way that one has to be very careful about making vows that offer to make a sacrifice in exchange for some something desired. "You'll get just what you asked for," she said (Berg & Shirt TC 1997).

times. Rather, it is about granting autonomy to a genetic group who continue to come under the oppressive policies of the Indian Act in the present day.<sup>15</sup> The status quo is perpetuated through the public schools system as well as political policy (Allen 1986; TNT 1976-1979; Wilson 1993; Lewis T12 1996a). The Parent Council of WSSS was making a radical rejection of that status quo by founding a culture school, an *Alternative School*. Pauline continues:

*I wanted to rejoice with someone. I wanted to celebrate. But I was alone. The teacher was up there [in the gallery]... Everybody was congratulating me and everything. It was good, but I wanted to see our people in there, and they weren't there. <shift block> The funny thing is that we got a lot of support from Europe, but we didn't get that support from the Native community here. Even the established organisations looked the other way. <shift block> That was so significant, in those days. They were scared. They were so scared. So I came home all alone on a street car. Then my work was cut out for me. We moved in, the next day, to Winchester Public School (Regnier & Shirt TR2 1987b).*

Pauline pauses, shaking her head, as if to settle the information in her own mind, once again. "All the trucks were rolling," she says, this deliberate contrast with the image of those cattle trucks carrying the Indian students away from everything familiar bringing her to laughter (Regnier & Shirt TR2 1987b).

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At the end of World War II, media attention to the conditions suffered in the schools and on the reserves provoked a public outrage (Maclean 1973; Pellerin 1982). Randy Fred (1988), a Tseshaht from British Columbia, reports his parents raised three of his cousins when his aunt could not care for them. When their own children were on holiday, "the entire family, including cousins, lived in the small four-bedroom house", a total of

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<sup>15</sup> This is why Bill Lewis (T13 1996b) insists the Survival Schools are more necessary today than ever.

eighteen people. "In fact, one summer there were actually 21 of us living in that tiny house" (22). As for the schools, the main positive response was the imposition of provincial education standards. However, the benefits of this legislation were severely undercut by cost-cutting measures that led to an even greater overcrowding in the schools. Pauline recalls the situation at Blue Quills:

*P: The dorm was shaped like an 'L'... There was about 150 of us in that room all together. And there was a nun sleeping on each far end. And there was a fire escape.*

*S: So the dorm was all the girls together ? All 150 ?*

*P: Yup. All of us together, in three groups, and one nun on each end. And they would lock those doors at night, so no one would escape (Shirt T1 1992a).*

The building was always under-heated, and the children did not have sufficient clothing for the winter. But the deplorable conditions experienced by students in the residential schools went far beyond the realm of physical conditions, or even education.

"We couldn't speak our language," Pauline reports, adding, "I was so stubborn, I said, 'There is no way that anyone will take that away from me.' I can still speak Cree" (Regnier & Shirt TR1 1987a). Yet the total experience of their induction into schooling - the disinfecting showers, the shearing of their hair - draws the comment, "It was so symbolic... them trying to wash away our whole past" (Regnier & Shirt TR1 1987a). Indeed, Randy Fred sees the "elimination of language" enforced through the residential school system as "a primary stage in a process of cultural genocide" (1988: 15). This offers support to Pauline's suggestion - from the other side of that issue - that the key to the revival of Aboriginal culture is embedded in Aboriginal language (Shirt T4 1993b; Shirt & Nahwegeechee T11 1994a). There are many testimonies from other students to the effect that they resisted language assimilation in the residential schools, but they also indicate that resistance was often very costly. As Fred reveals:

*My father, who attended Alberni Indian Residential School for four years in the [19]20s, was physically tortured by his teachers for speaking Tseshah: they pushed sewing needles through his tongue, a routine punishment for language offenders (1988: 15-16).*

At Blue Quills the students were not tortured, but they were slapped with rulers, isolated, and publicly shamed for flaunting the rules:

*P: That was their way. Usually not physical stuff, humiliation. Like, they would force us to wear our underwear on our heads.*

*S: In front of everybody ?*

*P: Uh huh.*

*S: For speaking your language ?*

*P: Yeah. For speaking our language. But for anything, really. Any little thing. That was one of their favourite punishments. [pause] They did that all the time, for any little thing.*

*S: That's not physical violence, but it's so emotionally abusive !*

*P: Yeah. It was, it was. (Berg & Shirt TC 1998).*

The suppression of Aboriginal experience reached every aspect of the students' prior experience. "They would not allow us to speak... about our ways. Nothing," Pauline recalls (Regnier & Shirt TR1 1987a). If a student was caught looking at someone of the opposite gender, even when the other student was a brother or sister, the nuns made the children stand before the entire group and shamed them (Regnier & Shirt TR1 1987a; Shirt T1 1992a). The public outcry over the conditions suffered by Canada's Aboriginals fuelled both federal surveys and academic studies between the 1950s and the mid-1970s (Maclean 1973; Pellerin 1982). The medical surveys concluded that overcrowding - in the schools and on reserves - was compounded by an inadequate diet and a paucity of medical services. Tuberculosis and other diseases were untreated, resulting in a tragic loss of life, while survivors also suffered a severe decline in quality of life due to disabilities (MIB 1971; Maclean 1973):

*Colin Wasacase...is a Cree from Broadview, Saskatchewan. He knows what Indian*

*residential schools are all about... He was at one such school at the age of six when he broke his left arm. The [untended] arm turned gangrenous and had to be amputated (Adams 1970: 35).*

The medical reports also discussed the social and psychological disruption that flowed from: the fracture of family and community bonds, the suppression of Native culture and languages, forced religious study and the severe physical punishments exacted for non-conformity (Pellerin 1982). This was compounded by the stresses accumulating from: rigorous daily schedules, constant hunger, inadequate clothing, insufficient heating, segregation of siblings and genders, and physical and sexual abuse by their guardians (Fred 1988; Haig-Brown 1988; Johnson 1988).

Despite the proliferation of reports of the sexual abuse of Native children in the Residential Schools that has claimed media attention in recent years, it remains a difficult topic for public disclosure. On February 7, 1998, CBC New World aired a segment about the Port Alberni, British Columbia, band's recent lawsuit, which charges the Church and the Crown with equal responsibility for abuses occurring in the Residential Schools. Willy Blackwater, a member of that band, reported the trauma associated with this abuse was heightened by virtue of being subjected to the legal system and media attention. This caused one person to attempt suicide just days after the suit was brought before the courts. Pauline also speaks of the damage done to a child's self-image through sexual violation, but her story is told in a circular fashion, rather than directly. The issue of nicknames provides an opening for discussion of her own shifting sense of self. I allude to prior conversations about her experience, but what she manages circles a direct report:

*P: The name that was given to me by my Grandparents, the ones that liked me, it was 'Sheep' ...My mother told me... 'Do you remember your name ? Sheep ? [she repeats the*

*name in Cree] Because you were just like a little lamb. Because you were so kind, never a temper tantrum from you as a child'... I grew up in a safe environment.*

*S: Safe in some respects. I mean, you've told me things, that your safety was violated.*

*P: Yeah, after... But when I was growing up, it was like I was in my mother's womb, and I was kind and gentle. <snip> Between age eight and nine... when I was in grade one, by that time, I had been violated. <snip block > And for a long time I had such a fear of going out into the world, because of that Boarding School (Shirt T1 1992a).*

Typically, Pauline finds a way of placing her own situation in context with the larger First Nations community. It may be a personal survival tactic, a kind of deflection, but also serves her well in fostering social change through her activism. After she was expelled from Blue Quills for non-compliance, she moved to Edmonton and finished high school at a Catholic school. This rebel had a cause, and Pauline founded the first Native Youth Group in Canada while she was in grade 12 (Shirt T1 1992a; Berg & Shirt TC 1998):

*That was in the early [19]60s... It brought all the Indian students together from the Boarding Schools, the Metis families... They were the ones who felt drawn to the formation of the Youth Group. We did a lot of things. It brought the Indian students together. But the horror stories that I heard about [two names are mention here, both unintelligible] and all those other places. They were horrible stories about being physically and sexually abused. There was a lot of sexual abuse... I noticed that a lot of the women... ended up on the streets in Edmonton... They were alcoholics and street walkers... At that time, there was nothing [else] for them (Regnier & Shirt TR1 1987a).*

It is also typical of Pauline that she strives to offer balanced reports. Several times during our work on the thesis, she counters negative information about the Residential Schools with the comment: "That's one thing I have to say about the nuns at Blue Quills. They did give us a good academic training" (Shirt & K. Shirt T9 1993h; Berg & Shirt TC 1998). Still, on the whole, trauma was compounded by tragedy because most of those schools delivered a sub-standard education which failed to prepare their graduating students for integration with mainstream society (Persson 1986; Fred 1988; Johnson

1988). Plagued by runaways (Adams 1970; Regnier & Shirt TR1 1987a; Haig-Brown 1988), a combination of factors also contributed to an astronomical school drop-out rate (Pellerin 1982; Urion 1993). The Ojibway educator and historian Basil Johnson (1988) says the school he attended at "Spanish [near Sudbury, Ontario] was but one of 76 such institutions, with a combined total of 8,000 students, that operated in the 1940s throughout Canada" (6). The schools usually stressed "four areas of teaching... good personal habits (such as cleanliness and punctuality); English; reading and writing; and trades" (7). Despite this, among the graduates of the school at Spanish:

*Many did not speak English, many had little more than Grade 3 education, and even those with Grades 7 and 8 could not understand the Indian Act and the powers that it conferred upon the Indian agent, who one day, any day, could come to a house to announce, 'We've decided that it's best for you and your children that they be sent to Spanish' (8).*

Johnson suggests the drop-out rate reflected a general feeling that schooling was both punishing and irrelevant to the lives of Aboriginal people.

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The government response to the public demand for improvement in conditions on the reserves and in the Indian Schools, after WW II, led to an amendment to the Indian Act in 1951, allowing for integration through the public school system. This marked a dramatic shift in focus from the policy of acculturation-through-isolation begun in the 1600s, to one of acculturation-through-submersion. In tandem with the push for integration, the Residential Schools were gradually dismantled in the 1960s and 1970s. However, the transition period was slow and painful. While it provided for the integration of Native students in "joint schools... wherein the Federal government agreed

to pay school boards for the increased costs of accepting Indian students" (Pellerin 1982: 9), the Integration Act did not guarantee enrolment in local schools. It also failed to provide supports for the child's transitional years (Adams 1970). Statistics indicate that, of children entering school in 1951 and 1952, only 1.9% of Natives in Manitoba completed grade twelve, compared to 33.9% of all students in Manitoba (MIB 1971: 104). The Hawthorn study (1967) indicates that after integration there was a 4% improvement in school retention; however, with a 94% school drop-out rate by grade twelve among Natives in Canada, it was far from sufficient (130). The lack of support provided for integrated minority students drew heavy criticism, but initial efforts to offer support were hampered by cultural bias in the educational system itself (Pellerin 1982). All of this is alarming enough, but both Barbara Burnaby (1980) and Carl Urion (1993) express concern that all of these statistics focus on Status Indians, and there is no available data to indicate how non-Status Indians and Metis students fared in the public education system.

Investigations of Native students' failure to succeed in school resulted in a multitude of explanations (Maclean 1973; Pellerin 1982). Most centered on the ability of the students to learn (Goucher 1968; Urion 1993). Yet the search for tools to measure learning is itself based on the twin assumptions that learning is dependent on intelligence, and that intelligence can be measured. One of the first questions asked was: *Does race determine intelligence?* Common and Frost (1988 cited in Pellerin), indicate that the search for evidence of intelligence led some researchers to measure skull volume and brain weight, while others attributed meaning to the size of the anterior and posterior regions of the brain. Comparisons were then made of the shape of the cranium, and further studies of brain lobe symmetry explored the difference in results on standardised

tests for dominant culture and minority students. None of these studies offered satisfactory results.

When their physical attributes failed to offer sufficient explanation for students' difficulty, researchers turned to explorations of their culture and background for indicators of their preparation for school. In comparing the performance of poor, Native and immigrant children to the standards set by the dominant, white, middle- and upper-class students, a *deficit model* was developed. It was attended by the claim that minority culture groups have impoverished backgrounds that fail to foster the cognitive operations and skills required for success in contemporary society. This notion received criticism as "a form of institutional racism", and the *cultural difference model* was established by adding the qualifier that no culture is superior to another (Urión 1993: 104).<sup>16</sup> Though the Aboriginal culture has long been regarded as an aural one, the study of *learning styles* seemed to indicate a reliance on visual rather than auditory cues in learning among Native students (Stairs 1993). As a result, *interference theory* explained that a resistance to non-Native teaching styles required the teacher (rather than the student) to make culturally-sensitive accommodations in the delivery of lessons (Phillips 1983; Wild et al. post-1983; Sawyer 1991).

More recently, the presumption that cognition can be quantified was challenged, and the focus of study shifted to a reassessment of the tools designed to measure intelligence.<sup>17</sup> Fresh comparisons of the results from standardised tests led researchers to

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<sup>16</sup> This proposal is sometimes characterized as relativity, drawing criticism for its tendency to devolve into pat claims that all cultures are equal though different.

<sup>17</sup> The WISC-R and Verbal Score IQ were both popular during the 1970s and 1980s, yet assessments using K-ABC or TONI-B became more common in the 1980s (Common & Frost 1988 cited in Pellerin 1982).

conclude that it was the tests, rather than the students, that were failing to cope with cultural differences. Standard tests fail to indicate the intelligence of Native students (and others) because they fail to account for differences in: facility with teaching the language, motivation, educational goals, cultural background, prior experiences and preparation for school (Phillips 1983; Common & Frost 1988 cited in Pellerin 1982).

Concern about cultural conflict led Kaegi-Gerda (1972 cited in Pellerin 1982) to suggest:

*The educational system, if it is to succeed, must be based upon the Indian child's environment and then expand to provide the knowledge of the culture or society that surrounds him. The object of Indian education should be to aid the Indian in becoming a social citizen adjusted to his environment and a full participant in Canadian life without the necessity of departing from his ancestral heritage (Pellerin: 12).*

In other words, academic success is to some degree dependent upon a student's cultural security and social adjustment.

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Integration was called the final effort to assimilate the Indian through schooling.<sup>18</sup> Yet, when unsupported integration of Indians was criticised for failing to account for differences in their background (Kaegi-Gerda 1972 cited in Pellerin: 9), student failure to adapt to unfamiliar demands in mainstream schools was met by programmes of "remedial and compensatory education" (Stone and Denevi 1971 cited in Pellerin: 10). Despite evidence of a gradual decrease in drop-out rates, the evidence of progress was insufficient. From issues of access to funding and delivery, the integration policy had met

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<sup>18</sup> The White Paper (1969) proposed the erasure of Native Canadians as a distinct racial group through political legislation. Trudeau suggested claims to a distinct society were unfounded if a distinct language and culture were not maintained. This completely ignores the Canadian government's role in suppressing the languages and cultures of First Nations people.

with problems. Studies of school failure as a cultural phenomenon found the problems were inherent in the *system's* inability to address cultural difference, rather than a failing in the students or their culture (Pellerin: 10-12).<sup>19</sup>

*...racial discrimination is often experienced for the first time. The language of instruction is different from the child's first language. Discipline and accepted social behaviour are alien. The child's own history and culture are often ignored or denigrated. Teachers are from the middle-class; programs and textbooks stress middle-class lifestyles and values. Teachers' expectations for the Indian child are frequently lower than for middle-class pupils. Verbal and non-verbal communication is often misunderstood by both teacher and pupil (11).*

The Hope Maclean (1973) review of Native education in North America reports the Canadian government's study of Native students in primary school in 1962 found:

*25% had no English or French; 32% had a limited understanding of English or French; 30% had a working use of English or French; and just 13% were considered fluent speakers of English or French (Maclean: 105).*

The child's facility with the teaching language was demonstrated to influence school success or failure. However, there were sociolinguistic contributors to academic progress and social acceptance that were largely unrecognised before the late 1980s. Edward Hall's (1969, 1973) studies of communication refer to a "silent language" of behaviours accompanying speech: "that is, those deep, common, unstated experiences which members of a given culture share, communicate without knowing, and which form the backdrop against which all other events are judged" (1969: x). He identified cultural differences in both the pattern of communicative events, and the meaning associated with certain behaviours, which were corroborated by later studies of Native communication patterns (Phillips 1983; Wild et al post-1983).

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<sup>19</sup> The studies include: Wax 1973; Holt 1964; Spindler 1974; Kleinfeld 1972; and Hjelmseth & Berg 1971 cited in Pellerin 1982.

While Susan Phillips' (1983) comparison study of English and Native classroom behaviours on the Warm Springs Indian reserve found that strong clashes in cultural expectations for behaviour are common in the primary grades, it also suggests most of those behaviours are absent or significantly suppressed by grade six in mixed-culture classrooms. Then, the Native student withdraws into a pattern of silence, restlessness, and general resistance to schooling. While resistance is often interpreted as defiance in the classroom, Holt (1964) and Spindler (1974) suggest that "silence, lack of attention, [choosing] peer acceptance over teacher acceptance... psychological withdrawal [and] ...withdrawal from the school system" should all be regarded as common *coping strategies* in situations of cultural conflict (cited in Pellerin: 11-12). Unfortunately classroom teachers and researchers frequently succumb - in practise if not in theory - to cultural bias by universalising dominant culture behaviour. In this case, silence, day-dreaming, averted gaze and social withdrawal are interpreted as signs of wilful non-cooperation, while the student's inner reality may be something quite different (Pellerin 1982; Phillips 1983; Wild et al. post-1983).

The unsuccessful integration to local public schools during the 1950s pivoted, in part, on the fact that access to local schools was not guaranteed. Alternative arrangements were often far from adequate, family and community ties often broken by boarding at distant schools:

*At Armstrong, Ontario, just 240 miles north-east of Kenora, the local school board [would] not allow Indian children to attend the local school, contending that the Indian parents [were] not taxpayers but squatters on Crown land. So the children, like Charlie Wenjack, [were] separated from their parents for ten months in the year by being sent to residential schools hundreds of miles from their homes (Adams 1970: 38).*

In 1960, as my older brother walked me to kindergarten, we met a classmate from Brian's

grade five classroom. He had a new haircut that advertised his Aboriginal heritage. As we watched, he was swarmed by four boys of the same age. Always teased, now they brutalised him for daring to wear a *Mohawk*. I learned a deep lesson as my brother stepped into the fray to assist his friend. Afterwards, Brian told me he knew they had no chance of winning (it was four on two) but that was not the point. Though he deplored violence, he felt that accepting people in their difference was worth fighting for. Indeed, integration to the provincial schools meant that Native children were no longer isolated from dominant society, but the result was that they often experienced racism directly from their classmates. Charlie Wenjack's story remains topical because he became the inspiration for a federal inquiry into the Indian Affairs' education system when he died from exposure beside the railway tracks on October 22, 1966 (37). The story of the Mohawk boy in my brother's class also remains topical because his *Mohawk* would still elicit a trouncing in many school yards today.

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Charlie was nine when he first attended school, and he understood very little English. The Cecilia Jeffrey Residential School was being used as a dormitory for 150 children integrated to the local public schools at Kenora. Charlie was considered a slow learner. At 12-years-old he was miserable in his third year of *opportunity classes*, so miserable that "he died trying to walk 400 miles home to his father" (Adams: 29). Unfortunately, Charlie's story was not an isolated incident. Nine other children ran away from the Cecilia Jeffrey school on the day Charlie did, though the others were found and returned (50). The preponderance of runaways is a theme picked up by Fred (1988), Johnson (1988) and the former students at Kamloops Indian Residential School (Haig-Brown,

1988). They all suggest the frequency of runaways - sometimes numbering three to six students at a time - was "a graphic plea to those at home to save them from their misery" (Haig-Brown: 109-110). Yet runaways, drop-outs, denial of access to local regular schools and the failure of educational policy to address the cultural bias in standard curricula were all compounded by a greater political context.

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In The Poverty Wall (1970), Ian Adams examines the gap between rich and poor in Canada as a political and social policy impacting on the population through a number of social institutions, including education. This gap is "built of greed, racism, and the misery of... one-third of our nation's population [who] lives in poverty" (cover). In the 1960s, the Dominion Bureau of Statistics identified several levels of poverty through surveys. It also found that a combination of two or more points from the following seven-point list of indicators meant "the family is likely to stay poor" (19-20):

- 1/ the head of the family has no more than an elementary school education;
- 2/ the family lives in a rural area;
- 3/ the family lives in the Atlantic provinces;
- 4/ the head of the family is not working;
- 5/ no member of the family has worked during the year;
- 6/ the head of the family is 65 or older;
- 7/ the head of the family is a woman (Adams: 19).

Even in contemporary times, many families can check two or more points on that list.

While the poverty wall is higher for the chronically poor than for those who have fallen on temporary bad times, it is a virtually insurmountable barrier to success for First Nations people (27). In 1969, an eighth point was identified as a factor in chronic poverty:

*In the Trefan Court area of Toronto... a year-long study... concluded that many of the so-called 'opportunity classes' ...were nothing more than dead ends, and that the decisions to put [students] there were made not so much on the basis of intelligence as on economic back-ground. The classes teach such skills as basic wood-working, babysitting, and muffin-making ... [and] children were brainwashed into believing they could do no better (115).*

"The technology of education was ...freezing conditions in society to prevent children of low-income families from progressing upwards" (115).

Adams (1970) suggests that because Charlie was poor and Ojibway, he had two strikes against him. Clearly a multitude of other forces contributed to his poverty:

*It was revealed in the House of Commons on July 7, 1969, that during the 1967-68 fiscal year, the federal government had contributed \$7.2 million to the post-secondary education of foreign students in Canada - \$4,320,000 of that amount, more than half, was spent on foreign undergraduate students. By comparison, during the same period, the government spent \$312,603 for the post-secondary education of Canadian Indians and Eskimos. Of this amount, \$311,103 was spent at the undergraduate level (115).*

Foreign university students were subsidised with 23 times more support than Canada's Aboriginal students received. A grand total of just \$1500 was granted in support of Native Graduate students in 1968. An even starker contrast in the opportunities for improvement through education is drawn when the national funding for Native education is compared to the fringe benefits granted to top-ranking educators. In 1969, Ontario's North York School Board trustees "spent \$74,000 in a series of farewell dinners for the Borough's Director of Education, a man earning \$35,000 a year" (Adams: foreword).

In the meantime, the Aboriginal community was demanding greater autonomy, laying the foundation for the Native Survival School movement and the shift from federal to band-operated schools (Maclean 1973). That two-fisted demand for community input was part of a universal revival of Aboriginal traditions and world view that took root as

the indigenous nations of Canada and the USA were finally recognised as full-fledged citizens, with a right to freedom of speech and religion in the late 1960s. However, the fact that the education system actively participates in replicating the gap between those that have and those that have not in this country (Adams 1970), is aptly illustrated by the fiscal history of the Native Survival Schools in Canada. The local boards of education that adopted the Plains Indian Cultural School in Calgary and Wandering Spirit Survival School in Toronto each denied those schools sufficient funding to pay their cultural teachers (Novak et al. 1983; Regnier 1994; Berg & Shirt TC 1998) This point bears repeating. Though those boards of education recognised they were *Culture* Schools, their funding supported only academic programmes. As a result, the schools were forced to divide their attention and energy between teaching and fund-raising for the very programmes that had inspired their founding in the first place (Regnier 1994; Berg & Shirt TC 1998).

<<<< >>>>

When Charlie attended school in Kenora the deficit model was the most popular explanation for student failure among minority groups. But it is important to note that the seven-point list of indicators for poverty fails to account for all of the strikes lined up against Charlie: He was poor, Native, raised in a rural area, only his father was living, he was 400 miles from home and community, he was a late starter in school, and a lack of facility with English put him in the *opportunity class* (Adams 1970). As I count it, that makes eight strikes. No wonder First Nations leaders felt the need to demand control of their own education. Even if he had stayed until he graduated, integration would not have delivered a cure for the problems he faced in his schooling.

Yet there *was* some progress. The number of Indians graduating from grade twelve rose from 3.4% to 16% by the mid-1970s (Urion: 102). This was facilitated in part by the establishment of special Native Teacher training programs in the early 1970s, followed by university programs in Law, Education and Native Studies (Urion 1993). The province of Ontario also established a criterion that allowed Aboriginal communities to demand Native representation on public school boards (Burnaby 1980). Various studies supported the demands of Aboriginal communities who entered negotiations with the federal government for greater control of educational policy and pedagogy. In 1969, a long sit-in at the Blue Quills Residential School in Alberta, Pauline's alma mater, eventually led to the success of the Saddle Lake band in negotiating *joint* control of the school in 1969 (Maclean 1973). Then, in 1973, the Rae-Edzo-Chief Jimmy Bruneau Elementary School in the Northwest Territories was built after extensive consultations with the community about the school's architecture, the school calendar and the need for culture-sensitive programmes that accommodated student participation in community hunting trips (Maclean 1973).

In the meantime, below the 49th parallel, the Navajo Nation founded the Rough Rock Demonstration School (1966) in Arizona. It featured:

*pre-school to grade 12 offering a bilingual-bicultural program, which exposed pupils to the values and customs of both the Navajo and the dominant American culture. The goal of the school was that students... maintain an equilibrium between the two cultures (cited in Pellerin: 13).*

BIA reviews of the school in 1970, 1972, and 1974 were so positive the school became a model for other Native-directed schools in the USA (13). However, The Red School House (Lyons 1972), established at St. Paul, Minnesota, recognised there were differences in an urban student's bi-cultural experience, and fostered a stronger pride

through the revival of Native culture, while educating students to "the problems associated with being in a modern urban environment... It was named one of ten model Indian schools" in the USA in 1976 (14).

In the midst of this cluster of success stories for Native-directed education, the Canadian government introduced the White Paper (1969), establishing its intent to "relinquish its responsibilities to the Indian peoples and turn them over to the provinces... [This would] result in the cessation of all federal funding for Indian education" (14). There were protest demonstrations all across the country. The Chiefs of Alberta responded by writing Citizens Plus (1970), which was soon nick-named The Red Paper. The Manitoba Indian Brotherhood's (MIB) report, Wahbung: Our Tomorrows (1971), articulated a history of neglect and abuse and presented a vision of self-directed community schools. Finally, the National Indian Brotherhood (NIB) presented a policy paper called Indian Control of Indian Education (1972) to the government. Among the accommodations the NIB asked for were:

- 1/ unbiased textbooks
- 2/ culturally relevant and culturally sensitive curriculum
- 3/ awareness training in dominant norms and values for Native students
- 4/ Native culture and history courses for non-Native students
- 5/ Native teacher-training
- 6/ community control of education
- 7/ core and immersion First Nations language programmes
- 8/ core and immersion culture classes for Native students
- 9/ greater provisions for adult training and post-secondary education (NIB 1972)

The success of Native-directed schools in the USA, the NIB's prescription for a revision of Native education policy, the public protest voiced over The White Paper and the continual failure of other education programmes to address the needs of this group collectively contributed to the federal government's *acceptance in principal* of the NIB

proposals in 1973.

But with all change comes a resistance to change. In 1974, Renaud saw evidence of "a backlash here and there across the country" (41). While the provincial Ministries of Education acknowledged the integration policy of 1951 had failed Native students (41), the same policy supplied "substantial capital gains grants to build new classrooms, gymnasiums, and auditoriums, and equip new labs... [and] paid full per capita cost of operations " to the affected school boards (39). As fresh policies redirected funds into Native-run schools, the "school trustees and teachers and their respective organizations... show[ed] signs of negative reaction" to the shift in funding structures (Renaud: 41).

In 1974, the Native Peoples' Caravan to Ottawa (NPCO) saw 200 Aboriginal activists descend on Parliament Hill with a manifesto that protested conditions on the reserves and in urban ghettos. Their primary goal, during the long march from British Columbia to the capital, was to educate the Canadian public. The context for a Native Survival School movement in Canada was several centuries of neglect and frustration, but it was the context for many other movements for change as well. During the few short weeks following the conflict between the RCMP riot squad and NCPO activists at the Native Peoples' Embassy, a political network was founded that demanded change in all areas of their lives: government structures, health services, shelter, education. Tasks were designated to people from one end of the country to the other, and Pauline decided she would work for the children.

The demand for community-based, self-directed schooling developed with two thrusts because - despite a long list of common problems - urban Natives and reserve Indians had different needs (Berg & Shirt TC 1997, TC 1998). The reserves were struggling to retain their population, even as they worked to improve school retention. The Native

Survival Schools had developed primarily as an urban phenomenon (Pellerin 1982; Regnier 1987), and they focused on fostering the revival of ancient Earth-centred traditions where the students otherwise had little opportunity to experience a *natural* environment (Lewis T12 1996a, T13 1996b). In both communities, there was concern for security in the children's home environment as well as their academic progress.

As with any activist project, the Survival School movement met its share of difficulty in expanding its membership. When a Survival School failed to see its fourth year, it was usually because a) it was not grounded in the traditional teachings, b) it had failed to engage sufficient involvement of the local community, c) it was unable to sort out the split in attention between cultural and financial issues, or d) any combination of the above (Regnier TEL 1995; Berg & Shirt TC 1997). However, some schools failed when they ran into leadership problems or when an internalized racism developed in the case of multi-nation schools (Berg & Shirt TC 1998).

In Canada, the Survival School movement is usually referred to as a strong network of perhaps six to eight schools. The focus of educators continually returns to the models established by: T'lisalagi'lakw School in Alert Bay, British Columbia (1974); Wandering Spirit Survival School in Toronto (1976); Kumtuks Alternative School in Vancouver (1976); Kanewake Survival School on the Caughnawaga reserve near Montreal (1978); Plains Indian Cultural Survival School in Calgary (1979); and the Saskatoon Native Survival School (1980), later renamed Joe Duquette High School (Lyons 1979; Pellerin 1982; Novak et al. 1983; Haig-Brown et al. 1997). As Regnier (TEL 1995) says, like WSSS, the Survival Schools that survived to that critical fourth year and beyond were the ones that founded their curricula in the teachings of the Medicine Wheel.

In sympathy for the goals established by the Survival School movement, the number

of band-run schools - as opposed to federally-controlled reserve schools - rose from 53 in 1975 to 312 by 1990. Of course, these statistics need to be read in context with the massive exodus from the reserves to the urban centers. Yet 44% of Native students were attending band schools, with an increase to a 47% graduation rate from grade twelve nationally by 1990 (Urion 1993). The Survival Schools cannot boast of a strong influence over the national school retention figures directly, mainly because the schools themselves were small in both their student population and the number of schools that found a way to survive. Yet this narrative history suggests their success cannot be quantified simply in terms of their effect on statistics. Other tools must be discovered to measure their success (Berg & Shirt TC 1998).

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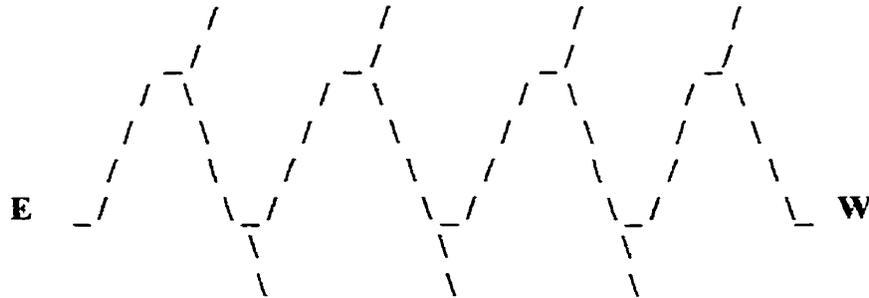
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**THE LIFE PATH**



A person enters the physical world by the Eastern Doorway and progresses through life until they pass back into the Spirit World at the Western Doorway. The spurs from the life path represent distractions from the spiritual contract. Adapted from Densmore 1970: 11.

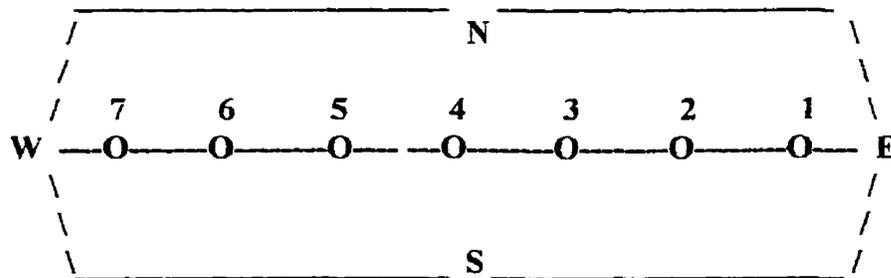
**THE SEVEN STAGES IN THE LODGE OF LIFE**

Legend

- W Western Doorway
- N Northern Doorway
- E Eastern Doorway
- S Southern Doorway
- O-- the life path

The Stages

1. Good Life (0-7)
2. Wondering Life (7-14)
3. Fast/ Wandering Life (14-21)
4. Truth/ Balancing Life(21-28)
5. Planning/ Planting Life (28-35)
6. Doing/ Harvest Life (35-42)
7. Elder/ Teaching Life (42- death)

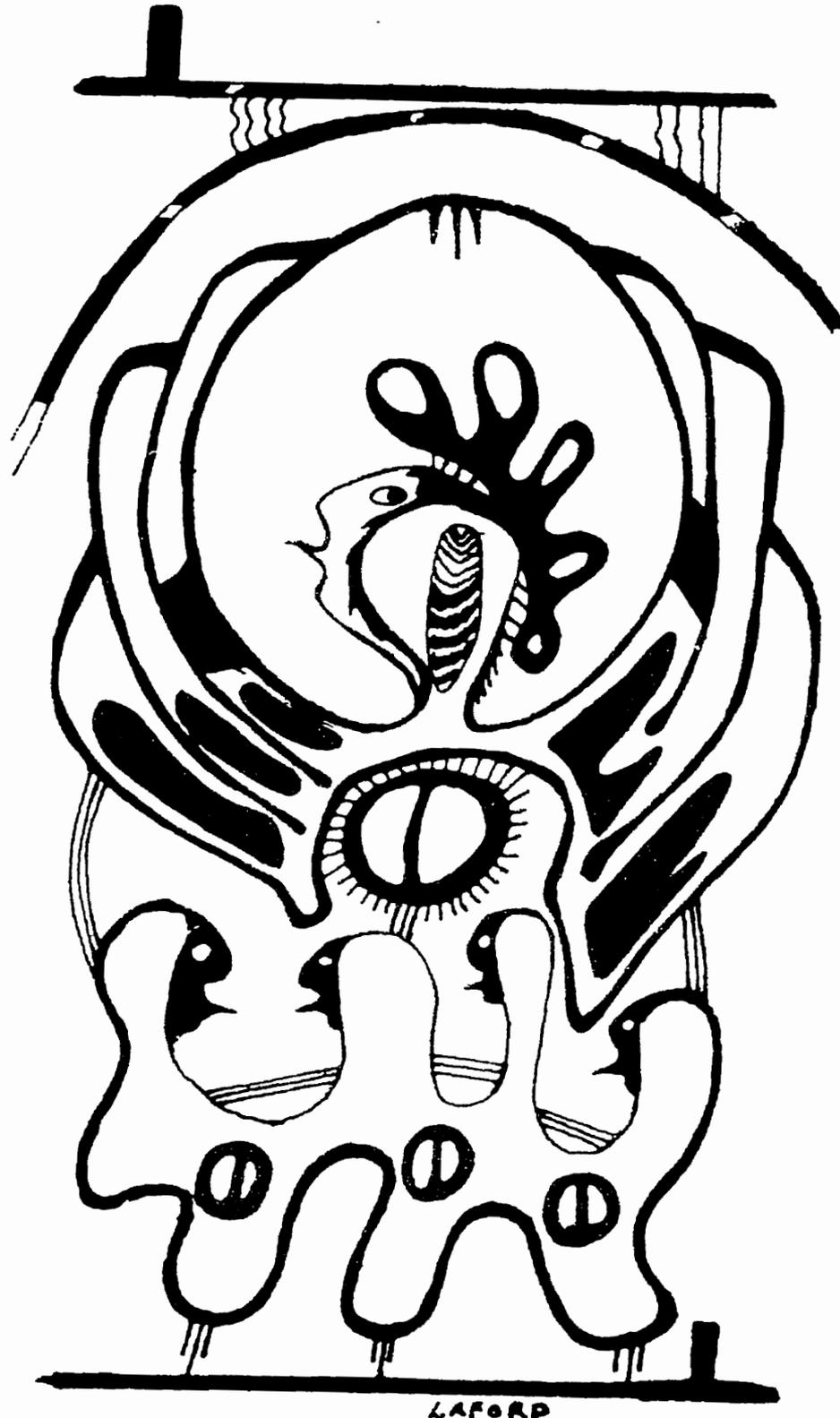


The Lodge has four doorways, at the cardinal points. A person enters through the Eastern Doorway at birth and passes on through the Western Doorway. The Seven Stages are periods of seven years. Adapted from Dumont 1990: 146.

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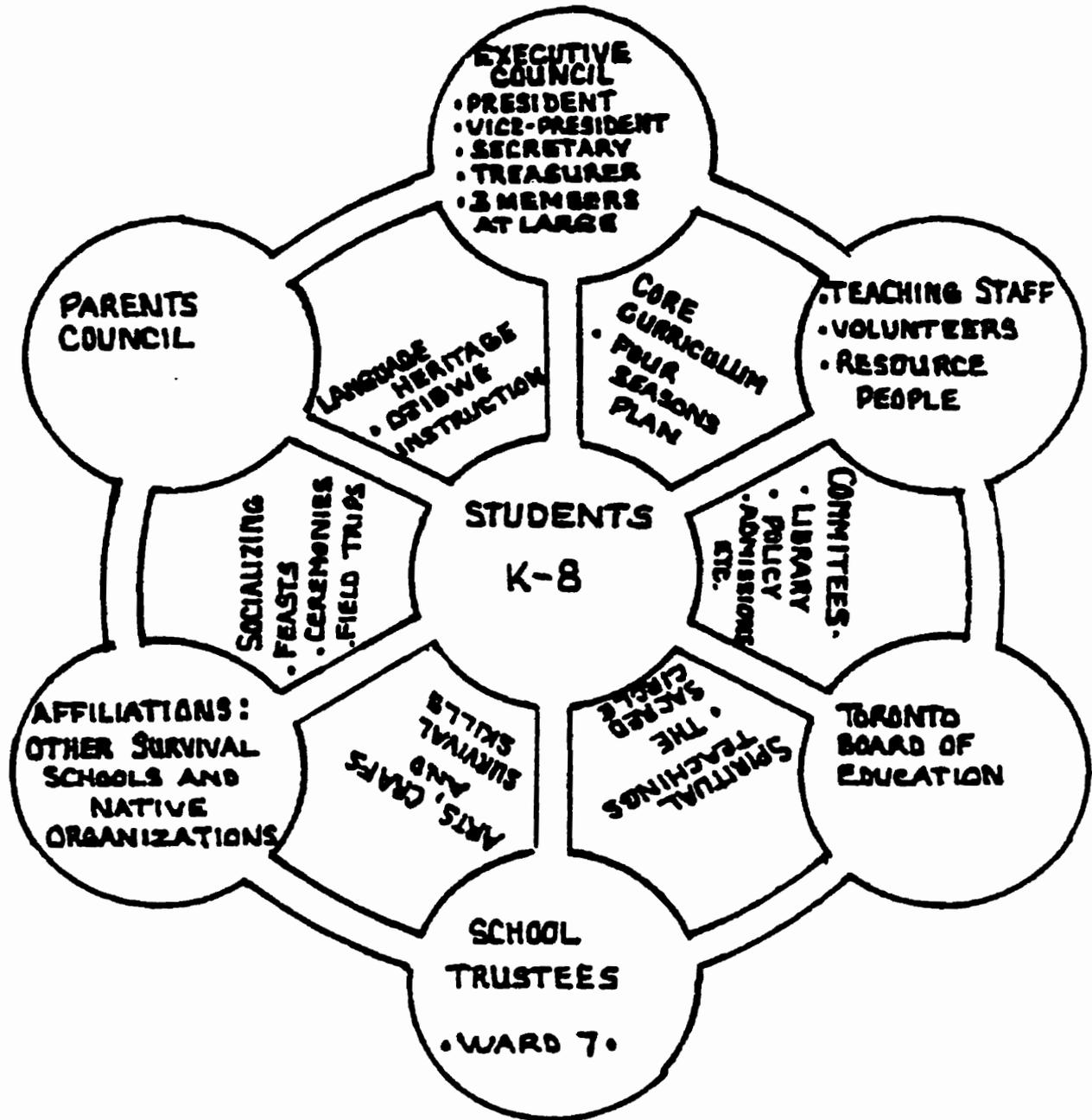
WSSS Logo by Lafort.  
Wandering Sprit Survival School Information Handbook: cover 1983.  
WSSS archives, reproduced with permission from Pauline Shirt.

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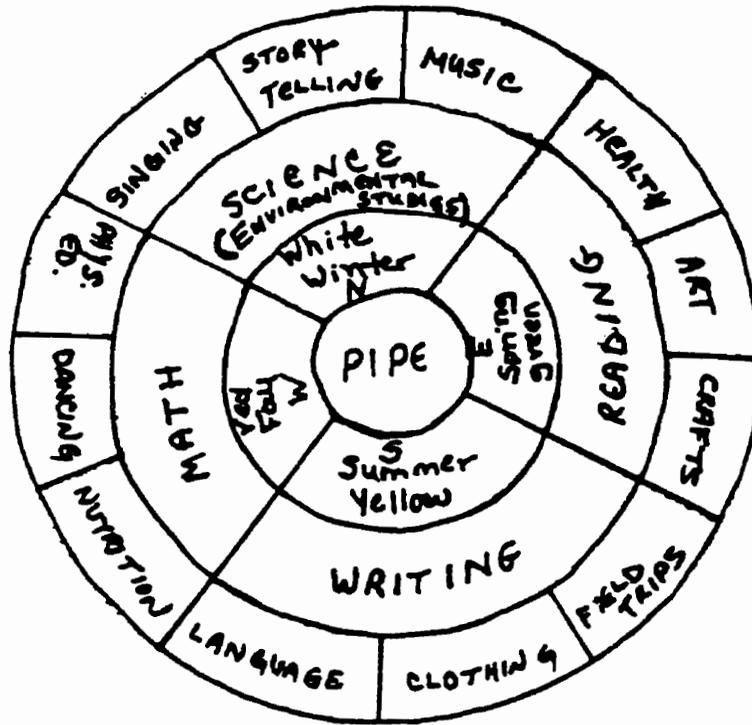


LAFORD

WSSS School Community (1983), WSSS Handbook  
Reproduced with permission from Pauline Shirt.

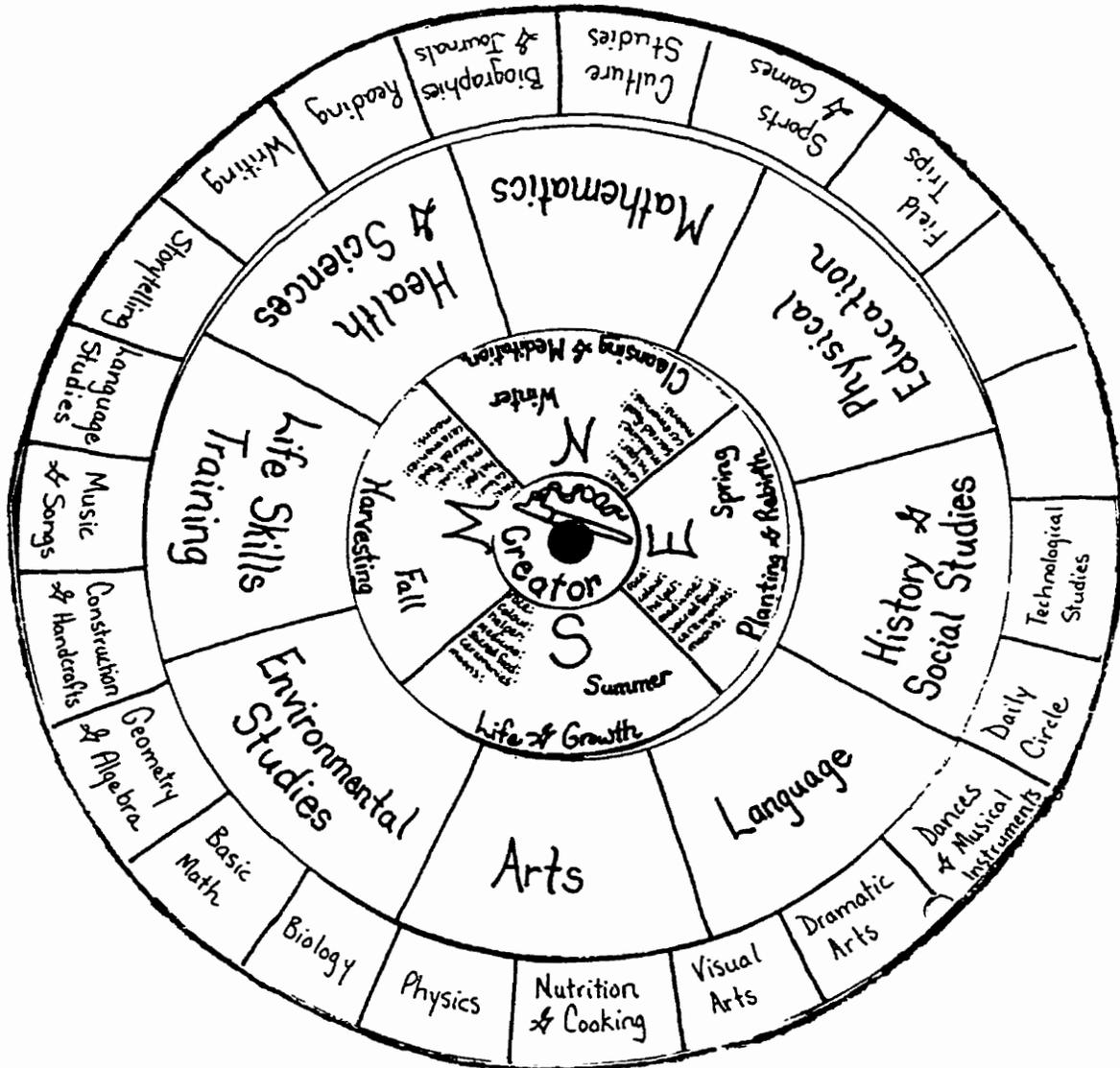


Four Seasons Curriculum Outline (1983), WSSS Handbook  
 Reproduced with permission from Pauline Shirt.



	FALL	WINTER	SPRING	SUMMER
Date	Sept. 21- Dec. 20	Dec. 21- March 20	March 21- June 20	June 21- Sept. 20
Theme	Thanksgiving ( Harvesting)	Cleansing ( Feasting)	Planting ( Rebirth)	Life and Growth ( Berry Picking)
Direction	West	North	East	South
Colour	Red	White	Yellow	Green
Animal	Buffalo (Grand Old Man)	Bear ( Healer)	Eagle ( Messenger)	Turtle ( Messenger)
Medicine Plant	Sage	Cedar	Tobacco	Sweetgrass

The Teaching Wheel for a Four Seasons Curriculum  
developed by Pauline Shirt, drawn by Sharon Berg, 1993



Riot on the Hill, RCMP and Native People's Caravan, 1974.  
CP Wire Photo, WSSS archives, reproduced with permission from Pauline Shirt.

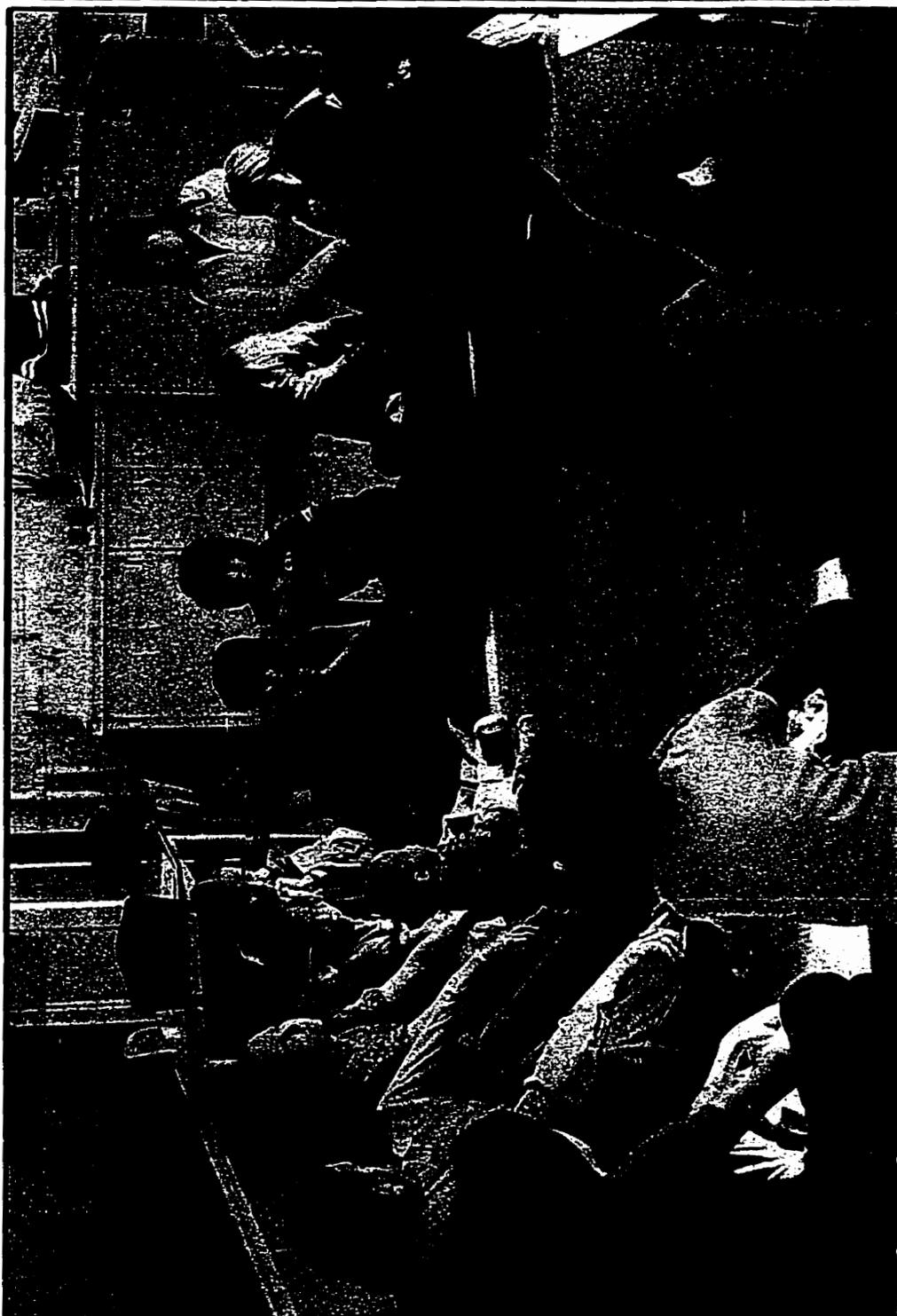


The Harper Family by Ursula Heller, 1981.  
WSSS archives, reproduced with permission from Pauline Shirt.

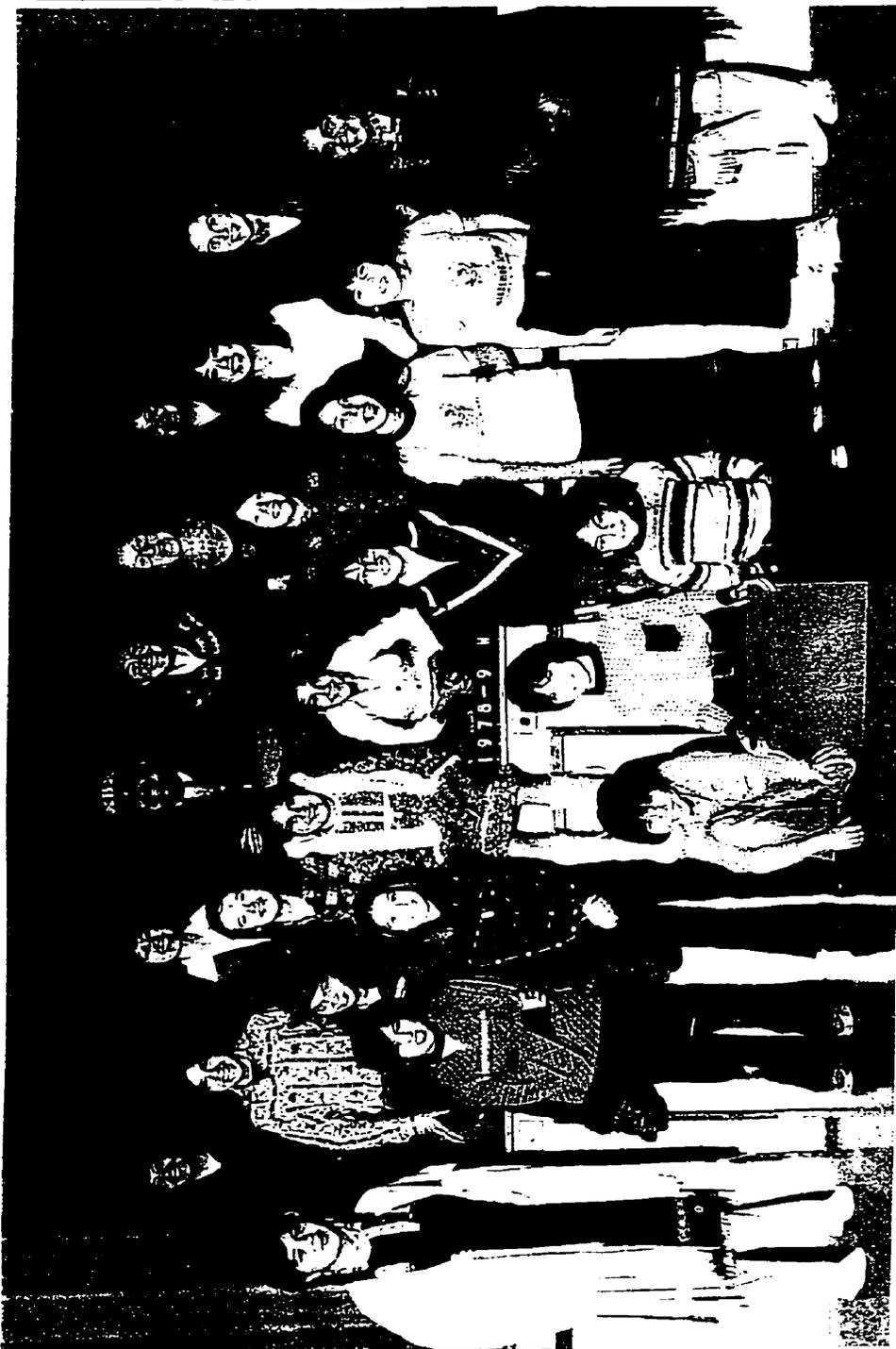
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The morning Sweetgrass Circle at WSSS, 1978.  
Going Home To the Red Path by Laura Reid. *Hourglass*, volume 5, number 1.  
WSSS archives, reproduced with permission from Pauline Shirt.

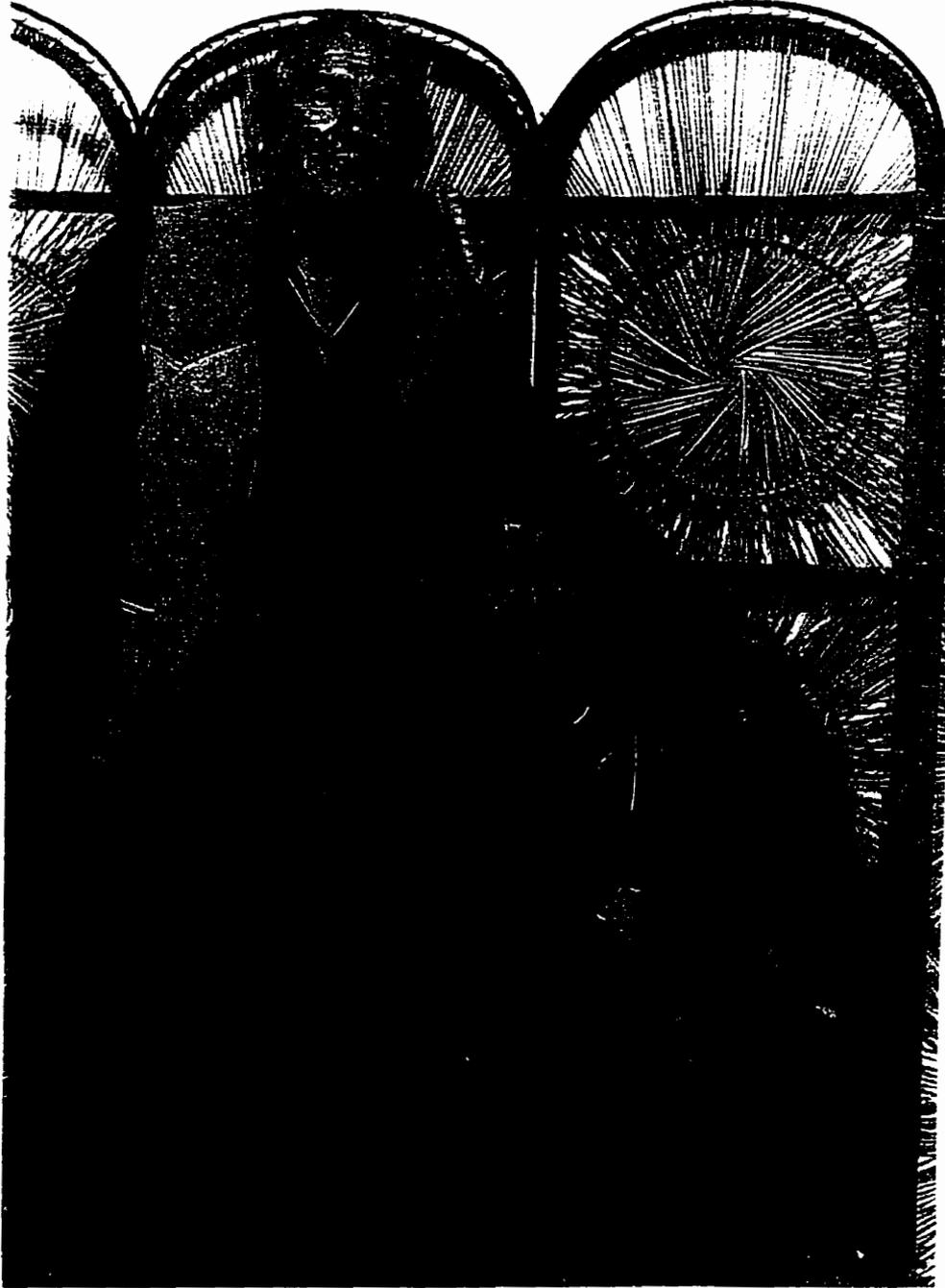


Wandering Spirit Survival School, Walker School Photo, 1978-79.  
WSSS archives, reproduced with permission from Pauline Shirt.



Pauline Shirt and Vern Harper, circa 1990.  
WSSS archives, reproduced with permission from Pauline Shirt.

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**Figure 1**

All Grades	W.S.S.S. AFTERNOON TIMETABLE					October 1979
Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday		
Day 5 (1)	Day 6 (2)	Day 1 (4)	Day 2 (5)	Day 3 (6)		
GIVEAWAY FEAST & FILMS	Jr./ Heritage Lang. - Native Studies	Boys & Girls Day	Jr./ Heritage Lang. - Native Studies	Jr./ Arts & Crafts		
(8)	Sr./ Native Studies - Heritage Lang.	Day 5 (10)	Sr./ Native Studies - Heritage Lang.	Sr./ Winchester P.S.		
THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY	Day 4 (9)	Day 5 (10)	Day 6 (11)	Day 1 (12)		
	Jr./ Heritage Lang. - Native Studies	Boys & Girls Day	Jr./ Heritage Lang. - Arts & Crafts	Jr./ Native Studies		
Day 2 (15)	Day 3 (16)	Day 4 (17)	Day 5 (18)	Day 6 (19)		
Jr./ Native Studies - Heritage Lang.	Jr./ Recreational Activities	Boys & Girls Day	Jr./ Heritage Lang. - Native Studies	Jr./ Arts & Crafts - Heritage Lang.		
Sr./ Heritage Lang. - Native Studies	Sr./ Winchester P.S.		Sr./ Recreational - Heritage Lang.	Sr. Heritage Lang. - Native Studies		
Day 1 (22)	Day 2 (23)	Day 3 (24)	Day 4 (25)	Day 4 (26)		
Jr./ Heritage Lang. - Native Studies	Jr./ Native Studies	Jr./ Recreational Activities	Jr./ Heritage Lang. - Arts & Crafts	P.D. DAY		
Sr./ Native Studies - Heritage Lang.	Sr./ Arts & Crafts	Sr./ Winchester P.S.	Sr./ Native Studies - Heritage Lang.			
Day 5 (29)	Day 6 (30)	Day 1 (31)				
Jr./ Heritage Lang. - Arts & Crafts	Jr./ Recreational Activities	CLASS PARTY				
Sr./ Native Studies - Heritage Lang.	Sr./ Arts & Crafts					

**Figure 2**

All Grades	W.S.S.S. TIMETABLE					1979-1980
Time	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	
9:00-9:45 AM			Sweetgrass Ceremony			
9:45-10:30 AM	Core Curriculum *					
10:30-10:45 AM	Recess					
10:45-12:00	Core Curriculum *					
12:00-1:00 PM	Lunch					
1:00-1:30 PM	Ojibway	Ojibway Lang.	Ojibway Lang.	Ojibway	- Scadding Court -	
1:30-2:15 PM	Language	Girls & Boys Native Studies divided into Jr./Sr. groups		Language	Swimming & Physical Education	
2:15-2:30 PM	Recess					
2:30-3:00 PM	Girls & Boys Native Studies divided into Jr./Sr. groups					
3:00-3:15 PM	Clean-up & Dismissal					
3:15-3:45 PM	Remedial Work					

\* developing skills in listening, speaking, reading, writing, spelling, mathematics

Figure 3

All Grades		W.S.S.S. TIMETABLE				January 1980
Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday		
	(1)	(2)	Day 2 (3) Jr./	Day 3 (4) Jr./ Native Studies		
						Sr./ Heritage Lang. - Sr./ Native Studies - Winchester P.S.
Day 4 (7) Jr./ Heritage Lang.	Day 5 (8) Jr./ Academics - Nutrition	Day 6 (9) Jr./ Heritage Lang. - Native Studies	Day 1 (10) Jr./ Academics - Arts & Crafts	Day 2 (11) Jr./		
Sr./ Feast at Anduhvaun	Sr./ Recreational Activities	Sr./ Heritage Lang. - Native Studies	Sr./Heritage Lang. - Nutrition	Sr./ Heritage Lang. Arts & Crafts		
Day 3 (14) Jr./ Arts & Crafts - Heritage Lang.	Day 4 (15) Jr./ Recreational Activities	Day 5 (16) Jr./ Heritage Lang. - Native Studies	Day 6 (17) Jr./ Nutrition	Day 1 (18) Jr./ Heritage Lang.		
Sr./ Winchester P.S. Arts & Crafts	Sr./ Academics - Arts & Crafts	Sr./ Nutrition	Sr./ Native Studies			
Day 2 (21) Jr./ Heritage Lang. - Nutrition	Day 3 (22) Jr./ Recreational Activities	Day 4 (23) Jr./ Heritage Lang. - Native Studies	Day 5 (24) Jr./ Academics - Arts & Crafts	Day 6 (25) Jr./ Heritage Lang. - Recreational		
Sr./ Arts & Crafts Nutrition	Sr./ Winchester P.S. Recreational	Sr./ Academics -	Sr./ Native Studies	Sr./ Heritage Lang. -		
--- Native Way School Conference at Native Canadian Centre ---						
Day 1 (28) Jr./ Heritage Lang. - Nutrition	Day 2 (29) Jr./ Arts & Crafts - Academics	Day 3 (30) Jr./ Enoch Turner Schoolhouse	Day 4 (31) Jr./ Heritage Lang. - Native Studies			
Sr./ Native Studies	Sr./ Enoch Turner Schoolhouse	Sr./ Winchester P.S.	Sr./ Academics - Nutrition			

**Figure 4**

<b>All Grades</b>		<b>W.S.S.S. TIMETABLE</b>			<b>February 1980</b>
<b>Monday</b>	<b>Tuesday</b>	<b>Wednesday</b>	<b>Thursday</b>	<b>Friday</b>	
Day 5 (4)	Day 6 (5)	Day 1 (6)	Day 2 (7)	P.D. Day (1)	
Jr./ Recreational Activities - FEAST -	Jr./ Heritage Lang. - Native Studies	Jr./ Academics - Arts & Crafts	Jr./ Nutrition	Jr./ Heritage Lang. -	
Sr./ Recreational Activities	Sr./ Heritage Lang. - Native Studies	Sr./ Heritage Lang. - Nutrition	Sr./ Academics - Arts & Crafts	Sr./ Winchester P.S.	
Day 4 (11)	Day 5 (12)	Day 6 (13)	Day 1 (14)	Day 2 (15)	
Jr./ Recreational Activities	Jr./ Heritage Lang. - Native Studies	Jr./ Heritage Lang. - Arts & Crafts	PARTY - FOR ALL -	Jr./ Heritage Lang. - Nutrition	
Sr./ Academics - Arts & Crafts	Sr./ Heritage Lang. - Nutrition	Sr./ Heritage Lang. - Native Studies		Sr./ Heritage Lang. - Recreational	
Day 3 (18)	Day 4 (19)	Day 5 (20)	Day 6 (21)	Day 1 (22)	
Jr./ Heritage Lang.	Jr./ Recreational Activities	Jr./ Heritage Lang. - Native Studies	Jr./ Arts & Crafts	Jr./ Academics -	
Sr./ Winchester P.S.	Sr./ Academics - Arts & Crafts	Sr./ Heritage Lang. - Nutrition	Sr./ Native Studies	Sr./ Heritage Lang. - Recreational	
Day 2 (25)	Day 3 (26)	Day 4 (27)	Day 5 (28)	Day 6 (29)	
Jr./ Heritage Lang. - Native Studies	Jr./ Arts & Crafts	Jr./ Heritage Lang. - Academics	Jr./ Heritage Lang. - Native Studies	Jr./ Recreational Activities	
Sr./ Native Studies	Sr./ Winchester P.S.	Sr./ Arts & Crafts	Sr./ Native Studies	Sr./ Academics - Recreational	

**Figure 5**

<b>Gr. 6-8</b>	<b>W.S.S.S. TIMETABLE</b>					<b>1983 - 1984</b>
<b>Time</b>	<b>Monday</b>	<b>Tuesday</b>	<b>Wednesday</b>	<b>Thursday</b>	<b>Friday</b>	
9:00-9:30 AM	Circle	Circle	Circle	Circle	Circle	
9:30-10:30 AM	Language Arts (core)	Language Arts (4 Seasons Curriculum)	Language Arts (core)	Language Arts (4 Seasons Curriculum)	Language Arts (core)	
10:30-10:45 AM	----- Recess -----					
10:45-11:00 AM	Language Arts (continued)	Language Arts (continued)	Language Arts (continued)	Language Arts (continued)	Language Arts (continued)	
11:00-11:30 AM	Ojibway Lang.	Ojibway Lang.	Ojibway Lang.	Ojibway Lang.	Ojibway Lang.	
12:00-1:00 PM	----- Lunch -----					
1:00-2:15 PM	Mathematics/ Environmental Studies (4SC)*	Mathematics/ Drumming	Mathematics/ Environmental Studies (4SC)*	Mathematics/ Drumming	- Scadding Court - Swimming & Phys. Ed.	
2:15-2:30 PM	----- Recess -----					
2:30-3:00 PM	French -	French -	French -	French -		
3:00-3:30 PM	Novel Reading (Silent Reading)	U.S.S.R.	Novel Reading (Silent Reading)	U.S.S.R. -	- Scadding Court - (continued)	
3:30-4:00 PM	----- Remedial Work -----					

\* Arts & Crafts are an integral to the 4 Seasons Curriculum, Language Arts/Mathematics program. Science and Social Studies are also included in these periods

Figure 6

**Figure 6**

<b>Gr. K-Primary</b>		<b>W.S.S.S. TIMETABLE</b>				<b>1983 - 1984</b>
Time	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	
9:00-9:30 AM	Circle	Circle	Circle	Circle	Circle	
9:30-10:00 AM	Ojibway Lang.	Ojibway Lang.	Ojibway Lang.	Ojibway Lang.	Language	
10:00-10:30 AM	Native Teachings	Riverdale Public Library/ Lang. & Math **	Native Teachings	Native Teachings	& Math *	
10:30-10:45 AM	----- Recess -----					
10:45-11:45 AM	Lang. & Math / Music	Lang. & Math / Story & Poems	Lang. & Math / Music	Lang. & Math / Story & Poems	TIES	
12:00-1:00 PM	----- Lunch -----					
1:00-2:15 PM	Lang. & Math	Lang. & Math	Lang. & Math	Lang. & Math	- Scadding Court - Swimming & Phys. Ed.	
2:15-2:30 PM	----- Recess -----					**
2:30-3:00 PM	Language/ Story & Poetry	Language/ Music	Language/ Story & Poetry	Language/ Music	- Scadding Court (continued)	
3:05-3:25 PM	----- Prepare Students for Buses -----					
3:25 PM	----- Students Board Buses -----					
3:30 PM	----- Remedial Work -----					
3:30-4:00 PM						

\* Arts & Crafts are an integral to the 4 Seasons Curriculum/Language Arts/Mathematics program & Science & Social Studies are also included in these periods.  
\*\* switches every second week

**Figure 7**

<b>Gr. 3-6</b>		<b>W.S.S.S. TIMETABLE</b>				<b>1983 - 1984</b>
Time	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	
9:00-9:30 AM	Circle	Circle	Circle	Circle	Circle	
9:30-10:00 AM	Discussion & Handwriting	Discussion & Handwriting	Discussion & Handwriting	Discussion & Handwriting	Discussion & Handwriting	
10:00-10:30 AM	Ojibway Lang.	Ojibway Lang.	Ojibway Lang.	Ojibway Lang.	Ojibway Lang.	
10:30-10:45 AM	----- Recess -----					
10:45-11:35 AM	Lang. & Math (individual work) Creative Writing/ (books)	Animal Stories/ Language Arts	Letters/ Creative/ Language Arts	11:00 Storytime Native Teachings	Spelling & Phonics	
11:35- 11:50 AM	Silent Reading		Silent Reading	Silent Reading		
11:50-12:00	----- Tidy-up & say Prayer -----					
12:00-1:00 PM	----- Lunch -----					
1:00-1:45 PM	----- continue work from AM -----					- Scadding Court - Swimming & Phys. Ed.
1:45-2:15 PM	Native Teachings	Drumming & Culture	Native Teachings	Drumming & Culture		
2:15-2:30 PM	----- Recess -----					
2:30-3:00 PM	----- Individual Work or Free Time -----					- Scadding Court
3:05-3:25 PM	French	French	French	French	(continued)	
3:30 PM	----- Students Board Buses -----					
3:30-4:00 PM	----- Remedial Work -----					

\* Arts & Crafts are an integral to the 4 Seasons Curriculum/Language Arts/Mathematics program & Science & Social Studies are also included in these periods

**AFTER FOUR TEACHING CIRCLES\***

January	6	(class cancelled due to previous commitment)
	13	LEGENDS: The Nanabush Stories, etc.)
	20	THE 4 DIRECTIONS: Helpers & Medicines
	27	EAGLE TEACHINGS
February	3	(class cancelled by P.T.A.)
	10	THE 4 RACES & MEDITATION
	17	WINTER TEACHINGS
	24	THE 7 STAGES OF LIFE
March	3	THE MEDICINE WHEEL
	10	CLANS & WAMPUM BELTS
	17	(P.A. Day)
	24	SPRING TEACHINGS
	31	SPIRITUAL FASTS: Cleansing & Sweatlodge
April	7	STRAWBERRIES & FIRST MEDICINES
	14	PLANTING TIME: Rebirth & Reproduction
	21	GRANDMOTHER MOON
	28	BEING CREATIVE: songs, dances, etc.
May	5	SUMMER TEACHINGS
	12	PREPARING FOR CEREMONIES
	19	PICKING MEDICINES & STORING FOODS
	26	THE TRINKET SYSTEM: myths & stereotypes
June	2	CEREMONIES: Thanksgiving, Feast of the Dead, etc.
	9	GUEST ELDER: T.B.A.
	16	PREPARING FOR FEASTS & GIVE AWAYS
	23	FEAST & GIVE AWAY CEREMONY: last class

*\* The traditional calendar is 13 months. The Teaching Schedule has been adjusted to reflect the school's use of a 12 month calendar and once-a-week scheduling of classes (Shirt & Berg, 1993).*

## A COMPOSITE OF FIRST NATIONS CALENDARS<sup>1</sup>

**January** - Kisaapisim - The Great Moon (of returning hope of spring) - (Plains Cree)  
 Ap-ta-bi-poon-kee-zis - Half Winter Moon - Saulteaux - (Plains Ojibway)  
 E t'za hee za - Cold Moon - Dene (Chipewyan)  
 Wee-te-hi - Hard Time Moon - Assiniboine  
 Witehi-wi - Hard Month Moon - Dakota (Sioux)  
 Ki-se-pi-sim - A Time To Be Kind Month - (Chippewa-Cree)  
 Naktasu - Sanka (Kootenay)  
 Ichachachak Atlim - Her Cold Moon - Wisham  
 Wilupup - Cold Weather Moon - Nimipu (Nez Perce)  
 GeeTchee Mahneeco Geezis - Great Spirit Moon - Anishinabe (Ojibway)  
 Thwenssiistch - Midwinter Moon - Selish (Flathead)  
 Witehi - Tree Popping Moon - Lakota (Sioux)  
 Suanpana - Man Moon - Hlanoma (Taos)

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**February** - Nipko Natanik - Black Bear Month - Sanka (Kootenay)  
 Towinpana - Winter Moon - Hlanoma (Taos)  
 Wachkun Aktlmin - Shoulder Moon - Wisham  
 Shkushush - Windy Moon - Spukane (Spokan)  
 Bobiodagenis - Wind Scattering Leaves Over Crust of Snow Moon  
 - Panawampskewiak (Penobscot)  
 Mikisiwpisim - Eagle Moon - (Plains Cree)  
 Mi-gis-ew-kee-zis - Big Moon - Saulteaux - (Plains Ojibway)  
 de deyni cho za - Bald Eagle Moon - Dene (Chipewyan)  
 Am-hanska - Long Day Moon - Assiniboine  
 Wicata-wi - The Raccoon Moon - Dakota (Sioux)  
 Mi-ki-siw-pi-sim - Bald Eagle Moon - (Chippewa-Cree)

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**March** - Wanhlapan - Hlikok Natanik - Melting Snow Month - Sanka (Kootenay)  
 Alasinmoqst - Seventh Moon - Wisham  
 Strong Wind Moon - Hlanoma (Taos)  
 Buoninge - Big Cloud Moon - Chiwere (Oto)  
 Lahhgeejul - Squirrel Moon - Maklaks (Modoc)  
 Schinidhimun - Buttercup Moon - Spukane (Spokan)  
 Penodarnwigizus - Egg-laying Moon - Panawampskewiak (Penobscot)  
 Niskipisim - Goose Moon - (Plains Cree)  
 Nik-ki-kee-zis - Goose Moon - Saulteaux - (Plains Ojibway)  
 Ha za - Wild Geese Moon - Dene (Chipewyan)  
 Wicinstayazan - Sore Eye Moon - Assiniboine  
 Nis-ki-pi-sim - Wild Goose Month - (Chippewa-Cree)  
 Istawicayazan-wi - The Sore Eye Moon - Dakota (Sioux)

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**April** - Kak'kmi Natanik - Earth Cracking Moon - Sanka (Kootenay)  
 Alakohtlkt Aktlmin - Eighth Moon - Wisham

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<sup>1</sup>Note: There are 13 Moons in the traditional First Nations Calendar

Shkapsh - Spring Moon - Spukane (Spokan)  
 Sigwanamegwi-gizus - Spring Fish Moon - Panawampskewiak (Penobscot)  
 Wi'topa - Moon of New Grass - Lakota (Sioux)  
 Nahapana - Ashes Moon - Hlanoma (Taos)  
 Utendubyou - Early Vegetation Moon - Maklaks (Modoc)  
 Ayikipisim - Frog Moon - (Plains Cree)  
 Muk-ka-kew-kee-zis - Frog Moon - Saulteaux - (Plains Ojibway)  
 Tsa'li za - Frog Moon - Dene (Chipewyan)  
 Ta be'ha wi - Frog Moon - Assiniboine  
 Magaokadi-wi - Moon in which Geese Lay Eggs - Dakota (Sioux)  
 Ah-yi-ki-pi-sim - Frog Moon - (Chippewa-Cree)

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**May** - Alqis Aktlmin - Nineth Moon - Wisham

Spetum Spukaniis - Bitterroot Moon - Selish (Flathead)  
 Wozupiwi - When Ponies Shed Moon - Lakota (Sioux)  
 Iakapana - Corn Planting Moon - Hlanoma (Taos)  
 Esaawuck - Eggs Time - Maklaks (Modoc)  
 Kikaigizus - Planting Moon - Panawampskewiak (Penobscot)  
 O'hlomi Natanik - Deep Water Moon - Sanka (Kootenay)  
 Sakipakawpisim - Budding Moon - (Plains Cree)  
 Wozupi-wi - The Planting Moon - Dakota (Sioux)  
 Sag-ki-pa-kaw-o-kee-zis - Budding Moon - Saulteaux - (Plains Ojibway)  
 a geze za - Egg Laying Moon - Dene (Chipewyan)  
 Wa'h-pe ooye-hanwi - Leaf Moon - Assiniboine  
 Sah-ki-pah-kahw-pi-sim - Blooming Month - (Chippewa-Cree)

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**June** - Kokokupku Natanik - Ripening Strawberries Moon - Sanka (Kootenay)

Kabnakaiapana - Corn Tassels Appear Moon - Hlanoma (Taos)  
 Chakshilit Aktlmin - Rotten Moon - Wisham  
 Melaonye - Hoeing Corn Moon - Chiwere (Oto)  
 Bahhaawc - Apaws Digging Moon - Maklaks (Modoc)  
 Gangalanqans - Ripening Berries Moon - Haida  
 Sahch - Onion Moon - Spukane (Spokan)  
 Muskhogi-gizus - Seals Rise on the Water Moon - Panawampskewiak (Penobscot)  
 Paskawehowi-isim - Hatching Moon - (Plains Cree)  
 Wa-sa-sa-hanwi - Red Berry Moon - Assiniboine  
 O-zi-bi-ni-kow-kee-zis - Blooming Moon - Saulteaux - (Plains Ojibway)  
 a gaze yoile za - Egg Fertilized moon - Dene (Chipewyan)  
 Wajustecasa-wi - Moon when the Strawberries are Red - Dakota (Sioux)  
 Pahs-ka-we-ow-pi-sim - Hatching Month - (Chippewa-Cree)

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**July** - Kokuskumu Natanik - Ripening Serviceberries Moon - Sanka (Kootenay)

Advance in Body Moon - Wisham  
 Misqueemene Geezis - Raspberry Moon - Anishinabe (Ojibway)  
 Canpasawi - Cherry-ripening Moon - Lakota (Sioux)  
 Toitupana - Sun House Moon - Hlanoma (Taos)  
 Chekiluhe - Buffalo-rutting Moon - Chiwere (Oto)  
 Wa'hilka'hilqans - Property-distributing Moon - Haida  
 Paskoowipisim - Moulting Moon - (Plains Cree)  
 A Che za - Duckling Moon - Dene (Chipewyan)  
 Ap-ta-ni-bin-o-kee-zis - Unripe Berry Moon - Saulteaux - (Plains Ojibway)

Mno-ken-cho-kantu wi - Midsummer Moon - Assiniboine  
 Canpasapa-wi - Moon of Red Rip Chokecherries - Dakota (Sioux)  
 or Wasumpa-wi - Moon when Geese Shed Their Feathers  
 Pahs-kow-pi-sim - Shedding Feathers Moon - (Chippewa-Cree)

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**August** - Kchilmitilkikuwaiyit Natanik - Berries Ripen in the Night Moon - Sanka (Kootenay)  
 Fayopana - Autumn Moon - Hlanoma (Taos)  
 Tkahalaguah Aktlmin - Blackberry Patches Moon - Wisham  
 Oonoochetoo Pisim - Mating Moon - Ininiwuk (Cree)  
 Aiuka'hl - Salmon Spawning Moon - Nimipu (Nez Perce)  
 Wahtaybuhgah Geezis - Leaves Turn Colour Moon - Anishinabe (Ojibway)  
 Schei Spukaniis - Autumn Moon - Selish (Flathead)  
 Wi'napcinwanka - Calves Grow Hair Moon - Lakota (Sioux)  
 Ohpahowipisim - Flying-Up Moon - (Plains Cree)  
 O-pah-ow-pi-sim - Time To Fly Moon - (Chippewa-Cree)

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**September** - Kulmakaku Natanik - Ripe Chokecherries Moon - Sanka (Kootenay)  
 Chakolulih Aktlmin - Her Acorn Moon - Wisham  
 Nantsolpana - Yellow Leaf Moon - Hlanoma (Taos)  
 Tominnahmala - Spiderweb on the Ground at Dawn Moon - Chiwere (Oto)  
 Butdewuck - Wild Plum Moon - Maklaks (Modoc)  
 Holoqans - Spawning Salmon Moon - Haida  
 Pkwiptesi-gizus - Reddening of Leaves Moon - Panawampskewiak (Penobscot)  
 Nohcitowipisim - Mating Moon or Tukwa'ke pesim - Autumn Moon - (Plains Cree)  
 Wahs-te-pah-kahw-pi-sim - Faded Leaves and Grass Moon - (Chippewa-Cree)

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**October** - Kupakpik Natanik - Falling River Moon - Sanka (Kootenay)  
 Iskuwapana - Ripe Corn Moon - Hlanoma (Taos)  
 Itkakaha 'ktlmin - Her Leaves Moon - Wisham  
 Hliteqanak-ya'hlanna-yachunne - Great Sandstorm Moon - Shiwina (Zuni)  
 Kasketenoo Pisim - Freeze-up Moon - Ininiwuk (Cree)  
 Hopla'hl - Falling Leaves Moon - Nimipu (Nez Perce)  
 Wi'wikcemna - Yellow Leaves Moon - Lakota (Sioux)  
 Doceedeneege - Deer Moving South Moon - Maklaks (Modoc)  
 Pimuhumoowe pesim - Migrating Moon - (Plains Cree)  
 Kahs-kah-ti-now-pi-sim - Approaching Frost Moon - (Chippewa-Cree)

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**November** - Kitalutsupka Natanik - Killing Deer Moon - Sanka (Kootenay)  
 Ichalahchuk Aktlmin - Her Frost Moon - Wisham  
 Itayaupana - Harvest Corn Moon - Hlanoma (Taos)  
 Tahawah'son - Every Buck Loses his Horns Moon - Chiwere (Oto)  
 Ahdahbahdemutte - All Leaves Turn Colour - Maklaks (Modoc)  
 Gisals - Stomach Moon - Haida  
 Pebonameswi Gizus - Winter Fish Moon - Panawampskewiak (Penobscot)  
 Ihkopiwpisim - The Frost Moon - (Plains Cree)  
 Kak-scut-te-kee-zis - Freezing-up Moon - Saulteaux - (Plains Ojibway)  
 e T'se'l za - Frost Moon - Dene (Chipewyan)  
 Cho-he-wonka-wi - Frost Moon - Assiniboine  
 Tahcapsun-wi - The Deer-rutting Moon - Dakota (Sioux)  
 I-ko-piw-pi-sim - Frost Moon - (Chippewa-Cree)

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**December** - Nistamu Natanik - Sanka - Kootenay  
 Nunpana - Night Moon - Hlanoma (Taos)  
 Itkachahuhk'k'hlimah Aktlmin - Her Winter Houses Moon - Wisham  
 Thrin - Cold Moon - Chiwere (Oto)  
 Elahhejume - First Half of Winter - Maklaks (Modoc)  
 Chinuyahlhuntutun - Houses Built Moon - Spokane (Spokane)  
 Kya-muya - Dangerous Moon - Hopi  
 Ktcigizus pabonamwi-gizus - Big Moon, Winter-coming Moon  
 - Panawampskewiak (Penobscot)  
 Pawacakinasispim - Frost-exploding-trees Moon - (Plains Cree)  
 Ma-gos-a-kee-si-kuk-kee-zis - Winter Begins Moon - Saulteaux - (Plains Ojibway)  
 zi ne do ya za - Shortest Day Moon - Dene (Chipewyan)  
 Wi-te'hi sunka ku - Brother to Hard Time Moon - Assiniboine  
 Wi-iakenon pa - The Twelfth Moon - Dakota (Sioux)  
 Pah-wah-chah-ki-nah-sis - Time When The Snow Brings Everything To The  
 Ground - (Chippewa-Cree)

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*Sources: (from the WSSS Archives 1997)*

*Chippewa-Cree. 1978. Daychild Portrait Calendar. Rocky Boy Reserve: Montana.*  
*Plains Cree. 1978. Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Calendar. Saskatoon: Saskatchewan  
 Indian College, University of Saskatchewan.*  
*Mohawk Nation. 1975. Native American Calendar. Akwesasne Notes. via Roosevelttown, NY.*  
*Mohawk Nation. 1974. Native American Calendar. Akwesasne Notes. via Roosevelttown, NY.*

### NATIVE SCHOOLS IN CANADA, 1981

year	school	location	grades/ages	pupils
1974	T'lisalagi'lakw School Founded by parents concerned children were not functioning in larger society, offers cultural classes but emphasis on academics.	Alert Bay, BC	Nursery - 10	55
1976	Kumtuks Alternative School Founded for students with history of poor attendance and poor academic achievement. Stresses English, mathematics & science. Designed to assist in the entry-period transition from negative schooling experiences to regular programs by promoting positive Native self-image through better achievement scores and Native Studies classes.	Vancouver, BC.	age 12 to 14	20
1976	Wandering Spirit Survival School Founded by parents for urban Natives & run as private school until February 1977. Adopted as Alternative School of Toronto Board of Education. Expanded school calendar & developed Four Seasons Curriculum based on traditional Medicine Wheel. Elected Parent Council directs operations under Toronto Board guidelines. 1/2 day of academics and 1/2 day of cultural teachings. Numerous group & individual projects with monthly Feasts, field trips & summer camps for Pow Wows & seasonal, traditional Ceremonies open to community.	Toronto, ON	grade 1 - 8	30 ?
1978	Ustla-hahn Alternative School Designed to assist school drop outs on the reserve only.	Vancouver, N.S., BC	age 14 to 17	24
1978	Kahnawake Survival School Mohawk reserve children are offered vocational and non-vocational programs on a "campus" of six buildings plus an office and totalling 12 classes in 1979. "Project education" emphasizes self-reliance within cultural teachings. Governed by an elected Combined School Committee.	Caughnawaga, PQ	grade 7 - 11	?
1979	Plains Indian Cultural Survival School Founded to assist urban drop outs through regular academics and culture courses. In 1980 program expanded to include students bussed in from close reserves.	Calgary, AB	grades 7 - 11	92
1980	Saskatoon Native Survival School Founded for urban drop outs and curriculum combines 50% academics with 50% cultural teachings. School is directed in partnership with Roman Catholic Separate School Board in Saskatoon.	Saskatoon, SK	grades 7 - 11	85

**Chapter Six:****RED IS FOREVER:  
EMANCIPATION THROUGH EDUCATION**

&lt;&lt;&lt;&lt; &gt;&gt;&gt;&gt;

*Red is forever  
for we will never be banned.  
Red is a culture  
and this beautiful land.  
Red is the Great Spirit  
and the Grandfathers too.  
Red is me and you.  
Red is the Great Turtle Island.  
Red is braves and warriors.  
Red is children and families.  
Red is Anishinabe Nation  
that will never be conquered.*

*E.L.P.<sup>1</sup>*

&lt;&lt;&lt;&lt; &gt;&gt;&gt;&gt;

In its first year , WSSS struggled to be recognised by the Ontario Ministry of Education as a private cultural school, survived six months without funding and applied for adoption by the Toronto Board of Education as an Alternative School. It also changed location twice and more than doubled its student roll. Its perseverance "was a testimony to the commitment of the parents and volunteers", and its difficult beginning proved to be "a year when many stereotypes were broken down" as WSSS gained the respect of numerous trustees on the Board of Education (Novak et al. 1983: 6). The most hurtful

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<sup>1</sup> From the front cover of the WSSS Information handbook (Novak et al. 1983). The author may be Erlene, whose line drawing of a Pipe accompanies the poem.

resistance to the tiny school came from those it was designed to serve:

*As Vern says: 'Many of our people, because of oppression, have developed a 'back-of-the-bus mentality', and are not only afraid to make demands, but have such low self-esteem that they don't believe in their own rights'. ...considered too militant and radical... many Indian people... saw no benefit in a separate school and wanted their children to 'make it' in the regular school system (5).*

On the other hand, WSSS was founded on the idea that the path towards self-determination begins with Native education. Vern found the proposal that Native Way education was a radical trend cause to point out that Native control of Native education was not a new idea but a very old one (Holdway et al. 1978).<sup>2</sup>

Alex MacKay, an Ojibway language teacher, reports that parents sent their children to WSSS "to make them aware of their native culture and their language, and the kids are really receptive to it" (DiManno 1988). While earlier communities had lost continuity with their traditions through acculturation, the Native Way Schools recognized that an extensive metaphoric symbology embedded in Aboriginal languages continued to tie spiritual teachings to the most pragmatic lessons of survival. In fact, it was understood that to speak an Aboriginal language was to speak the sacred teachings within a learning environment that involved the entire community (Pitiwaniquat CL 1988; Berg & Shirt TC 1997). This concept encompassed not only storytelling and directed lessons, but also the specialized narratives of songs, dances and ceremonial rituals (Benton-Banai 1988). It may have looked like *fun* in contrast to the lessons delivered in regular schools, but

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<sup>2</sup> Regnier (1994, TEL 1995) and Haig-Brown et al. (1997) speak of a curriculum grounded in the Medicine Wheel teachings. Pauline sometimes speaks of the Medicine Wheel, but most often refers to Aboriginal pedagogy as the Turtle Island teachings. She calls the programme at WSSS the Four Seasons curriculum, but tends to refer to the curriculum of the Survival Schools network as Native Way. These terms appear to be interchangeable among the participants in this study.

dancing, drumming and singing were regarded as serious work that demanded reverence, practice and intense concentration. In the NFB documentary of WSSS (Holdway et al 1978), Jim Dumont takes the proposal that Aboriginal communities can be healed through a return to traditions to another level, insisting:

*Unless we know the legends and the stories of Creation, unless we know the songs and ceremonies, we don't really know who we are. And our children have to have that from the beginning. And that is really the center of the school, the basis of the whole Native way school (Holdway et al. 1978).*

Even the seemingly utilitarian tasks of cooking, sewing, or preparing for a Feast are layered with story and protocol through the cultural analogues that guide the students in discovering the meaning attached to both their social interactions and their place in the natural world (Brody 1981; Whitecap 1988; Bowers 1993). The tenets of an Aboriginal pedagogy are collected under different names by different groups, yet within the embrace of historical indigenous culture groups, a child's education followed the thematic progression of the Four Seasons in an articulation of regional relationship to the land (Basso 1987; Cruikshank 1990; Bowers 1993).

The pedagogy of the Survival Schools network unified the many nations of the larger indigenous community of North America in the 1970s through the articulation of shared moral principals and values, signified by common metaphoric analogues. Through the participation of respected Elders, WSSS made a conscious return to traditional social patterns in the transgenerational delivery of Creation Stories, Caution Tales, Legends and Histories. It was recognised that story had traditionally governed social relationships by articulating respect for the Elders, the roles of Clans, the function of the moiety system and the focus of seasonal ceremonies (Dumont CL 1988; Porter 1993). However, Pauline stresses that the culture classes were not simple history or sociology lectures. WSSS

offered an immersion programme, and culture was articulated through involved activities that were directly linked to seasonal themes or social events. For instance, if the boys learned how to make a Waterdrum, it was not merely to offer them a craft activity, or to give them a new toy. The Waterdrum was made to be used in specific social situations. The task of constructing the drum was preceded by teachings about its spiritual and cultural significance, including the protocols guiding its use. Not only artifacts but also the traditional outfits made by the children at WSSS were created with the purpose of using them at social events, such as the monthly Feasts or the seasonal ceremonies. In addition, a fancy dancer made a fancy dance outfit, while a girl who made a jingle dress learned to jingle dance. The orientation of the school was lived traditions, and this element of the curriculum addressed the students' notions of identity through markers of their specialized role in the community (Pitiwaniquat CL 1988; Berg & Shirt TC 1998). Placing the stress on *living cultures* also meant that the curriculum was tied to the traditional thirteen moons of the natural world, rather than the twelve months of the Gregorian calendar. As one reporter observed, "Summer excursions to wilderness camps and visits to the school by resource people, such as a native herbalist or survival expert, reinforce the lessons" (Brydon 1979). Just as there were after-four classes and monthly Feasts in the evenings, the calendar year at WSSS extended far beyond the regular school calendar.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> For a compilation of calendars from several Native nations as they correlate to the Gregorian calendar see Figure 9. It soon becomes clear that the name of each moon is tied directly to the biotic community in both its seasons and its regions.

In a survey and discussion of the Native Survival Schools movement as it manifest in Canada, Robert Regnier (1987) identifies WSSS as part of an emancipatory schools movement.<sup>4</sup> However, while Pauline says staff were always working around visiting academics at WSSS (Berg & Shirt TC 1998), the most abundant sources of literature on the school are the interest pieces and profiles that appeared in the newspapers and popular magazines of the day.<sup>5</sup> This is problematic. While these articles offer a glimpse of the school in action through comments on a child's activity or the mention of study topics (Reid 1978; TNT January 1979; Newton 1978; Marchand 1980; DiManno 1988), reconstructing the educational experience of WSSS students is often frustrated by simplistic reports that the morning was devoted to academic subjects, while cultural lessons took place in the afternoon (Reid 1978; Hughes 1978; DiManno 1988). For that reason, the interviews featured in the NFB documentary Wandering Spirit Survival School (Holdway et al. 1978) offer an important treatment of the school's history. Though this aspect of the film's production is not obvious, the NFB short The Man, the Snake, and the Fox (1979) also sheds insight on the school's project-oriented programme by presenting footage of an actual storytelling event featuring the WSSS students with

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<sup>4</sup> On a biographical note, Regnier teaches in the Education Department at University of Saskatchewan, where Pellerin completed her MED. He also served as Principal for the Saskatoon Native Survival School at one point, and is co-author of a study of the school, which has been renamed Joe Duquette High School (Haig-Brown et al. 1997). This thesis continually presents me with ironies. In 1987, when Robert Regnier interviewed Pauline about WSSS, she invited me to sit in on the discussion. Though Pauline spoke of her intention to write a book (Regnier & Shirt TR1 1987a), neither Regnier nor I knew she would ask me to do the writing. It was when he sent her copies of the transcript that she asked me to read them over, suggesting they might help me to write the history of the school for her. It is unusual to source another ethnographer's work so directly, but I took Pauline's suggestion and my presence at the interview as license to quote those transcripts at length in this paper. Regnier has done the most significant research on WSSS and the Survival School movement in Canada, and I would be remiss if I failed to mention it was a telephone consultation with him in 1995 that directed me to the only other significant scholarly consideration of WSSS I could locate.

<sup>5</sup> The majority of these pieces cover the period from 1977 to 1980, which Pauline refers to as 'the heydays of Wandering Spirit' (Berg & Shirt TC 1997, TC 1998).

their Ojibway language teacher, Basil Johnson (Berg & Shirt TC 1998).

Still, it is largely journalism rather than scholarly treatises that some of the important political issues the school and its founders faced are recorded and addressed.<sup>6</sup> For instance, WSSS made the news because of the controversy that followed the staff's refusal to start the school day with the Lord's Prayer, though morning prayer was the policy of the Ontario Ministry of Education at the time (Dutton 1979). It is journalism, also, that identifies the specific issues that confused Aboriginal children in dominant school settings through their history classes. For instance, while the Aboriginal community regarded Big Bear and Wandering Spirit as cultural heroes, in school the children were told they had participated in the Northwest Rebellion and, like Louis Riel, they were identified as traitors to Canada (Brydon 1979; Slinger 1980, Holdway 1978). Even the school's name was met by political resistance:

*The Mounties were unsuccessful in their bid to change the school's name yet the irony of the situation is not lost on the Indians. They are expected to attend schools named after such 'white' heroes as Sir John A. MacDonald... [though] it was his government that quite simply stole the Indians' and Metis' land in the West (Brydon 1979).*

As Pauline says, while Riel was posthumously declared a Father of Confederation, because the Aboriginal leaders who had been jailed or executed as his co-conspirators are still labelled traitors, these specifics continue to confuse the Aboriginal student (Berg

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<sup>6</sup> I obtained access to Pauline's personal archives in 1997. Unfortunately, they had been stored in a basement locker and were missing for some time. Once recovered, they were severely water-damaged, mildewed and running with silverfish. Also, it was apparent that some boxes - most notably those with pictures - were lost. Yet they proved to be an especially valuable source of information about the specific incidents surrounding the decision to found WSSS. They also contain materials which stand as testament to the tremendous span of activist concerns Pauline and Vern devoted themselves to, on behalf of the First Nations community at large, during the period they were involved with the school, such as the organization of a Conference for the Toronto branch of Indian Rights for Indian Women and the activities of the Canadian branch of AIM. In addition, the archives establish that WSSS staff participated in the creation of a document that surveyed the needs of Native families in Toronto, while Vern made attempts to found a non-profit corporation to assist Native inmates during their re-adjustment to independent living.

& Shirt TC 1997, TC 1998).

As a spokesman for WSSS, Vern often grounded his comments about the purpose of the school in issues of concern for the greater Aboriginal community:

*One of the biggest problems for native people is a 'John Wayne mentality,'... In the movies, there [are] cowboys and Indians, good guys and bad guys. The native people do not feel good about themselves (Horgan 1979).*

In a moment of frustration, he would ask, "Why try to be an imitation white man ?" (Brydon 1979). Yet the issues of identity WSSS addressed were actually far more convoluted than this. At a national conference addressing the prospects for children in 1979, Vern identified a "rift that separated families when children left home and adopted the white man's city ways" saying WSSS "helps children to deal with their *double heritage*" (Farrell 1979 emphasis added). In fact, the Native Way pedagogy approached the issues of Aboriginal students' poor self-image and the low status of Aboriginals in dominant society as manifestations of an imbalance in both the individual and the community. The effects of social exclusion were first addressed by affirming the students' difference and then by fostering an inclusionary experience. As Vern said, "At Wandering Spirit we are lucky to have the four races... One race cannot survive without the other three" (Reid 1978).

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Perhaps predictably, WSSS's project to extend the influence of its activism was frustrated by popularized explanations for the school's inception. The dilemma Pauline and Vern faced when their son, Clayton, refused to return to his regular school (TNT 1977: December; Hamilton Spectator 1979; Horgan 1979; Slinger 1980) tended to eclipse reports of other reasons for founding the school, such as the centuries of trauma

and frustration Aboriginal people suffered in the name of education under the Indian Act. It also eclipsed the social and spiritual dynamic inherent in Pauline's vision, her essential role as the school's Director and the school's dependence upon a dedicated group of social activists and volunteers who helped to deliver the programmes on a daily basis. This misconception served to trivialize the significance of WSSS in carving the way for a national network of Native-directed schools.

As Laura Reid (1978) says, it took fifteen years to dismantle the Residential Schools system.<sup>7</sup> "Unfortunately, the original stigma attached to the Native Canadian didn't disappear with the schools" (16-19), and there were continuing ramifications from prior policies. While the Residential Schools were closed, they are still well remembered by generations of First Nations people who were "intimidated into silence and immobility... [and] systematically intimidated into forgetting they were Indian" (Marchand: 41).<sup>8</sup> The culture schools emerged during this transitional phase in the history of Indian education in Canada. Vern Harper was often quoted as saying "a loss of native spirituality ...[was] at the root of the sufferings of [my] people" (Horgan 1979). Indeed, if a new generation is cradled in the arms of eighteen-year-old mothers, between the Indian Act of 1876 and the final year of the residential schools six generations were stripped of continuity in their traditions and world view. The Native Survival Schools welcomed the seventh generation.

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<sup>7</sup> "The last [Residential] school, in Sioux Lookout, closed in the spring of 1978" (Reid: 16-19).

<sup>8</sup> Marchand (1980) refers to a generation in their 20s and 30s, which places them in their 40s and 50s now. However, as the last school closed in 1978, and children began attending at the average age of six, the last group of children to attend Residential School is only now in their 20s and 30s. Also, long after the Residential Schools were officially closed, because local provincial schools were not legally required to open their doors to them, Indian children were shipped hundreds of miles to attend willing schools after the integration policy was established. At this point, the Residential Schools were used to 'billet' these children, though they attended public schools.

The resurgence of Native Way allowed the Aboriginal playwright Tomson Highway to announce, "I came back to the dream" (Marchand: 41). However, despite a strong contingent of activist support for WSSS,<sup>9</sup> the Aboriginal community in Toronto expressed differing opinions about how - and even if - their stolen heritage could be recovered (41). The acculturative forces of more than 100 years had pitted those who chose to forgo their heritage to adopt a *white* lifestyle against those who resisted the status quo by fostering a return to ancestral traditions. As a result, "almost any political statement one can make as a native will offend someone or other in the native community. It is not an easy minefield to negotiate" (118). Indeed, there were occasions when the small school was met with the realisation that "one's most dogged and slippery opponents are often found in one's own community" (110).

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The focus of Native Way education rests on the idea that children are the future of a community (Novak 1983). At WSSS, there was a clear understanding that these students could not be separated from the social reality of the urban Native. While Aboriginals

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<sup>9</sup> In terms of the chronology of participation, my research identifies Nancy Wood as the first teacher. Pauline ran the show from the beginning and Vern joined the school after a year and a half. Ken Tobias was an early cultural consultant who also acted as a teacher briefly after Nancy left. After the school was adopted by the TBE, Wendy Beatty, Kathy Sims, Elizabeth Thompson, Fay MacKenzie, and Marian Machida all spent time at WSSS as certified teachers who delivered academic subjects. Initially, Pauline taught Cree language classes. The Elder Kasper Solomon and Basil Johnson both taught Ojibway language classes and acted as cultural advisors and storytellers. George Kenny also participated as a storyteller. In the school's 'heydays' Ken Tobias, Sam Moosecamp, Joe Sylvester, Dawn Smoke, Mark Phillips and Clarence Kaachagee were among the school's many cultural program advisors. Among the volunteers Rianne Nahwegeechzhic, Anias Smoke, Bill Lewis, Stewart Greene, Helen Hayden, Nancy Kimaro, Beth Giles, and Dora Raphael - and a variety of others too numerous to mention - participated as volunteer assistants in the classroom or the office during the early years. In addition, Helen, Beth, and Pauline all worked towards the founding of a Kindergarten class, which was added in the Fall of 1980. Eventually, some of these people received a small honorarium through Pauline's fund-raising efforts. However, in addition to the regular consultants, strong support for the cultural program was offered by a steady stream of celebrity-status Cultural Teachers and Elders who volunteered their services whenever they visited Toronto (Lewis T13 1996b; Harper T14 1997; WSSS archives 1997; Berg & Shirt TC 1997, TC 1998).

comprise less than five percent of the Canadian population, their future is more severely compromised than any other ethnic group (Regnier 1994: 135):

*The suicide of about 5000 Canadian Indians under the age of 25 each year is at a rate six times higher than for non-Indians. Some researchers believe the true rate is twelve times higher than the Canadian average (135).*

Regnier found that between 74 and 94 percent of Aboriginals have been sexually abused in childhood and "fifty percent of the federal prison population is Aboriginal", rising to a seventy percent incarceration rate by the age of 25 in Saskatchewan (135). Therefore, the astronomically high drop out rate among Native students must be recognised as just one expression of the discouraging statistics for self-perpetuating, destructive social patterns evident in the Aboriginal population. From the beginning, the WSSS programme was designed in recognition of two other compelling facts: that "60 percent of Toronto's native families ...are headed by only one parent, almost always a mother" (Marchand 1980), and that the personal despair experienced in relation to the brokenness of family was often expressed through alcoholism (Holdway et al. 1978).

In line with the goal of providing a secure environment for learning, there was a concerted effort to address the home environment of the WSSS students head on. Students were encouraged to escape the self-destructive patterns they witnessed in their community by adopting First Nations values and traditions, proper nutrition, abstinence from addictive substances and a commitment to non-violence:

*A tall man with a salt-and-pepper braid that falls to the middle of his back, [Vern] gathers up a rambunctious child in his long arms and hugs him, and the child becomes easy and quiet. 'We show them spirituality and love and try to teach by example' (Slinger 1980).*

This is a foundational principle of Native Way education. Modelling and demonstration

are gentle and forgiving, but they are also powerful methods of teaching.

In an extension of this logic, WSSS was adamant that all children needed the full support of their parents to succeed in their studies:

*The idea of the afternoon sessions is to have parents attend classes with the students... This is all part of a plan to get parents more involved in the education of their children, a plan taken so seriously by the school's executive council that direct parent involvement is one of the criteria required to enroll a child (TBF 1977 cited in TNT 1977).*

Traditional culture stresses the involvement of extended families in the raising and education of children, but family networks were fractured by generations of residential schooling. Almost overnight, First Nations people were expected to resume the responsibility for parenting, with little acknowledgement that their model for adult-child interaction was now rooted in the traumatic experiences of Residential Schooling (Alcoze CL 1988). Many parents who brought their children to WSSS were desperate for crisis intervention.

WSSS addressed the brokenness of the students' families through the principles of modelling and demonstration that guided interaction with the students, but stressed an additional principle: responsibility. The parents were encouraged to assume responsibility for the model they set, and to earn their children's respect. In the process, they found their own sense of healing and personal development. In the NFB film made about the school, Vern says:

*Already we see the home life changing... We can set good examples where many other parents who maybe are drinking will quit drinking... It does affect our children. If our children are seeing fighting and arguing at home they cannot come to school and concentrate on what they're trying to learn (Holdway et al. 1978).*

As Vern said, the children learned to see themselves differently through their experiences at WSSS because they saw their parents differently.

Vern's insights on the subject of healing were based on years of addiction counselling:

*'When an alcoholic or an addict leaves his bottle or his addiction,' Harper said, 'it leaves an empty space. And if he doesn't replace that emptiness with something else, chances are he will go back to his alcohol or drugs.' So the last state of that man [sic] is worse than the first. The answer for native people is spiritualism. The pipe. Men and women can grab that pipe and it will carry them through anything (Marchand:113).*

Yet at WSSS they modeled more than abstinence from addictive substances. The teachings delivered through the Sacred Circle each morning were founded in the idea that the social and physical illness evident in the Native community are caused by an imbalance in the physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual aspects of being. Some Elders suggest the imbalance that manifests as the brokenness of families and criminal activity among urban youth is caused by being raised with a paucity of stories (teachings) and the scattering of communities (Aken 1993; Lightning 1993). In general, the pedagogy of healing "proceeds in phases of belonging, understanding and critical reflection", which are cyclical (Regnier 1994: 137):

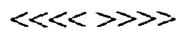
*health means to live a meaningful vision of one's wholeness, connectedness, and balance in the world [so] illness is a loss of meaning that results in weakness, fragmentation and isolation, lack of purpose and direction (135).*

Among many Aboriginal nations, the pipe is a channel for counsel with the Good Grandfathers and the Creator.<sup>10</sup> Living by the Pipe is to walk the good walk, to hold a purpose invested with meaning. The Sacred Circle rituals are an affirmation that the individual can return to "harmony with the whole" (138). In fact, as Regnier suggests, the harmony of reintegration developed through the Sacred Circle ceremony assumes both a prior "brokenness" and the potential for "reconciliation" in a process "that recognises individual limitations" while it stresses inclusion (138).

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<sup>10</sup> The pipe is at the centre of the Sacred Circle and the Four Seasons curriculum (see Illustrations 5 & 6).

In a creative response to a state of emergency, WSSS became an extension of the students' homes, reflecting a traditional social pattern that knit family and community members in mutually supportive relationships (Holdway et al. 1978). Not only did the school embrace the parents through their participation in morning circles, afternoon cultural classes, monthly Feasts and seasonal camping trips to ceremonies,<sup>11</sup> but it also established what Bill Lewis (T13 1996b) refers to as a buddy system. Each child was partnered with an adult other than a parent, who made a commitment to offer support on 24-hour-a-day basis in the style of a Big Brother or Big Sister. Just as the pedagogy and curriculum was "indiginized" (Regnier 1994: 137), the school welded facets of dominant culture social activism with Aboriginal pedagogy in the belief that "schools were centres of healing and teachers were healers... [who] move beyond personal needs to become servants of the community" (136). While Vern admitted they had to walk a fine line in the recovery of traditions that reinfused cultural pride among their students, he also declared, "It is up to us to do something different. No one out there is going to do it for us" (Hughes 1979).



The Four Seasons curriculum integrates the Four Seasons Plan developed by Pauline with the curriculum guidelines set out by the Ontario Ministry of Education (Novak et al: 13), with themes and activities for each season that are carried across the curriculum (see Illustrations 5 & 6). These themes are based on a quartered circle of relationship to our natural "relatives: the four-leggeds, the winged, the swimmers and the crawlers" (Novak et al: 13). So in its expression of compass directions - East, South, West, North -

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<sup>11</sup> At minimum, the Four Seasons were marked by seasonal ceremonies, which occurred in the general time frame of the summer and winter Solstices, and the spring and fall Equinoxes. They involved extensive outdoor activities, no matter the weather, including camp-outs. Ceremonies were usually held over four-day periods at various locations (often on reserve) in Wyoming, Michigan and northern Ontario (Berg & Shirt TC 1997).

the Sacred Circle defines different orientations to the physical world. Generally, the Four Directions are invested with meaning articulated as the seasons, activities, sacred foods, colours, animal spirit-helpers, medicines, moons and the four races of humanity (Berg & Shirt 1993; Regnier 1994). Yet each Native nation also develops an independent relationship to the circle through the specifics of its seasonal calendar and its relationship to ancestral territories. In other words, the differences in climate, terrain, animals and plants found in a region are reflected in the Circle - which Pauline refers to as the Teaching Wheel - through the cultural expression and languages indigenous to the region (Alcoze CL 1988; Shirt T1 1992a).<sup>12</sup>

While the classic western model tends to isolate same-age groups of children in school settings under the control of single classroom teachers, the education of the child through the Four Seasons curriculum is achieved through integration with the extended family and community in the belief that everyone exposed to the Teachings - including children - is a teacher (Novak et al. 1983; Dumont CL 1988). Spirituality is not separated from daily activities, and Native Way stresses the patient accumulation of knowledge, rather than the dominant culture's attempts to "cram it into our minds" (Novak et al: 11). In 1982, there were three classes at WSSS, with a junior, middle and senior teacher.<sup>13</sup> As

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<sup>12</sup> For example, one gross difference in the expression of human relationship to the natural world as it manifests in different regions is found in the orientation of the path travelled around sacred fires of traditional people. Above the equator, when water enters a whirlpool it travels clockwise. Below the equator, water flows counterclockwise in a whirlpool. The direction of the sacred circles is walked in the same direction as the whirlpool in each region. One bold exception are the Iroquois nations around the Great Lakes. However, the fact that they walk counter clockwise in their circles is said to lend support to other evidence that they made a long migration north many centuries ago (Alcoze CL 1988).

<sup>13</sup> The classes are listed as Junior Kindergarten to two, three to five, and six to eight. WSSS also had an educational assistant, a part-time paraprofessional "who assists with the Kindergarten children," a part-time administrative assistant, a lunch program director and lunch supervisor, a part-time French teacher for grades four to eight, and access to a speech therapist and public health nurse (15).

the senior teacher, Marian Machida believed:

*Flexibility around the person and the program and the community allows both the teachers and students to take advantage of resources and resource people from within and outside the community (12).*

The middle grade teacher, Kathy Sims, said "the learning of traditional Native values... help[ed] the children develop a strong and positive self-image... [by] stressing the importance of a balance between mind, body and spirit" (13), and Elizabeth Thompson, the junior teacher, insisted "Everyone is expected to be involved... We're all equal here. It's not only a goal but it happens" (12).

The staff and volunteers at WSSS believed that language was the key to reinvesting Aboriginal children with their cultural heritage (13):

*Friends come in to tell the children about Native history and folklore. The lessons are informal, the atmosphere warm and friendly. Often while the kids are doing crafts like beadwork, adults are sitting with them, sharing beads and conversation. These same friends, along with Pauline Harper, teach the kids Cree and Ojibway (Reid 1978).<sup>14</sup>*

This was a return to traditional teaching practices, but it was far more than an approach to lessons. The low student-teacher ratio meant that the potential of individual students, and efforts to motivate their learning, could be pursued in a more meaningful and personal way (Novak et al: 12). In fact, the Parent Council, teachers, volunteers and students were all so deeply involved in the support network established by the school that they came to speak of their *WSSS family* (Lewis T12 1996a; Harper T14 1997).

In Pauline's terms, the entire school community was brought "under the protection of the Pipe" through their return to traditional practises (Marchand: 109-110). In The

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<sup>14</sup> While practical constraints meant that they could only offer lessons in the Cree and Ojibway languages, there was sensitivity to the fact that some students were from other nations. Those students reaped the benefit of exposure to an Aboriginal language. Students also had the option of studying French, and many students developed a facility in three languages while WSSS shared the Sackville site with Inglennook High School (Pellerin 1982).

Sacred Circle (1994), Regnier compares Whitehead's "metaphysics of process" (130) with "a process pedagogy based on an aboriginal approach to healing" (129) in the Native Survival Schools. Each pedagogy is founded on the notion of process as a universal event that resists the classic western view of human development in sequential stages as entities estranged from their environment. Whitehead recognises that all things are interconnected, and his curriculum reflects "the life of students connected to the world around them" with the stress placed on an immediate application of knowledge. In other words, the focus is "the teaching of ideas for use rather than preparation for use" (131). The traditional Aboriginal pedagogy concurs with Whitehead's process pedagogy, but it takes the concept of interrelatedness a step further. The physical and social health of human beings is dependent upon living in balance with not only a social environment but also the cosmic processes. Furthermore, a constant mimicry of the interdependent relationships observed in the cyclical patterns of natural phenomena reinforces the interrelatedness of humanity to the natural world (Waters 1963; Brown 1964; Regnier 1994: 132).

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Sister Judith Pellerin (1982) was a "partial participant" (37, 46) in the senior classroom at WSSS for three days a week from September 10 to November 15, 1981, while she conducted a behavioural study of three students for her MED thesis. WSSS had taken up residence in two classrooms on the third floor of Sackville School in October 1978, and also had a separate office and phone on the main floor (Novak et al. 1983).<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> There was considerable flux to the student population in different periods, which is reflected in the number of classes. While all grades were housed in one classroom in the days the school was at the Native Centre or

At the time of Pellerin's study, the student population was divided between two classes, Kindergarten to grade four, and grade five to grade eight. In the senior room:

*Furnishings in the classroom included desks which were scattered throughout the room in no apparent arrangement, and which the pupils were allowed to move from place to place as they wished (Pellerin: 43).*

The teacher, a Japanese-Canadian woman, rarely used her *teacher's* desk. Instead, she sat at a round table large enough to seat six to correct work, or to provide individual instruction (43). The room was decorated with very large posters depicting wildlife, historic Native leaders, Native art and the problems of alcoholism. In addition to the desks, there was a bookshelf with seventy library books and a set of encyclopedias, a cupboard containing textbooks and art supplies, and a sewing machine.

While Pellerin's study is important because it provides a description of real students in real time (masked by pseudonyms), it must also be read with an eye to the prejudices of the day and the limitations of its discipline. Throughout her thesis, the researcher tracks the attention students give to the teacher, their efforts to complete assignments and the frequency of their wanderings from their desks. She virtually ignores the emancipatory orientation of the curriculum and pedagogy in her concern that the teacher fails to curtail certain student behaviours, and that the students lack commitment to their academic lessons. However, there were those who recognised that the traditional Aboriginal pedagogy practised during the afternoon language and culture classes had also guided an open-ended approach to the academic lessons.

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Winchester Public school (Regnier & Shirt TR2 1987b), at Sackville School there was a period when the school had three classes (Novak et al. 1983). In 1985, WSSS moved into four rooms plus an office, in its own wing on the third floor of Dundas Public School. While there are times when the population of the school has swelled to the point where even these quarters are inadequate to its needs, the Dundas School site continues to be the home of the school. WSSS was renamed First Nations School in 1990.

As teacher for the grade four to grade eight class, Marian Machida did not conduct classes in the manner of the dominant schooling model. In fact, while grades were assigned to "ease paper work", students progressed "at their own speed to their own potential" (Reid 1978):

*One student may be taking math at grade five level while his reading is only at level four. Projects are often designed for individual students. Rather than have the entire group do an assignment that only interests half, she has several assignments going at once. 'The kids need good motivation, so I try to find things they like to do. I teach very few 'class' lessons. Instead, I work on a close one-to-one basis' (Reid 1978).*

Once again, there were very few full-class lessons in Fay MacKenzie's primary classroom:

*She spends the morning going from desk to desk, talking with the kids personally. 'I can tell if they're accomplishing what I want them to.' The classes are always noisy but usually productive (Reid 1978).*

In the conclusion to her study Pellerin (1982) reports:

*The findings of the study indicated that in the case of the three Ss, the school partially met its goal of helping pupils to develop a sense of pride in their Indian identity, but was inadequately meeting its academic goal of providing pupils with a sound academic base with which to continue into further education beyond grade eight (213).*

However, it is critical to note that, like the traditional educational experiences of an Aboriginal child, the Four Seasons curriculum at WSSS was *responsive* rather than *definitive*. There was a relaxed time frame for the delivery of lessons, in the sense that teachers attended to indicators of a learners' receptiveness and modified the lesson to take advantage of situations that applied the lesson directly. Moreover, students were encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning, rather than developing obedience to teacher-imposed deadlines for the completion of assignments. However,

this does not mean that there was no organised guideline for the delivery of lessons.<sup>16</sup>

The emphasis on the students' responsibility for their own learning often fell on the value of reflecting upon the effectiveness of their prior approach to lessons and assignments. In the sample interviews that Pellerin includes as appendices to her thesis, Agnes, a grade eight student, offered an ironic critique of her own study habits. She began by confessing that she followed a practised scheme, shifting in her work habits from term to term. As she points out, her approach is something Pellerin's study could never hope to reveal:

*R: Well, if you were gonna be here all year you'd see my logic, but it makes no sense.*

*I: Well, what is your logic ?*

*R: Don't work for the first term.*

*I: Because ?*

*R: Just don't. The second term, from the first term, you know what you gotta fix up. I just wait for my first report card, so I know the grades I need... then I just work the second term to get my grades up... and the third term I'm at the grade level.*

*I: And you can do that ?*

*R: I've done it before. I don't know how many years so far. Works out alright.*

*I: I just wondered because when I talked to you the last time you sounded as if you really knew what you wanted to do getting through high school and such, and I would just hate to see you lose all that because you weren't putting the work into it.*

*R: Never. Everyone in my family dropped out at grade eight. I ain't about to (258).*

This is far more than an appraisal of her own potential for success. Agnes offers an evaluation of the study, making it clear that she recognises the research design suffers from critical limitations. However, neither of Agnes' spontaneous evaluations is addressed in the body of Pellerin's work. The fact that she asks one child what they plan to "be" and another where they plan to "live" is also not accounted for in her analysis.

There are other problems with Pellerin's project. Two of the three students were in a

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<sup>16</sup> For samples of the monthly teaching schedules for the school see Figures 1 to 7 (copied from the WSSS archives 1997).

transitional phase of their schooling experience, attending WSSS for just one week before Pellerin's study began (45-46). One must ask if it is reasonable to expect that any school could turn things around for those students in the same time frame. This question is inspired, in part, by the work habits of one student who had been attending WSSS for two years:

*Donald worked steadily once he had undertaken an assigned task, completing the task and having the teacher check his work before proceeding with the other activities in which he engaged between tasks... This is not to suggest that Donald worked steadily all day or every day, but rather that when he did undertake some assigned task he worked at it until finished... On occasion, Donald helped other pupils with their work.. [He] showed Agnes the writing she had missed due to her absence from school, and he loaned her his book from which to copy (92-93).*

In fact, Donald frequently "received free time on account of having completed his assignments for the day" (201).

A February 1977 announcement in Toronto Native Times Newsletter stated, "The objectives of the school are to ...stress progress rather than failure" (TBE 1977). However, while Ken Tobias, a volunteer culture consultant in the early years, reports that the teachers were careful to cover their "obligations under the Education Act", WSSS also aimed to redefine both the definition of progress and the time frame involved (Holdway et al. 1978; Shirt T1 1992a). For one thing, it was understood that Aboriginal children were often in crisis in their home lives. Therefore, subjects of study at any of the Native Way Schools were not limited to academics, spiritualism or cultural revival. The student was assisted in learning "survival skills that range from setting snares in the bush to taking the subway by oneself in the city" (Marchand 1980). In addition, a clash in expectations rooted in culturally determined rules for talk and social interaction meant that many of the Native students arriving at WSSS from regular schools were already

resistant to learning and socially withdrawn (Phillips 1983; Wild et al. post-1983).<sup>17</sup>

Unfortunately, in the eyes of some dominant-culture educators who visited WSSS, even modest examples of this behaviour profile were misconstrued as the students' refusal to co-operate or the teacher's lack of attention to classroom management (Pellerin 1982, see Appendices B and C).<sup>18</sup> In contrast, the WSSS community understood there could be no overnight solutions to the problems arising from six generations of assimilation.

Two facets of WSSS that both the journalistic and scholarly treatments of the school tend to miss are the lunch and bussing programmes for the Kindergarten to grade three students. They were both considered integral aspects of the over-arching school programme - in large part because they permitted the scattered urban Aboriginal community greater access to a Native Way education during the primary years. Early access was considered critical to the academic success of these children because there was then less need to undo the damage to Aboriginal pride and self-image, or the patterns of resistance to schooling, which manifest among Aboriginal students who are introduced to school through the regular system. In the interest of establishing a well-rounded

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<sup>17</sup> Phillips (1983) found teachers often held to dominant culture models when they looked for indicators of student attention and comprehension, such as eye contact and nods of the head (95-101). However, in addition to different patterns for gaze and indicators of listening, the cultural rules extend to gestures, notions of personal space and notions of appropriate humour (102-114), as well as competing for attention, question-response time and turn-taking in speech events (108-114). Cultural patterns also determined ideal group size for various activities, and preferred style of interaction (119-124). Wild et al. (post-1983) found culture predicted communicative behaviours such as speech-openers and lead-ins, systems of address, relationship-marking, periods of silence, wait time and interruptions.

<sup>18</sup> Pellerin's Behavioural study completely ignores the impetus for founding the school, and perpetuates further cross-cultural misunderstandings by comparing three students at WSSS to the standard for school behaviour set in dominant culture classrooms. Her study emphasis falls on a narrow band of gross behaviours presumed to demonstrate student attention, but she fails to articulate either a model for learning and creativity that identifies the range of behaviours demonstrated by the WSSS students or a detailed list of the specific behaviours she intends to track. Usually her indicators are only implied (see Appendix A) as when she designs a response questionnaire with a scale that purports to measure student attention during teacher-led and independent tasks. Her study presents 31 Tables and one Chart which exhibit poor mathematics. The background information on the students is minimal, and, except for direct interactions cited, behaviours are presented out-of-context with their teachers and classmates.

curriculum that included sports, WSSS had made a special arrangement to use the Scadding Court and John Innis Community Centre for its physical education program. There were also regular weekly excursions to the libraries of their host schools. "Other programs include[d] the Children's Garden... a Speaker's program and field trips" (Novak: 14). But the Sacred Circle that began every day at WSSS was typical of the Survival Schools and the cultural revival that brought the indigenous North American nations back to the observance of traditional practices (Hughes 1978; Haig-Brown et al. 1997). As Vern said, the Aboriginal students could only turn their attention to their academic success when they discovered pride in their cultural identity, healing within their families and a sense of belonging in their community (Marchand 1980).

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Traditionally, each dawn (but in the case of WSSS each school day) is greeted with a meditative prayer and smudging:

*In the middle of the room, the children sit in a sacred circle of life. One child lights the braided strand of grass, waits a moment and blows it out. The smoke fills the air, turning it sweet and mystical (Reid 1978).*

The Circle addressed the manifestations of interrelationship through the teachings delivered as prayer meditations and a ritual layered with a cultural significance that the children soon articulated in their own terms. One journalist reported:

*Darnell uses a white swan's wing to fan the sage smoke through the two-room school. 'It makes us have a good morning. It makes it so there's no fights'... About 20 of us sitting on a green carpet in the Sacred Circle of Life watch carefully as Vern Harper ritually washes himself with the smoke and tells us he is washing out his negativity, unblocking his spirit, opening himself to communion with the spirits of the past - 'the Grandfathers' - so he may be better able to retrace the steps of his culture (Slinger 1980).*

One of the primary Grandfathers was the namesake of the school, Wandering Spirit. The absence of recognition for the powerful visions and gifted leadership of historical Aboriginal figures was an issue the school addressed daily through its manifestation of the very cultural traditions those ancestors had fought to uphold.

Based on an understanding of relationship established by the pedagogy imbedded in Aboriginal traditions, WSSS devised *the philosophy of the child*. It is expressed through six annotated points in the WSSS Handbook (Novak et al. 1983). First, there is the need to recognise the difference in Little People. Second, personalism is accepted as self-determination. Then, WSSS promoted a positive self-image, a propensity to share and self-discipline as three interrelated facets of personal development. Finally, there is acknowledgement of the need to articulate an attitude of tough love as part of the overall philosophy, because some adults and children exhibited behaviours and attitudes that were incompatible with the goals of the school (7-9). Parents were encouraged to attend, and all comers were welcome to join-in. However, there were no simple observers of culture, only participants in a return to Native Way as lived experience (Dumont CL 1988). Moreover, even well-wishing volunteers who "would come desiring to change or redirect the process... soon [became] aware that these are a people who know what they value and will not be deterred" (Hughes 1979). The staff had learned to be resolute on this last point, saying, "If a person is unable to contribute or share what Wandering Spirit is all about, then there is little point to being here" (Novak et al: 9).

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In the NFB documentary (Holdway et al. 1978), the parents' evaluations of the school are expressed as comments on the changes they noticed in their children after they started to

attend WSSS. One woman insisted:

*They're a lot more self assured... A lot of them were very turned-off school because they've had a lot of bad experiences, and now... most days they're eager to come to school and learn about their culture (Holdway et al. 1978).*

Another said:

*They're becoming more, you know, proud of themselves, being Indian. And I'm really happy about that because I want them to... respect themselves and hold their heads up, wherever they go (Holdway et al. 1978).*

The language teacher, Alex MacKay, also saw the success of the school in the enthusiasm of his students. While most of the children do not speak their aboriginal mother tongue at home, "Ojibwe is based on phonetics... It's very easy to learn. The kids soak it up" (DiManno 1988).

Still, evaluations can often be flawed by politics, cultural assumptions, oversight and a clash of educational goals. In an interview held at the end of her eleven-week study of WSSS, Pellerin (1982) asks 14-year-old Agnes what she has learned "about being Indian" at the school. She is met with a candid, self-reflective response:

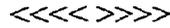
*R: About the customs - about the feasts, and how to place our food if we have a feast; and about tobacco ties, which I knew about, but I wasn't certain how many and where they should go, but I figured it all out. [Vern's] just starting me on the things that I should have known when I was knee-high to a pop bottle, but I didn't. So, it's alright. And the Circle too.*

*I: Those are all sorts of ceremonies or special things. Are you learning anything about how an Indian should live in everyday life ?*

*R: Oh yeah. You're supposed to live close to the earth and be pure and all that (251).*

The researcher interrupts the student's narrative when she does not receive the answer she is looking for. The student obligingly shifts away from talk about the particulars of the cultural programme and its personal impact to offer the off hand platitudes that have stereotyped Aboriginal culture. The researcher's interruption suggests that, despite her

immersion over an extended period, she has entirely missed the point behind the indiginised curriculum at WSSS. In her first response, Agnes revealed she had internalized a principle that the founding group stressed as fundamental to healing. The recovery of traditional rituals and ceremonies means the integration of those traditions with the demands of everyday life. Culture is not something pulled out for special occasions. Rather, it is the constant expression of being in relationship to the social, spiritual and physical world.

**Chapter Seven:****REVIEWING ARCHIVES, RECOVERING LIVES**

Pauline sings out from the kitchen, listing a variety of teas for our choosing. We opt for regular black. Her friend Rianne and I are sitting at the dining table that fills the short arm of Pauline's L-shaped living room. It is early afternoon on a grey winter day (Shirt & Nahwegeechic T11 1994a; Shirt & C. Shirt T11 1994b). There are swirls of frost on the panes, but the window is propped open on a tin can. Steam radiators have over-warmed the room. An Arizona colour scheme predominates in the decorating: pink sand walls, red clay trim; a Native-influenced print on the couch that repeats the earth tones of the room with the addition of emerald green, indigo and a touch of mauve. There are several matching mahogany-veneer shelving units, and a long deep green, glass-topped dining table with eight chairs. Photographs of the family and several original oil paintings by Native artists are arranged on the walls, while a large wood carving of an eagle and all sizes and types of baskets - willow, cedar twig, birch bark and Sweetgrass - cluster on the shelving units between books. Pauline's pride are the red willow-framed mirror on the wall behind the couch and a matching, rough-hewn coffee table. Red Willow is a powerful medicine, the name she gave to the Healing Place she operated during the late 1980s. A friend made her this mirror and table as a gift.

The floor is well-swept and the house is tidy but a small pyramid of cardboard boxes - incongruous and intrusive - sits beside the door to the porch. Pauline has already explained she has been on one of her cleaning binges, a clearing-out. Once or twice a year, she goes through her clothes closet, book shelves, the porch and her collected boxes

of papers. She tosses or redirects anything that is not essential, consciously paring down on everything material in her life. This includes an attempt to condense her personal archives. While the pile has become smaller over the past decade, there are still half a dozen boxes of papers and newspaper clippings relating to her work on various activist fronts in the Native community, or to WSSS, in this pyramid. She has pulled them out of the cold porch where she stored them, to sift through and condense them, but her review has been interrupted by other demands for her attention.

The boxes are a demanding physical presence in this room, the intrusion of historical record. In the interests of our project. I call out, "I can help you review them". She does not respond. Perhaps my voice has not carried into the kitchen, but I do not repeat the offer. Pauline has been safe keeper of these archives for more than a decade. I am involved in this work by her invitation alone. Rianne is quiet through this exchange, watching her hands. We have met and exchanged greetings at Pauline's house several times, but we are not well acquainted. It is our mutual friendship with Pauline that brings us together for conversation over tea, our inclination towards familiarity laid on that foundation. Neither one of us is inclined to small talk, and the boxes, which refuse to be ignored, give us both something to focus on. When Rianne asks, I volunteer that my curiosity about the archives is rooted in Pauline's request that I write the history of WSSS. Rianne nods and smiles to indicate she approves of the project. I do not say so, but I am still unsure what shape the story of Pauline's school will take: historic novel, biography, curriculum study, or anthropological thesis. All I know is, whether it is framed for academics or the lay public, I will conduct interviews and search out documents. Pauline has listed a number of items she wants me to address which require historical research: the truth about her great-great-Grandfather Wandering Spirit, the

truth about Big Bear's connection to Louis Riel, the original mandate of the school, the Four Seasons curriculum.

With the whistling of the kettle, Rianne and I go to the door of the galley kitchen, helping to carry milk, sugar and cups to the table. Rianne squeezes between the boxes and the table to sit, while I take a chair on the opposite side, leaving the head of the table for Pauline. She is singing under her breath as she bustles into the room with the teapot. She sets it down and turns to bring a small box from the top of the pyramid to the long table. Pauline draws our attention to the colour photograph in a magazine clipping (Reid 1978). A circle of 20 adults and children sit on a large, olive-green carpet. The sun casts strong luminous bars of light across the classroom, brightening faces on one side of the circle and haloing heads from behind on the other side. Pauline points to one of the woman:

*P: This is one you should interview. She was one, in the first four years... She can give you background, you know ? <snip>*

*S: [This picture] has Clayton & Ted in it. <snip> and Lesley.*

*P: Yeah (Shirt & Nahwegeechic T11 1994a).*

Clayton, Ted and Lesley are all Pauline's boys. She has often said that looking at pictures of the WSSS students is like looking through a family album. All of her children attended the school, the three boys and her daughters Deanna and Luanna. Pauline is not the only one to say the family spent so much time at WSSS, it was an extension of their home (Harper T14 1997). Yet there is more to this than commentary on a shift in family habits. Among members of the Native community in Toronto, Pauline was known as the *mother of the school*. Parents, volunteers and children all became extensions of her family. Pauline considers the faces in that circle now, drawing on memory, and continues:

*P: See, we had people of colour, too. That's Theodore. [pointing to a black boy in a grey striped shirt] . <snip> He was a sweetheart, that one.*

*R: Yeah, Theodore (Shirt & Nahwegeechic T11 1994a).*

Her comments subtly reframe our reading of this photograph. The notion of *extended family* is suddenly placed in the context of the global community. Pauline continues to lead us around the circle, identifying faces she has not seen in years, giving people their names. Even for Rianne, the picture finds a fresh context, some of the faces brought into focus under a different light.

*P: [pointing to each person as she calls their name] And there's Luanna, here... And she died, Judy Conten.*

*R: Oh really ?*

*P: She died. She was one of the mothers. <snip> Fay MacKenzie, one of the teachers. She's a mother, Alice Bryant. And this [child] is Cathy Ashkewe, right here (Shirt & Nahwegeechic T11 1994a).*

The listing of names is presented as an off-hand report, but this activity is clearly more than a process of identification. I am a sudden witness to the transportive nature of history as Pauline pulls several more news clippings from the box. One is a brief article with a photograph of three men dancing in a circle with several children. Two of those men are wearing the broad-brimmed suede hats with headbands that seemed to signify a traditional man in the Aboriginal community during the late 1970s and early 1980s (CFSC 1979). Again, Pauline makes introductions. I have not met them all, but recognise some of the names from earlier conversations about the school.

*P: This is Anias. Anias -*

*S: Smoke ?*

*P: Anias Smoke, yeah. That's Harmony's father. And this is Vern. [pause] He's dead, this one, Kenny Whiteloon [pointing to a child]. This is ah - what's her name ? I can't remember. Cathy Ashkewe, Luanna, and - Oh, what's this guy's name? He used to be at Wandering Spirit. He was [inaudible]. He was one of Jim Dumont's helpers (Shirt & Nahwegeechic T11 1994a).*

Once again, the story is thrown into fresh context. Pauline's tone of voice betrays the deep emotion attached to her revelation that two in the circle have died. Grief makes me conscious of the tension inherent in this review of the archives. Rianne and Pauline have included me in this reclamation of shared experience. It strikes me that even historical relationships are not static but shifting, transformative. Before we drew them out of the box, these pictures dealt with the past: *These ones were there*. Bringing them into the present narrative causes a shift in context and history is not a casting backward but a drawing forward: *This is who remains*. Clearly, both deep pride and a profound loss are integral to the story of WSSS.

Now, Rianne draws Pauline's attention to a full page clipping from a small community newspaper (New Times 1979: July 15). There are two articles with photographs on this page. As she turns to it, there is a brief pause, then Pauline breaks into great peals of laughter. She points to the caption underneath one of the photographs, and Rianne begins to laugh with her. I am nonplussed, so Pauline tries to fill me in on the joke.

*P: It's so [pause for breath, laughing] That's Helen [Hayden] and Dawn Smoke.*

*S: Yes ?*

*P: [still laughing] Oh, we laughed when [the reporter] said, 'Dawn Smoke, the Secretary'. This is in the 1970s, eh ? [still laughing] And she could have crowned that woman (Shirt & Nahwegeechic TII 1994a).*

Apparently Dawn, like Pauline, resented the way dominant culture tends to attach limiting job descriptions to women's work, belittling their function and influence. In the 1970s, they felt the reporter, another woman, should have known better.

Pauline's attention returns to the clipping she is holding, the one with the photograph of dancers (FSC 1979). She points to a brief poem which introduces the article.

*P: ...Look at this. This is...*

*S: Luanna's !*

*P: That is Luanna's saying. That is her own saying. Look at this. [quoting the poem]:*

*Wandering Spirit is... a school.*

*Wandering Spirit is kids.*

*Wandering Spirit is Indians.*

*Wandering Spirit is a good and bad school.*

*Wandering Spirit is drumming.*

*Wandering Spirit is... the FUTURE.*

*S: Right.*

*P: I don't know how old she was [when she wrote this poem].*

*S: Wasn't there another saying that she wrote (Shirt & Nahwegeechic T11 1994a).*

She is excited by my reminder. "Oh, right here, right here." She shuffles through clippings and papers until she locates a slim grey booklet, then reads aloud again. This time Luanna's poetry graces the back cover of the WSSS Information Handbook (Novak et al. 1983):

*P: [quoting]*

*Children are here to  
learn,*

*Parents are here to  
provide,*

*Grandparents are  
here to teach,*

*All related in the  
Sacred Circle of Life.*

*P: That's theirs. [smiling] That's... from the kid's mouth (Shirt & Nahwegeechic T11 1994a).*

As we continue to sift through the contents of the box, I collect snippets of the saga which is the history of WSSS, developing a collage of vignettes. We focus on the classic classroom portraits and news photos, rather than the newspaper and magazine clippings they are attached to. This excursion through the archives is something like looking at an

unbound school yearbook, all of the pictures provoking stories that ignore the captions.<sup>1</sup>

Some time passes in this activity before Pauline worries aloud. Despite her efforts to safeguard them, some items in these archives are damaged by mishandling, while others are apparently missing. She says there were several articles by the Toronto Star's reporter, Joey Slinger, but now there is just the one she holds in her hand (Slinger 1980). She pauses to skim through it, reading silently until she comes to a passage that makes her wince:

*[quoting] 'Harper is a founder, and more or less guiding spirit, of the school'. [tossing it onto the pile] Slinger was [pause] Vern's favourite. You know? [pause] He lives up the hill, here in Riverdale (Shirt & Nahwegeechic TII 1994a).*

This is her way, constantly tying the past to the present with snippets of fresh contextual information that shift or expand upon prior preconceptions. But you have to know Pauline and her values to understand the flick of the wrist as she tosses Slinger's clipping on the pile. Her frown says Vern liked media attention, and this reporter focused on him as a celebrity figure.<sup>2</sup> It is not that Slinger ignores Pauline and the Parent Council

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<sup>1</sup> Five years later, despite the stress dominant culture places on *witnessing*, I found the photographs an unreliable record. Perhaps this is because the photographs are oddly detached from the school's living history, until they are brought to life through the participants' stories. It is as if the photographs gloss over activities by freezing participants in their dance steps and reducing the culture teachings to symbolism. The dances and morning circles become an artifact of Native culture rather than a human expression of relationship. This point was brought home to me in a profound way in January 1998, as I reviewed newspaper and magazine articles in the WSSS archives for the umpteenth time. While studying the photograph accompanying the Rosie DiManno (1988) article. I suddenly recognised my own two daughters among the cluster of children who sat on the floor before the cultural teacher Mark Phillips. In fact it was my 12-year-old Ila who was frozen in speech, while Brynna, just shy of five years old, was caught in a daydream on the edge of the group. Ironically, it was not some expression of my own child but the striped T-shirt and tousled blonde head of a classmate that made me look closer. Only when I realised this boy was Connor Merzetti - Brynna's playmate and a neighbour in our Co-op - did I see my children in the grainy picture. This incident gave me reason to reconsider the value of photographs as witness records. Pictures are more effectively the visual prompts for memories. In the reliving of experience history is brought forward through stories.

<sup>2</sup> While she praises many Aboriginal actors, musicians, writers and celebrity personalities for their service to the community, Pauline's harshest criticisms are placed at the feet of those she calls 'peacocks'. This is because the quality of attention they seek relies on external appearances, image, rather than integral principles and values.

who directed operations at the school, but they are eclipsed by his portrait of Vern. He does not see the intricate interweaving of roles. Pauline has said many times that Vern was a very good spokesman. By no means anyone's puppet, he sometimes contributed profound insights in his own right. Yet his role at WSSS was more that of public relations officer than guiding light. The school was founded on Pauline's vision, and the labour of about a dozen other dedicated volunteers, the larger portion being single-parent women. In fact, Vern only left his job at Pedahbun Lodge<sup>3</sup> to devote himself to the school after WSSS had proved itself through a year and a half of full operation (TNT 1978; Shirt & Nahwegeechic T11 1994a; Berg & Shirt TC 1997, TC 1998). As a spokesman, he took up the role of Warrior Chief in a moiety system that operated as a gynocracy, with Pauline in the role of Peace Chief (Allen 1986; Berg & Shirt TC 1997, TC 1998). It is one of the original complaints of the First Nations that the colonizer is blind to the social roles of Aboriginal women (Kehoe 1981; Alcoze CL 1988; Fleet 1997). In this light, Pauline's comment is not so much a rebuff of those men as it is an effort to reclaim the original story of the school, shifting the focus away from personalities to stress the roles each member of the collective assumed in relationship to the school community .

We move on to the next clipping, which profiles a white man who learned traditional Native artistry from his Cree step-mother. Wearing a broad-brimmed hat with a fancy headband, [G.N.] holds a beautiful long-stemmed pipe aloft in both hands. Traditional bead-work decorates the stem, and four eagle feathers hang on a loop between the bowl and mouthpiece. In the background, a shelving-unit displays chokers, Sweetgrass and quill baskets and handmade dolls in traditional outfits. Once again, historical

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<sup>3</sup> Pedahbun Lodge is an Aboriginal Healing Centre in Toronto where Vern worked as a Counsellor.

relationships are thrown into fresh perspective by the unpredictable commentary of Rianne and Pauline. They joke about his nickname, "Gordon Six-pack", his Achilles' heel conflicting with community values, but they continue with praise for both his skill as an artisan and his intentions:

*P: ...He was a beautiful, beautiful artist. He gave a lot of stuff to the school.*

*S: [referring to the photograph] This is in the school ?*

*P: Um hm, yup. He did an exhibition at the school. Yup.*

*R: You should see this guy's work.*

*P: Yup. It is [pause] - He is a genius, yeah.*

*R: He's better than lots of Native people (Shirt & Nahwegechic T11 1994a).*

There is no condemnation here, for either his addiction or cultural appropriation. Instead, he is recognised as a man who faced serious personal struggles while successfully negotiating a crossing of the boundary between cultures to earn tremendous respect in an untypical way. They tell me [G.N.] was reinvesting traditional Native Way with *life*, returning what his ancestors had stolen from Aboriginal peoples across North America through his workshops with children, at WSSS and in the public school system.

Our exploration of the archives is interrupted by the phone. Pauline excuses herself briefly and returns with news her son Clayton plans to stop by later. She suggests I interview him as a former student of WSSS. Our conversation turns now, and Pauline and Rianne explore the difficulties Pauline faced in founding the school. Rianne suggests there is something that other stories about WSSS have overlooked:

*R: There was no money.*

*P: Yeah. <snip>*

*R: They did this all without money. Everything was volunteer. <snip> And it ran better then, then it ever did.*

*S: ...It seems like, as soon as the money started coming...*

*R: Well, that's always the way... <snip>*

*P: Yup. All these jealousies and accusations and everything came... It just weakened the*

*spirit...of the school.*

*S: Things stopped coming from the heart?*

*R: Yup. <snip> Jealousy, basically ...was the breakup of the school. <snip>*

*P: ... But also, too, the [spiritual] Grandfathers predicted that. <snip> They told us that they would, you know ? They said, 'Yes, the school is very good,' and they supported. They were 100 percent behind it because, you know, I had gone Fasting for it and all that. But, they said- [pause] They didn't say I would be sick. They said I would leave... There would be jealousy... and I said, 'Who is it? Who? Who is it?' And they said it would be a white person that would break the school. [pause] Now, I don't know, I can't point fingers at anybody. What I understand - for my own understanding now - is [it was] the system itself. You know? The corruption in the white society... That's how I would see it, myself. <snip>*

*R: So, you know, it 'was' a success, but, in regards to the whole picture... she's way beyond her time (Shirt & Nahwegeecheic T11 1994a)*

From their perspective, though the school continues under a new name, there is a break in the continuum. Everything in creation shifts through stages in its existence on the physical plane, and this shift was predicted. Still, while predictions foreshadow and sometimes explain events, they cannot erase the pain attached to them. For Rianne and Pauline, the school is no longer the entity known as WSSS.

Once again, the phone rings. Pauline leaves our tiny circle and this time she is drawn into an extended conversation. Rianne and I watch as she flips back and forth on the pages of her wall calendar, cross-referencing with notes in her daily agenda. She is trying to fit a fresh request for her services into a long list of bookings to assist individuals in their healing or to facilitate ceremonial openings and workshops. Her schedule always extends over three months. Glancing at each other, Rianne and I catch the resignation written on the other's face. She laughs and I shake my head, but it is always this way at Pauline's house. Her friends and family have adopted an attitude of benevolent tolerance, enduring the broken conversations, teasing her fondly about her need for a secretary. Pauline is both an Elder and a Counsellor-Healer. When someone in the community is in

need, she is duty-bound to respond, and her children, friends and family are all expected to make sacrifices on behalf of the community with her. Still, we often worry as the relentless demands of her role exhaust her own physical resources. She never rests, or slows down, until illness has her suddenly bed ridden for days.

When Pauline returns to the table to find her tea has gone cold, I cannot resist teasing her:

*S: [feigning annoyance] Did you bring the pen back ?*

*P: Oh, I'm sorry. [she laughs self consciously and rises to retrieve the pen]*

*S: [laughing] Never mind, I was teasing. Sit down.*

*P: [she visibly relaxes, laughing at herself]*

*R & P & S: [all laughing together]*

*R: Grab her while you can !*

*S: Yeah, exactly (Shirt & Nahwegeechee T11 1994a).*

In 1987, when Pauline first asked me to write the history of WSSS, one of her concerns was her health. On three separate occasions, cancer has manifest, but always in another spot on her body (Regnier 1987; Shirt T2 1992b). She also has an enlarged heart and a number of other problems. We have both worried aloud that we will miss the opportunity for a full collaboration on this story because of her health (Berg & Shirt TC 1997, TC 1998). Yet those are just the blue days. On a good day, Pauline is convinced she can overcome her cancer. While she is not free of cancer, she takes as proof the fact that it has gone into remission or disappeared from the affected site several times.<sup>4</sup> Afterall, she is still on her feet.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> The two week life span that Medical Doctors predicted would follow from a decision to decline western medicine when Pauline was first diagnosed in 1982 has (so-far) been extended through a combination of Sweatlodge Doctorings and Naturopathy to cover more than sixteen years.

<sup>5</sup> As I am working to finalise the thesis manuscript in October 1998, Pauline has been diagnosed with cancer in a fourth location on her body. Predictably, she has initiated intensive Sweatlodge Doctorings. However, determined as ever to move beyond ill health she continues her work in the Prisons in Maple Creek and Kingston.

In fact, my perennial dilemma as an ethnographer has been the difficulty I faced in convincing Pauline to sit long enough for an in-depth discussion of the school. I soon realised that such a thing could not be forced and decided to trust that the story would come to me, if it should, in its own way and time. The result is that it has come to me in pieces, for more than a decade, like a jig-saw puzzle that is far too large and complex to complete in one go. I used to wonder if her reluctance to deliver a crafted *story*-version took root in her frustrations over the present circumstances of the school. Now I realise that her method was both intentional, in that I now know this story through living with it for an extended period of time, and a matter of circumstances. In her effort to maintain her independence and self-sufficiency while fulfilling her role in her community as a cultural teacher and spiritual counsellor, Pauline has become a victim of her own work schedule.<sup>6</sup> "Grab her while you can," Rianne says, voicing her support for this history. It seems to make a difference that Pauline heard her friend say this. Suddenly she settles across from me, and gives me her full attention:

*S: ...I wanted to ask you... I've got two stories on the seed for Wandering Spirit... <snip> that Clayton and his difficulties planted the seed, and that it was the Caravan.<sup>7</sup> <snip> I can see why both of those things would plant that seed, but I'm just wondering how they come together? Did the Caravan lay a groundwork, and then Clayton was like the final drop of water in the bucket that made it spill over?*

*P: He was the one that decided that. He was the deciding factor, in that. Yeah.*

*S: But you must have been talking about founding a school earlier?*

*P: Yeah, well... the Native Peoples' Caravan was ... [the reception] when we went down to Parliament Hill... After, we said, 'Okay, what now?... What should we do now? How*

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<sup>6</sup> Pauline is called upon frequently to do work in the community as a Spiritual Teacher, a Counsellor, and a Prison worker.

<sup>7</sup> This is a reference to the NPCO in 1974. To put this event into a broader context: Bob Brunette of the Rosebud Reservation, USA, inspired The Trail of Broken Treaties. Several Caravans set out from reservations in different States, converging on the BIA headquarters in Washington, USA, in 1973 (Crow Dog & Erdoes 1991: 83-84).

*should we carry on [pause] the fire?'<sup>8</sup> ...We used to have meetings over there... [at] the stone house, in Ottawa. That's where we stayed after... the incident, eh? <snip> [Vern and I] stayed there for about a week, I think, and then came home. But [the other leaders] stayed there about a month after. And then the RCMP just burned it down... Anyway, that was where the seeds were planted.*

*S: In that old stone house?*

*P: Yup, um hm. But the movement was [pause] We started, you know, with the Caravan...Getting together... over the concerns of whatever was happening in the country. You know? ...We said, 'You go home to your own areas, to your own reserves, wherever you are and start... Work on education, work on health, or whatever'. You know? So we said, Vern and I said, 'Oh!' We started talking about the schools and the people used to talk about schools...*

*S: So, it sounds like a number of seeds were planted, at the same time -*

*P: Yup.*

*S: - education, health, & other issues... <snip> And you just picked up the one for education?*

*P: Yeah, uh huh, because education was affecting my children, you know? The lack of proper education was affecting my children in the school system. At that time, Luanna and Deanna were the only ones. I mean, Clayton was just beginning his Kindergarten and he hated it. You know? Because he used to get beaten up... I went up to the teacher... We went up to her and said, 'Hey, this is what's happening to him'. 'Well, tough', that's what the principal said. <snip> We used to have to drag them some times... drag them to school. And they would fight and say, 'No way, I don't want to go to school. I'm not going to go to school'. So I said, 'OK'. You listen to your child, you know? You listen to the spirit of your child and say, 'What can we do?' So we said, 'This is unsafe'. Unsafe, because we went to the principal and the teacher ourselves and they didn't want to deal with it... They said, 'Oh, tough luck. Tough. That's the way it is'. That was their attitude, and that's exactly what they said to us. <snip> So we said, 'Okay, this is unsafe territory. This is unsafe territory for my child, so what can we do? This child has to go to school. He lives in an urban setting'. So that was when we started to say, 'Okay'. We started talking to some people in here, and some parents, and we said, 'Okay, why don't we start our own school?'*

*S: In the Co-op? (Shirt & Nahwegeechic T11 1994a)*

I am thinking of the rallying support offered by individuals in the Co-op.<sup>9</sup> Bill Lewis,

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<sup>8</sup> In my understanding, this question refers to both the notion of a guiding spiritual fire and the pragmatic struggle for the recognition of Native rights within the context of dominant society.

<sup>9</sup> My list of Bain Co-op members who were parents of children at the school or who volunteered at WSSS as support staff is not complete, but such a list must include: Chris Wilson, Bill Lewis, Nancy Kimaro, Helen Hayden, Dora Raphael and Beth Giles (Berg & Shirt TC 1997).

an activist, long time volunteer at the school and family friend, was living in the same courtyard as the Harper family at the time. Chris Wilson, one of the team who made the film Wandering Spirit Survival School (Holdway et al. 1978), was also a neighbour in the Co-op (Lewis T12 1996a). But this is not what Pauline meant:

*P: No... Within the Native community. <snip> And they said, 'Okay, we'll support you' ... I just started it, and it was here [tapping on the table], in the living room.*

*S: Right. So the seed was planted in 1974 and you talked about it for a couple of years. It was 1976 when it was finally founded. <snip> You only ran it a couple of months out of here?*

*P: Well, actually, we started September 20th, [1976,] I think we were here for about a month [or] a month-and-a-half, and then we went to the Native Centre. From the Native Centre... I approached the [Ontario] Ministry [of Education]. The Ministry helped me contact the Toronto Board. I went to the Toronto Board February 10th, [1977] and then from there on we went to [Winchester Public School on] Prospect Street... [W]e were there for one year and then we went to Sackville, because that school was too small for us, because it was just one room. <snip> But a lot of things happened, in that time. There's a lot of fillers, eh? And then... that's when I... left the school there, in 1982.*

*S: Right. It was at Sackville, still, in 1982?*

*P: Yup.*

*S: And in between the Caravan and September 20th, 1976, would be the time when you had gone down to ceremonies? I think you said it was at St. Paul -*

*P: Um hm.*

*S: - and you were given that message from the Old Woman?<sup>10</sup>*

*P: ... That was before that.*

*S: That was before 1974?*

*P: Oh yeah. We started.. Let's see, that was the beginning of Three Fires ... [turning to Rianne] It was about 1972 or 1971, wasn't it?*

*R: Yeah (Shirt & Nahwegeechic T11 1994a)*

In fact, the handbook for the Red School House indicates it was founded by the Twin City Indian community in 1972 and operated out of the AIM headquarters in St. Paul,

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<sup>10</sup> To speak of an Old Woman or Old Man in Aboriginal communities is not simply to distinguish their age but to acknowledge their authority as an Elder (Brody 1981; Dumont CL 1988; Shirt T1 1992a).

Minnesota (Lyons 1979: 6, 12).

All things were happening at once in a movement that united bands across the continent in the early 1970s; distinctions between activities in Canada or the USA often manifest as a difference in the size or timing of the protest. In the USA, there was the Trail of Broken Treaties to Washington in 1973, the occupation of the BIA building by 500 demonstrators and its re-christening as the Native American Embassy (Hux et al. 1987; Fleet 1997). In Canada, it was the NPCO in 1974, the establishment of a Native Peoples' Embassy, and the confrontation between an RCMP Riot Squad and 200 demonstrators on the Hill (Ticoll & Persky 1975; Shirt T3 1993a; Harper T14 1997). This is a context for activism that the corporate media articles about WSSS did not reflect.<sup>11</sup>

*R: ...Eddie [Benton-Banai] had a Vision before 1974. <snip>*

*S: And that was the beginning of Three Fires Society?*

*P: Y-y-yeah, sort of.*

*R: No... Already, Eddie had begun -*

*P: He had already begun himself.*

*R: Yeah, he already started looking around for [signs of] the Seventh Fire...<sup>12</sup> and that's*

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<sup>11</sup> WSSS has rarely received attention in academic journals. In fact, it is a feature of the literature on the subject that news articles represent the primary sources of information about either WSSS or the Native Survival School movement. The WSSS archives reveal that several B.A. students from the fledgling Native Studies Department at Trent University executed small studies for their course at WSSS in the late 1970s. The archives also hold notes pertaining to reviews of the performance of several BED students from University of Toronto who completed the practicum portions of their degree at WSSS. In addition, Pauline speaks of a steady flow of visiting educators and graduate students from other provinces, the USA, and Europe (Regnier & Shirt TR1 1987a; Shirt T1 1992a; Berg & Shirt TC 1997). However, a search for these produced only one Masters thesis from University of Saskatchewan (Pellerin 1982).

<sup>12</sup> In *The Mishomis Book* (1988) Benton-Banai reveals that seven Anishinabe prophets predicted Seven Fires or prophesies. The First Fire refers to a migration (following the path of the Megis shell) to a Turtle-shaped island, and the escape of an imminent destruction; the Second Fire speaks to a loss of spiritual strength and a boy who points the way back (the Little Boy Water Drum); the Third Fire predicts another move west, to a land where food grows on the water (89); the Fourth Fire speaks of the arrival of Europeans, saying there are two potentials for change: brotherhood or death; the Fifth Fire tells of a choice all Natives must make, and one who promises false salvation but brings strife for generations; the Sixth Fire is the loss of teachers and emergence of a new sickness as grandchildren reject their Elders (90); the Seventh Fire speaks of a new generation who seeks out the Elders and returns to the

*when Edna and Jim and that [group], they got together, and then [inaudible] in Michigan, [inaudible] at that Sunrise Ceremony.<sup>13</sup>*

*P: Yeah, I think they had the Wild Rice Festival in there at that time and Eddie was invited, so they started having Sweats in there. Because I remember [pause] they were having problems. They didn't [pause] Nobody really knew how to run a Sweat. I remember Corky was trying to run a Sweat... That was the Wild Rice Festival, in White Earth [Reservation, Minnesota]. I remember, what's her name was there [pause] Vicky...*

*R: Green.*

*P: Yeah, Vicky Green was there and Edna was there. And I guess quite a few of us were there. [turning to Rianne] Were you there too?*

*R: No. <snip>*

*S: So, had Eddie started The Little Red School House by then? Or was that after too?*

*P: It was already there. I think it was already started.*

*R: Yeah, it was already started.*

*P: [It was running] a year or two, at that time, because we went to see the school. <snip> Yeah, I went to see the school.*

*S: So, did that have a big influence on your decision to start [WSSS] then?*

*P: Oh yeah, that was one of them (Shirt & Nahwegeechic T11 1994a).*

While the stress was on inclusion of all First Nations people at WSSS, the Aboriginal community the school was most closely connected to is "an ancient alliance among three Algonquin nations of the Ojibway, Odawa, and Potawatomi... known as the Three Fires. This original alliance had powerful military strength; however, the primary force which governed the Three Fires Society was religious in nature and function" (31). The territory of Three Fires extends over the Canada-USA border, and Pauline and Rianne establish that the points of reference and impetus for founding WSSS in Toronto belong to the larger group, which consciously re-asserted its historical relationship to territory.

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teachings, but finds a blind fork in the path. That fork indicates a choice laid before all people. One trail is slow but the Earth is green, the other is fast but the Earth is scorched. The choice is sometimes interpreted as natural living or a life guided by technology. Only one path leads to the eternal Eighth Fire of peace and brotherhood (93).

<sup>13</sup> Edna Manitowabi and Jim Dumont founded an independent Native Way community on private land at St. Charles, near Sudbury, Ontario. The group lived very simply, without electricity, and established a Survival School named Bi-daas-ke-win (Berg & Shirt TC 1998).

However, the Native Survival School movement was not just about schooling. It was rooted in a spiritual-cultural revival that touched every facet of daily life.

*P: See, you've got to remember [pause] the American Indian Movement (AIM).<sup>14</sup> Wounded Knee<sup>15</sup> had a lot of impact on everybody, right across North and South America, eh?*

*R: And Wounded Knee was around that time.*

*P: ... Yeah and we were part of that thing...<sup>16</sup>*

*S: Of Wounded Knee?*

*P: ...Yeah. <snip>*

*S: <snip> This was the big protest?*

*P: Yeah. Uh huh (Shirt & Nahwegeechee T11 1994a).*

The phone rings again. This time Pauline sighs and asks Rianne to take a message for her. This decision elicits a laugh from Rianne, and smiles all the way around the table.

For the moment at least, history takes precedence:

*S: So, were there other schools that you had seen?*

*P: Were there other schools? [pause] ...Heart of the Earth, I think, started after. [pause] I can't remember when Heart of the Earth started. It was Red School House, and another school somewhere. I can't remember where... But I know, the School House, Red School House, was the first one.*

*S: That was the first one in the States <snip> The first one you were aware of?*

*P: Oh yeah (Shirt & Nahwegeechee T11 1994a).*

In her response to an inquiry I placed on the Internet, Laura Waterman Wittstock (EM

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<sup>14</sup> Established in 1968 to address "Indian ghetto problems" in St. Paul, Minnesota, after the urban Natives joined with "traditional reservation Indians... AIM became a force nationwide." (Crow Dog & Erdoes 1991: 75-76).

<sup>15</sup> Sometimes referred to as the second incident at Wounded Knee, this protest near the Sioux sister reservations of Rosebud and Pine Ridge, South Dakota, USA, was enacted to draw attention to continuing abuses perpetrated against Aboriginal Americans by the federal government of the USA and its representatives. Beginning on February 23, 1973, a siege between a group of Indians and the FBI lasted 71 days. The incident also commemorated the long history of Indians in America by reminding the public of the slaughter of Big Foot's band on December 29, 1890. In that incident, the Seventh Cavalry had slaughtered half of the band of 340 - mostly women and children - though they had indicated their intent to surrender, they were surrounded in a gulley, and all but a few young warriors had already given up most of their weapons (Hux et al. 1987: 276, 529).

<sup>16</sup> Pauline indicated that she was visiting Sioux territory and attended the Sacred Peyote ceremony Mary Crow Dog describes (Crow Dog & Erdoes 1991) where the intention to make a symbolic siege of Wounded Knee was discussed (Berg & Shirt TC 1998).

1997) reveals that she and Elaine Salanias

*happened to write the first organising plan for the White Earth school. <snip> Wandering Spirit visited Red School House in 1975 and subsequently came back for the association of survival schools conference in 1976... As I recall [they] took documents from Red School House with which to organise their efforts. Heart of the Farth Survival School also assisted.*

Yet Pauline recalls her search for Aboriginal curriculum materials also took her to other regions of the country:

*P: There was also another one, in LA... With Bill Poppapaw - Pop-pa-paw ? Or some thing like that. But he's dead now, Bill. Wah-pah-paw ? He started that, in there. And then - [pause] I think, but I'm not sure if there was another one. There were very, very few though, you know ? But Red School House was the beginning...*

*S: Was that part of the context [for founding WSSS], though ...those schools that had started up ? Had you seen an effect in their community that would <snip> spur you on ?*

*P: Um hm. Yeah.*

*S: How much was language survival part of the reason for founding the school? <snip>*

*P: I remember Eddie saying, one of the first things he said, was: 'You cannot understand your culture if you don't understand your language. That's your key.' I remember hearing him saying that. That was one of the things that really... pricked my interest, you know ? ...He said, 'It's the key to the understanding of yourself [pause] that you know your language'.*

*S: That's why I ask. I figured that was so.*

*R: Yup.*

*P: That was a very key, key thing, yeah.*

*S: Were you, were your children speaking Cree at all ?*

*P: No. Just a few others, here and there... Well there's - You know, although I speak my language [pause] I think... if WSSS was out West, they probably would have been speaking Cree. But because I was the only one - more or less the only one here [in Toronto], you know, speaking Cree - it was really hard to converse with anybody. You know ? [half laughing] Not unless I talked to myself...*

*S: So did you install language classes ?*

*P: <snip> At the beginning, I did. I did. Because I was teaching university students. That's how I earned my money when I first came to Toronto.*

*S: Really ?*

*P: Yeah.*

*S: You were teaching them Cree ?*

*P: I was teaching them Cree, yeah. Um hm.*

*S: Where was that ?*

*P: I had ten U of T students. [University of Toronto]*

*S: Wow.*

*P: Ten students, yeah. [pause] See, when Alex MacKay<sup>17</sup> says, [WSSS] was the first school teaching [Native language] that's not so. I was one of the first ones. I was the first one, the only one. [pause] It was Anthropology students that I was teaching...*

*S: So, you provided a language class within the [WSSS] school, too ?*

*P: Yeah, I did, I did. I taught them Cree, that's right...*

*S: Was anybody else teaching them other languages ?*

*P: N-no. There was nobody... But then, the second year, Basil Johnson came in [pause] and he started teaching Ojibway. <snip> As a volunteer, although he was on payroll at ROM [the Royal Ontario Museum]. You know, because we didn't have any money. We didn't have any money to pay him.*

*S: Yeah. Well, I guess a lot of the stuff that was done, in the beginning, was volunteer, eh?*

*P: Um hm. Yeah.*

*S: Okay. Well, that gives some idea of the context... [pause] I'm wondering about specifics, about the collection of people that got together to plant that seed for WSSS ...I understand Clayton had some trouble in the school yard, he had some problems [pause] with the methods of teaching as well as the relationships with the kids. Were there other kids that had similar experiences ?*

*P: Oh definitely... Most of the parents that I talked to, within the community, were [pause] had heard about the Caravan, or were part of it. And these parents, these students, were having, you know, really difficult times.*

*S: So, in general, all of those students were.*

*P: Yup, everybody. Yeah. But I had said, I just want to start it with [pause] the elementary level.*

*S: Right.*

*P: ...I know, at that time, there were some high school students [pause] because - You know, I was raising some children that were at high school level.*

*S: Fostering ?*

*P: Fostering, yeah. Fostering children. [pause] And they were having a difficult time. <snip>*

*S: So, it was a conscious decision to start with those little folk and focus on them, that you couldn't deal with [older children] ?*

*P: Yeah, because they weren't - You know, because they weren't tainted by [pause] you*

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<sup>17</sup> Alex MacKay is the Ojibway Language teacher who taught at WSSS (later known as First Nations School) from the late 1980s into the mid-1990s.

*know, the influence of the school system, eh ? Because I wanted to start fresh. I started with six children in here. <snip> You see, when I started the school here, I didn't have no guidelines, nothing, nothing, nothing.*

*S: Right.*

*P: It was a private school. So, I started in here with our own materials and whatever we had on hand, which is very little, you know, because there was no curriculum, [pause] no books on [Native] curriculum, at that time. <snip> We just started, here, in the living room... And then, after, because we were getting more children, I asked the Native Centre if they could provide a space for me (Shirt & Nahweegechic 111 1994a).*

As Pauline's narrative progresses beyond the founding year of WSSS, once again, she provides a context which shifts the significance of WSSS from the micro scale [Toronto] to the macro scale [North America]. WSSS was not a school for the Toronto community alone, but a model for the Aboriginal community that straddled the Canada-USA border. The so-called moccasin telegraph does not recognise that arbitrary boundary, and it reached even non-Native activists who were the concerned parents of Aboriginal children. Some parents were so desperate to find Native Way schooling for their children, they were willing to uproot their families to resettle in another region of the continent:

*P: ...At that time, one of the students was... Dorothy Ann [Woods]. She was from Vermont... Her mother was non-Native, but because she had heard about the school, and there were no schools around her area, she wanted her child to come in and be taught by Native people. [pause] That's how Dorothy Ann came and enrolled at the school... She stayed here [at Pauline's house], and then her family joined the circle.*

*S: So, back when [the school] was in your living room, before you went to the Ministry of Education and received guidelines... How did you set up your curriculum, at that time ? What did you put in place ? You must have had a Vision of what the children needed.*

*P: ... First of all, I went Fasting, eh ? ... I went Fasting and I asked the old men what my direction was, at that time. And they said, 'Yours is with children'. So I thought, 'Oh well, my dream has always been to have a children's home' ...And it still is... to deal with children that nobody wants. And which I did. I fostered a lot of children like that here in my own home, with no assistance from anybody, except one. You know, when I*

*count them, I can count 13 children that came and went in here.... That's what the Old Men said, [on] one of my Fasts... They said, 'We will help you. You take care of the children... That's your Vision.' <snip> I didn't really know what to do because, you know, me living in an urban setting and all. [pause] Where would I go to, especially in a place like this ? Where was I going to raise a bunch of children, apart from my own, [pause] with no land base ? So I said, 'Okay, this is a start... with the school'. [pause] ...We first started the school, in here, and we sat around in the Circle and that's when I knew. [pause] I recognised my Vision then, at that time. You know? That was the beginning of that... But the thing was, we didn't have the curriculum itself. But because of my own up-bringing, and the way I was brought up, and my teachers... the Old Men had said - [pause] I asked them about the curriculum, and they said, 'It's in your own backyard'.*

*S: Right.*

*P: ... That's why I travelled to Red School House, to look at their curriculum... to look at everybody, all over the place. You know ? I even went to Montana, and Blue Sky country I went all over the place.*

*S: When were you doing those trips ? After you had founded the school or -*

*P: No, before, before [pause] because we were still talking, you know ? We were still talking about those things, before and after. I couldn't find anything. So the Old Men said -[pause]*

*S: [filling in the blank] You had to do it yourself.*

*P: So, in my Fast, I asked them. I says, 'Where ?' You know, about the curriculum ? And they said, 'It's in your own back yard'. And so, when they said that... being human, I just - I didn't really know what they meant. But that's when I started doing that circle and the Four Directions. I started with the Four Directions and their meanings ...the Grandfathers, and the teachings... that go with it - Which was just a beginning, a beginning. A lot of people didn't understand what the hell I was talking about. They thought I was crazy, you know ? ... But now - like you said - [snapping her fingers] that was the key.*

*S: That was the key. But Robert Regnier said [in 1995] that it wasn't just the key to Native education, but the key to the Survival movement, bringing the Survival Schools into Canada... Which is really interesting because he's done that overview [see Regnier 1987c] Ah, I'm just wondering how much the Ministry of Education guidelines and stipulations changed what you had in place. Or did you find a way to adapt?*

*P: Oh, I didn't. I didn't listen to them.*

*S: You didn't change ?*

*P: I didn't, no way, uh uh. I looked at their guidelines and it just sure didn't fit in with my - with our own spiritual guidelines, eh ?*

*S: And yet you had to meet those guidelines.*

*P: I had to meet - Okay, it's very basic: a safe place, a safe environment to raise the children in a good way, and that was the beginning, and that's our teachings, too. It's*

*a teaching, you know ? ...You put a child in a safe place and that child will get nurtured in a loving way and that child will learn anything . [pause] Whereas, if you put them in an environment that's unsafe, the child, of course, is going to become, you know, very fearful and can't think properly (Shirt & Nahwegeechic T11 1994a).<sup>18</sup>*

This is a phrase that comes into Pauline's speech almost daily, *Put the child in a safe place*. While the concept is drawn from traditional teachings, her personal realisation of its importance is rooted in her own experience of childhood trauma:

*I used to wonder, 'Well, why am I saying this ?' But we need to have a safe environment for the children. The children cannot go through that torturous time, you know [such as she had experienced in the Residential School] <snip> That's when we started holding our breath because of the fear... We were made to feel fear, fear, fear (Shirt T1 1992a).*

In fact, it was largely a happy coincidence when meeting the protocols, which are guidelines in a traditional Aboriginal pedagogy, harmonised with the Ministry or TBE guidelines and stipulations. In its initial year, WSSS ran into conflict over the use of smudge in the Sacred Circle held each morning.<sup>19</sup>

Pauline has often told the story of one occasion when a child apprentice used so much Sage the smoke set off fire alarms throughout the building. Knowing this was not a drill, the *host* school filed out to the school yard and waited for the Fire Department to respond. The students and staff at WSSS, however, proceeded with their Circle. Pauline laughs from the belly when she tells this tale, throwing her hip out to demonstrate how she braced herself against the door to bar the entrance of several angry men in rubber suits and helmets who were willing to chop it down, if necessary, to put out that Sage

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<sup>18</sup> Coincidentally, CBC radio newscasts reported in June 1998 that recent studies had found early childhood traumas seem to interfere with the chemical balance during brain development, and thereafter these imbalances tend to manifest in a variety of clinical diagnoses.

<sup>19</sup> There are many reports being posted on the Internet, even today, which speak to the spiritual and cultural discrimination Aboriginals in Canada and the USA continue to experience through the abolition of the use of smudge in public buildings such as universities.

smudge. The Fire Marshall told them to stop using their ceremonial incense, and the TBE backed this ruling with its own set of complaints. Yet the staff knew there was no danger involved, and there was also no way they were going to stop smudging. So WSSS simply appealed the Fire Marshall's decision and continued to smudge, using much smaller amounts of Sage. In time, they won the *right* to proceed with their traditional practises. But the point of this tale-within-the-larger-story is that Pauline held the door closed against those firemen until the very last Meegwetch was spoken in their Sacred Circle. The staff at WSSS were determined to define *a safe environment for learning* in their own terms (Berg & Shirt TC 1998).

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Rianne is a Nurses' Aide, on the afternoon shift. Pauline's son Clayton arrives to visit just as she is getting ready to leave, and she teases him about his sense of timing. There are laughs all around, and Pauline makes a fresh pot of tea while Clayton and I catch up on news. Clayton sits at the place Rianne has just vacated at the dining table. The box still sits on the table, with the pictures and articles we were looking at spread beside it. You can see the urge to tease come across his face, provoked by the pyramid of boxes by the porch door and the clippings that lay on the table. "You been on a cleaning binge again, Mom?" His head is bent over one of the clippings, and he half smiles, but does not meet her eyes. "Yeah, right," she says, but her tone of voice says 'This joke is worn out'. The clipping Clayton picked up is a group photograph. Immediately, as Pauline and Rianne did, his first response is to conduct a roll call, escorting us around the circle of faces: old classmates, their parents, volunteers and the WSSS teachers.

*C: That one's um [pause]*

*P: [suggesting] Carl.*

*C: No, that's Punky.*

*P: Punky? Oh, yeah... And that's his mother. You know, she died this summer.*

*C: She died?*

*P: Yeah, uh huh.*

*C: Oh, that's too bad.*

*P: Judy (Shirt & C. Shirt T11 1994b).*

It dawns on me that what I am seeing here is something I never experienced looking over my family photo albums. For Pauline, Rianne, Clayton - and now myself - this public recollection involves something more than a review of past events. The potential for social change that was represented by the collective of people involved with WSSS is being redefined in terms of losses that could not be determined at the time. I am thinking, it must feel like this when the residents evacuate a burning building, sigh in relief as they gather safely outside and then realise too late that someone was left behind:

*C: [pointing, one after the other, to a circle of children, some with their back to the camera] That's Luanna, that's Cathy Ashkewe, um... I think that's Kenny Whiteloon...*

*P: Yeah.*

*S: [laughing] You're doing pretty good to tell somebody from the back -*

*P: Ha, from the back!*

*S: [half laughing] - years & years later! (Shirt & C. Shirt T11 1994b).*

Clayton chuckles to himself as he picks up another photograph. This is a classic class portrait, the students standing in rows, the first row sitting on a long bench. He continues to draw past relationships forward, giving each person a name.

*C: [pointing to a boy wearing a green vest] And that's Jeff.... <snip> Not Jeff. Naw, his name wasn't - Raymond MacDonald!*

*P: Raymond MacDonald? ... Where's Jeffrey then?*

*C: He's not here.*

*P: He's not in there?*

*C: He's not in this. [pointing to a boy in a striped shirt] That's that kid, Punky. <snip> What's his real name? ...*

*P: Derrick.*

*C: Derrick, yeah.*

*P: Yup, and his brother Darren was there <snip> must be there somewhere.*

*C: And that's Theo. I remember Theo. [he pauses, considering, and points to another child] I don't remember that kid.*

*P: That's his sister...*

*C: Oh. Yeah.*

*P: Theo's sister. <snip> I can't remember her name. <snip> And her mother, and I can't remember [her name]... She used to live in Bain Co-op, here.*

*C: Yup. And that's ah - Carl Smith. [in a blue shirt]*

*P: Carl Smith? <snip> Are you sure it was Smith?*

*C: Yeah (Shirt & C. Shirt T11 1994b).*

This shared history emphasises the recollection of prior relationships, but it also suggests there is a certain level of flux to memory. While the details can be negotiated with another person's recollection, they are articulated through a process that recognises some essential order or meaning the collective calls truth. However, it appears Clayton has a heightened ability to recall details. I express my admiration for his acuity. He counters with humility:

*C: Well, I mean, all these guys were there for years, right? <snip>*

*P: That's for sure! That's for sure. You guys were together for many years.*

*C: Yeah.*

*P: Isn't that something when you're [inaudible]...*

*S: Do you know where these people are?*

*C: I sort of keep track of them, most of them - [pointing in sequence to several people in the photograph] I don't know what happened to him. I don't know where he is. He still lives in Toronto. She still lives in Toronto. [turning to Pauline] Didn't Kenny pass away?*

*P: Yeah. Kenny passed away, yeah.*

*C: Kenny passed away. [pointing to another face] I don't know where he is, but he's still in Toronto.*

*P: Jeffrey is going to high school, I think. Or college.*

*C: Raymond, you mean.*

*P: Raymond? Oh, Raymond.*

*S: Could you - If you keep track of little bits of information about where these guys might be-*

*C: [anticipating my request] Yeah. <snip> I know where two are, right now. I ran into -*

*One of the first students, too. What was her name ? [tapping on the table] What was her name ? She's not in that picture... Sara Kendle.*

*P: Oh, Sara, yes.*

*C: Sara Kendle and Arlene. What was Arlene's last name ?*

*P: [muttering, inaudible] I don't know.*

*C: Yeah. And Jeffrey's in Peterborough. <snip>*

*P: And he's going to Trent, eh ?*

*C: Trent, yeah. He's in Trent. Trent University. The rest, I don't know where they are. But I'm sort of trying to find them, myself. I don't know where they are, but... Everybody knows where everybody is. Sort of.*

*S: In general ?*

*C: You find one and then you find the others, yeah (Shirt & C. Shirt T11 1994b).*

It now appears Clayton's facility with detail is at least partly rooted in the same involved concern that predominated among the staff and volunteers at WSSS (Lewis 1996a, 1996b). It has reached beyond the parameters of school calendars, again, to track old school companions through their activities in the community as adults, if only by word of mouth. With his next response, it is obvious that news of their whereabouts and activities offers Clayton a sense of connection with his old classmates, despite the fact that many of them have taken very different paths in their lives than the one he walks.

*C: I was talking to my sister about all of this, because we were talking about [how] it's twenty years. The reunion's coming up or something, right ?*

*S: Right.*

*C: Twenty years. And we were all talking about, 'Well, let's get everybody together and...'*

*S: That would be great, if I can make it to that, and you get everybody together for that I'll just -*

*C: Yeah. But the joke was half of them - what I know of half of them - are either dealing with alcoholism or they're in prison. [pause]*

*S: But the other half? No ?*

*C: Well, no, the majority of them are. [pause] And that was the joke, right ? (Shirt & C. Shirt T11 1994b).*

He says it is a joke, but he is not laughing. Here it is again, the sharing of history with reference to fresh contexts draws all of the relationships portrayed in the photograph into

new associations again. I am trying to grasp the full impact of this contemporary framing of the class picture. Clayton is clearly saddened, as he faces the pain that surfaces through sharing the WSSS story head on. Yet there is an obvious desire to account for the real impact of WSSS in the lives of its students in his narrative, without pretending that rosy futures were realised for everybody. Yet the context for a story is constantly in flux, never static. As Pauline breaks in, the backdrop for the WSSS story shifts from a consideration of people in the small circle of the WSSS community to their place within the larger context of schooling within the Toronto Board of Education:

*P: But [sigh] See, that - That says a lot !*

*C: Yeah, that says a lot. But you have to understand, right ? All these kids were the misfits, anyway. Right ?*

*S: Well, I was just going to say - Because, at the time, how many students were succeeding in school ?*

*C: Yeah.*

*S: Right ? So if you've got half succeeding where -*

*P: And why were they considered mis -*

*S: - only ten percent -*

*C: Yeah.*

*S: - were succeeding before, then it was a success.*

*C: That's the thing, yeah (Shirt & C. Shirt T11 1994b).*

In the overlay of speech - three of us talking at once - Clayton and I have momentarily overlooked the roots of Pauline's concern. The statistics for success or failure in school rest differently in the understanding of Clayton, or me, than they do for Pauline. These statistics are something she has lived with all her life: as a student in a residential school, as a parent, as a Director and founder of the first Native Survival School in Canada. Of the three of us, Pauline is the one who was subjected to the forced acculturation of Native children through the residential school system. She was judged by the culturally biased criteria for academic achievement and social success laid out by

dominant culture at a time when both the population and culture in Canada reflected a predominantly Anglo-Canadian experience. She is the one who can speak to the trouble Native students have consistently experienced with those standards.

The Hawthorne Report (1967) indicated school failure among Aboriginal students was due to difference in culture and preparation for school (Hope 1973: 105). Yet that context has been shifting over the past twenty years with new programs. Even the composition of the population has shifted, in part due to immigration, but largely because the Anglo-Canadian experience is no longer considered the whole of the Canadian story. In the 1950s, only three of every 100 Native children went past grade six (Barman et al. 1986: 9). The gradual dismantling of the Residential School system and the stress laid on inclusion had made some difference. Yet statistics are at best misleading when they are disassociated from their context in human relations. As Pauline cautions:

*P: That could be termed as a racist statement, that whole thing: 'They were the misfits'.*

*Okay, now... you have to say, 'Why are they the misfits?'*

*C: Yeah. In the eyes of the public....the Board of Education, they were.*

*P: And you have to say that <snip> or it becomes a very racist statement (Shirt & C. Shirt T11 1994b).*

The point is that the standards these children were measured against were based on a culturally-biased model for behaviour and intelligence (Pellerin 1982; Phillips 1983).

This is not to say that they did not exhibit problem behaviours; they were children with a history:

*C: They were the rejects -*

*P: Yup.*

*C: - and they were all handed down to WSSS, anyway.*

*S: Well, that was still happening when my kids were there in 1987 to 1988.*

*P: Yeah. <snip> But not in the beginning. The second or third year, that's when it started happening. <snip> Not the first year.*

*C: Not the first year, no. No, because the first year was only us, anyways.*

P: *And a few others, yeah. <snip>*

S: *So [TBE] sent those kids to you because they didn't know how to handle them ?*

P: *They didn't know how to handle them.*

C: *No, they were all troubled children.*

P: *They said, 'They're the rejects', because they couldn't handle themselves. [The dominant system] didn't understand them, you know ? They couldn't understand the spirit of that person, [pause] those children.*

S: *Well, then there's another way of looking at it, too, in that, if they'd seen that you were having success, they were hoping that you would have success with these.*

P: *Exactly ! Yeah. <snip> A lot of them said that, too, 'Since you're very successful with these children' - I mean, we had the - Look at Johnny Geegwetch -*

C: *Yeah.*

P: *Nobody, nobody, wanted Johnny Geegwetch in the community... None of the Native families wanted to keep him. But we kept him here [in Pauline's home]. Because they said, 'Oh he's the most terrible, terrible little - But we kept him, and we had him Doctored.*

C: *What was Punky's last name ? Greavor ?*

P: *Derrick - Derrick , uh - Punky Conten, isn't it ?*

C: *Those guys, too. Him and his brother, they were trouble makers.*

P: *Yup.*

S: *...Bob Regnier said that, the difference with you - even more than the other [Survival] schools - is that you didn't stop at making it a school. You went on to Doctor those children.*

P: *That's the thing !*

S: *And it was a very conscious decision <snip>... to Doctor those children.*

P: *Yeah, we Doctored those children by the Old Men...<sup>20</sup> I would have about six to ten children, coming with me - and pack-sacks, and sleeping bags - to Wyoming at our own expense, to go and get them Doctored.<snip>*

C: *And the Aquins ! I mean, they were so poor, they came to school with no shoes!*

P: *Yeah. It was something.*

S: *So you got them shoes ?*

P & C: *[in chorus] Yeah.*

P: *We got them shoes, clothing, whatever. You know ? ...I mean, these people, these children didn't have any food at the house, at their homes. So we - That's the reason why we started one of the best nutritional programs.*

S: *One of the first [school lunches], too.*

P: *The first, too, yeah.*

S: *Did you have breakfast, as well as lunch ?*

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<sup>20</sup> This refers to ceremonial Doctorings, and access to the Good Grandfathers through the Sweat Lodge.

*P: Breakfast ? No, but we always had, you know, nutritional snacks. In fact, we had a - what do you call that ? - from Plenty.<sup>21</sup> What do you call that Farm ? They call it The Farm. We had Soya milk. You know ? Banana Smoothies and all that for the children. For that purpose, simply for that purpose. Because some of these children were just - Nutritionally, they were just-*

*S: And you can't learn, in that state. You can't ! I mean [pause] they're starting to discover how much your nutrition affects your behaviour, as well.*

*P: Um hm. Yup (Shirt & C. Shirt T11 1994b).*

The key to the success of WSSS, as Robert Regnier sees it, is its grounding in the traditional Medicine Wheel. This does not mean a return to pre-colonial times through the rejection of everything western or modern. Clearly, WSSS was dealing with urban Natives, and that established a whole sequence of influences upon the students' development:

*P: They say, 'Okay, now where are these people ?' You know, because some of them have moved out - We couldn't offer - There was no high school at that time.*

*C: Yeah.*

*P: ... And there was no - I mean, what was the after care ?(Shirt & C. Shirt T11 1994b).*

This is critical. As Pauline suggests, there was an absence of programmes or personnel within the dominant schooling system that manifest as support for the continued success of WSSS's students through high school and into their adult lives. As she states, it is not enough to support the development and healing of an elementary school child if the teen and the adult are returned to fractured homes, chronic poverty, an environment of substance addiction, overt social oppression and homelessness.

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<sup>21</sup> The organization known as Plenty is the Canadian chapter of an alternative American spiritual group that began, quite literally, as the 'following' of Stephen Gaskin in the late 1960s. About 50 converted school buses made a Caravan as he meandered across the USA on lecture tours. Gaskin's platform was 'Helping man [sic] is a good place to start your search for God' (Gaskin 1990: 29). In 1971, the travelling church of 300 people bought 1000 acres of land in Tennessee, establishing a communal community called The Farm (Gaskin 1990: 17). Since then, 'We grew from 300 to 1200 and shrank back to 300... [and] the community revised its economic organization' (17). The organisation is now expressed as a collection of self-sufficient chapters which downplay individualism to promote compassion as an aspect of community wellness.

S: So, beyond grade eight, where did they go ?

P: The after care was, they went back to their home life. Their home life, at that time, was - People were just beginning.

C: I think what WSSS did for a lot of them, was [it] gave them their childhood. You know ? Because they all came, a lot of them came from troubled homes. <snip>

P: Most of them.

C: Most of them, yeah... I think that's what WSSS did, for a lot of them <snip> ...allowed them to be kids. And he kids with [other] Native kids. I mean, most of them were Native, too. Right? So, they were at home there.

P: Yeah. You know, when Kenny Whiteloon - Nobody wanted to teach Kenny Whiteloon.

C: Yeah.

P: And we started with him, right from grade [pause] one ? No, Kindergarten, actually.

C: Kindergarten, yeah.

P: Yeah. And, I mean [pause] he had such a hard time. He was such a, you know, social misfit, according to the system. You know ? And he came to our school and he was able to... be in a family setting, a family atmosphere that was safe. You know? ...He died here [in Toronto]. He died on the street...

C: Yeah, but WSSS got his teeth fixed and everything !

S: Yeah ? <snip>

P: Yeah, uh huh. We found food, clothes, whatever we could get. And then his mother died. His mother... was an alcoholic. [pause] But he didn't have the back-up, eh ? <snip> He didn't have the back-up. You know, the after care. So, the only after care he got was Council Fire,<sup>22</sup> which were his friends. So he died on the street. And when he died, we went to bury him, in a traditional way. You know ?

S: How old was he, when he died ?

C: He wasn't much older than Arnold. <snip> He was 28, or 30 maybe.

P: Yup.

S: When was that ?

P: Just recently. Last year. <snip> And I even buried him with my Teacher's Scarf, which is from the Mide. And my teacher said, 'Why did you bury him with that, with your Teacher's Scarf?' And I just said, 'He was my child !' ... He was my child, and he'll always be my child. Anybody who went to WSSS was part of my family. <snip> And Kenny was partly my child, so I told her that. You know ? Anyway, hopefully she understood.

S: Yeah. Interesting, because that's somebody from your own community asking you that. Right?

P: Yeah, because she said, 'Oh, he's not Mide !' And I says, 'To me, he's my child !' He 'is'

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<sup>22</sup> Council Fire is a Toronto organization that serves the street people of the local Native community, providing them with hot lunches, counselling services and a place to warm up and socialise.

*my child, and I would argue with anybody. I don't care who they are, the highest - I'll argue he was my child, he was part of my family. So I buried him with my Teacher's Scarf, to honour him, to help him out because he was so troubled. And I got hell for that. I may never get my Teacher's Scarf again, but that's alright, as long as I helped somebody go into the Spirit World.*

*S: Your Teacher's Scarf? <snip> That was presented to you in a ceremony?*

*P: That was sent to me in a ceremony, yeah. I was one of the few recognised teachers of the Mide, eh? ...But to me it doesn't matter, I wouldn't cry over it.*

*S: Well, you made a decision.*

*P: I made a decision, yeah. Well, that's the thing (Shirt & C. Shirt T11 1994b).*

Like the old African adage that it takes a village to raise a child, Pauline insists not only parents but also the entire community is responsible for affirming and supporting the children of every colour and creed. Sometimes this involves an element of personal sacrifice that is not merely physical. If it takes a village to provide physical nurturing and security, after all, it takes a village to assure the children that they belong to a people and a place and have a purpose in the world.

**Chapter Eight:****SACRED CIRCLE &  
THE FOUR SEASONS CURRICULUM**

Winter is the season when the Earth meditates under her blanket of snow. Traditionally, this is a time for legends, which are only told between the first snow fall and the last snow melt. It is a time for reflective meditation and doing spiritual work (Dumont 1988), and that is also the context of our collaborative work . In January 1993, Pauline and I began to meet regularly. We had decided to work as a team to assemble a curriculum handbook based on her Four Seasons plan at WSSS (Shirt T1 1993a, T2 1993b). After several meetings, she teased that my house had become her secret hide-away. The joke in this, which set us both to laughing, was that working at my house had only modified the interruptions. Our work period ended as my ten-year-old daughter came home from school for lunch, and Pauline's family forwarded at least one important call whenever we met.

We stationed ourselves in my dining room at the back of the house, away from the noise of street traffic. A large square room in pale grey, it was always bright because it had two sources of natural light. On the south, a French door led to the porch. A big window on the west looked out onto young maple trees rising from a woodland-style garden behind the building, their naked branches now dusted with snow. On the inside of paned-glass, a row of potted plants praised the sun from the window ledge. I had set the table under that window, taking full advantage of the light. On the north wall were two

stacked thirty-gallon aquariums. The bottom tank held a variety of goldfish, and the top one was home to three large aquatic turtles that spent their days *sunning* on a platform under a full spectrum lamp. My daughters and I called this *the office*, but a tall buffet and a sideboard were lined up against the east wall and the round glass-topped table dominated the room. The only tributes to an office were a filing cabinet wedged in the south-east corner by the porch door, and two long narrow desks arranged as an 'L' in the south-west corner.

On this day, as we settled at the table, Pauline told me how good she felt about the work we were doing:

*P: The more and more I deal with my papers, the more and more I want to go home [to Alberta]. It gets closer, closer, closer, Sharon.<sup>1</sup>*

*S: Well, maybe through doing this work it will become possible.*

*P: Yeah (Shirt T31993a).*

This is an important point. Celia Haig-Brown (1988; 1995) suggests that there are tremendous possibilities for promoting social justice through the *coalition work* that manifests in a cross-cultural ethnographic project like this one. This involves more than simple team work. As Pauline and I develop our methodology, process the information gathered through our research and develop our dialogue, we are teaching each other, becoming true partners-in-learning. One aspect of our method hinges on the switch-back character to the dialogue, whereby I reflect my understanding of the teachings back to Pauline for review and synthesis.

Pauline tapped on the notes before her, saying that we needed to emphasize both the

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<sup>1</sup> Pauline admits that she has ached to return to Alberta almost since she arrived in Toronto. She often expresses a deep sense of loneliness as a foreigner in Ontario that finds its root in the fact she has no one to talk Cree to on a consistent basis, and she misses the sense of relationship she has with the land itself in northern Alberta (Berg & Shirt TC 1997, TC 1998).

research that lay behind the teachings, and their source.

*P: This comes through dreams. These are through Visions, all these things. Sure we can learn through The Mishomis Book, others, and all that but -" [long pause]*

*S: Yeah... Eddie [Benton-Banai] says, 'This is what arrived through dreams'. He said, 'These gifts, these teachings, arrived through dreams' (Shirt T31993a).*

However, her point was not simply that dream research underlay the teachings, but that dreams and other forms of research are an ongoing aspect of the Native Way pedagogy and curriculum. In all relationships, the emphasis falls on process:

*P: Yeah. And that's what was happening with me, last night, in regards to this thing...*

*S: Oh... your dreams. I'm always wanting to direct you back to your dreams, in terms of the imagery. You're always finding these children that are crying, and finding ways of feeding the children when you have no food.<sup>2</sup> Your dreams are really telling you so much. I don't know how many times you've told me there's this little child you're supposed to take in and nurture. And sometimes, I've thought, maybe that's you, or [the children at] WSSS... but maybe it's just what needs to be done for children in general (Shirt T31993a).*

Pauline nodded. She had noticed a change in her own dream image:

*P: Also... talking about dreams - [pause] before, most of my dreams said, 'I don't have the proper dress. I don't have the proper shoes. I don't have the proper coat. [pause] I'm not ready yet.'*

*S: Yeah ?*

*P: But lately, I've been driving ! I've been having beautiful clothes. I'm really slim, and loving the clothes that I wear, and loving my shoes ! (Shirt T31993a).*

She interprets this shift as an indication she is making progress, she is ready now. Yet to understand the full dynamics of that shift she draws on an earlier dream about footwear:

*P: A couple of years ago I was telling Edna [Manitouwabi] this dream. I was dressing up and getting ready to go somewhere and all of a sudden I have these beautiful moccasins, a beautiful, beautiful pair of beaded moccasins. So gorgeous! They were right there. [she gestures to the ground beside her feet] So she said, 'What did you*

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<sup>2</sup> Pauline had once advised me that when a person dreams of eating she receives spiritual nurture, and to dream of being hungry was likewise to dream of a lack of spiritual nurture.

*do ?' Well, I said, 'They are mine. These are mine. I'm not giving them to nobody.' So I picked them up. I was reaching for them and going to put them on my feet, but I didn't put them on my feet, yet. I just picked them up.*

*S: So you didn't put them on ?*

*P: I didn't put them on.*

*S: So you didn't walk that path yet ?*

*P: No. Not yet, no. (Shirt T31993a)*

This interpretation of Pauline's dream inspires reflection on the metaphoric suggestion, raised through our earlier conversations, that the Life Path is a moccasin trail. When Pauline first asked me to write the history of WSSS, in 1987, she suggested that this tiny culture school had picked up the ninety-year-old moccasin trail of her great-great-Grandfather, the Cree War Chief Wandering Spirit. I understood that she was making no distinction between symbolism and actuality, and other people associated with the school have also suggested WSSS was continuing Wandering Spirit's work on the physical plane by securing the future of First Nations people through Native Way traditions (Lewis T13 1996b). If the moccasins in Pauline's dream represent her work to manifest Wandering Spirit's vision, then perhaps picking up those beaded moccasins spoke to her intention to protect that vision. As it turned out, while our collaborative work to design a curriculum handbook brought us closer to Wandering Spirit's vision through schooling, the curriculum handbook did not manifest. Instead, our work became the foundation for this thesis. So, as the final draft meets her approval, perhaps she will dream of placing those moccasins on her feet.

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As Pauline and I worked on the handbook in January 1993, the table in my dining room was covered with a variety of books and papers related to Native Studies

curriculum. At the center of everything, as always, was our smudge bowl. The strong incense of Sage permeated the whole house. This time she was calling her guide The Turtle Island Teachings, determined that it would facilitate a programme suitable for all age groups and all indigenous nations in any region of North America. While Pauline's personal reference for its foundation was established by the teachings delivered to her as a child, this is a curriculum that she Fasted for, one the Good Spiritual Grandfathers guided. There were no guidelines for an Aboriginal curriculum when WSSS was founded (Shirt T1 1992a; Shirt T4 1993b), so she collected ideas from the first Survival Schools in the USA (Shirt & Nahwegeechic T11 1994a; Wittstock EM 1997). It took her some time to figure out what the Grandfathers meant when they responded to the question she posed in Fast with the suggestion, "The curriculum is in your back yard" (Shirt T1 1992a; Shirt & Nahwegeechic T11 1994a). So she started with what she knew, "doing the Circle", which had established her own orientation to the world as a physical, social and spiritual being long before she entered Residential School at the age of eight (Shirt T1 1992a).

Pauline confesses, despite her atypical experiences at Blue Quills, it was only after she entered high school in Edmonton that she realised how critically different her upbringing was from what people in dominant society - or even many Native people - experienced (Shirt T4 1993b). Deep in the woods, away from the settlement on the reserve, her family practised the Old Ways, marking the shifting of moons and seasons, integrating their gatherings with the natural world in its processes. There were ceremonies for births, naming, various rites of passage and deaths, and there were more ceremonies to send the men off on hunting or fishing trips. Yet there were also the every day rituals and protocols observed as the women cooked a meal, set up camp, gathered

berries or taught the children how to treat the meat and hides of the animals the hunters returned with. As she says, the Elders and her parents were a constant source of lessons about the Circle of Life. So the Shirt children were immersed in the teachings through their daily chores, practical demonstrations and stories:

*P: ...My Dad used to take us out in the field and teach us. My grandmother and my mother would take us on trips out into the woods and identify things to us; plants and animals and whatever.*

*S: Would they give you teachings about them? Traditional teachings?*

*P: Oh definitely. There were teachings with everything, but we didn't think of them as teachings because they were just part of our daily living. That was the way we lived... I remember my Grandparents used to hold the Sweats, and I was allowed to sit with the men... I would sit with the women sometimes but, especially around the Lodge, the women were always mobile, doing things, while the men would sit and talk. You know? I guess that's where I learned how to go after something, just go ahead and do it the best way that you can.*

*S: Around the Sweatlodge?*

*P: Around the gatherings like that, around the Fire Gatherings.*

*S: There were other Fire Gatherings?*

*P: Oh, lots of them! Like, the men would go hunting. My Uncles would come and get my Dad and they'd do a ceremony before they went hunting. That was a very Sacred time for them, you know, before sunrise... such a joyous time for them. They were so happy (Shirt T4 1993b).<sup>3</sup>*

This idyllic portrait of childhood is a dramatic testimony to the persistent resistance to acculturation in Aboriginal communities (Haig-Brown 1988). Simply to practice the Old Ways was illegal according to the Indian Act (Venne 1981):<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> The ritual Fire-Gathering before sunrise, the fact they "talked to the animals" and the *sending-out* to hunt, suggests these hunters made a spiritual connection with their prey similar to the one discussed in Hugh Brody's Maps and Dreams (1981). Old time hunters would dream of the hunt and see a specific animal in their dream. Sometimes they marked it for a kill in the dream, and the animal they eventually harvested would have that mark (44-45).

<sup>4</sup> The Indian Act and the Indian Agent on the reserve enforced this prohibition as law, and those who practised their ceremonies were often jailed. This policy continued until First Nations people were granted citizenship in 1969 (Venne 1981).

*S: So, even though they were supposed to be suppressed, there were lots of ceremonies happening? You said the Sweats had gone underground, but people would still practice? Were they frequent or -*

*P: Yeah... Just my family. You see, that's where my love for the Seasons came in. We would do things on a seasonal basis... Everything was done traditionally. Traditions were a way of life for us. Like, [the hunters] would talk to the animals. And they would take the liver out, and that would be the main offering of, say, the deer.*

*S: To the Grandfathers?*

*P: Yeah. So that was the sacred food to them. And nothing was ever wasted. I remember, in all the camps, there was no such thing as pollution, no such thing as garbage. You would leave camps so clean... They were a very clean people, very respectful to the land, very respectful to Creation.*

*S: I'm curious, because I've read stories of the RCMP coming in to disrupt ceremonies, and arrest people, and take them off because ceremonies were not allowed.*

*P: Yeah. Okay, I didn't see that in my time. That happened on some reserves, but I didn't see that.*

*S: Was that because they were practising openly, and you managed to -*

*P: Yeah. A lot of us learned how to do things unnoticed (Shirt T4 1993b).*

Learning to do things unnoticed was critical. When a ceremony was called, the extended family group arrived "bit by bit" at some secret, pre-determined site. They went deep into the woods, far from the eyes of people on the reserve who would attempt to curry favour by reporting the traditionalists' activities to the Indian agent. As for the Indian agent, he had no reason to suspect the Shirt family were practising their traditions because they regularly attended Church. There were two churches on Saddle Lake Reserve and Pauline reports there was an adversarial tension between those who followed the Protestant faith and those who were Catholic. This sometimes pitted one group of Church-goers against the other, adding another layer of complication to the strained relationships that developed as people were collected in too-close quarters on the reserves:

*S: Were people [at Saddle Lake] mostly traditional?*

*P: No. It was hidden. You wouldn't talk about it. If you were traditional, you did what*

*you had to do.*

*S: So you would wear the [religion], that was acceptable to white culture, openly -*

*P: Yeah. Exactly.*

*S: - and the belief which stemmed from your Native heritage, was hidden, even from your own people ?*

*P: Yeah.*

*S: How schizophrenic !*

*P: I know ! Yeah, it was.*

*S: So, in fact, what you are, what you obviously are - Native - is the part that is hidden.*

*P: Yeah. See, in my background... there was a lot of mixing of Catholicism and traditionalism... Well, they were saying, 'Jesus Christ', but then again, they were talking about the Grandfathers and all that Nim-o-shi-muc. And I'd say, 'Who are Nimoshimuc? Who are the Grandfathers ?' I would say that, as a child. And I remember, because of the [Residential] School, I knew who Jesus Christ was... But then, here I would come home and I would hear these things. And it really confused me for many years. My Grandmothers and Grandfathers would say, 'Yeah, that's just the way'... and the traditions would be covered. And I remember the Sweats. They'd say, 'We can't have this'. They'd have to take the Sweatlodge down, right away. And that Sweatlodge would be way out in the woods ! (Shirt T4 1993b).*

This recollection begins to explain Pauline's understanding of the Spiritual Grandfathers' answer to her questions about the source of a Native curriculum she would use at WSSS. In her early childhood, those deep woods became Pauline's *backyard*, far from the social tensions that brewed between neighbours at the settlement. In contrast to western notions about the danger in the wilderness, it was not in the settlement on the reserve but in the undisturbed, natural environment of those back woods that Pauline could safely express her beliefs in the nurturing embrace of an extended family. In the teachings of the Sacred Circle, even the animals are kin and will not harm those who live in honour of the Earth and show respect for their homes. This was Pauline's backyard. Everything that she learned in those back woods during her early years became the guiding focus of the Four Seasons curriculum she developed for WSSS (Shirt T4 1993b). The Turtle Island Teachings, or the Medicine Wheel, designate the

ceremonial and daily patterns of life through the attributes of their territory. While the Wheel was sometimes laid out on the Earth as an arrangement of stones, a site for ceremony, it defines not so much a physical setting as an orientation to the world at large from within a particular region. The Medicine Wheel *is* a relationship.

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It is embarrassing for me to look at the transcripts and realise how much talking I did in the early tapes when I think I should have been listening. There is a standing Aboriginal joke about this habit of white folk. After I finished transcribing the third tape I apologized to Pauline. "Why don't you just tell me to shut up sometimes?" I asked. She chuckled, saying we were teaching each other, and I relaxed. Then my good friend Maeve Kelly (LC 1997) read a draft of this thesis and teased me, "Only someone as arrogant as you could be so humble, Sharon". Pauline laughed to think of this contradiction. Humility is not synonymous with inferiority in the eyes of a traditionalist but rather an antonym to arrogance. Humility, in the perspective of the renowned Elders, is a composure akin to serenity. She was not disturbed by my tendency to talk because she recognised that I also listened. In fact, over the past decade our collaborative effort has undergone its own process, developing a unique pattern for dialogue.

According to First Nations tradition, I am properly the *student*, the one who is supposed to *observe* and *listen*. I know this. Yet, there is a partnership to learning in our collaboration, each person reaching halfway across the bridge between cultures. The process of rendering cultural translations is difficult, the transpositions sometimes interrupted by Pauline's struggle to find the right phrase or word. This is not a comment on her facility with English but on the difficulty of transposing concepts from one world

view to another. As a teacher, she is extremely patient and forgiving of my questions, which often act as interruptions to the flow of conversation. However, my questions allowed me to check the associations she meant to draw against my prior understanding of the teachings. At the same time, for the purposes of this project, I am not only an apprentice-student of her traditions, but the designated scribe. That was another point for teasing each other about the dynamics of our relationship, the irony in our separate roles. She talks, while I record and interrupt with questions. After all, it is my culture that is renowned for recording information through the written word, and investigating through questions. This is a standing Aboriginal joke about ethnographers.

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In the middle of January 1993, Pauline was distressed by the First Nation School's admission that the curriculum she left in place as she retired in 1982 was *lost*, because it meant they were operating without the guidance of a cohesive Aboriginal curriculum or pedagogy. Yet she was also excited. The AKEC had asked her to direct a curriculum development project for the school.<sup>5</sup> After years of voicing concerns about the direction the school was taking, she was feeling confirmed by her relationship with the AKEC. In a recent General Meeting, First Nation School had even given her official recognition as both an Elder and *the mother of the school*. It seemed providential that we were already designing a curriculum handbook. Pauline and I had gathered a variety of curriculum materials and reviewed them before we began to write the handbook (Shirt T3 1993a). Among them was one called All My Relations (Verral & Keeshig-Tobias 1988). This is

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<sup>5</sup> Unfortunately, this project was met by political in-fighting at the school and Pauline was fired from the curriculum development team just a few weeks later.

a phrase frequently heard in the Midewin Prayer Circles. I tend to think of it as a verbal glyph, or a conceptual shorthand. *All my relations* represents an orientation to the world that is ideally understood through immersion in a lifetime of shared cultural experience, the collective, daily experience of relationship developed through ritual, ceremony and story. That phrase focused our work.

On this day, Pauline was encouraging me to create a list of subject headings for the curriculum handbook, calling them out loud. These headings articulate the natural order in the Circle of Life like a shorthand outline that begins with the Creation story. Before one can begin to talk of cultures, she explained, there are the cosmic processes that define the Circle:

*S: So the Circle and the Turtle Island Teachings come first, and everything else comes after?*

*P: Yeah, because 'all my relations' is like the Earth and everything else.*

*S: So the Lunar Calendar and the Four Seasons are part of the circle ?*

*P: Yeah, part of the circle. That Lunar Calendar is part of 'all my relations' because Grandmother [Moon] is a woman. She's that head teacher (Shirt T3 1993a).*

Always, always, the emphasis falls on relationship, the processes and the cycles evident in the natural world. *All my relations* is the inter-relatedness of all things. Pauline listed the Grandfather and Grandmother figures in a cosmic version of the *family tree* which finds its root in the single most creative force of life in the cosmos.

*P: Creator.  
Earth, by herself for the time being.  
Moon.  
Sun.  
Stars or Cosmos.  
Other planets (Shirt T3 1993a).*

She sighed, and reported she was up looking for her old curriculum notes until 3 AM:

*P: Do you know what it really is ? My basis ? It's my language.*

*S: Oh yeah, because the teachings are in the language ! <snip> The teachings are laid out for you in every sentence'. <snip> I've seen that much in trying to learn to speak Ojibway, the way phrases are assembled, the relationship between the different parts of a phrase. You can see the teachings in there, just in how the language is constructed (Shirt T3 1993a).<sup>6</sup>*

The way I understand my ability to grasp the *process* of Aboriginal language - though I am a non-speaker - rests in the concept that, "A mind that has been stretched to a new idea never returns to its original dimension" (O.W. Holmes quoted in Ross, 1996: 112). As I understand it, Aboriginal language is impregnated with the poetry of storytelling: each creation story, legend, caution tale and parable is condensed - something like encrypted computer files - and slipped into the phrases of everyday speech. In this way, the teachings are made immediately available to everyone. The message is coded only for those who do not know the stories that properly surround individuals in their every activity through a lifetime of narrative events.

*P: So, the word that kept coming to me, and the first thing I saw, coming in here [she points to the aquariums], was a turtle. Last night, I was looking at everything, and I kept seeing 'Turtle,<sup>7</sup> turtle, turtle'. And then I remembered a conversation with my mother when she was visiting... She said, in Cree, 'The Old People used to say this'. [followed by a Cree phrase].' And I said, 'That's the same thing as the Ojibway teachings'... I kept seeing 'Turtle Island', and I said to myself, 'If I brought this curriculum back home and I presented it to the Old People, well, I'd damn well have to tell it the way it should be.' You know ? Because they'd tell me. They'd say, 'Pauline, you're full of -' [pausing for emphasis] - and they'd just walk away. So I said, 'I've had all these teachings, and I'm that generation now.' [pause] 'They're*

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<sup>6</sup> (Dumont CL 1988; Pitawanaqwat CL 1988). I studied Ojibway through Laurentian University twice, but found it extremely difficult to learn without daily opportunity to speak the language, and withdrew each time to avoid academic penalty.

<sup>7</sup> The turtle is a significant symbol for the Mide. In the Creation Story which speaks of Earth's second forming after the first Earth was submerged by a great flood, the turtle offered to support a new Earth on its back. This is why North America is referred to as Turtle Island (Benton-Banai 1988).

*dying'. That's what this Old Man said, 'It's up to you guys now. It's your generation now. You have to keep the life flow flowing.' He said it so beautifully in Cree. At my Uncle's funeral, that's what he told us. 'It's you now,' he says. 'All the Old People are dying, and they've left the legacy to you. It has to be passed on.'* [long pause]

*S: So does language come in here ?*

*P: Mm hm. You see, language is part of the action, part of that whole thing we'll talk about (Shirt T3 1993a).*

First Nations languages build upon a repertoire of root verb-phrases (Pitawanaqwat CL 1988; Ross 1996) which are something like a linguistic hieroglyphics, or a metaphoric shorthand. The perceptions delivered through the Turtle Island Teachings are embedded in that web of verb-phrases, which then act as a constant reference - a conceptual template - for perception, being and action. In other words, on the individual level, language is the template for both identity and a way of life through stories-manifest-as-action. Language is neither neutral nor passive. Taken to the cosmic level, language articulates relationship through the ever-renewing Circle of Life and is considered an active force in the physical manifestation of all things. As Pauline says:

*P: When you say something, then it manifests into action. So, all this thing [the legacy] is language, everything. But this is part of our plan [tapping the notes], how to manifest that language into action... (Shirt T3 1993a)*

In other words, the Curriculum handbook plays a part in the manifestation of culture simply by articulating the teachings that guide the human relationship to the natural world. From this perspective, language itself is understood as the process by which we *become*, not in Descartes' sense of being-because-we-*think*, but being-through-*participating* in the natural processes of the physical world.

There is a *poetic* quality to everyday Aboriginal speech, which is heightened into *spirit song*<sup>8</sup> during ceremony, often resulting in temporal-perceptual shifts that are propelled by the stress on the *active* qualities of relationship: *involved experience* and *felt presence*. The work of Edward Sapir and Benjamin Lee Worf suggests that being verb-focused makes the conceptual constructs of First Nations languages remarkably different from the conceptual constructs of the noun-based European languages (cited in Kehoe 1981: 555-556). Furthermore, in Returning to the Teachings, Rupert Ross (1996) suggests Aboriginal languages are more poetic than, for instance, English. However, as I have come to understand the functional *process*, Aboriginal languages build upon metaphoric references in somewhat the way westerners understand poetry to extend metaphors through their development in fresh contexts and associations.

Western writers often speak of poetry as condensed language. This suggests poetry is a more direct form of communication, one stripped of all that is not essential. Sometimes it slips free of the bonds of everyday logic to deliver its message. In Aboriginal languages, the process seems to be even more highly condensed. Strings of prefixes and suffixes directly join basic verb-phrases, bringing the original verb-phrase into a fresh context as it contributes to the resonance of encrypted teachings. In fact, it is said that the translation of a single word in Ojibway may require a paragraph in English to approximate the meaning (Pitawanaqwat CL 1988). Chet Bowers (1993) suggests it is a function of language to define both our relationship to and our perception of everything else in the natural world. The mythic underpinnings of tacit cultural metaphors are reproduced in a language/culture/ thought connection. In other words, language literally

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<sup>8</sup> This is Sean Kane's (LC 1996) term for a poem with an unusually high resonant quality.

speaks us as we speak it (Bowers 1993: 197). In other words, language manifests.

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Again, we come into being not through mere thinking but through our *interaction* on the physical plane, through our being-in-relationship. That is the focus of the Midewin prayer meditation: *All my relations*.

*S: What I'm wondering is, if these are chapter headings, would you talk about language in this chapter immediately, as you head up with a discussion of Earth and the Turtle Island Teachings ? ...*

*P: Well, that's the Breath of Life, eh ? <snip> When the Creator put all of the Four Races into their proper locations he gave them that Breath of Life and told them 'You're Cree. You're Blackfoot' [tapping different places on the table top as if to indicate different regions].*

*S: ... Hm. As a poet, I work so much with breath... what you say, what you don't say, and where you break a line, I know that's true. The Breath of Life 'is' in language.*

*P: Yeah.*

*S: Westerners don't often make that connection.*

*P: No you - We don't (Shirt T3 1993a).*

Language is the Breath of Life, because it calls us into being. However, language calls us into being at a precise location on the physical plane, and thereby defines our relationship with that specific territory.

It is not as contradictory as it first appears to say that there is an over-arching Aboriginal model for the Medicine Wheel, but that there is no Pan-Indian experience. The Teaching Wheel can be thought of as a template, marking the points of reference that delineate the particulars of relationship in each specific territory.<sup>9</sup> That list of references collects in four quarters of the circle to indicate: cardinal directions, seasons,

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<sup>9</sup> See Illustration 5 for the WSSS model (Novak et al. 1983) and Illustration 6 for an improved articulation of the Teaching Wheel (Berg & Shirt 1993).

races of humanity, animal helpers, seasonal colours, medicines, sacred foods, ceremonies, moons and tasks or orientations in the physical world (see figure 6). For the people of the Mide, the West (cardinal direction) represents the Fall (season) as a time for harvesting (task or orientation).

However, just as the cutting pattern for a dress is not the dress and leaves room for many variations in its assembly, the template provided by the Teaching Wheel is not an expression of that relationship to region until it manifests *in-process* as culture. The model gives guidance to the human-land relationship, but it is the experience of each nation in its *historic interaction* with its land that determines the specifics of cultural expression.

Regions are expressed on the land through the animals, plants, physical terrain and weather cycles specific to that territory, and the dynamics of historical interaction in a territory are complex. However, the distinctions of region take place on both the physical and spiritual planes in an ever shifting context. Therefore, while the variations of culture cannot really be reduced to *filling in the blanks* on the Teaching Wheel, Pauline felt this was a place to start in understanding how the differences in culture manifest. Stressing the need for simplicity, her idea was to offer a model identifying the basic principles of the Medicine Wheel through examples from nations that knew their basic history and traditions. Any nation not represented could refer to the model in the recovery of its own region-specific history, traditions and curriculum. However, each nation had the responsibility to uncover its own stories, daily rituals, seasonal traditions, clothing, hunting or gathering patterns, symbolic designs, dances, songs, musical instruments, housing and food preparation, as well as the names, clans and governing system of that group.

Suggesting we look at three groups, Pauline added that First Nations people have always complained about the popular versions of their names, first, because they were designated by Europeans and second, because they often stress the negative aspect of historical inter-tribal relationships:

*P: Okay, I think we're going to have to concentrate on three, the Neyihew (Cree), the Anishinabe (Ojibway), and the Hoodanesani (Iroquois).*

*S: Well, yeah. It's the same as calling the Inuit 'Eskimos'. [in a teasing tone] Apparently it's the Cree who were responsible for naming them. That's what I heard. Isn't 'Eskimo' Cree for 'raw meat eater' or something like that ?*

*P: [laughing] Well, of course. They used to come down there [to the Northern Plains] and give us a really - [still laughing] We still kinda -*

*S: [laughing, interrupting] That's your side of it ! Of course, 'they' say -*

*P: [laughing] Ha ! My side of it ?*

*S: Apparently. [laughing] Things were so different, though, pre-contact (Shirt T4 1993b).*

Pauline's sense of humour recognises a shift in relationships. Old feuds need to be laid to rest. Besides, intertribal relationships were not always difficult:

*S: Thom Alcoze told me the Cherokee were the Peace Keepers between the Iroquois and the Ojibway, in their inter-relations. So, if we talk about the Clans, we have to talk about the different nations, too, in terms of their responsibilities to each other, that aspect of historical relationships.*

*P: Yeah. That's the governing system, the Clan system, and also, in some places, it's called Houses. Houses. You know what ? Maybe we should concentrate on four, talk about four nations, because those West Coast Indians have Houses (Shirt T3 1993a).*

Each nation has Clans, some of them overlapping, and a person travelling through foreign territories can still expect to be welcomed in the home of their Clans people (Dumont CL 1988). However, as part of the articulation of tribal identity, in the past, different nations assumed roles in relationship to the larger community in a region (Alcoze CL 1988).

Though this is a minor example, I want to return to Pauline's revision of her plan, in-

the-moment. It is so characteristic of her approach that it deserves a closer look. Some people would read this shift in plans as a lack of prior planning or an indication of indecision. Instead, I see this is an example of leading with your most humble foot in the interest of responsive teaching. Some of the most renowned Aboriginal teachers have subjected their efforts to fulfill their vision to a public review. For instance, the Sioux Elder Black Elk reflected on his life's work to preserve the spiritual traditions of his people, "the hoop of the nation", and judged he had not been entirely successful (Brown 1953). Always, the Elders who place the well-being of the community first tend to check their prior understanding against new ideas and information, bringing the teachings into fresh contexts. Black Elk was not shy about voicing his opinion that a different tactic on his part might have been more successful in manifesting his vision. Pauline, likewise, suggests there were things she could have done differently at WSSS. Humility, born of candid reflection on the contrast between what one attempts and the impact of personal limitations on that vision, can be empowering. For one thing, it establishes the freedom to respond to present and future situations differently.

She taps on our notes. The teachings say we all come from the same source, she said. "It all comes back to that Breath of Life, the language, the nations, the Four Directions" (Shirt 1993b). The Creation stories of the Mide indicate humanity was not placed on Earth until after the natural processes were established. In The Mishomis Book (1988), Edward Benton-Banai presents a number of Midewin teachings in story form.<sup>10</sup> Through the order of the stories, this book supports Pauline's point that to understand the human

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<sup>10</sup> This book follows the development of a series of stories in a *colouring book* format which were used as curriculum materials for the Little Red School House (Lyons 1979; Berg & Shirt TC 1997). These materials were made available for sale and WSSS was among the other Survival Schools who used them.

relationship to the natural world or culture requires reflection on the cosmic processes by which the Earth itself was formed. The narrator, Mishomis (Ojibway for Grandfather), says Earth is female because all life comes through her and is nurtured by her. As Mother Earth was created, Four Directions were laid across her surface, and each Direction harnessed distinct powers. Then, "Creator sent his singers in the form of birds to the Earth to carry the seeds of life to all of the Four Directions" (2). The teachings are presented through story as an extensive metaphoric symbology, drawing parallels not only between human and animal behaviour but also between the physical and spiritual realms of existence. The Seeds of Life are also ideas (Raphael TR4 1998). They are distributed through the winged-birds and through members of the Bird Clan, who are the community's spiritual leaders and teachers (Benton-Banai: 74-76).<sup>11</sup> This is Pauline's Clan, of course, and her role in carrying the seeds of life to the Four Directions was made manifest through WSSS (Shirt T1 1992a).

The Midewin Creation Story continues, "Gitchie Manito then took four parts of Mother Earth and blew into them using a sacred shell. From the union of the Four Sacred Elements and his breath, man was created (2-3)". The foundational teaching about the human-land relationship is that human beings arrived last, are dependent upon the other creatures and the Earth for nurture and they must take care not to disturb the great Circle Dance of Life on the planet (Benton-Banai 1988: 3; Dumont CL 1988). At the same time, the Breath of Life ties human beings to those Four Directions on the surface of Mother Earth through the cosmic processes, and this manifests as nations connected to specific ancestral territories:

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<sup>11</sup> Among the Anishinabe the Crane and Loon Clans offer the people a balanced leadership as co-Chieftains (Benton-Banai: 74).

*P: So these Directions are... where the foods [and medicines] are. Like the Four Directions say, the Sage is in the West. <snip>*

*S: What is in the East ?*

*P: Tobacco. See, we [in the West] have Tobacco, but we got Tobacco from the Red Willow, the Sumach, and others.*

*S: Kinnikinnick ?*

*P: Yeah, but we didn't call it that. That's from - Is it from Six Nations ? I think so.*

*S: That's right. You used the barks.<sup>12</sup>*

*P: Yeah. [J.] showed me that, in the foothills. [He said], 'This is how we got our Tobacco...' And they're all in the mountains, the things we used. <snip> That's where my love is (Shirt T4 1993b).*

Her connection to the land is strong. Every year, Pauline pines for her ancestral territories and takes a long trip back to Alberta to gather her medicines. This is how she maintains her connection to the land where she entered the Lodge of Life, picking Sage in the foothills of the Rockies and Sweetgrass on her reserve. She also collects medicines the Old Men and Old Women taught her to use: berries, plants she knows only by their Cree names, a certain species of tree fungus. When she returns to the East, she brings her supplies for the year in suitcases. Often she supplies her closest friends with Sweetgrass she has tied herself, generous braids, wide as two joints of a finger.

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Think of breath as a framework for verbal expression, or the internal skeleton of language. It is breath that allows for both nuance and amplification in the voice. Breath is active and dynamic. Inherent to breath is the potential for silence, though silence is not merely the absence of voice. Joe Sheridan (1992) makes the point that in silence there is the "realm of stillness and the unsayable" (24). In that which rests beyond

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<sup>12</sup> This version of *Indian Tobacco* mixes shaved barks and sometimes includes berries and herbs.

articulation or manifestation, there is that which exists in its potential for *becoming*. Rupert Ross (1996) explores the notion that First Nations languages are metaphoric because relationships are named in terms of open-ended interactions, while the English language tends to delineate adversarial, judgemental relationships through the character of its verbs and nouns. Native languages are "softer", he suggests, because strings of suffixes and prefixes expand upon a repertoire of basic verb-phrases. "Every speaker can create new vocabulary *on the fly*... expressing the finest nuances of meaning" (Ross: 115). The open-ended metaphors offer poetic resonance, symbolic suggestion or archetypal significance. Silence partnered with resonance and metaphor carries us over the boundaries between the physical world and other realms in dream, meditation and prayer. Yet there are both neutral verbs and a high potential for poetic expression in English. This is one aspect of William Shakespeare's art. It is said that the average North American uses a vocabulary of about 6,000 words and reads at a grade six level. Yet Shakespeare employed a vocabulary spanning 32,000 words by joining, splitting and otherwise inventing new words and his audience rose to the challenge, following his meaning. So while a contrast of languages can be instructive, it need not perpetuate dichotomous thinking about the limited potential for poetry in individual languages.

Indeed, to understand either poetry or Aboriginal languages requires a shift away from the contemporary western understanding of metaphoric meaning through an intellectual referencing for the natural world to one that offers a fully integrated, *felt* experience of the world. The language *function* of poetry is far more complex than the common western recognition of the aesthetic value developed through rhyme and

rhythm allows.<sup>13</sup> In fact, what is called poetry often falls short of the genre's potential. Poetry is ideally the craft of highly-skilled, linguistic shamans. It functions as a ceremonial, transformative form of communication, developing perceptual and temporal shifts through deeply felt, resonant imagery and tones. Poetic language is a tool of teachers, healers, magicians and storyteller historians.

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The stress on exposure to Aboriginal languages at WSSS meant that the children were continuously acquainted with the names of animals, objects and tribes in a variety of indigenous tongues, especially through stories. There were formal classes in Ojibway, and French language classes were made available through the *host* school. There was also a very high exposure to Cree language, though my research indicates instruction in Cree was supplementary, except in the first year (Shirt T1 1992a; Harper T14 1997; Raphael TR4 1998). In 1980, while WSSS was at the Sackville site, Dora Raphael volunteered to assist in developing a "bilingual language program":

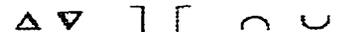
*Helen [Hayden] and I designed cards for teaching the language. They were quite large. [she gestures, indicating six by eight inches] On one side was a picture and the Ojibway word.<sup>14</sup> On the other side was the Cree word and the syllabics (Raphael TR4 1998).<sup>15</sup>*

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<sup>13</sup> On the other hand, it is commonly acknowledged that Europeans appreciate poetry to a greater extent than North Americans.

<sup>14</sup> Ojibway and Cree are often rendered in the alphabet using a system of phonetic spelling whereby long vowels are indicated by a double letter and short vowels by a single letter. For example Chi-noo-din is the phonetic Ojibway word for big wind (Benton-Banai 1988: 32; Pitawanaqwat CL 1988).

<sup>15</sup> Syllabics is a non-alphabetic writing system based on phonetics which uses 52 symbols such as the six illustrated to the left. Rather than letter-sounds, each of these symbol represents a full syllable. As a phonetic writing system it is universal. Any language can be rendered in syllabics (Pitawanaqwat CL 1988).



In other words, the WSSS students were given constant aural exposure to four languages: English, French, Ojibway and Cree. In terms of writing, they learned to write in English and French, made phonetic renditions of Cree and Ojibway using the alphabet, and learned to read and write syllabics.

While she was at WSSS, Dora also worked on a team project to record the Four Seasons curriculum in print. The basic orientations or foci of the Four Seasons as she understood them are:

*Autumn - give children understanding of the importance of harvest*

*Winter - impart ideas of production, invention and husbandry*

*Spring - show the constant change and renewal, the sowing of seeds and ideas ...*

*Summer - experience growth, fun, travel, expansion of spirit, mind, and body*

*(Raphael TR4 1998).*

However, these orientations are metaphoric and open-ended. As she insists, "The thing that makes this curriculum brilliant is that the Four Seasons can be interpreted for application to all endeavours and activities in life, even for technologies" (Raphael TR4 1998). The flexibility and responsiveness of this system is one of the qualities that makes the Four Seasons curriculum timeless.

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The Old Man who urged Pauline to take up her role as a carrier of traditions and a teacher had watched her growing up on the reserve. He must have known she would approach her responsibility with respect and caution:

*P: Last night, I was thinking about going back to the Elders and saying, 'Come sit with me. Is this right? These are the teachings I was given. Now, I'm in the Grandmother stage. Is this right?' [pause] I'm of this generation, so I'm going to put everything in black and white.*

*S: This reminds me of the story of Frank Waters going to the Hopi. They welcomed him, and said, 'Somebody has to put this down [in writing]'.*

*P: That's the story of all Native nations, all over. In this, here [tapping our notes], with the Breath of Life, language, and the Four Races, when everybody was designated, each nation had [a] different Wheel of Life. All over Turtle Island. We're talking about Turtle Island. Like the Cree, we have our own colours, the birds, everything. So here [tapping]... that's what we're going to talk about, all these things that are different. Different ways, different circles. Different circle teachings, different nations. All the teachings are the same. They came from the same source. But the teachings are adapted according to the environment, according to the region.*

*S: Right. And that goes back to what Thom Alcoze said, which is, 'Culture is a people's response to the land'. It always goes back to the region that they're in. They're not going to have ceremonies that use things that they cannot acquire.*

*P: Yeah, that's the thing, you know (Shirt T31993a).*

The Aboriginal Elders often make the point that language comes from the land. As Ronald Wright says in Beyond Words (1983):

*All these languages have rich vocabularies for hunting, trapping, and describing topography. They are elaborate ways of defining the movements of water and wind, the varying quality of vegetation, seasonal habits of wildlife, the shape, sound, smell of the land (45).*

Like language, the teachings come from the land. This is why Pauline says there are different circles in different territories. Different circles develop different relationships, but there are some broad parallels. Every Direction has Sacred Foods, for instance:

*P: When I go home we have Saskatoons. What is the berry that's similar to that here ?  
It's the Strawberry.*

*S: The Strawberry ? Oh, I thought Saskatoon berries were something like a Blueberry.*

*P: Well, they're Blueberries, but they're similar to - It's in the meaning.*

*S: So, that's the 'significant' one ?*

*P: Yeah. Here it's the Strawberry, but when we go back home they don't have any Strawberries... So you have to adapt yourself, according to the region. And the same thing with Wild Rice. Wild Rice isn't grown at home.*

*S: Yeah, Wild Rice only grows in the marshes.*

*P: No, it only grows in the East, in here. That's the Eastern Doorway's food. So, when we say, 'What are the Sacred Foods of this area ?' that's the Corn, the Wild Rice, the*

*Strawberry...'<sup>16</sup>*

*S: ... Isn't it: Corn, Strawberry, Wild Rice, and Meat ?*

*P: Yeah. [pause] Squash - [long pause]*

*S: That's for the Six Nations. Squash is something they grew. Hm. But according to Jim Dumont the Four Foods were Corn, Wild Rice, Berries, and Meat.*

*P: Yeah, that's ours too. But this is [pause] getting a little mixed up. [pause] When I go back out West we have Strawberries, Okay ? But we're not talking about Feast Foods here. You're talking about the Feast Foods. We're talking about the Sacred Foods of the region ...Okay ? Saskatoon is a very Sacred berry over there. That's what the Wild Rice is over here, a Sacred Food. (Shirt T3 1993a)*

In each territory, the Teaching Wheel identifies both the Medicine plants and Sacred Foods among those that are indigenous and bountiful in the region. The Feast foods, on the other hand, incorporate both those foods that are less bountiful in the region, and the foods obtained through trade and interaction with other nations. However, even this rule of thumb is not rigid. The Teaching Wheel is ever-responsive to shifting conditions on the land. Corn is not indigenous to the northern reaches of the continent. It was introduced to the Six Nations in the Great Lakes region through trade in the tenth century (Kehoe 1981: 216). Until the twelfth century the retreating glaciers of the Ice Age were still so close there was not a long enough growing season for corn to be cultivated in any quantity. However, as the glacier retreated and the growing season was extended corn became a Sacred Food of the Six Nations.<sup>17</sup> The many parallels between the Circles of different nations include a metaphoric symbology which is most obviously

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<sup>16</sup> According to the Mide, the Lodge of Life is also replicated on a grand scale over the continent. It has Four Doorways (at the four cardinal points), and each Doorway has a different role in relationship to the others. There are Sacred Foods, Sacred Medicines, Sacred Colours, et cetera, associated with each Doorway or region (Dumont CL 1988; Berg & Shirt TC 1997, TC 1998).

<sup>17</sup> "The earliest evidence of domesticated plants in the Northeast dates to about A.D. 1000, and marks the beginning of the Late Woodland period. Maize, beans, squashes, and sunflowers began to be raised in the southern and Laurentian-Lakes sectors of the Northeast, no doubt imported from the South or Midwest" (Kehoe 1981: 216).

employed in pictography, petroglyphs and Native Sign Language (NSL) and approaches a universal North American system of communication (Tomkins 1969: 93-95; Dewdney 1975). In fact, the historical use of NSL, the *lingua franca* prior to contact, traces the paths of an historic trade route system on this continent that reached from Hudson's Bay to the Gulf of Florida and from the East coast to the West (Mallery 1880; Tomkins 1969; Mails 1972: 3). Like corn, wampum was not indigenous to the regions of all groups who used it; however, it was recognised as Sacred to inland groups after it was made available through trade (Shirt T3 1993a).<sup>18</sup> Again, the key point is that the Teaching Wheel is *responsive* to the human environment on all levels: social, spiritual and physical:

*P: I was thinking about this when I went back home, 'What are the Sacred Foods of this region?' There's the Chokecherries, the Saskatoons. There's the meats: Deer, Bear; and all that's common in all areas [out West]. But we don't have Corn... <snip> Okay, [pointing to my listing] this, here, is the Ojibway: Strawberries, Wild Rice... <snip> Six Nations is Squash and Beans, that's their foods.*

*S: Squash, Beans, and Corn, The Three Sisters.<sup>19</sup>*

*P: Yeah, Six Nations are the ones, I find [pause] have it really together, in terms of foods, because they were the farmers. But back home - <snip>.*

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<sup>18</sup> Prized in part for their rarity, wampum beads are cut from the long, tubular shell of a marine creature called *Dentalia*. Prior to contact they served as a kind of currency, but not in the modern sense of the word. Wampum was Sacred, which is why it was made into ceremonial sashes, or Wampum Belts, which recorded treaties between rival groups. One example is the Two Row Wampum Belt that records an early treaty between the Iroquois and European settlers. The two straight rows symbolize that each nation promised to walk its *row* in peace, unmolested by the other. (Alcoze CL 1988; Berg & Shirt TC 1998).

<sup>19</sup> There are many stories told about The Three Sisters which tie the processes of the natural world to human interests. A Cherokee with a Ph.D in Biology, Thom Alcoze (1988) describes corn, bean and squash as staples of the Iroquois diet. In combination, these plants make a full protein. Through companion planting they make another partnership. The beans give nitrogen to the soil (which the corn leaches); the corn gives the beans something to climb; and the squash provides shade for the soil, protecting against loss of moisture and soil erosion around the shallow roots of the bean and corn. This physical relationship among plants is developed as a metaphoric analogue through the stories and legends of the Iroquois. In addition to offering teachings about nutrition and agriculture, the story bears moral, spiritual and political messages about the wisdom of negotiating mutually beneficial relationships between individuals and nations (Alcoze CL 1988; Dumont CL 1988).

*S: They used to dig a lot of bulbs and roots, right ?*

*P: Oh yeah, even now. We have Wild Turnips, Wild Potatoes, Wild Carrots, and things like that. I remember digging them. [sigh]*

*S: You see ? That's an example, there. You can find out through the stories, history... Okay, you look at Eddie Benton's book, and you find out what the Medicines are through the stories, through the legends. You pick up very quickly they are Tobacco, Cedar, Sage -<sup>20</sup> So, if you can't find something, it might be there [in the stories].*

*P: See, we have the Sage [in the West] . They don't have the Sage over here [in the East]... And we have Sweetgrass. Okay, that's common, a common, common medicine...*

*S: But even the Sweetgrass, they don't have way down South. They have Corn Pollen, Peyote, and things like that, instead.*

*P: That's right. [pause] ...We have to say that, these kinds of things.*

*S: And just dispel this whole Pan Indian idea <snip> [that] all Native people are the same... The relationship to a particular region [needs to be] recognised... Look at The Trail of Tears. Part of The Trail of Tears, the reason for the complete desolation of those people, is they were taken completely out of their region and transported to the region of the Navajo. So, whatever foods, whatever Medicines they used, they couldn't even find them in that region. They didn't have... a relationship to that land. [They have] ...built a relationship to that land, but they didn't have it at the time (Shirt T3 1993a).*

While we talked, Pauline flipped through the activity guides we collected. Now she stopped at the instructions for making Birchbark baskets:

*P: Hm. Well, okay, Birchbark -*

*S: Okay, Birchbark was so important to the people here. They didn't have just Maple Syrup, they had Birch Syrup. It's just like with the Sacred Trees. Out in the West it was the Cottonwood. But here, what is it ?*

*P: It's the Cedar. The Cedar and the Maple. Those are the Sacred Trees here. And the Maple doesn't grow out West.*

*S: Yeah, but the Birch does, in the North.*

*P: Yeah, and Blueberries are common. That's another berry I forgot about. [We] had Blueberries.*

*S: ...But only in the North ?*

*P: Only in the North. And that's the berries of the Bear, the Sacred Food of the Bear*

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<sup>20</sup> Each Medicine is invested with a distinct power. Some of the most widely Medicines used are: Tobacco, Sage, Sweetgrass, Cedar, Peyote and Corn Pollen, but they vary according to the nation and region (Dumont CL 1988; Berg & Shirt TC 1997).

*(Shirt T3 1993a).*

The teachings always run just below the surface in any conversation, delineating the relationship between the physical Earth and the Spirit World. To make reference to a Sacred relationship is to imply the rest of the story through that conceptual glyph. Bear is the Keeper of the Northern Doorway, the door to the Spirit World. He is the Guardian of Knowledge for the tribes who live in the land of ice and snow. As Benton-Banai (1988) says, knowledge is like water, which would flood the Earth if some were not frozen. "The world cannot be all water and it cannot be all ice and snow" (42-43). Instead, Water follows a cycle through melting and freezing. It is the same with Knowledge, and one has to Fast or meditate to attain some forms of knowledge. On the symbolic level, this orientation corresponds to the position of Bear in the North, who allows passage into the Spirit World when the proper protocol is followed. The favourite food of Bears is Berries.

*S: So, when you get down South, [perhaps it is] nuts and the Pinenut becomes really important for the people of the South-West. [I don't think they] have the berries in the same way that we have.*

*P: Yeah, and our Maple [in the West,] is the Chokecherry. <snip> Of course, nuts is us, too. And we used to gather nuts all the time.*

*S: [in Ontario] We don't have nuts like we used to because our trees have all been plowed down. <snip> As a child I used to gather walnuts, hazelnuts, beech nuts - We don't see these things any more. Oh, and chestnuts (Shirt T3 1993a).*

Pauline continued to flip through the Indian Crafts book. This time the activity she stopped at related to natural dyes:

*P: Sumach Bark.*

*S: They're saying that those things are sources of dye, but some can be foods as well.*

*P: Yeah, this is a food.*

*S: [reading over her shoulder] Lambs Quarters. Did you know [name omitted] collects them to eat ?*

*P: Yeah. And that plant's everywhere. <snip> (Shirt T3 1993a).*

Drawing references from the curriculum guides and activity manuals we collected for review, now we struggled to articulate a critical difference. Our handbook refers to a theory/practise/content that resists the tendency of dominant culture educators to slot culture studies into either forty-minute subject periods or three-week units of study. But the Turtle Island Teachings cannot be truncated for delivery into a single class, several weeks, or even several months work on a Native Studies unit. The pedagogy employed in the teachings hinges upon the *integration* of values and principles that determines both perception and identity in a responsive, reciprocal relationship with the natural world. Culture cannot be visited and observed, no matter how long the study unit. Even in the process of explaining this concept across the boundaries of culture, the collaborative methodology Pauline and I have engaged in has shifted our separate notions of being-in-the-world. We will not come away from the project unchanged, but as partners-in-learning.

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When she makes phone calls, consults over speeches to be given, ceremonies to be conducted, or writes an academic paper, Pauline continually jots notes and draws diagrams. These are the journal notes of conversation and planning, the diagrams of her cognitive process. As "the power behind the school, the organizing force", Dora Raphael (TR4 1998) believes that Pauline's habit of keeping a constant journal-diary is "the secret to her success".<sup>21</sup> She had learned to write at the speed others were talking, while jotting

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<sup>21</sup> Unfortunately, Pauline did not regard these journal-diaries as historical artifacts but as notes to herself. While she still keeps a running journal-diary, she tends to 'lose' them as they no longer impact upon her present-

side notes as a reference for questions. She also insisted that the teachers and volunteers keep personal logs for their study plans, phone calls, activities and interactions with others (Raphael TR4 1998). In this way there was always a record to refer to when something went awry or a foundation to build upon success. Pauline's circles, quartered circles and joined or concentric circles are a schematic, a framework that she jots key words across. She uses these circle diagrams the way other people count points off on the fingers of their hands. That is what she was doing as she retraced her steps and continued the list of subject headings for the handbook. Each heading had a series of sub-headings:

*[pointing to central circle] Okay, this is Earth. [she writes 'Earth' in the circle] This is the Turtle Island Teachings. [tapping the next concentric circle] Earth is South, the Breath of Life, and everything. [she writes 'South' and 'Breath' in the second circle] Then we talk about the Bloodline, we talk about Water. [she writes 'Blood' and 'Water'] (Shirt T3 1993a).<sup>22</sup>*

Retracing her articulation of these sub-headings, she repeats and then extends their referential meaning, pointing or jotting notes in the appropriate circles:

*P: Earth. [pointing to main circle]*

*Breath of Life, air.*

*Water... nourisher, purifier and blood of our mother.*

*[as an aside] Of course, there's other teachings [for water], like Birthing.*

*S: And woman's role as caretaker [of water] ?<sup>23</sup>*

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day negotiations with others or her calendar of commitments. There were no journals among the collection of papers in the WSSS archives that I examined in 1997.

<sup>22</sup> The reference to Earth as 'South' can be followed to a deeper level, like all conceptual glyphs. Cosmically, Earth is the Southern Doorway in the Lodge of Life. South is the doing or gardening time, in contrast to the spiritual hibernation of Winter and the Northern Doorway. The Eastern Doorway is where we enter the physical plane and the Western Doorway the passage beyond physical life.

<sup>23</sup> Grandmother Moon is caretaker of water because she controls the tides, which is why the woman's menstrual cycle is referred to as 'a visit from Grandmother' or 'being on one's moon'.

*P: Yeah.*

*S: And that goes back again -*

*P: [tapping on my notes] Underline 'Creator' and then 'Earth'. Okay, [listing]*

*Creator...*

*Creation.*

*And Creation is Earth,*

*Moon,*

*Sun,*

*Ta-da, ta-da. [pause]*

*Okay? Creator comes first, then Creation, so we look at what's in there and the Earth. 'All my relations' is the Earth. Okay? Earth and her relations. But first we talk about Earth and the Turtle Island Teachings. So we must be very clear about that, specify that. Because in most of the curricula it's generalised. So this comes in where - [pause followed by a sigh] The biggest complaint we have, in terms of the curriculum outlines and curriculum development, is that this [is not]' individualized'. The Earth and how we are related to each other, how we flow through that, is an individual experience. And that's what we should say here, explaining that this curriculum has been implemented [pause] - through dreams and visions, of course - as part of a relationship to the Creator, through the Earth and all life flowing out of it, as an individual. [pause] So that's an individual's union, then. Eh? ... Out of Earth comes all of these options, you know... races and nations... No, [rephrasing] through Earth comes all of these teachings. All of these other entities flow through her, when we land here from the Spirit World.*

*S: Through the Earth, associations are made with other entities?*

*P: Yeah, entities or spirits. That's what people generally say, spirits... And then go on from there. How do you implement the tool? I should say, what kind of tools does the Earth have? What was given to us?*

*S: ...This takes me back to The Mishomis Book and some of the points Eddie makes. You're here, you're present on the Earth as someone who can see, somebody who can hear, and somebody who can think, and you really have to remember to use reflective thinking. Because the teachings he presents always come back to a person, the individual, who has a set of problems before him, or a challenge before him. This Anishinabe, the first man lowered to Earth, he would come up to a problem... 'How do I get across this lake?' And he tried this and that, and nothing is working. Then finally, when he sat back and really took a look around, he saw what the animals did. [their pattern of relationship] He took a little bit from this animal, a little bit from that one, and he put it together. That comes back to what you're saying, that you pick everything up from the Earth, through the Earth and all her relations, her children.*

*P: All her relations, yeah.*

*S: They give you your instructions, and it becomes so obvious that -*

*P: - you can't live without the others. You can't be without the others.*

*S: And also, that humanity follows. We do not come first. We have to work to find our place.*

*P: Yeah, woman - Well, Earth is a female entity, a female energy. So, she's the first one that all life flows through. And that's why Water is so important... There are teachings for everything, and out of that a curriculum...*

*S: So, in the Creation Story, you'll find what order things go in ?*

*P: Yeah, for the Turtle Island Teachings. Everything has a teaching, so that's what we should say (Shirt T3 1993a).*

At this point, Pauline paused and broke into laughter. It was a moment of shifting perceptions, the laughter associated with relief. "I've always wanted to do this [handbook], for so many years. To work with somebody." She broke into laughter again. Though she has been surrounded by people who sought her council as a teacher for decades, Pauline experienced tremendous loneliness in her part of the struggle to foster Native control of Native education. Now, however humble I felt about my contribution, she clearly felt affirmed in our partnership to articulate her vision of the Four Seasons Curriculum.

*S: I just want to make sure I get this right, in terms of the curriculum implemented through the dreamed Visions as a individual experience. Each individual - not just the nations - each individual has to turn back to the teachings ?*

*P: Yeah, but that's the thing. Most curriculum is everything as a whole. Everything as a whole, but it doesn't become an individual experience (Shirt T3 1993a).*

In other words, it is not enough to present the teachings as points for memorisation, an intellectualisation about the Earth's processes. For instance, water does not *represent* the nourishing lifeblood of this Mothering planet, it *is* her blood and life force. The Four Seasons curriculum hinges on a process whereby the teachings are integrated as *involved experience* on the physical plane. This is part of the spiritual contract that is established with the Seven Good Spiritual Grandfathers before an entity enters the Lodge of Life (Benton-Banai 1988; Dumont CL 1988; Berg & Shirt TC 1997, TC 1998).

*P: There it comes again, the responsibility of self. You come here alone to the Earth plane, and you go through your journey, and you go out alone. So it's an individual thing. It's an individual experience of the Spirit. There's no such thing as a two-Spirited person. It's the one Spirit... [side comment with an ironic chuckle] The lesbians are going to love me !*

*S: Repeat that ? It's an individual experience as a Spirit. There's no such thing as -*

*P: - a two-Spirited thing. There's only one Spirit. We come here alone, on a Spiritual Contract, and we go through Life, we 'experience', because it's all to learn. [the purpose of Life]*

*S: And Earth is where we try to bring balance to our experience ?*

*P: Yeah, that's the only, only thing, right there, is the experience. The whole thing that we're talking about is experience. And that's all we carry into the Spirit World, is our experience. That's what people can't understand. If you are mind, body and spirit -*

*S: Well, that's why you shouldn't run from your experience, you should go through it.*

*P: Yeah.*

*S: And that's why the only transcendence, the only way to transcend - whatever your experience - is on the physical plane. Jim [Dumont] said, as a Spirit that's on the other side of the wall, you have to come onto the physical plane, you have to walk from the East to the West [through the Lodge of Life] in order to progress.*

*P: Yeah, and it's a transitional, developmental period, through what we call the Seven Stages of Life (Shirt T3 1993a).*

The walk from the East to the West refers to the Path of Life (see Illustration 1) which runs through the center of the Lodge of Life (see Illustration 2). Each individual is not only a physical entity but a spiritual, emotional and intellectual being. Despite many distractions in the physical realm, spurs on the Life Path that can distract the spirit from its contract, the individual must progress in all four realms of being to maintain balance. However, humanity is also a participant in the cosmic processes through the interrelatedness of all things. Therefore, the individual's responsibility lies with more than her personal development. As Pauline puts it:

*If one follows the Sacred teachings for the Good Grandfathers, then the Circle will continue from the Unborn to Seven Generations onward" and each individual also plays a part in the continuation of the Circle of Life (Shirt 1997a).*

There had been much concern in the Aboriginal community for the acceptance of people

with alternate sexual orientation, and they were referred to as the two-spirited people. I wondered how Pauline understood two-spiritedness:.

*S: We've seen that a lot of the people who have come to the forefront lately, in terms of fighting for women's rights, or Native revival, are gay or lesbian. <snip> In terms of this book here, The Sacred Hoop, [Paula Gunn Allen] talks a lot about -*

*P: - the relationships ?*

*S: Well, the fact that [traditionally] there were lesbians and gay men, people who dressed as the other gender, and lived as, and sometimes married as other than their gender....*

*P: Yeah, I can talk to that, because my Grandfather said that. My Grandfather said there was a gay man in Goodfish Lake... the Medicine Man there. But this man was so abused and ridiculed by others, his own family rejected him... What my Grandfather did is to give support to that person because - There you go again ! You see, he saw him as a part of Creation. He's a part of Creation. But the thing is, his first mother is Earth (Shirt T3 1993a).*

In other words, the Medicine Man at Goodfish Lake was born of the processes of Earth.

Pauline's reference to Mother Earth draws on metaphoric resonances in the teachings.

Each individual has to establish a relationship to the natural order of things. This

includes the twins of creation, those energies that manifest as the straight line (male) and the circle (female). Only in their union do they create the spiral of energy that propels life forward (Dumont 1988). Only through the union of man and woman can life proceed in its ever-renewed cycles of birth and death (Benton-Banai 1988; Dumont CL 1988).

This is why Pauline calls sexual intercourse the Greatest Ceremonial Act (Berg & Shirt TC 1997). This is the teaching that underscores Pauline's understanding of the roles and responsibility man and woman carry in relationship to each other, to the community, and to all life on the planet.

Continuing with the story of the man her Grandfather knew at Goodfish Lake, she said:

*P: He hadn't been - His male and female energies were unbalanced... I asked that question. There was a gay man who was working at WSSS, and I said, 'What are we going to do about these people?' I went to the Lodge, and I said, 'What should we do? What's the thoughts on homosexuality?' The statement from the Grandfathers, they said, 'It's very simple, very simple. They just don't know their roles as man and woman.' So, that falls back into themselves.*

*S: As an individual?*

*P: As an individual. They're part of that Creation, so they have to experience this. We have to experience that balance. <snip> And we can't be too liberal.*

*S: But Jim said that there were people who were specially touched, that it was considered - [pause] Someone who had a deformity for instance, someone who had a hunched back, or whatever, was actually considered to be closer to Creator because they were 'different' from other people. They'd been given that special attention.*

*P: I've seen that, with kids who didn't have any family, who were orphaned, single-parent kids.*

*S: But he said, people with a difference are considered more special. They often would become a Medicine Person because they were considered people who'd been given special attention by Creator. And, if I remember correctly, he lumped homosexuals in there. But there wouldn't have been as many as there are now.*

*P: I really believe there wasn't. It's because of our society, sexual abuse and whatever.*

*S: Yeah. Well, just as there are hermaphrodites (Shirt T3 1993a).*

Despite her worry about the consequences of being *too liberal*, I was thinking of the positive potential that exceptions carry to prove the rule. Jim's teaching seemed to indicate that exceptions are part of the responsive flux in the natural order of things, the general rule being somewhat elastic. However, Pauline was focused on the painful social consequences of drawing parallels between sexual orientation and spiritedness. Sex and difference are two issues with an especially heavy impact upon the urban Native community. She had witnessed this as a young woman, in Edmonton:

*P: Yeah, I knew a Native woman like that. [hermaphrodite]*

*S: Those are specially touched people.*

*P: Do you know where to find them? Where you find them is on the street, Skid Row. That's where you find that kind of people, because of what society has - You know? But I remember this one woman from Edmonton called Leona. She was tall and husky, but that's what she was. She was so gentle, so kind! I remember one thing about her,*

*because I used to look at her a lot. People felt so good being around her, but she lived on the street. That's where she felt she was accepted, in the outside world. I mean, especially in Edmonton, which is such a conservative city. She was an outcast. But I remember, going back to my Grandfather, that's what he said. 'I will take this person under my wing and give him support because they're easily misunderstood.' ...That's what it is, because there is no two-spirited thing. Absolutely. We come here as one Spirit.*

*S: One spirit, male and female, both ?*

*P: Male and female inside us, but that doesn't mean there's two Spirits. That's one together. There's the yin and yang together to make one Spirit, a complete wholeness. <snip> It is something that can be overlooked, and children should know about that - Well, when you talk about sex education, that's such an important thing. Sex education. We didn't have that. Especially me, in the Boarding School - Hell, if we ever talked about sex we were thrown down the stairs or something. It was really a taboo, eh ? < snip > I mean, it's very simple, very, very simple. All it is, is these teachings. When they say sex - Well, the way the nuns put it, it was such an evil, evil thing -*

*S: That, again, goes back to 'all my relations', because people are dividing themselves into being a physical being, a spiritual being, and a sexual being, instead of taking the whole entity... in balance (Shirt 1993a).*

With this reference to living in balance on the physical plane, Pauline smiled and moved on. She tapped our notes again, going back to the subject headings in the handbook:

*Okay, this here [tapping our notes], the Four Directions. I got this through the surface of the Earth. When you talk about it, that's the Four Directions on the surface of the Earth, the spiritual and the physical powers (Shirt T3 1993a).*

When Pauline said, "I got this through the surface of the Earth", she was speaking to both her relationship to ancestral territory and her nation's Circle teachings. There is that which comes to a person through the cultural relationship to land, but it is the individual's responsibility to conduct further research through Dreams, Fasts and Visions, to develop an individualized relationship to the land:

*P: [We] talk about the surface, and then we talk about the Water.*

*S: Now I wonder. When you're talking about the surface of the Earth, spiritual and physical powers, that has to do with the life journey on the physical plane and the way*

*that things happen [pause] together ? That when you walk your life path it is both a physical and a spiritual experience ?*

*P: Yeah, um hm... After that we can talk about ... the Four races. Okay ? [pause]*

*S: Well, there's nations within the Races.*

*P: That's right ! And then, there's the regions. Okay, and then, when you look at the Circle, [she draws a circle filled by sub-headings] we have:*

*the Four Races,*

*the Four Directions...*

*the Seasons.*

*What makes the entity itself ? What are the Seasons ? <snip> We're talking about the Earth as an entity itself. So, she... was given the Breath of Life and the water, the Life Blood, with Creation. And then, with that, comes the Four Directions and then the Seasons. This all relates together. [listing]*

*Creator.*

*Creation.*

*Breath of Life, air.*

*Water, Life Blood.*

*Seasons.*

*Four Races.*

*Colours.*

*Medicines.*

*Earth's Relations, et cetera.*

*[pause] Even before people comes the Seasons.*

*S: Through the Earth we begin to learn our associations with other entities. So we have -*

*P: - our relations. We have the Water, the Earth, the Seasons. What's tangible ? What do we have to have for things to grow ? [listing]*

*The Four Seasons,*

*the Four Elements,*

*the Four Directions.*

*Then man will come through, after. But first, we have to learn all of these things.*

*First.*

*S: ...The calendar is set before we arrive.*

*P: Yeah, well, that's according to the Seasons. <snip> Earth as an entity, herself, she's got the Breath of Life, she's breathing, and then she's got the Water...*

*S: The Four Elements are part of Earth, and the Four Seasons are part of Earth, and then the Four Directions...*

*P: Yeah... the Four Directions have the Medicines, the Gifts, the Colours, and all that...*

*S: That's all part of Earth ?*

*P: Yeah, that's all part of Mother Earth. So, maybe we should say Mother Earth and her relations ? She becomes Mother Earth. She becomes a mother. <snip>*

*P: Then the body. <snip>*

*S: The Four Elements ? Okay, why do you call a thing female ? Okay, a kettle is female. It has the water in it, the fire underneath it, the steam rising out is air, and then there's the thing itself, that's the last one... Well, whether it's metal, or wood, or stone, or crystal it's Earth... Okay, so the Four Directions and the Seasons are almost the character of that entity, right ? The personality ? <snip>*

*P: That's right. Yeah, yeah.*

*S: So, the Four Elements come first. <snip> Nothing is alive, according to the teachings, unless the Four Elements are present. So the Four Elements have to come first, before Earth can be alive. <snip> We have to think of another word than Element. That is not a word that can even approach describing what we mean. It's a scientific word, and this is not about something so clinical and distant from life as 'the study of life'. It's about the 'experience of life' (Shirt T3 1993a).*

While the Earth is regarded as an entity that communicates teachings about the nature of relationship, Pauline's point that the teachings must be integrated as an individualized *experience* as well as than a cultural message means the emphasis always falls on direct interaction with the Earth in its processes.

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Despite the media acclaim and scholarly attention her school received in its heyday, half-way through January 1993 Pauline said she felt as if she was "starting from scratch" again on two fronts (Shirt T3 1993a). First, she was working to recover the Four Seasons curriculum for First Nations School through our work on what we tentatively titled The Turtle Island Teachings handbook. Second, a decade after retiring from WSSS, Pauline was employed by the Toronto Board of Education to teach an after-four Native Culture class at Leslieville Public School. However, it was now clear to her that the TBE's recognition of an alternative pedagogy at WSSS had not been extended to the Board's Heritage programmes.

As Bill Lewis (T12 1996a) and Trevor Owen (T16 1997) indicate, WSSS was

accepted as an Alternative School, and this meant the Board made some concessions to its difference within the collection of the Alternative Schools, rather than as a Native Way school.<sup>24</sup> This had a significant impact on WSSS's autonomy in terms of its pedagogy and curriculum. On the other hand, the TBE had negotiated passage through a political minefield in addressing the concerns of the majority of Toronto's ethnic communities by restricting the delivery of Heritage programmes to the extra-curricular portion of the school calendar (Cook 1995). Their concessions to Heritage language and culture classes were "localized changes in Board practise", but, because these changes were not reflected in its official policy (9,) the school principals and the lobbying efforts of some parent groups had a critical influence on how the knit between community and Board concerns was accomplished. This was not necessarily problematic as it allowed for greater flexibility in the response to community concerns (Cook 1995). However, at Leslieville school, Pauline discovered an after-four class instructor was granted very little autonomy in either curriculum design or pedagogy. Soon after classes began, she was fielding challenges and requests from the parents and principal.

While Pauline had developed a Teaching Circle calendar based on her Four Seasons curriculum for the class, the parents wanted her to shift the curriculum away from teachings delivered through the Sacred Circle ceremony, legends and related activities to focus on what Pauline calls "the trinket system". Their complaints centered on a desire for their children to learn how to do beading and to work with leather. As she said, they were asking her to run a *crafts class* rather than a *culture class*. When Pauline resisted, the principal and parents assembled a committee and subsequently delivered her an

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<sup>24</sup> Ironically, as the only ethnic school, WSSS remains the only exception to the rule in the TBE policy.

ultimatum. First, they arranged for another woman to deliver craft lessons during the last half of the class (Carr 1993: 1). Then, though Pauline's culture dictates that males and females sit in opposite halves of the Scared Circle that began each of her classes, the committee insisted upon "alternating boys and girls in the *circle*". Finally, they demanded a "big friend/little friend pairing" of the students (2), with a "1, 2, 3, *Out Discipline Policy*". Pauline was told to record each of the pupil's "offences" during class and deliver periodic reports to the principal (2). This rigid, culturally-insensitive and authoritative approach to discipline clashed with the philosophy of the child that had focused the programme at WSSS and Pauline's Four Seasons curriculum. It also ignored the fact that WSSS was renowned for the success of its traditional pedagogy and nurturing approach in the discipline of children who had been labelled behavioural- and learning-disabled by the dominant schooling system (Shirt & Nahwegeechic T11 1994a; Lewis T13 1996b).

In her job interview she had made it clear she intended to tailor the Four Seasons curriculum at WSSS to the after-four programme (Shirt T3 1993a, T4 1993b). After nearly two decades, she was still rubbing up against the old stereotypes of Indian culture in the education system, and the lateral oppression that manifest as a result of forced acculturation continued to be the most hurtful resistance to her work. This hurt was not the result of personalised attacks, but rather her recognition that those parents had internalised the dominant culture stereotypes about what Aboriginal culture is.

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In many ways, Pauline's after-four Culture Class exhibited the same problems that other educators in the inner city have to grapple with, but the problems were exacerbated

by the after-four time slot:

*P: I don't know, I'm having such a difficult time with them, the After School programme. These kids have been up since six or seven o'clock in the morning. They've gone to school all day long, and then I come in between four and six o'clock and they're hyper... They know nothing about Native culture and the only thing they want to learn, and it breaks my heart, is the trinket system. You know? 'Let's make beads !' I said, 'No. That's not what Native culture is all about'.*

*S: But that's what has been projected onto Native culture.*

*P: I know, I'm just - Okay, with me, I decided I'm going to stand up and say 'No. I have lesson plans.' You know ? 'I tell stories and legends.' And I said, 'You guys are going to learn these things.' And I give them a review, like, the Medicines, the Four Directions and all that. And they're getting to be good at it, you know, but they're so hyper. I mean, they're the worst, they're so disrespectful ! ...There are supposed to be two parents and they didn't show up until an hour later, last week, and there was no snack ! These kids are so hungry... I had to bring Rianne there, last week. 'Come and help me,' I said. <snip> 'I don't think I can handle these kids by myself. Can you come and help me ?' (Shirt T3 1993a).*

As she saw it, the children's behaviour only reflected the example set by their parents, not out of simple maliciousness but as manifestation of the depth of their acculturation:

*P: And the other thing, with me is, I'm not a crafts person.*

*S: But that's not what Native culture is about.*

*P: I know, but that's what these kids want to learn. That's what the teachers are promoting. <snip> But I really, really feel so disheartened by that.*

*S: But that's the point I made about this [one of the curriculum guides]. I've seen the teachers go to it, as a source, and all it's got is these activities. They don't read the introduction. They flip through, find an activity that they think relates to the rest of their curriculum... and they throw a craft at them ! Supposedly, through the craft, the students learn the teachings. Well, you aren't going to pick it up... from making a craft. If that [the curriculum guide] is your source, and that's all you use out of it, what are they really going to learn?*

*P: Yeah, like these things [flipping pages in a curriculum guide]. Like making a Fire bag.*

*S: There's a lot that comes before you make the Fire bag !*

*P: Exactly ! So each lesson is like that, for me. The history and the teachings of the Birchbark, all the things that go into it. It's such a really, really big thing (Shirt T3 1993a).*

This goes back to Aboriginal pedagogy: immersion in the teachings, demonstration and application. The child observes, listens, and observes again, integrating the stories that explain the relationship between a task and the Earth in its processes. Looking through an activity guide Pauline pauses, saying:

*Like this [pause, turning pages], tanning hides. That's such a big process in itself, an important process. I wish I could take those kids and bring them somewhere, take them to someone who's actually doing that (Shirt T3 1993a).*

When she was at WSSS that is precisely what she would do, organise a field trip, or arrange for someone who knew their culture to conduct workshops at the school:

*S: But, even in the tanning of hides - In order to understand... that goes back to 'all my relations', and not wasting.. It immediately goes back to respect, the teaching of respect and sharing. The deer shares. It gives its life to support people... So you don't take the hide off, take the best meat, and throw the rest away. You use everything you possibly can. You don't start tanning hides until you understand that responsibility. The deer is giving of itself in totality and that goes back, by association, to the idea that humans should give of themselves... making sacrifices, in recognition of, and in respect of, Earth and all her relations... You don't cut down every darn tree, but pick out enough wood for this fire... You don't plunder, you pick carefully, you make selections. And when you do harvest a deer you harvest one that is part of the surplus population... You don't take the prize buck and the prize doe, because they have such an important role to play [in sustaining the deer population].*

*P: But that's what these guys are doing, eh ? [tapping on the Indian Craft book] (Shirt T3 1993a).*

We both shook our heads in disgust with that image in mind. In one sense, the authors of these curriculum activity books were taking the prize buck as a trophy. In teaching culture classes, they took the crafts, without acknowledging the function of that artifact in the circle of relationship among all things. They took the feathers and beads, without acknowledging their responsibility for the larger processes of cultural appropriation. These guides were like the self-appointed Elders who gather the wannabes and ask for pay to run their Sweatlodge:

*S: Yeah...well, people have to assess whether each curriculum guide is a helpful tool or harmful. Like Jim Dumont said, 'Be careful who you pick for teachers'... <snip>*

*P: Um hm. Yup. (Shirt T3 1993a).*

This comment hinges on a critical point for Pauline, and one she returns to, over and over again. At WSSS she and the other teachers had offered a tremendous support network to the troubled parents, but they had also insisted that students bear a responsibility for their own healing, the health of their family and the well-being of the community. As she says, everyone has the responsibility to pick up their medicine bundles and walk in a good way. Taking care when you pick your teachers is just part of that responsibility.

**Chapter Nine:****PLANNING AND PLANTING:  
SEEDS OF THE GOOD LIFE**

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According to the Seven Stages of Life, Planning and Planting Life is the age of marriage and parenting, and it follows that the family is the garden. But the structure of families in traditional Aboriginal communities is complex and extends to involve the community (see Illustration 2). For instance, there are those who assume responsibilities in the manner of Godparents through the Naming Ceremony, in addition to the adopted Uncles and Aunties of every child. The notion of family relationship is not merely an issue of genetics, but one of social structure (Dumont CL 1988). Pauline calls this the Teacher stage of Life (Shirt 1997b). It is an age of tremendous responsibility as "the young become parents and begin the intergenerational task of teaching what they have been learning and experiencing" in the four previous stages of life (Shirt 1997b). The 1970s was an era when the Aboriginal community was planning and planting seeds, the ideas and traditions that guide the next generation's relationship to one other and Mother Earth (Benton-Banai 1988; Dumont CL 1988; Raphael TR4 1998). The general thrust of this stage is transgenerational education to foster the goodlife through the nurture of mind, body and spirit together. In line with the symbolism of that metaphor - planting seeds of the goodlife - WSSS found it had to till the soil before it could plant.

Bill Lewis was living in in British Columbia when I interviewed him, but from the mid-1970s into the early 1980s, Bill Lewis was a close friend of the Harper family, and

one of the more dependable volunteers at WSSS (Lewis T12 1996a, T13 1996b). Like other volunteers, he drew on his prior interests and expertise to define the nature of his assistance. Known in the Co-op as a plant doctor, Bill's work helped WSSS to manifest a direct relationship to the richness of that goodlife metaphor by teaching the children about "gardening and the natural sciences" (Lewis T12 1996a). Still an activist in February 1996, Bill was on a tour of speaking engagements as the western director of the Canadian Alliance in Support of Native Peoples (CASNP), when his tour was cut short by a heart attack. After being hospitalised for a week in St. Catherines, he could not risk flying home to BC immediately. Predictably, Pauline brought him to Toronto, and set him up at her house. I was reluctant to conduct an interview because of Bill's condition, but both he and Pauline insisted that it was necessary. Bill and I sat at my dining table, each with a cup of tea, and the tape-recorder placed between us. It was impossible to ignore the constant shake in his hands, which he said was a result of the heart attack, his difficulty with pronunciation or his trouble with writing. However, Bill is given to continual expressions of optimism. He said he was lucky. He had good friends to care for him.

At 61, with blue eyes and silver hair, Bill is unusually candid. One of the so-called Butter Box babies born in an infamous Home for *unwed mothers* in Nova Scotia, he did not discover until years after his time at WSSS that he was half Native. Vern and Bill had both been professional boxers "out West" during their prime and, in 1976, they re-established contact when Bill was a Community Legal Worker in a Clinic at the Dondale Community Centre. "The Toronto Warrior Society... had a little office there" (Lewis T12 1996a):

*B: I guess there'd been a lot of discussion about [pause] sort of the concept, because the*

*Heart of the Earth Survival School in Minneapolis was being formed. <snip> So, there was a lot of discussion going on about the very idea of Native Way schools and teaching and that sort of thing. Indian independence through, you know, an independent education... It was more on a theoretical level... Then [Clayton] stood at the top of the stairs one day and said, 'I ain't going'. [laugh] He wasn't going to go back to regular school, so we just put it to Pauline... 'When are we going to get this school that we're talking about?'*

*S: <snip> Clayton's the one that has a learning disability. <snip> But I don't think the school knew he had a disability at all...*

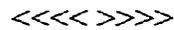
*B: Yeah, but this wasn't with the disability so much. It was with the racism in the school and the fights and stuff that was happening all the time (Lewis T12 1996a).*

While he had not participated in the NPCO in 1974, Bill said 1976 was "a time in which people were trying to assert a way of dealing with things, other than the begging-bowl thing of 'Please give us this, please give us that'". The demand for Aboriginal autonomy in the delivery of education arose as the push for autonomy was expressed "in other political areas". As Bill said, "the border didn't mean nothing, that little red line" and local efforts were guided by a strong cross-border activism for the revival of Native culture (Lewis T12 1996a). In fact, the Red School House and Heart of the Earth Survival Schools in the USA had established a model for emancipation impossible to ignore.

Bill had a long-range perspective on the story of Native Survival Schools, and, through his work with CASNP, he was aware of the activities of Native organisations and communities across the country. He felt there had been a resurgence of interest in the Survival School movement during the mid-1990s, not only in terms of engaging in an historical analysis, but as a focus for contemporary Aboriginal activism:

*B: In a way, we're just speaking about how things are operating now and what's going on now. [pause] To go back and evaluate the experience of the establishment, and the building, and the attempt to maintain and develop a Survival School - as a reality and not just as a concept - [pause] it's almost like it's gone full circle. It's back on the agenda again (Lewis T12 1996a).*

The movement to foster emancipation through education continues to be relevant, yet now the model Survival Schools have their own history to strengthen the insights of the next generation of community-based schools.



The social problems that arise when large populations are thrown elbow to elbow through urbanisation are part of the context for the development of the Survival School Movement as a largely urban phenomenon (Regnier 1987a). Unlike other cultural groups in Canada, who experienced urbanisation over several generations - quick as that is - the Aboriginal community was urbanised through massive migrations to the cities in just thirty years. The major Canadian cities had absorbed Indians migrating from the reserves in a mass exodus during the 1960s and 1970s (Urion 1993), and by 1976 the situation was desperate. Drawn by the promise of better jobs, better housing and better education, urban Natives were met by broken dreams. The effects of cultural assimilation were compounded by the fact that city living throws social stratification into high relief. Those who struggled to give their children better opportunities were frustrated in their ambition because Native children continued to suffer as a stigmatised minority whose educational experience was managed through culturally biased comparisons to standards set by a privileged few (Urion: 101).

Part of the problem was that cities attract unworkable population densities. The ideal size of a sustainable human community appears to be reflected by the size of small Aboriginal bands, between 75 and 150 people (Alcoze CL 1988; Context Institute 1991;

Lewis T12 1996a):<sup>1</sup>

*We've kind-a got to go back to the smaller communities. Like, you know, to look at my own situation. You think well, 'Do people care about us ?' [Are we] able to help each other, and support each other ? <shift block> The history of the establishment, the maintenance, and development of this school is important to the people of this land, and to all people, because everybody can learn these lessons. You know ? (Lewis T12 1996a).*

At WSSS, parents received social support and the opportunity to learn traditional community values, a sense of their roles and their purpose in life *beside* their children.

*B: Whatever happens anywhere else, that kind of caring community is what this kind of schooling is about... I would argue building alternate ways of doing things now is more important than it's ever been.*

*S: More important ?*

*B: Yeah... My step-dad, in a rather cynical way, would say, 'The only place you're going to find a helping hand is at the end of your arm'. I remember modifying that a number of years ago, to say, 'Yeah. But that only counts if you reach that hand out to the person standing next to you.' I think that's what it comes to now. You know ? We really have to care for each other because it's always a question of power, whether it's educational power, or government power, or what-have-you. 'They're' going to do what they're going to do... At a recent CASNP meeting, [pause] some of the Indian bureaucrats said, 'I don't care what 'they're' going to do. It's what 'we're' going to do that's going to count.' So we need to go back, and re-examine our history, and retrace our steps for 20 to 50 years (Lewis T12 1996a).*

There is an ancient African adage Pauline is fond of quoting: It takes a whole village to raise a child. This concept is strongly reflected in the Medicine Wheel teachings.

However, in 1976, it was clear that the village itself needed to experience healing in order to fulfill its responsibility to the child.

The community values that inspired the WSSS programme were more than a philosophical position. *All my relations* refers to the adoption of a pattern of living that

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<sup>1</sup> Large bands, such as the one that congregated under Big Bear and Wandering Spirit, collected several sub-Chiefs and their followers. While the larger band's membership was fluid, depending on the number of sub-Chiefs who threw their support behind the head-Chief, the smaller groups were more stable (Dempsey 1984; Carter 1996).

promotes harmony with the full circle of life in the biotic community, whether it is human, animal, bird, fish, insect, plant, microbe or rock and soil. Living in a traditional way is not a return to pre-contact practises, but the acceptance of certain conditions and responsibilities that run counter to modern practises (Dumont CL 1988):

*S: Pauline always stresses the fact that this was an urban school... and that those kids made contact with and developed a strong sense of relationship with Mother Earth, even in the midst of this [pause] concrete village.*

*B: ... Not only that, how to grow a lot of stuff in a small space, because we don't have a mass of land [pause], to grow stuff in a city <snip> ...to maintain that sense of connection with the Earth, [cough] not just to go out to the country and [pause] be a part of nature, but wherever you're at.*

*S: You've still got connection.*

*B: You can still, spiritually, be part of it. So that even if you got, like, a little window box with your herbs growing in it, that's life, and you're part of that. You know, to me [pause] if you're not growing something, [pause] if you're not part of the creative process at that level in any way, then [pause], it seems you can't really say you're part of the Earth [chuckling]. Because that's what the Earth is. And Pauline's right... Just as an example... [gardening] was a very important part of the school... <shift block> [The idea was] to grow our own food wherever we are, in the smallest possible space in an urban area... [to] gather and grow our own medicines and stuff, and not think that everything you need to survive physically has got to come from Loblaws ! [laugh] There's less game. So, all the traditional ways... are still there... and they still have to be supported,[pause] but there's got to be more imagination in terms of self-sufficiency... and how to go about it. Self-sufficiency, it ain't a virgin birth. It don't just happen. You've got to work on it and build up community. (Lewis T12 1996a).<sup>2</sup>*

The return to traditional values and principles did not mean a rejection of everything modern and western. While the Teaching Wheel lays the foundation for the Four Seasons curriculum by setting out a series of strict protocols for interaction, it speaks to a responsive *pattern* of relationship rather than a rigid set of rules.

Still, in 1976, there were few illusions about the hard choices these parents faced. It

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<sup>2</sup> Though he uses the term 'self sufficiency', Bill appears to employ this term (in different contexts) to mean both 'sustainability' and 'independence' or 'autonomy', so it should be read in that context.

had been several generations since Aboriginal communities had openly practised the Old Ways, and most of the people involved were living examples of the consequences of living without attention to the healing pedagogy of those ancient teachings. On the other hand, they were also aware of the risks involved in opting out of the dominant culture's education system:

*B: It was always a very defined adjustment... We didn't know if CAS was going to come and snatch the kids at any point, or what ! They just said, 'Well, look, the situation's unendurable, and we talked about this, so let's just do it !' It's like those situations that happen a lot in life. It's not so much that people don't know what to do. It's kinda the fear of doing it ? ... And then once you say you're going to do something, the way to do it, or how to make it work, will come as a result of having made that decision [laugh].*

*S: I got the impression that the Survival School Movement was founded in that kind of belief... across the country. Most of the people just said, 'What we've got isn't working, we just have to do something'.*

*B: Um hm. <shift block> WSSS has always been very special to me because [pause] - in spite of whatever happened, and whatever was right, and whatever was wrong - there was always a direction that was being set. I believe in that direction. I believe it's more true, even today, than it was then (Lewis T12 1996a).*

There is a Midewin teaching about seven prophecies that were presented to the Anishinabe in the distant past to guide their westward migration on the Earth through seven eras. In the Seventh Fire, it was said, the people would face a monumental decision that would manifest as a blind fork in the path. Prophecy revealed that one path led to scorched Earth and the other to a green Earth and the Eighth Fire. In the intimate relationship between humanity and the Earth processes, the future of all life hinged on which arm of the fork was taken on the journey forward (Benton-Banai 1988: 92-93; Dumont CL 1988). For some members of the community, Aboriginal people came to that fork in the road as citizenship allowed for a free choice between integration with dominant society and a return to the Old Ways. There had been years of discussion about the path to autonomy among activists from one side of the nation to the other, but it was

clear that serious consequences followed from either choice. The Survival Schools determined that finding the path to green Earth, rather than scorched Earth, required reintegration with the Old Ways. Bill explains, from their perspective:

*It was the survival of a way of seeing things, and it's the survival of a way of life. [pause] More importantly, raising your children and grandchildren... with a strong enough sense of who they are, where they come from. Because it's sort of like the old saying: If you can't remember history you're condemned to repeat it (Lewis T12 1996a).*

In fact it was a 100-year history and a series of defined personal moments that motivated the radical choice of that tiny cluster of parents in Toronto.

Remembering was the point of beginning at WSSS. The school programme was dedicated to a return to the Old Ways that reviewed history through Aboriginal eyes. Native Way schooling meant recognising that there was an Aboriginal pedagogy. It also meant fostering Aboriginal pride through a distinct set of values and principals that reinvested the community with its sense of belonging, reciprocal relationship and participation in the processes of a Mothering Earth through a continuum of time. That process involved both the community and the individual (Shirt T3 1993a, T4 1993b). Bill says:

*This is the strongest thing that I feel about WSSS. Once young people have a sense of who they are, then they can make all kinds of decisions that will have, like, a foundation, [pause] a root, that can let them take off to wherever they want to go. And we see it ! We see it with the kids that have graduated since (Lewis T12 1996a).*

Certainly that was Luanna's experience. Though no numbers exist to prove WSSS's success statistically, the *family* kept in touch through word of mouth. The general testimony is that approximately one third of the students at WSSS were considered Behavioural- or Learning-disabled and many arrived at WSSS for their *last chance*. WSSS was renowned for its high success rate in keeping students until graduation.

Moreover, a significant number of graduates went on to university, and several have proceeded to the graduate level (Shirt 1994b; Lewis T12 1996a; Harper T14 1997).

The path these traditionalists chose was not without its tests. The federal government's acceptance, in principle, of the NIB policy paper, Indian Control of Indian Education (1972), while positive, was recognised by the Aboriginal politicians of the day as a partial acceptance of the Native platform on education (Burnaby 1980; Novak 1981). In terms of funding, the project to provide for the Aboriginal determination of Aboriginal education was carried out in steps: first, as the provinces were delegated with responsibility for educating Indians, and then, as further authority was delegated to the Municipalities to determine how education funding was directed. Too many middle and lower-level beaurocrats were introduced to manage the project effectively, and the Survival Schools that struck up partnerships with Municipal school boards were placed in a severely compromised position. The cultural portion of their school programmes, the very impetus for founding a Survival School, depended on both a constant effort to raise funds and the assistance of a dedicated group of volunteers, some "working two jobs, but one of them didn't pay" (Lewis T12 1996a). The Municipal boards had provided a facility, but they directed their funding towards the hiring of academic teachers (Novak et al. 1983; Regnier 1987a; Regnier & Shirt TR1 1987b).

Luanna Harper remembers that, at WSSS, the students recognised that the school was a model for other schools because reporters "treated us like we were the local celebrities" and volunteers arrived "from everywhere. They'd just come in, and just be there, somehow. It was really something" (Harper T14 1997). While that high level of volunteerism was one of the keys to WSSS's success, it also meant that the school struggled to maintain continuity and to prevent polarization on the issues that

surrounded the establishment of a cultural school (Lewis T12 1996a). At WSSS, the Parent Council devised its policies with an eye to safeguarding WSSS against both the tremendous resistance to change inherent in bureaucracies and the potential for internal takeovers. The school brochure indicates an interview established whether the school programme fit the student's needs (WSSS archives 1997), and a clear commitment to the Medicine Wheel teachings was one of the conditions for registration (Lewis T12 1996a):

*S: ... I imagine [volunteers] chose the way that they would contribute ?*

*B: Yes... and then, you know, we'd talk about it. <shift block > People would come in... as equals in some sense but under the direction of the leadership of the Native community...That's something that sometimes it's very difficult for people to be able to do, you know ? They sort of want to move in and then - even if it's not nasty and conscious - they try to impose their values upon our community... There were friends and allies, you know, people who could work together to establish that identity, and that curriculum, [pause] and that way of seeing things and doing things. <shift block > Anyone who came on board... had to understand that ...The final decisions would be made by the people that were most concerned.*

*S: The Parent Council ?*

*B: The parents and the Native community. And that would be a priority. As a matter of fact, in the beginning it was very definite. 'We're going to try to keep it as a Native Way school.' Like, from day one there were some non-Native children that were part of it, but with the specific understanding that they would be Native-identified...asserting that it's a Native Way school, doing things in a traditional way.< shift block > Establishing that was very important, and it was also very difficult. Even today to say, 'Okay. Look, I'm sorry, you don't have the right to make those decisions. That's our decision to make', is difficult... Once that was kind of established, [with] a kind of structure built around it to make it work, then there was a way that you could bring in volunteers and they would be becoming a part of something that had a sense of its being... Everything kind of flows from that. If you do it the other way around, you may get the results you want, but at what cost ? Like, I know that I didn't get much formal schooling, but once I decided to come home to learn stuff, heck, I'd be learning stuff ten times as fast when I wanted to learn something, as opposed to when somebody tells me I gotta (Lewis T12 1996a).*

Becoming part of something with a sense of its own being was critical for both the children of the school and the community as a whole. The school provided a focus and a

sanctuary, which permitted them to develop a sense of who they were in relation to the cosmic whole.

Unfortunately, the project of establishing a partnership with the powers-that-be at the TBE to secure funding brought with it the potential for the two sides to be polarised by conflicting interests. Luanna remembers "When we were at the Board, sometimes we were just skimming by [financially]" (Harper T14 1997). While WSSS was put under constant pressure to prove its eligibility for funding through student numbers, the Board's budget projections failed to account for the rapid growth of the school, especially after the Kindergarten opened:

*L: The Kindergarten was expanding big time ! We loved it, you know ? All these little kids... A lot of people made the effort to bring them there. But then, there were also [pause] a lot of kids that were just thrown in there [pause] by the system. And a lot of them had a lot of problems! [ironic laugh] Big time problems. Like Nistum and Kenny <snip>*

*S: Whiteloon ?*

*I.: Yeah. ... He was through the [board]... He was there a long time at the school.*

*S: I've already heard a few stories about him [pause] climbing up on top of the cabinets when your Dad was showing some officials through the school.*

*L: Oh. my ! [embarrassed laugh]*

*S: Nobody knew he was up there.*

*L: Oh, my God ! [pause] Yup. Some of the crazy things that happened there ! (Harper T14 1997)*

On both levels, through the school's dependence on volunteers and through its partnership with the TBE, there was a constant struggle to anticipate the introduction of elements that would disassemble their project from the inside. Bill suggests:

*Making sure that foundation was established... [meant] there was no danger of being overwhelmed or very subtly 'Trojan Hosed' kind-a thing... <snip> ...Because [the*

*school] was never an anti-non-Native thing. It was just pro-Native (Lewis T13 1996b).<sup>3</sup>*

Yet demographics were important. There was constant pressure from the TBE to prove eligibility for funding through criteria that were essentially antithetical to the process. Teaching staff was limited by the school enrollment, despite the fact that a third of the children required greater attention as "special needs students" (Lewis T13 1996b). The level of attention these children required was not a hidden issue. In fact, a considerable portion of "last chance" students were directed to WSSS by the TBE with the suggestion that the school was obligated to take them (Shirt T4 1994a; Lewis T12 1996a).<sup>4</sup> While Pauline, Vern and the rest of the WSSS family were determined to assist any children that others had rejected, there is no doubt that this side-tracked their original project.

In the return to Native Way, the mandate of the school went beyond the rescue and healing of students who had problems in the dominant system, to surround the children in traditional life ways. There were other institutions whose mandate was to rescue the children with resistance to schooling, but the original vision of WSSS was to establish a facility where children could be raised in loving security from the day they entered school.<sup>5</sup>

*B: There [was] a sort of natural division ... There's a... group of children that have already been part of the system for so long that you're spending a lot of effort*

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<sup>3</sup> The number of non-Native students attending WSSS in the year my daughters attended (1987-1988) was about 25%, but despite representation from all races during the period of Pauline's direct involvement in the school, the percentage was low (Lewis 1996a; Berg & Shirt FN 1997.)

<sup>4</sup> Ironically, school policy stated there was a parent-school interview to establish whether there was actually a match between the school programme and students' needs (school brochures for 1976-1982, WSSS archives 1997).

<sup>5</sup> There was a strong demand for Kindergarten. A group of parents including Beth Giles, Helen Hayden and Nancy Kimaro designed the programme, which was finally established in 1980.

*undoing...*

*S: You mean, they come in at grade five, six, seven, and eight ?*

*B: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. [said very staccato] And they're put into grade six, seven, and eight or what-have-you, but they're coming in with a history. <snip> You're undoing the regular orthodox educational system's shenanigans, in terms of ways of dealing with conflict and what-have-you. <snip> That was a tension that was there too, at the time, and it was too bad. <snip> Let's say Pauline and Vern and other people could be the determiners, and the council, then there could have been an honest look at it... Sometimes you send a signal out to the bureaucracy that you've accepted something that is not really acceptable to you.*

*S: Right (Lewis T12 1996a).*

However, WSSS proved its expertise in handling the special students. In line with the pedagogy of the Medicine Wheel, the focus of intervention was the *healing of the child* rather than the *censure of the behaviour*. While lessons and activities promoted the child's sense of belonging to a community, and the morning Circle focused on the reintegration of mind, body, emotion and spirit, Pauline also took the *special needs* children for traditional Sweatlodge Doctorings in Alberta, Minnesota, and Wyoming at the school's expense (Novak 1983; Harper T14 1997). Dora Raphael (TR4 1998) recalls that while Pauline often took adults who needed healing to the late Raymond Harris, a powerful Medicine Man in Wyoming, she would also bundle several children with their bed rolls into a bus and escort them to Doctorings by herself, if necessary.

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At the time of his heaviest involvement with WSSS, from 1976 to 1978, Bill was working as a community legal worker, and he draws strong parallels between what happened in the legal field and what happened to Ontario's initiative to develop responsive, community-directed educational services for Aboriginal people. The primary issue was that the dominant culture system replicates hierarchies of power and majority

rule that are in direct conflict with the community's interest in establishing circles of influence and consensus. The experts had difficulty recognising the expertise and involved-insight of community workers, and therefore failed to relinquish control over either practices or policy development (Lewis T12 1996a). In the field of education, the school boards had difficulty detaching from the dominant culture model for school government or student behaviour. These concerns were compounded by an imposed timetable for change and culturally-insensitive methods of identifying problems or tracking student achievement (Pellerin 1982; Shirt T11 1994b; Lewis T12 1996a). That resistance to a fresh timetable for change and an alternate model for tracking student achievement was probably the school board's most damaging influence on pedagogy and curriculum. Parent Council members at WSSS had recognised they were entering into a collective process of change at the community level that requires stages of development. Therefore, initially, the cultural, spiritual and emotional recovery of the students was prioritised, because "building that sense of self, and that sense of community, and family, and caring" provided the tools that were foundational to their "life's work" (Lewis T12 1996a). There was no attending expectation that their scholastic achievement could be addressed overnight:

*B: [T.H.] is a perfect example ...Academically, he was staying back, but once he got into it and took off, well, heck ! ...Now that wasn't just an academic thing. When he decided to learn, he learned quickly because there was that desire to learn and the foundation was there, even academically... [though] technically, it could be said that we had half as much schooling [pause] as the rest of the system did...*

*S: Using someone else's system of measurement.*

*B: Of course. Yes ! But ... what difference did it make ? When you look at the results and say, 'Okay, the children that went through this system, where are they today ?' Not just in terms of, you know, are they millionaires or famous this, that, or the other ? ...Doctors, Lawyers, and Indian Chiefs but... are they happy and comfortable human beings ? Are they making a contribution to their family, and to their community, and*

*are they good human beings ? (Lewis T12 1996a).*

Bill offered the analogy of setting out on a journey guided by a compass. Travelling over any terrain the intention to pass in a single direction must incorporate flexibility in dealing with obstacles along the way. It was the same in the project to foster emancipation through an autonomous education system. The tactics employed required attention to both the bigger picture and the necessity of day-to-day decisions. Movement in the desired direction sometimes involved advancing in small measures on the path for change. However, Bill reports that WSSS found itself "constantly counter-punching, fighting a kind-a guerilla war with the establishment" (Lewis T12 1996a):

*Four, five, six years after, we were still hearing... 'Well, why do you people [pause] need your own school ?...Why can't you just fit in over here, have your beads and feathers, do your little number.' ...We just couldn't get through to them. It was... a separatist argument, they were saying (Lewis T12 1996a).*

The early resistance to Native Way schooling did not fade with time, and Bill found the most offensive aspect of the objections to their independence in the displays of liberal paternalism among members of the TBE:

*B: There was this kind of attitude... It was almost like a bloody pat on the head, you know ? ...This is really cute, unique...what you're doing... But you do have to realise that you have to fit the curriculum'...*

*S: 'And there's these standards you've got to measure up to' ?*

*B: - And 'It's these standards that you have to measure up to'. And we never argued that we would want to, like, as a goal: that we would shoot towards these standards, but not expect [an] immediate, virgin birth. You know, six hours a day of academics. The cultural thing [pause] was the key, [pause] and the other stuff followed from that. They saw it in reverse (Lewis T12 1996a).*

Bill had spent time in the USA during the 1960s, and saw the same pattern in response to the Black community's decision to assert its autonomy. "People felt threatened by people asserting their autonomy ! Right ?" (Lewis T12 1996a). During a meeting between

the TBE and WSSS, he felt compelled to say:

*'Wait a minute ! I didn't have a very good life as a kid, and I remember running away from home a number of times... Now, if I move away from home, I move out of the nest. I'm speaking about what 'I' want to do. I want to build a life for myself... That doesn't mean I'm going to go back and burn mom's house down ! (Lewis T12 1996a)*

The feeling of the Parent Council was that there had been enough studies of the situation. There was no longer room for discussion on the *need* for Native-directed schools - that was well established. Moreover as Bill said, "They were told ! Pauline was told" to found the school by the Good Grandfathers in Fast. The vision was in place (Lewis T12 1996a). What was needed was a serious effort to address the pragmatic issues of establishing those schools.

There were nay-sayers who accused the WSSS group of scrambling for funding dollars, and some suggested Pauline was living an extravagant life through the school's bank account, but the opposite was more the case. Bill reports:

*The purpose [of WSSS] was not to give a guaranteed annual income for Pauline and Vern, because I can tell you, that sure as hell wasn't true. Look at the kind of sacrifices that they made to keep that school going ! I mean, just the kind of gossip that I hear, indirectly, about how they were living high on the hog ! Well, what a crock! That's nonsense. And believe me, I would be the first to say something, because I know, people can get caught up in doing it for their loyalty to the pay cheque (Lewis T12 1996a).*

Luanna Harper makes the point that working for the school was not employment for her parents, but a project of love. She heard rumours that Pauline was forever taking trips on the school's money, but the family's reality was just the opposite. Pauline continually asked her family to make huge sacrifices in order to support the school and Luanna makes it clear her children learned to give freely to children who had less security :

*That's one thing people don't realise, is that my mother... would have a cheque every month from Family Benefits, or whatever. Most of that money went to the school, and we knew that... We didn't care. [WSSS] was just part of us (Harper T14 1997).*

Both Luanna and Clayton Harper echo Pauline's claim that the children at WSSS were embraced as part of her extended family (Harper T14 1997; Shirt & C. Shirt T11 1994b). This is typical of relationships built through a return to the values expressed through Native Way.

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Bill reflects upon the process of recovering traditions as a phenomenon which, though experienced in the Aboriginal community at large, was more clearly articulated through the school:

*B: There was a thing that kept being said at the time of WSSS: We're retracing our steps, and going back to the original instructions... That's what it's about; remembering those original instructions... Like, I don't believe things are lost forever... Communities that have supposedly lost their way, even become Catholics, they can still come get this. < snip > Pauline and Vern and all the people at WSSS have set a direction (Lewis T13 1996b).*

Irony follows irony in this story: while the efforts of the Council to assert their difference on a cultural level were welcomed on the international level (Bruhin 1981 in WSSS archives 1987, Krauth 1983 in WSSS archives 1987, Wittstock EM 1997), locally, WSSS was frustrated by the tendency to be lumped with the other Alternative Schools as another special interest group (Lewis T12 1996a; Harper T14 1997):

*S: It almost seems as if people were hungry for an example of how to do things differently.*

*B: Yeah... Instead of, like, trying to fit in. Oh, that's the other thing. We were always considered an Alternative School, right? So that meant they kept putting [WSSS] in the Alternate bag, with the other schools: Inglenook, Subway, and whatever. Well, you know, the Indian School [pause] that's just one of the Alternative Schools (Lewis T12 1996a).*

In fact, the founding of WSSS was linked to a cultural phenomenon:

*S: Do you think that [the other Survival Schools] would have happened without the model of WSSS being put in place? Or do you think it would have [pause] happened differently ?*

*B: Well, for one, WSSS wasn't the first model... We're speaking here of North America.*

*S: Without reference to the border ?*

*B: Yeah, that. <snip> There were a lot of people would... come in to find out what was going on and how it was working. Of course, at this point... it had that root, that solid foundation, but it was still struggling.*

*S: Struggling to come into its own ?*

*B: [Struggling] in its process, and development, and coming into being. It was still, you know, not 'there'. And, of course, something is never 'there', it's always a process. So, when you're looking at it, it's not like you're looking at a still shot, it's like a movie. [laugh] (Lewis T12 1996a).*

In other words, although western history attributes a specific date to the founding of each school, the birth of these schools heralded the potential of Aboriginal children, not merely their current level of achievement:

*Vern, Pauline, and everybody - over the years - would have people stay at the house. And [they would] sit and have long discussions... Then people would go back and try their own thing. In fact, if anything, it's too bad that more schools weren't established. Because then there'd have been a more solid foundation for dealing with this stuff today. There's not enough of it (Lewis T12 1996a).*

Yet through activism for Native independence through education the Survival School movement engaged in a political, social and spiritual process of healing that was both transgenerational and prophetic.

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Stewart Greene (TR3 1997) corroborated Bill Lewis's position on the significance of the Survival School movement to current trends in education or social activism. He was in his early twenties when he became involved as a volunteer at WSSS. Stewart is an Ojibway from Iskutahsohgigun, Shoal Lake. A man in his forties now, he has merged a

traditional approach to life with his endeavours to pursue a higher education. Arriving at Pauline's house for a visit, he accepted her request to talk to me about his experiences at WSSS. We sat at my dining table and talked over a coffee. He smiled and nodded, reaching out to touch the pouch of tobacco I placed on the table between us to indicate he was comfortable with my outline of the interview process and accepted my request to interview him. However, while he laughed shyly, he firmly declined to be interviewed on audiotape. I found myself smiling as, in his kindness, he slowed his speech and repeated key phrases to ensure the accuracy of my note-taking.

Stewart expressed a strong sense of resolution about the value of the model set by the Native Survival Schools. They impacted on the Aboriginal community straight across the country in the late 1970s because they offered *all* Native students, even those who were not lucky enough to attend them, a positive sense of purpose and identity (Greene TR3 1997). People felt they predicted a change. The next generation would experience pride in their heritage, rather than shame.

Stewart was raised in one of the few communities where people managed to maintain their language, and the community still performs a lot of the old ceremonies. Yet, despite this strong cultural grounding, Stewart was one of the Native youth who left the reserves in the 1970s. In the process, he left school at the age of 16. In that regard, his experience reflects the statistics for school drop-out in the Indian population. However, though he spent considerable time drifting from one major urban centre to another, Stewart's story is not stereotypical. He did not become mired in an urban ghetto. He travelled, exploring life in the major cities and the world away from the reserve, but he always planned to return. As he put it, this was his Wandering Life, but he always felt he had a responsibility to work on behalf of his community (see Illustration 2). So he volunteered

extensively at WSSS in his late teens and early twenties, staying for several weeks at a time on a pass through Toronto.

Stewart was weeks away from finishing a university degree in Environmental Assessment as we talked. It was the pride he gathered in watching the birth of WSSS and other Native-run schools that eventually inspired Stewart to return to High School, some fifteen years after he dropped out. In the early 1980s, Stewart and his brother had tried, unsuccessfully, to found a parent-directed school on their own reserve. He still carried enthusiasm for their project in his voice, but said they never got beyond discussions with the Chief because they had no teaching degrees. As he says:

*Seeing those schools gave me a sense of purpose. I didn't have to attend them to pick up the motivation... There was a learning process in the experience of WSSS. There is no other way. It must be picked up again... But things won't be the same because a lot has changed in the meantime. People are more spiritual, they're better educated now (Greene TR3 1997).*

The circumstances of contemporary times mean that the student population, teachers and volunteers would be operating in a different social terrain. In fact, he feels there is a greater need to expand the context for Native-run schooling now than before. "We need to create Native institutions right up to the post-secondary level" (Greene TR3 1997). At the same time, he is reassured by signs that contemporary Aboriginal youth are finding fresh ways to express their resistance to both the status quo and the forces of acculturation. As he says, after the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples released its Report in 1996, he saw "a new energy out there again, among the younger people". Unlike their parents - the activists of the 1960s and 1970s who demonstrated their discontent by marching, picketing or occupying the offices of government officials - "they are finding other, creative ways of demonstrating. For instance, they are

demonstrating through street theatre" (Greene TR3 1997).

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The call for a broader demonstration of resistance to the contemporary status quo in no way undermines the work that WSSS did, in its own time, to shift the policy and practice of federal, provincial and municipal political systems with a century-long history of suppressing Native autonomy in the name of care-taking. Moreover, as Bill Lewis indicates, though they were small in number, the Survival Schools drew public and media attention to the transcendent capability of a race of people who, historically, had been deemed incompetent to handle their own affairs.<sup>6</sup> While the band-council schools are more plentiful, Bill felt they struggled for autonomy with, perhaps, even less opportunity for an *arms length* partnership:

*S: [Because] the control of the money and so on still came from the federal government ?*

*B: Yes... In fact, there's some reserves in the country could, if they decided to... they have enough of an economic base, they could probably set up an autonomous school system.*

*S: You're talking [about] now ?*

*B: Yeah, it could happen, if they chose to. Of course, I don't expect - There again... as long as you're sitting [pause] waiting for the money to come, then you can't make it work.*

*S: Yeah. My understanding is... Pauline did a lot of fund-raising on her own to keep [WSSS] independent.*

*B: Yup. Yup. Oh yeah. That was, in fact, a big part of that discussion ...that in order to maintain your independence you had to be sure to diversify that funding... That you make sure you have enough independent money coming in... you don't feel reliant... But of course, the government [pause] - and it's true today - [pause] still have the control... They can say, 'Okay, look. We're paying for your teachers, we're paying for supplies... So you have to meet this -' [pause]*

*S: [suggesting] Set of standards ?*

*B: [nodding] '- set of standards, and this curriculum. And you have to make your thing fit*

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<sup>5</sup> This is the legal rationale for making people wards: that they are somehow impaired in their capacity.

*in here. We're not going to adjust' (Lewis T12 1996a).*

The NIB (1972) policy paper pointed out that "it has been the Indian student who was asked to integrate: to give up his identity, to adopt new values and a new way of life" (25-26). Indeed, as David Murray (1991) insists, in cross-cultural exchanges, historically, the Aboriginals bore the greater burden in translation, not simply because they were expected to make the adjustment in the interest of becoming more civilised but because the colonizer operated under the myth of a *transparency of language in translation*. In linguistic and cultural interpretation, therefore, the Aboriginal effort has been virtually invisible. Yet due to the difference in the terms of reference for each language, the linguist J.A. Laponce (1987) suggests that the shift from speaking Hopi to speaking English "would involve not only a change of role but a profound change of personality" (11).

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WSSS's Four Seasons curriculum focused on the human relationship to the biotic community and cycles of the natural world, and this was reflected in a concept of human development through Four Seasons of Life (Dumont CL 1988; Berg & Shirt TC 1997). The intimacy of the human relationship to cycles in the natural world assumes a different relationship to time than that which dominant culture members consider natural, and the WSSS programme was likewise atypical not only in terms of the span of the school year, but also in the way that time was allotted to subject studies in the classroom. While they established monthly calendars with periods for Native Studies or academic subjects, there was an ever-increasing emphasis on the students' acceptance of a personal responsibility in completing assignments guided by their own sense of evolution rather

than teacher-defined deadlines. The curriculum also encouraged learning through various genres of the arts (Pellerin 1982; Berg & Shirt TC 1997) with the practical support of teachers and volunteers in, for instance, the research, writing and performance of original plays (Shirt T4 1993b; Harper T14 1997). Individual, small group and large group activities were encouraged.

At the same time, as the WSSS archive materials demonstrate - most dramatically through the notes written on giant classroom calendars - that there was a stress on marking the passage of the Moons and the Four Seasons through monthly *themes across the curriculum*. This included the study of rituals, dances and songs specific to the preparations for the monthly Feasts (Harper T14 1997; Pellerin 1982). Bill explains the different relationship to time and schedules.

*B: Instead of being run by the clock and the calendar, and yearly holidays,<sup>7</sup> [we were] thinking of it in terms of the seasons and the thirteen moons. It gives you a totally different focus... WSSS sort of started at a little bit different time than the regular school system (Lewis T12 1996a).*

They celebrated the change of Seasons on the 21st day of the appropriate months and, with some flexibility to account for the availability of the school building, they devised a 'traditional' school calendar:

*S: So did the kids go to school during the summertime as well ?*

*B: Some.*

*S: I mean, I know there was a lot of contact with the kids outside of regular school time, involvement with them.*

*B: Oh yeah, we had the buddy system.*

*S: Buddy system ?*

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<sup>7</sup> Bill is referring to the Gregorian calendar used by dominant culture groups in contemporary times, which identifies twelve months. While the Native American Calendars in the WSSS archives (1997) struck a rough correlation between the twelve-month calendar and the traditional passage of moons, the WSSS school year acknowledged the 13 moon s of the natural cycle (see Figure 9).

*B: ...All the people involved, the volunteers, and the parents, and the friends, and the relatives around... <snip> [participated in] a Big Brother or Big Sister thing. Like, Deanna's my buddy, right ?<sup>8</sup>*

*S: Right. Oh, that's what Pauline meant ! She said you were like her Dad.*

*B: [laugh] Yeah. So we had this buddy system set up, to be able to support kids out in the community. So that the school wasn't just here [making an enclosure with his hands]... to supplant parents but to complement, to work with the parents [opening his hands]. <snip> just figuring out how to be supportive <snip> in a non-interventionist kind-a way. I know the CAS says that's what it does but we know the reality is the opposite (Lewis T12 1996a).<sup>9</sup>*

At WSSS, it was deemed critical that the community find ways to nurture, heal and educate the parents, in tandem with educating their children.

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The project-orientation, and Earth-related themes of the curriculum at WSSS, naturally evolved from efforts to further the children's sense of a direct relationship to the Earth in its processes. This was accomplished through attention to the medicine plant helpers, and the harvesting and gardening of foods, yet, as Bill says, they never lost sight of the fact that they were urban Indians:

*B: I think that sometimes people get the idea that [pause] well, it's sort of a duality thing. You're either in the city, or you're living the good life out in the country 'back to the land'. Get away from the city and go out there.*

*S: As if you can't live the good life here ?*

*B: As if you can't, like, define a turf... In the city, I mean you're trying to survive... you're dealing with the bloody bureaucracy... the clock... You have to go and look at the calendar on the wall to remember when the moons are! ...It's harder in an urban area... and Pauline and Vern had to go away every now and again to do their Fasts*

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<sup>8</sup> Lewis is referring here to Deanna Schilling, Pauline's oldest daughter.

<sup>9</sup> At this time, the CAS had a reputation for removing Native kids from their homes for relatively minor offences on the part of their parents. In addition, those children were frequently put into distant foster care or adopted by white families, while members of the extended family such as Aunts, Uncles, or Grandparents - were denied the right to care for them (Joffman 1979; TNT 1978).

*and stuff. They'd go down in Montana and that. But [WSSS] was meant to bring people back, to show people <snip> the Good Life is here... There are spirits to this land. There's a spirit right over there on Algonquin Island. That's where I went for a couple of my Fasts. Right over there's a little special spot. I was going there 12 years in a row! ...*

*S: Among the Toronto Islands ?*

*B: [nodding as he continues] - There's Algonquin Island, then a little island called Snake... You don't have to go 1,000 miles away to feel that connection <snip> Hopefully, the school... makes people aware [pause] of the necessity to promote, to hang onto those ties, [pause] instead of looking at the city as [pause] the problem. You know ?...If you're looking at the problems all the time, you're not going to find the solution (Lewis T12 1996a).*

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The problem that WSSS proposed to overcome, i.e., the negative impact of urbanisation on the Native child, could not be solved by an escape to the woods in a return to the lifestyle of a prior century. Instead, its efforts were focused on finding a way to promote the child's own connection to the Earth and its processes within the city limits. After all, the relationship established through Native Way education is always specifically regional. In the process, WSSS's resistance to the negative impact of acculturative forces created a hybrid cultural framework for living in sacred relationship to the Earth, as a traditional person and an urban Indian. As Vern Harper suggests, WSSS "help[ed] children to deal with their double heritage," and one facet of the hybrid cultural framework the school cultivated was the struggle to establish a school yard garden (Farrell 1979):

*S: The way [Pauline] talks about it, that was a really critical event, to decide to fight for that garden plot.*

*B: Yeah. Well, it was incredible, [laugh] amazing (Lewis T12 1996a)*

They struggled for nearly two years to get the TBE to remove the tarmac from a small section of the playground. The city leaves little available land. Bill's focus was, and

remains, the need to cultivate a lot of food in a small space. However, everyone at WSSS believed it was important for the children to simply have the experience of nurturing a plant, to build that relationship with the Earth and all living beings:

*B: You know ? Get in flowers to grow with them in companion-planting, and do it as a process. And then have the sacred trees on the corners, and different bitty-things...*

*S: ...Now some of the schools are trying to recover their school yards. But at that time this was a very different thing to do.*

*B: Yes. It wasn't done at all, that was it ! But what it took ! ...My way of things is: If you take care of Momma, she'll take care of you (Lewis T12 1996a).*

When the TBE was finally persuaded to lift the tarmac, they had a garden of approximately fifteen by 24 feet, and there were lessons to be learned about the consequence of smothering the Earth:

*B: All that was underneath was gravel, sand, and not much in terms of earth. Right ? [laugh] So we had to try to get some earth in there, and then give that earth life. Because it's not gonna be able to pick up nutrients when there's no microbes and it's dead. Right ? ...Just the luck of the draw ...that time, I found a fellow who was selling out his little Earthworm Farm, there, who would participate. And [he gave us] fourteen... twenty-litre pails of castings [laugh]... [We] dug all that in.*

*S: Hm. Did the guy give you worms, too ?*

*B: Oh yeah ! I separated all them out [pause] to get them going, and left some of them there to do their work. A lot of it was mostly the eggs. So we had to wait and see how they would do. And so on... And the other thing was, sitting there trying to work it all out. Saying, 'Okay, we can walk in, and we can sort of plan a thing, and then it's all done and the kids go...' [he shrugs] You know ? Like, how do you make them part of that process ? <snip> ...It was Kathy Sims, at that time was teaching there... There was some trees... four trees... at each corner, right ? Then we had little areas... <shift block> We had said to the kids, 'Just go home and get some flowers, or whatever'... to see what they were going to put in their own little plots. <shift block> So we went out one day with the kids and I'll never forget - this is a classic - one little girl is sitting there... I think it was Beige's little girl, Harmony. She was sitting there and pulled up a little pile of earth. She was sort of watching everybody else and what they were doing, planting things. And they were diamond-shape, and kidney-shape, and these [plots] sometimes were no bigger around than that! [laughing, gesturing]*

*S: The size of a dinner plate ?*

*B: [laugh] Yeah. All little areas, right ? [laugh] This little girl came in as proud as she*

*could be. She had this plant, right ? This little thing. And she brought it in, and she wanted to put it in. And I said, 'Okay', and I was showing her... 'You just dig it in... and build it up around. And get the water tin and put it on it.' And other people came by and was just chuckling... because the plant she decided she just loved and wanted to see grow was a Dandelion. [hard laughter, catch of breath; B & S laugh together].*

*S: And you didn't say, 'No' ?*

*B: [hard laughter] No... And it was so neat because it was next to the ground, and then this little thing- [gesturing, the growing stem]. And then she just - [gesturing, snapping the flower off] Like, a few weeks later, she just blew the thing away. [puffing to blow the puff; B & S laugh] And, of course, all across the garden. Right ? [laughter, catch of breath, more laughter] Jeez ! Yup. That's all she wanted ! [laughter] Just to grow this Dandelion and blow the puff ! [hard laughter] <snip> And other kids had, you know, little beans. We were also trying to get 'the Three Sisters' going: bean, corn, and squash. <snip> We were still sort of experimenting on how ... and [the squash] just took over [laugh] that particular year... I got that figured out over the years. I'd just set a little pattern, actually in a circle, a ten-foot circle. How much corn to have, and let the beans grow up around the outside of it, and the squash to cover it in. It works out pretty good (Lewis T12 1996a).*

It should have been no surprise to anyone that the gardening project at WSSS crossed national boundaries. At WSSS, the context for things that took place at the micro level was always being extended to the macro level through an expanded sense of relationship to the Circle of Life. A reverse of the now famous environmentalist jingle, *act locally, think globally*, could have been WSSS's school motto. With Bill's help, WSSS joined the international Children's Gardening Circle movement sponsored by the United Nations, as the only Canadian representatives (Lewis T12 1996a):

*B: People were growing and working with children's gardening all around the world !*

*S: Now, I hadn't heard this before !*

*B: It was in the West Indies ! I went down to New York and met these people in the Bronx, and the fellow with the United Nations who was working with international children's things (Lewis T12 1996a).*

There was almost no literature on gardening with children at the time, though Bill found some material from the 1920s and the Victorian Age. He wanted to involve children "in

their own way, from their perspective, with what they wanted to see grow" because it took personal involvement to make the teachings "click":

*B: It's a question of not only learning about the Earth but learning that it takes time, and teaching the patience, and the caring for the Earth. Because if it's a result-oriented thing, [pause] 'I put a seed in. Where's my beans ?' You know, the next morning instead of <snip> Well, that you're taking care of the Earth. That the plant is kind-a like the prize... You're doing it because the plant - and I did explain this to them at the time - the little bean plant, for instance, it will make the earth richer because it fixes nitrogen. And it will take care of the corn plant, and squash will shade it, [pause] and these notions. And through the international children's thing ...I went down to see Sandy... [in] the Bronx. <shift block>*

*S: Who was Sandy ?*

*B: Eh ? Sandy Hinton... I don't know whether he was employed or just worked as a volunteer with the International Children's Garden thing. It was a thing that he and his wife had set up (Lewis T12 1996a).*

On Bill's visit to New York he met two people who established garden parks in the midst of the ghetto. In each case, the neighbours attributed a spiritual character, a sacredness, to the land. There is an obvious parallel here with the view of most traditional peoples, and particularly with the Aboriginal perspective, that some geographical sites are made sacred in their relationship to human communities (Kane LC 1986). However, human beings are also brought into a special understanding of themselves through their interaction with those sites. In fact, as they reported, those Bronx communities found not only a fresh sense of pride and identity through tending to their gardens, but they demonstrated increased respect for one another:

*S: Did [Sandy and his wife] come [to Canada] at all... to see what you had set up at WSSS ?*

*B: He never got to come up here, but <snip> I went down there... He was essentially trying to build something in the United States... Oh, that was part of their thing, their mandate... He understood what we were trying to do, and respected that autonomy without sort of a 'franchise' mentality. You know ? Just saying, 'You're doing the children's garden? Nobody else is doing it, that we know of, in Canada, so you're it. Tag !' [laugh] So we were, like, listed [among] the people who were doing*

*things around the world as the Canadian representatives of the International Children's Garden program.*

*S: That's fabulous. So, you were representing [pause] a real movement to recover the Earth on that level, too.*

*B: Yup... The other thing is, with the children doing it, then they take their little plants and they go home [pause] and the parents -*

*S: Get involved.*

*B: - get involved, and that was happening (Lewis T12 1996a).*

The Children's Garden Circle at WSSS was more than the teaching of relationship between the plants on a scientific level, as part of the academic curriculum. It was the experience of companion planting. It was more than a facet of cultural curriculum, describing the relationship of plants such as bean, corn, and squash through the Iroquois legend of The Three Sisters. Like traditional storytelling, the Four Seasons curriculum at WSSS was embedded with extended lessons about human behaviour, community values and spiritual relationships. Beyond the cultivation of food, there were practical applications of the children's learning experience through the gardening project:

*S: Pauline said you were growing herbs and the kids were taught what the different herbs were, so that if they split their knee on the playground or something they could go over [to the garden] and get that Medicine.*

*B: Yeah. Put mullein on or something. Just slap it on. Yeah, they would (Lewis T12 1996a).*

In teaching the students to address their own needs on simple daily levels, WSSS promoted a sense of autonomy and self-sufficiency in the WSSS children which, in turn, gave them a greater sense of personal security. For example, teaching the children to tend to their bumps and scrapes with the plant medicines in the garden fostered a sense of personal responsibility for their own physical well-being, as well as a personal relationship to the biotic community. This was paralleled in other areas of the curriculum, such as the attention given to nutrition in their health classes (Harper T14 1997).

Just as the clothing drives were organised in recognition of need, the lunch programme at WSSS was begun because a number of the students were hungry. While some of the volunteers addressed the school's interest in learning through the Arts, Vern made nutrition his project:

*L: I don't know if you know what the smoothie is ?*

*S: Oh, yeah !*

*L: [laugh, ironic tone] My Dad's famous smoothies !*

*S: With yogurt ?*

*L:[nodding] With Soya, and bananas. He'd make these every single day, for awhile there. [stressing every word, rolling her eyes]*

*S: Oh yeah.[laugh] (Harper T14 1997).*

There was a real concern not only about how much the children were eating, but what they were eating. In fact, the WSSS archives hold a significant number of books and pamphlets about nutrition, along with guides to edible wild foods and natural medicines. Among them is a booklet printed by the NIB, Full Circle: Food (no date) which cites studies on the connection between diet and behaviour.

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Although the school population never rose beyond ninety students while Pauline was involved, the organising focus of the school community was to establish an independent entity, rather than to attract a large number of students (Lewis T13 1996b; Berg & Shirt FN 1997). Size, as far as the WSSS staff was concerned, was not the issue; independent sustainability was. There were many converts to Native Way, but WSSS intentionally encouraged the founding of a series of small schools in deeply committed communities, with a rippling effect that reached across the continent, rather than increasing its student roll. With the help of community volunteers, the adult-student ratio was kept very high.

Little recognition is offered, either, for the fact that the school served the Toronto community as an informal learning institution for the adult community. However, the staff and volunteers were drained by the stress of being on the defensive with the TBE, and there was a bigger stumbling block than concerns over budgeting, staffing and pedagogical approach. What the Board had apparently not accepted when it adopted WSSS as an Alternative School, was that there is a critical period - a stage - when any group recovering from oppression needs the opportunity to engage in their independent learning, making and learning from their own mistakes, or simply working out the logistics of proceeding differently. Bill was adamant that people need to gain a sense of their own capabilities to set a direction for further action:

*B: You don't just bring people on that are the experts, but you let people try to learn by their own experience to be their own experts... Native people have to speak for themselves ... You can't have a Charley McCarthy-Edgar Bergman act... That doesn't mean there can't be discussion and disagreements... but when push comes to shove the decision is made by the people most concerned about the effects of that decision (Lewis T13 1996b).*

WSSS did not ignore the lessons learned by contemporary western studies, but always worked to dovetail that information with traditional patterns. The staff had read studies that indicated communication broke down if it involved more than 12 people, so they broke the classroom into small units. Volunteers and teachers worked one-on-one with the students (Lewis T12 1996a), who then brought completed assignments to the teacher for review (Pellerin 1982), and initiated small group projects (Harper T14 1997):

*B: The class is being taught and then you're helping one kid with the math, and someone else with the English. <snip block> And when you've got a large class like that, it can be broken up into little units the same as when we did the garden... It was really neat because it allowed for a way to incorporate volunteers... so you could kinda phase them in. So, let's say you come up with someone who's really not very good at working with kids, [pause] or arrogantly imposes the values of something else [pause], then you had*

*a way of assessing, and evaluating, and culling folks out.*

*S: Right. [long pause]*

*B: <snip> When you know where they're coming from, then there can be trust. [inaudible]. A lot of people from the dominant culture figured they could just walk in and, ah [long pause] and just assumed that they could do this, that, and the other. It can be dangerous. (Lewis T13 1996b).*

Yet, to adapt Bill's analogy of sailing ships and the process WSSS went through, climbing into your canoe and striking out in your own direction - even when you've been given the Harbour Master's blessing - requires more than simple paddling. As Vern Harper remarks in the NFB documentary about WSSS:

*If we want to control our own lives we must have the input into education... That's all we're asking. In fact we're demanding it. But if you're going to demand something you've got to be able to back it up with hard work (Holdway et al. 1978).*

The founders of WSSS discovered independence requires creativity in the approach to self-sufficiency, as well as hard work. Funding, and independence from the Toronto School Board, never ceased to be an issue. It was felt there could never be political and pedagogical independence until the community found a way to establish its financial independence. While Pauline was a very successful fund-raiser, part of her regret about her time at WSSS is that this role often took her away from day-to-day operations at the school itself. Everyone, including the children, had a sense of responsibility for the continued existence of WSSS. The students were making beaded crafts to sell at fund-raising events (Pellerin 1982), and there was an attempt to build the school's financial independence through the work of community volunteers who did not necessarily see their role as a direct involvement with the students. The plan was to establish a wealth-sharing small business venture:

*B: [We] had an acronym that fit it. It was called TIPI, Towards Indigenous People's Independence. [laugh]... At that time I was thinking in terms of canvas products*

*because I used to work in the boats with the sails and do stuff with canvas... Good canvas [for] teepees, canvas bags, tote bags.<sup>10</sup> All these things were popular, and today, we'd be right in the market. And then, we'd have our own designs, traditional designs and what-have-you on them. Like... an Indian version of Kettle Creek.*

*S: And there's your self-sufficiency.*

*B: ...and there's our self-sufficiency. And as well as doing the products... because of the different way of incorporating,<sup>11</sup> it was a way of involving part-time work and stuff for older people, who couldn't work full-time but could sit at home with a sewing machine [inaudible] and do something for an hour or two. [pause] Part of the money would go back to them, too, to the community. So it would involve older people. and then some of the people coming out of the institutions... on a part-time, community basis, taking this stuff and selling it, or whatever... and it was a way of involving the most people, young and old...*

*S: Right... That's community-building in itself, and you gain that sense of autonomy.*

*B: Yup, yup. (Lewis T13 1996b)*

The WSSS community found that the project of schooling their children involved much more than teaching. To use Bill's metaphor, to set a direction based on a compass line also required day to day decisions about negotiating the obstacles in their path as well as their direction of travel. This business venture had the potential, given the right circumstances, to allow WSSS to move towards total independence as a community-directed educational facility.

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<sup>10</sup> As it happens, several examples of those canvas bags were stored along with the legal documents, papers and correspondence of the WSSS archives. Pauline had been safe-keeping them for more than fifteen years. They were zippered duffle bags with leather handles, made of a very heavy, unbleached canvas. Obviously, this was a project that never quite got off the ground, but to see those bags is to witness a strong indicator of the creative energy that went into fund-raising projects for the school.

<sup>11</sup> WSSS was registered as a corporation.

**Chapter Ten****ALTERNATIVE VISIONS:  
UNLIKELY PARTNERSHIPS**

There was a point, in 1995, when it became clear the news had gone out I intended to work on the WSSS story for my Master of Education thesis. Two people Pauline had previously acknowledged as volunteer parents at WSSS approached me to say they wanted to be interviewed. However, in both cases, the details of their contribution to WSSS was challenged by Pauline. Both told me they had individually designed and co-ordinated a vital project at the school. In fact, they had worked together, as members of a three-person team and the woman who did not step forward for recognition had been the most industrious volunteer (Raphael TR4 1998; Berg & Shirt TC 1997, TC 1998). This situation suggests that a certain level of in-fighting and glory-chasing played a part in the unfolding history of the school. However, the fact that I had an authoritative source of corroboration for any claims made meant that I could hear afford to hear all sides, in recognition that both 'warp' and 'woof' threads are necessary to the weaving of an accurate history. In fact, placed in its fullest context, this scenario demonstrates the value of a narrative that draws on the memory of several individuals, including those with divergent points of view. If we are striving towards some form of 'objective history' in spite of a postmodern existentialism, it is through checking with a number of involved parties that themes will rise to the surface and repeat. In collective narrative such as this one something approaching 'truth' is presented in the aggregate of its voices. Everyone

seems to agree, for instance, that the WSSS mandate addressed security in both the child's home life and their cultural experience as a priority. Everyone agrees, also, that the mandate of the school reached far beyond mere academic concerns in terms of its scope and its calendar. In addition, WSSS must now be recognised as an informal adult education facility as a result of its insistence that parents and community members needed to learn the Medicine Wheel teachings *with* the children as volunteer assistants. Yet there is no single, definitive story of WSSS simply because the responsive nature of the Four Seasons curriculum allowed for the fact that everyone's experience of the school *was* different.

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In February 1997, when I told Pauline's daughter, Luanna Harper, that she was free to tell me what *she* thought was the beginning of the story, she said:

*L: I can tell you [pause] from when it first evolved. <snip> I remember ...all of us kids in the living room, with my Dad and my Mom. [pause] I think my Mom was doing my Dad's hair, and my Dad said [imitating his voice] 'Were gonna start our own school.'*

*S: You remember that ?*

*L: Yeah, yeah. And we're like, [in a sarcastic tone] 'Right, Dad'. ...She was braiding his hair or something, and he goes, 'We're going to call it The Little Red School House'. Like, there's already one in the States, and this is where he was getting his idea from, right ?... I remember thinking, 'A little red school house ! That would be so amazing, it's just too good to be true.' I didn't think it would happen. And that was the first thought... he expressed to us. And from then it was like, [pause] we were pulled out of school, [half-laughing ] we went to the Native Centre, and that's where we had our school... We had these books that were bought from Coles...little work books.*

*S: Writing books ?*

*L: Yup.... My Mom... bought a whole pile of them, and papers and pencils. [pause] There was only five of us there in the beginning (Harper T14 1997).*

All of the people who participated in this collage of narratives contributed, from their own point of view, stories about the things that had resonance for them. What stands out

in Luanna's story is the power in a single example of alternative schooling, the model of 'a little red school house' which gave several Aboriginal communities in North America the courage to opt out of the dominant culture schooling system in recognition that it simply was not working for them.

Like Clayton, Luanna "hated regular schooling" and was "miserable" in grade four (Harper T14 1997). Not only was she was being bullied by other children, in the school yard and in transit, but:

*L: They were doing tests on me, to put me in the Special Ed program... [in a frustrated tone] I didn't speak up, I wasn't - [pause]*

*S: You weren't having trouble writing or spelling or anything ?*

*L: No ! [in exasperation] I could read, I was learning ! But they thought I wasn't learning fast enough or something. <snip> But I knew what it was! You know ? That they thought I was slow or something (Harper T14 1997).*

The model for proper student behaviour was placed before student achievement in Luanna's experience of school. In her understanding of things, the difference in her pattern of classroom interaction, the fact that she did not speak up and the speed of her progress through assignments, were unfairly regarded as a measure of her intelligence:

*L: So, when we got out of there, I was happy ! [laughing] <snip> And the biggest impact was going to the Native Centre and seeing this room. And thinking, 'Wow !' You know ?*

*S: This is all ours ?*

*L: Yeah ! It was like, 'This is just too unbelievable'. You know ? 'We're going to school here !' <snip> And I just remember that room when we first went in there ! It was all lit up ! It was all sunny and shiny. [pause] There was all these little chairs ! ... I don't think we had regular desks, just big tables. ...And we knew it was school ! You know ? We knew it was something - Because it wasn't just my parents there ! There were a teacher and other people there and it was just something very serious... And then we had the Circle ! You know ? That was the beginning. [pause] We had the Circle in the morning, and it's been like that ever since... Sometimes you'd have somebody talk - [pause] My Dad would talk... Or this other man, Kasper Solomon...he was our Ojibway teacher, and he would talk and talk. <snip> He was such a special man. He*

*had so much patience for us. And this is something my Mom and Dad did. They gave this man an opportunity... They gave him an opportunity to teach the grandchildren.*  
*S: To be an Elder ?*  
*L: Yeah ! To be [pause] 'there' with us. And he did that for years. You know ? (Harper T14 1997).*

The dedicated involvement of community members and the inclusion of the Sacred Circle impressed Luanna with the seriousness of this project. "We knew it was school", she said (Harper T14 1997). The daily Circles and the Elders' teachings resonated for Luanna because she placed their significance in parallel with her experience of the Fire Gatherings on family excursions to the seasonal ceremonies of the Mide. As a child of cultural revivalists, Luanna recognized that the life of this school was Sacred because it was backed by the guidance of the Good Spiritual Grandfathers through those Circles.

The Circle is a unifier that symbolizes the community in its process. This function dominated the mandate of the school, through its organisation under the guidance of the Parent Council, community Elders and the cultural curriculum. As she walked into that sunny room at the Native Centre, Luanna was old enough to recognize all of these things and infer there would be both an improved understanding from her teachers and better relations with her peers (even if she could not phrase things in those terms). Speaking of the impact of her experience in attending WSSS, Luanna said her memories still draw on Marc Phillips' voice and the message in his prayer meditations as he conducted those first daily Circles:

*Meegwetch for the young ones that are here today, Grandfather, because it is for them that we are doing this, Grandfather - the school - that they may all grow in these ways, that they may become spiritually strong, Grandfather, and walk that Red Road that our Elders talked to us about, so much, Grandfather. I give thanks for all these things, Grandfather. Meegwetch, meegwetch, meegwetch, meegwetch (Holdway et al. 1978).*

As a student of WSSS, Luanna would write, "Children are here to learn, Parents are here

to provide, Grandparents are here to teach, All relating to the Circle of Life" (Novak 1983: back cover).

The ancient Sacred Circle was the center of the cultural programme at WSSS as this small group of Aboriginal traditionalists took the path towards spiritual recovery, yet the Parent Council recognised they were starting from scratch on other levels. Most of the parents had not been raised in the traditions they now hoped to deliver to their children, and the enormity of the transition to be made was reflected in the students' responses during their first experiences of Native Way teaching (Holdway et al. 1978). As Luanna reveals, there was considerable 'culture shock' among the students in the beginning:

*L: They gave us cigarettes to burn, eh ? [laughing] ...They would do that a lot, at different ceremonies. Because we'd get ceremonies at my Mom's, and ceremonies at the Native Centre... There were a lot of Pipe ceremonies [pause] and they'd give out cigarettes all the time. So, we would burn them, but we'd try and sneak a puff [laughing] while no one was looking.*

*S: So you'd light them, and just hold them ?*

*L: Yup, yup... <snip block> So we'd go there every day. [pause] There was a pool table downstairs in a Lounge area, and that's what we'd do for recess, right? Go play pool ! [laughing] And, I mean it just kinda grew out of that... Other kids came to the school... (Harper T14 1997).*

In their innocence, the students struggled to understand their experiences through the clash of cultural messages from what Vern had dubbed their "double heritage", traditionalism and acculturation. Healing could not take place overnight. This fresh generation was the first in nearly 100 years who had not been directly affected by the Residential Schools, yet they were urban children dealing with television and other mediums of acculturation. With repeated experience they began to recognise Tobacco in

its Sacred capacity, instead of as a cigarette.<sup>1</sup>

As Jo-Ann Archibald (1993) says, "to increase cultural power, wealth, and strength" one must share one's culture, but this is "a reciprocal process requiring time and the good will to listen, teach, and learn, and to participate in essential cultural protocol and practice" (342). With exposure to the Old Ways, the WSSS children were soon apprenticed to the Circle Conductor and accepted the responsibility of carrying the purifying smudge around the Circles. Daily, they prayed with and offered their Tobacco, often sharing their concerns with the community through meditative prayers. Coming home to the Old Ways, under the guidance of the Elders, was more than a path towards healing. They reestablished their connection to ancient wisdom about community, self, land, language and the individual's Life Path on the physical Earth.

There are some kinds of wisdom that depend on the accumulated, experiential information that evolves in a shifting, reciprocal, communal relationship to a specific geographic region over many generations. Chet Bowers (1995) suggests that *all* educators must "consider the need for a radical shift in attitude towards transgenerational communication and the role that the Elders should play in the vital processes of cultural storage and renewal" (17). This is consistent with WSSS's focus on recovering balance and healing through their reintegration with the natural world in the *process pedagogy* of the traditional First Nations Medicine Wheel (Regnier 1994). In that sense, the WSSS school community learned to embrace its struggles for understanding within several

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<sup>1</sup> Tobacco is one of the most Sacred Medicines of Aboriginals in Canada and the northern states of America. It is often used as an offering in prayer meditation, laid on the ground surrounding a plant which is to be harvested, for instance, or burned in the central fire at a ceremonial gathering. The smoke of Tobacco carries prayers to Creator, and unifies the Circle when the Sacred Pipe is smoked, but raw Tobacco is also considered a powerful Medicine (Benton-Banai 1988; Dumont CL 1988; Berg & Shirt TC 1998).

dimensions of time: their present experience, manifestation of a centuries-long struggle for autonomy and an evolutionary process that anticipated positive change.

While WSSS quadrupled its student numbers within four years, it had begun with the idea that there was value in being a smaller school. Building an involved community meant ensuring that each student was recognised as an individual within a supportive, affirming network of relationships. That effort can be lost in a school with a big student roll (Lewis T13 1996b; Berg & Shirt TC 1998). As Regnier (1987a) says, Survival Schools demonstrate emancipatory education:

*because they constitute liberating responses to cultural alienation, social dislocation and academic failure of native students as well as the political marginalisation of native parents. These schools demonstrate how Indian cultures can recreate themselves in the heart of Canadian urban society, and they serve a prophetic role in showing a way for culturally sensitive education to proceed (42).*

First Nations organisations and reserve leaders across the country had demanded control of their local schools. WSSS affirmed its urban elementary students within the embrace of their traditions on a daily basis, but part of its mandate was to develop future educational projects. In fact, there was a firm plan to establish a sister NativeWay high school in partnership with the TBE (Novak et al. 1983; Lewis T13 1997b; WSSS archives 1997). While that high school never manifested in Toronto, some of the communities that followed WSSS, such as Saskatoon Survival School and the Plains Indian Cultural School, took up the challenge of designing Native Way programmes for high school students.

The key to WSSS's success was that its process as a school was grounded in an embrace of the school community on the same level of intimacy as an extended family (Harper T14 1997; Lewis T13 1997b; Shirt T11 1994a). In an extension of the notion that

those who eat together keep together, the school proved that those who Feast together advance together in an integration of spiritual and educational goals. At traditional Feasts of the Mide, the apprentice helpers always assemble a dish of food for the Good Spiritual Grandfathers, offering the ancestors nurture before those on the physical plane take sustenance. Next the Elders are served by the helpers, in recognition of their guiding role in the community, followed by the helpers themselves, who have placed their personal concerns aside (for hours or days, depending upon the occasion) to tend to the Sacred Fire and prepare for the gathering. While the best interest of the community is always prioritised, this does not disregard the individual. Learning and healing experiences are always individualised.

Luanna reveals that some of the children at WSSS were obviously struggling with parental neglect, and the school community stepped in to take responsibility for satisfying both their physical needs and their sense of belonging:

*They didn't have everything. And they [pause] used to get in trouble all the time, and they weren't very clean, but that's the way they were raised. [pause] They were a big part of our life, really, when we were growing up, because they were there all the time, at different functions and gatherings (Harper T14 1997).*

Yet, though they accepted the role of extended family, the WSSS community did not take over the duties of the parents as they assisted the students. Instead, they made it clear that while the parents could expect support, they were also expected to discover their own healing through honouring their parental responsibilities.

At WSSS, it was recognised that part of the pain experienced by the Aboriginal community at large was a loss of traditional role models for social interaction, including the loss of parenting and grandparenting models. The NFB documentary Wandering Spirit Survival School (Holdway et al. 1978) addresses this point openly, acknowledging

that many Native parents had attempted to cope with the pain of racism, social oppression, economic disadvantage and the after-effects of physical and sexual abuse they had experienced in the Residential Schools by turning to alcohol and drug use. In the embrace of the Medicine Wheel teachings, the behaviour of children must always be understood through attention to their full environment, which includes their home life. Yet while their circumstances are recognised as an influence on their behaviour, the effort to address those behaviours does not detract from a simultaneous effort to affirm the child as a worthy human being. In fact, whether that entity is a child or an adult, they are recognised without blame as an entity struggling to attain balance on its Life Path.

Early on, the WSSS Council realised that re-establishing social support networks was as instrumental to the success of its students as any other facet of the school's organization or cultural curriculum. First, the Parent Council itself reflected the role of the traditional Chief Council, which granted a voice to every non-Council member of the school and community in open meetings. Then, the inception of an adult-child *buddy system* attempted to replicate the social function of extended families in recognition that the natural family ties of urban Natives were fractured by physical distance from many family members, and further strained by substance addiction or marriage break up (Lewis T12 1997).<sup>2</sup> Consistently at WSSS, the relationships established in the school community were focused inward, building and maintaining pragmatic support systems for both parents and children at the school. Yet simultaneously, they established an external web of reciprocal relationship in an extended community that spiralled outward

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<sup>2</sup> Pauline indicates she worked largely with mother-run families in the first year of the school's existence, in part because these were the contacts she had made through her work with Nellie's, a hostel for abused women in Toronto (Shirt T1 1992a).

in ever-widening circles to encompass Toronto, Ontario, Canada, and then North America.

While Pauline was at WSSS, the response to troubled students took advantage of the best possible resources, not only in a careful selection of Spiritual Teachers and Medicine Men from Wyoming, Alberta and Ontario (Berg & Shirt TC 1998; Novak et al: 10; Raphael TR4 1998), but also in a strong effort to establish a true partnership with the TBE. WSSS also used its access to appropriate dominant culture community resources. This intention is illustrated in the model for the WSSS school community included in the WSSS Handbook (Illustration 4). As Luanna suggests:<sup>3</sup>

*It was really something. It really changed afterwards. You know, my mother and father really made that place [pause] complete ? ...Without them... the structure wouldn't have been there. Because they were ...the ones 'behind the scenes', doing all this work. They were always going to all these meetings, meeting with the Board [of Education]... My Dad, when we were at the Native Centre, he said [lowering her voice, tapping in sync with stressed syllables] - 'We're a private school ! We're a Private Native school'. And he said, 'This is your school. This is not their school'... You know ? [tapping out the stressed syllables] 'It's a private school that is run by us'. Right ? And I thought that was really cool. And then [pause] I don't know what happened, but... they started having meetings with the Board (Harper T14 1997).*

The school had faced a continuous struggle for its own survival during the first year without a dependable source of funding, which led to a decision to sacrifice a certain level of autonomy. It was adopted as an Alternative School by the TBE in 1977. This is not to say that WSS did not continue to progress in its goal of providing emancipation through Native Way education, however.

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<sup>3</sup> For instance, Pauline worked closely with a TBE psychiatrist as well as the late Wyoming Medicine Man, the Elder Raymond Harris, in order to treat the troubled children (Berg & Shirt TC 1998).

It was the summer of 1997 when Pauline pulled me into the York University office of a man who was obviously an old acquaintance. Trevor Owen had been a teacher at Inglenook High School who had fond memories of the time when WSSS shared the Sackville Avenue school building. "You should interview Trevor," Pauline said, as we sat in his office. Trevor and I arranged to conduct an interview over lunch at an underground restaurant on campus and soon found ourselves chuckling as our over-attendant waiter interrupted, time and again, oblivious to the huge tape-recorder that lay on the table between us. Trevor understood that Pauline was anxious for us to talk, but he also seemed glad of the opportunity to tell me what it was like for two Alternative schools to share the same building.

Inglenook had been the sole tenant at the Sackville Street site for two years when WSSS joined it in October 1977. Trevor was Co-ordinator of the School for Inglenook,<sup>4</sup> and attended to a series of administrative responsibilities. As he points out, Inglenook was "already entrenched in the school" so some of the shared concerns, such as janitor services and building repairs, continued to cross his desk although WSSS was otherwise independent. As he put it, the mail went to separate offices and, "It wasn't like their life as a school was mediated through Inglenook" (Owen T16 1997).

*... I always liked the idea of the two schools being together... I thought that the elementary kids were a fabulous... moderating influence on our teenage crew and that, in very human and emotional ways they revealed through their relationships with one another just how much they needed each other... WSSS's program was in two rooms and an office on the second floor. Our program was in two classes on the main floor, [and] two classes on the second which, of course, [we] interacted with them... On the main floor... we would have lunch, there would be activities in the yard, and kids would play*

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<sup>4</sup> The Principal of Inglenook was an area Superintendent, while WSSS shared a Principal with Withrow Avenue School (WSSS archives 1997). Ironically, this was the same elementary school Clayton had refused to attend, launching the parents into their struggle for an independent education system.

*ball or soccer... The point is that we all knew each other, and we're talking about two small schools (Owen T16 1997).*

Inglenook was twice the size of WSSS, which "would have been thirty to fifty students at this time", but members of both schools soon knew which students were having difficulty in either population (Owen T16 1997). Everyone, including other students, assumed a shared responsibility for those individuals.

At the same time, though WSSS actively embraced an extended Aboriginal community, there was a definite line drawn between Inglenook and WSSS in terms of the two school programmes and their interaction. While Inglenook operated a co-op learning programme called Out Reach which sometimes placed the high school students in the WSSS classrooms as part of their practicum training, these were student-initiated placements and there was no formal arrangement to buddy the High School students with the Elementary School students in their academic pursuits:

*T: [They] did want to involve the extended community, but ... the WSSS community. So, they wanted to involve Elders, for example...*

*S: You didn't become part of the family ?*

*T: Oh, no ! Not that there weren't times when we didn't interact (Owen T16 1997).*

As Trevor said, the High School students were sent invitations to participate in the WSSS Pow Wows and other social events, which they accepted, but there was no merging of their programmes:

*T: And certainly... without suggesting that we were ever disrespectful to one another's [pause] lives together, we did acquire an increased respectfulness, over time... They would have Pow Wows, for example... The place would be jammed with all of these people, and all of these activities were going on. And there would be... all of these drums... So, suddenly, we would discover that during Pow Wows... you couldn't have Drama class. You know, you just couldn't do it because you couldn't hear anything ! [laughing] ... The first time, that maybe drove everybody crazy, but not thereafter because you knew that was part of what life was.*

*S: So, you adjusted...*

*T: Absolutely... as any community does (Owen T16 1997).*

The fact that WSSS had been adopted as one of the TBE's Alternative schools meant that it was regarded as one in a collective of Alternative institutions. On some levels, this caused a strain in relations with the Board. However, support for the Alternative schools was not universal and as they were met with some of the same arguments as WSSS, the culture school received significant support from the collective of TBE Alternative schools (Owen T16 1997):

*T: You know, it would be this Superintendent, not that one, this Principal, not that one... 'Who were we ?'... There was a sub-committee struck [at TBE] to deal with Alternative and Community programs that became our life-line to the Board. I think it was a master stroke of whoever dreamt it up, to have this sub-committee... It was rooted in Programs and Pedugogy [pause], a relationship which I also thought was brilliant. But, it's true that the Alternative schools of the day - really having come into existence through this will - would have seen themselves not only as alternatives to each other, but really alternatives to the system.*

*S: Yeah.*

*T: ... That's a big weight to carry !... So, there was a certain ...reticence, a certain circling of the wagons, if I could use that metaphor [pause] to protect the integrity of what your school program was. This applied as much to Inglenook as it did to WSSS. Although the reasons for it would be as different as the schools were from each other (Owen T16 1997).*

The Alternative schools embraced that difference as necessary but, at the same time, many felt their own survival "to be a miracle of will" (Owen T16 1997).

It is important to note that all of the Alternative Schools, by virtue of their size, had limited enrolment capacities. As a result, at Inglenook, Trevor conducted a careful screening of prospective pupils to determine whether the unique characteristics of the school programme actually matched the needs and interests of the new students. He referred to this as a review of "programme fit", and recalls:

*What we hadn't figured out - for the longest time - was that... by the very nature of our existence, we also caused students to see [each school] as distinct from [the others]. There was no such thing as 'the regular school' any more, just as there was no such thing as 'the Alternative school' (Owen T16 1997).*

Each school in the system was suddenly recognised as an *alternative* to the neighbourhood school for some members of the general student population. Trevor suggests this was one of the most positive influences of the Alternative Schools movement, at least within the TBE. While it claimed a greater level of autonomy within the system, the Alternative Schools movement did not advocate *separation* from the system so much as it provoked a *revisoning* of the system. The school board also recognised the movement as a collection of individual schools with distinctive programme characteristics, which delivered a common core programme.

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As Pauline reports, her application for WSSS to be adopted by the TBE was met with bellows of outrage from some of the TBE Trustees (Regnier & Shirt TR1 1987b). Yet, despite local resistance, WSSS's unique governing Council, the Four Seasons curriculum and Native Way pedagogy attracted international attention (Regnier & Shirt TR1 1987b; Shirt T1 1992a). In fact, WSSS and the Survival School Movement created such important models for emancipation that they were presented as an alternative pedagogy in the Teacher Training programmes of Germany (Krauth 1983 in WSSS archives 1997). Long before WSSS followed the example of two sister Survival Schools by creating The Wandering Spirit Survival School Information Handbook (Novak et al. 1983) "as a *how to* for all those interested in setting up a survival school", the school had accepted its

piloting role (2).<sup>5</sup>

*Daily, we receive inquiries about Wandering Spirit from across the country, the United States and from abroad... The theme of the Handbook, 'One and a part', is intended to illustrate... Wandering Spirit's distinctiveness as a Native Way school, while emphasising its role in the Native community, not only in Toronto, but across the continent (2).*

The school became a magnet for a constant flow of educators (Berg & Shirt TC 1997, TC 1998), local news reporters (Harper T14 1997) and a retinue of Aboriginal Elders and artisans who volunteered their services when they passed through Toronto (Regnier & Shirt TR2 1987b; Shirt T4 1992b; Lewis T12 1996a, T13 1996b).

By the early 1980s, the WSSS teachers were supervising the fieldwork of undergraduate students from Trent University's Native Studies program, while Bachelor of Education students from the University of Toronto completed their practicum placements at the school (Harper T14 1997; WSSS archives 1997). They had also attracted the attention of enthusiasts for First Nations culture in Europe. Political and financial support for the Survival School movement arrived unsolicited from non-Native support groups in Switzerland, who saw the importance of WSSS to the Native Survival School movement (Bruhin 1981 in WSSS archives 1997). In 1982, as Pauline Shirt and Vern Harper wrote their note for the Handbook, they could state with confidence:

*Our family has watched and participated in the growth of a dream which today symbolizes self-help and self-determination through Native Way Education. With growing support from many different areas of society, we have seen Native leadership strengthened and become respected, finding its rightful place alongside the dominant cultures in Canada. Our central concern has been and always will be the Little People who come to Wandering Spirit to learn traditional Native values and customs, while at*

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<sup>5</sup> Several of the Survival Schools created Information Handbooks to foster the development of other community schools. Most notable were the bound booklets produced by the Red School House (1979), The Kanawake Survival School (1979), and WSSS (1983), but the Tkisalagi'lakw School (1979) and others produced modest copier-printed handbooks.

*the same time they are prepared both academically and spiritually to cope with the diversity of values in the Canadian mosaic (Novak et al.: 4).*

While most of the newspaper articles of the day presented this tiny urban culture school as the desperate activism of concerned parents, suggesting it was a local phenomenon (Hamilton Spectator 1979; Horgan 1979; Slinger 1980), in fact, WSSS had established the model for a network of nine Native Survival Schools in Canada, and was part of a larger network of Survival Schools throughout North America (Brydon 1979; Regnier 1994, TEL 1995).

In January 1980, WSSS hosted a Native Way School Conference that gathered Aboriginal educators and interested parties from across the country. This was the first conference of its kind in Canada (Regnier & Shirt TR1 1987b; Shirt T1 1992a; WSSS archives 1997), but confidence in the social and political changes initiated in hand with the movement was so high that Vern Harper addressed the conference with a strong resolution:

*'Never again in the history of native people... will we allow our children to be taken away from us.' He was optimistic about these children. 'When I see them grow spiritually and respecting their parents and respecting their elders... I know that none of these children will become an obscure thing as an addict or an alcoholic' (Marchand 1980: 113).*

A number of Aboriginal communities, such as Grassy Narrows, appealed to WSSS for direct assistance in adapting the Native Survival School model to their community's needs. Pauline and Vern responded by travelling to the interested communities and facilitating several days of workshops to explain the Native Way model (WSSS archives 1997). However, each community necessarily accepted the responsibility for adapting that model to create a regional version of the Four Seasons curriculum.

The story of the Survival Schools is not one of uninhibited success. There was an apparent refocusing of energy in the Aboriginal community during the late 1980s. Though it continued to garner steady support, the community-gathering activist effort which had provided the initial momentum for the Native Survival Schools movement seemed to level-off. Perhaps this is because several of the Canadian schools bloomed and failed within their first four years (Regnier TEL 1995; Berg & Shirt TC 1998). The movement had never shaken the initial resistance to *separatism* from dominant culture school boards, and many urban Natives persisted in their position that the traditionalists directing the Survival Schools were radical extremists (Berg & Shirt TC 1998). While the urban Natives still experienced problems in local public schools, the dominant system was increasingly demonstrating sensitivity to the need for consultation with the Aboriginal community in designing a system of supports for their full integration, especially in the largest urban centres (Burnaby 1980; Novak 1981; Haig-Brown et al. 1995).<sup>6</sup> The statistics indicate that the main thrust of the two-fisted demand for Native-directed schools after the mid-1980s fell behind the shift from federally-operated to band-operated schools on the reserves, rather than the urban Survival Schools movement (Urion 1993).

However, a number of the pilot schools continue to provide an alternative to the dominant schooling system in both Canada and the USA. They are operated by a small but dedicated cross-border network of innovative Aboriginal educators. In fact, as the western director for the Canadian Alliance in Support of Native People (CASNP), Bill Lewis, insists, the effects of acculturation that continue to proliferate in the public

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<sup>6</sup> In some part, this sensitivity was forced by a dramatic shift in demographics. The urban centres had experienced an influx of minority students from all over the globe through immigration.

schools system and the reserve schools make the model established by the Survival School movement more important than ever (T12 1996a, T13 1996b). The whole point of establishing a model for emancipatory education, he suggests, is to negotiate autonomy through self-sufficiency, and despite a series of changes to the school itself, the model WSSS set between 1976 and 1982 - those first seven years the Good Grandfathers promised to Pauline, still point the way to achieving that goal.

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Pauline and Vern had both retired from a daily role in the school when a series of swift administrative changes at WSSS occurred in 1984. The Toronto Board arranged for a Community School Relations worker to "demystify Toronto Board structures" and promote the school council's increased involvement in policy-making (Regnier 1987a: 43). An arrangement to hire only Native teachers was negotiated in 1985-1986, and WSSS formalized the involvement of Elders and other Native Way personnel in the same year. Steps were also taken to address the high percentage of Behavioural and Learning Disabled children at WSSS, in recognition of a problem that had plagued its operations from its second year of existence.<sup>7</sup> "New Admissions procedures were adopted to ensure parental support and to limit access for students requiring exceptional education" (43). Then there was a move to a larger location. In 1986, WSSS took up residence in its own wing on the third floor of Dundas Public School. There were four large rooms and an

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<sup>7</sup> The Toronto Board of Education had continually asked WSSS to enroll a high percentage of students with special needs, many of them non-Native. Vern Harper, Pauline Shirt, and Bill Lewis each independently claimed that as many as one third of the students at WSSS were officially identified, or gave strong indicators for designation as Behavioural or Learning Disabled. At the same time, there were no additional Board personnel offered to support most of these students.

office. Next, the school obtained a grant to hire an Executive Director for two years. This was announced as "a major improvement over the previous one-half day per week non-resident Principal and it secured a continuing institutional basis for the indigenous cultural education program" (44).

On the surface, all of these changes were positive. The school was being given more formal opportunities to influence its own organisation, pedagogical policy and practice. However, in the long run these changes served to de-radicalize WSSS. While the TBE suggested it was working in partnership with the school, the evolution was far from a mutual process. In many ways, the shifts in government brought the school more in line with the dominant pattern for the management of pedagogical issues than did the Aboriginal model. For instance, when the Executive Director was hired, the TBE installed a Liaison person as support for the WSSS staff in understanding the procedures of the TBE; however, it failed to provide for the formal education of the TBE officials or Trustees in either the history of the school itself or an Alternative Aboriginal world view.

The original mandate of WSSS addressed the failure of Aboriginal students in dominant culture classrooms by doing something radically different. Rather than offering support to the students in their struggle to acculturate, WSSS recreated the Algonquin world view in their classrooms and made the social security of the child central to all of its programmes. The morning Sweetgrass circle established "the cultural and spiritual framework for learning, teaching, program development, [and] social relations" (44). While the original Parent's Council of the school reflected an Aboriginal approach to government, the AKEC Board reflected the business community model for management. My experience at the school indicated there was an investment in officialising the voice of Board members, thereby de-emphasizing the importance of parents and others in the

Circle. The Board also adopted Robert's Rules of Order to govern proceedings at the general meetings, which are in conflict with the process of a traditional Council.

Increasingly, the students' parents and the concerned community members experienced far less voice in the making of educational policy. Fewer parents and volunteers felt supported as partners-in-learning with their children. In 1987, there was such a falling away of volunteer support that the issue was identified as a crisis and addressed in meetings and the WSSS newsletter.

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Trevor Owen's (T16 1997) memories of the time that WSSS and Inglenook shared the Sackville Avenue school building are fond. What resonates in his memory is the harmony in personal attachments that developed among the elementary children school and the high school teens:

*T: It would be common to see kids in the Library, or on the stairs, or out on the playground. <shift block> What I remember is little kids, hanging off hunks.*

*S: [laugh]*

*T: You know ? ...It's worth noting that [pause] students at Inglenook were almost visibly identifiable by their alternative-ness. So we would have hunks with raging hair. We would have skin heads with raging baldness. We would have, you know, preppies. We would have mods. You know ? It was a circus [pause] in that respect. But there was never enough of one group to dominate and what they all had in common... was that they were all pretty smart and... had.. not really had good experiences in school. Many of them [were] failures in school previously, but [pause] very creative, very artistically minded... Inglenook had a Gallery... a student started ...and they showed works by established and student artists. So these were the kids you have. So my lasting image is of these, you know, is little Wandering Spirits bouncing down the stairs and into the arms, or on[to] the leg, or around the neck of... someone with red [or] green hair and blue lips with staples... in various parts of their bodies.[laugh] You know ? [laugh]*

*S: That sounds wonderful to me !*

*T: It was wonderful !*

*S: ...The Wandering Spirits... are struggling a lot with their identity - even when they're not Native kids, necessarily - because of their list of experiences of 'not fitting in' various other places [pause] which eventually directed them to that school -*

*T: Yeah.*

*S: So, to have the environment of WSSS associated with the environment of Inglenook -*

*T: Yeah.*

*S: - sounds marvellous !*

*T: Yeah. Well, you know... there's a lot to recommend it [chuckle] (Owen T16 1997).*

In fact, most of the interaction between the schools was student-initiated. The playground was mostly asphalt and "when you're in a hip and cool arts-oriented Alternative school, not that many kids are interested in sports", so Inglenook's students tended to sit on the platforms of the play equipment to smoke their cigarettes while the WSSS children gambolled over the slides and climbed the monkey bars all around them (Owen T16 1997). However, the WSSS students were highly sports-oriented, and there were some Inglenook students who wanted to toss ball or play basketball, so they would scrape together teams between the two schools (Harper T14 1997; Owen T16 1997).

As Trevor saw it, the two schools were "quite an unlikely pairing" and no one could have predicted the results (Owen T16 1997):

*T: Here you have a Native school, and this kind of urban place for hip, smart, creative, artistic drop-outs. You know ? Where does that fit ?*

*S: Was it an accident of housing ? Was it just that you had the room available ?*

*T: Yeah, and they were looking for space. That's right.*

*S: And it was as simple as that ?*

*T: Yeah.*

*S: So, that's wonderful. That's really wonderful.*

*T: Um hm. Yeah, it was great. And, I mean, there were times when - [pause] You know, we coveted the space. Inglenook couldn't really grow [pause] because we were full -*

*S: Hm.*

*T: - and the only way we could grow was if WSSS left. Now, ultimately, they did go, and Inglenook did grow. So, now [Inglenook] has the whole school building and it fills it out. And in that respect, you know, I'm sure Inglenook is quite happy about it. But, when it came time for WSSS to go, well, it really left in two senses. One, was that it left*

*the building.*

*S: Right.*

*T: I had left the school at this time, as well. I was no longer there. [pause] But in the other sense... when they changed their name <snip> to the First Nations School of Toronto [pause], when they went to ...Dundas... everyone, really, was of the same view. [pause] Which was, 'Right. I get it. Makes sense. No problem. Rats !' [ironic laugh] Because everyone loved that name WSSS. We thought it was so evocative. [pause] You know, the value of having a Survival School - [pause] <snip> But the idea of having The First Nations School was somehow more... well maybe more politically correct... maybe more useful, [pause] but there seemed to be a spirit lost there.*

*S: Yeah, in more senses than one.*

*T: In more senses than one. Yeah (Owen T16 1997).*

**EPILOGUE**

&lt;&lt;&lt;&lt; &gt;&gt;&gt;&gt;

Dream Diary: October, 1987

*I have just emerged from a state unlike any dream. It happened soon after Pauline came to my door, confirming arrangements to leave for the Fall Ceremonies of the Three Fire Mide at St. Charles in the morning. Getting ready for sleep, I sat on the edge of the bed to remove my shoes and a vision came over me, a message I must relay:*

I see tomorrow's journey, and our arrival at the camp. We are a party of twelve: Pauline, her troop, and my small family. Pauline has been told we will stay in a one-room log cabin, but, when we arrive, someone directs us to an abandoned schoolhouse. It is a small building, with one long room on each of two floors. We take the upper floor with a few of the other campers. A second group assembles on the ground level. We have been there some time, perhaps several days, when the building catches fire. The flames climbing the walls are brilliant and loud, a choir of orange and purple tongues that echo in the rafters. Part of me is watching this from a distance, watching myself as I respond. I watch as I take my children by their hands and lead them to the door. There is no discussion, no fear in our exodus, just a murmur of feet on the stairs as the rest of our party follows me out. The people on the ground floor come out behind us though no one has called an alarm, our retreat from the building calm and orderly. We wait for the last person to emerge. Then the crowd watches

as fire gives voice to the school, whispering and crying in its beams. We stand in a cluster, a short distance from the school, as flames raise a shout along the outside walls. Suddenly, I realise Pauline is not among us. "Where's Pauline ?" I call. And someone responds, "She stayed inside to put the fire out". Yet the fire cannot be contained. Fire is already laughing from the rooftop as it slips free of the building. No one heeds my call for help as I slip back inside the school to find her. She is standing by the wood stove, her whole body enveloped in a glow, embraced by flames that rise behind her head like an aura. The flames make a kind of halo, tinted purple with splashes of pink. Pauline is paralysed, unable to save the school and unable to leave it without assistance. I pick up two blankets, wrapping them around her head and shoulders and guide her from the burning schoolhouse. Outside, I notice I have draped her in a trading blanket and a handmade quilt. The others are still waiting in a crowd as we emerge from the flaming structure, the whole assembly singing out in chorus: "It's amazing. You got her out." I turn to look at Pauline now, and she is beautiful and serene, her face radiant and unscarred. She is smiling, watching the schoolhouse slip free of its form in a symphony of pink and purple flames. I turn to look at the school and the Good Grandfathers rise on smokeless drafts, like giant fireflies who will reassemble as a council of stars.

**LIST OF APPENDICES**

- 372 A: Survey Questionnaire. in Pellerin, Judith. 1982. A Case Study of Three Pupils at Wandering Spirit Native Survival School in Toronto. M.ED thesis. Saskatoon: University of Saskatchewan. Appendix A.
- 373 B: Table 2. Percentage Time-Totals for Behaviours of Ss During Periods of Total Class Instruction. in Pellerin, Judith. 1982. A Case Study of Three Pupils at Wandering Spirit Native Survival School in Toronto. M.ED thesis. Saskatoon: University of Saskatchewan. p.56.
- 373 C: Table 4. Number of Times Different Kinds of Oral Participation were Engaged in by Ss During Periods of Total-Class Instruction. in Pellerin, Judith. 1982. A Case Study of Three Pupils at Wandering Spirit Native Survival School in Toronto. M.ED thesis. Saskatoon: University of Saskatchewan. p.59.
- 374 D: Wandering Spirit Survival School: Annotated Time Line. Berg, Sharon. 1998.
- 376 E: The Seven Stages of Life. Shirt Pauline. 1997. unpublished paper. York University.
- 378 F: A Mide Quay's Qualitative Research Methods. Shirt, Pauline. 1997. unpublished paper. York University.

## Appendix A

**Copy of Appendix A: Pellerin, Judith. 1982.**  
A Case Study of Three Students at Wandering Spirit Survival School in Toronto.  
 Masters thesis. University of Saskatchewan.

Dear Sir,

I am working on my thesis for a Masters of Education degree, and in connection with my study, I need to establish a rating of High, Medium, Low for student attention during a lesson. I wish to obtain the opinions of other teachers in this regard, so that the rating scale which I use will not be based on my opinion alone. Would you have each of your teachers from grades 4 through 8 complete the following rating scale without consulting one another, and return to me in the enclosed self-addressed envelope by return mail.

1. Which do you consider an accurate rating for pupil attention during a lesson ?

- |                   |                                     |                   |
|-------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------|
| High Attention:   | 60% - 100% <input type="checkbox"/> | Please check one. |
|                   | 65% - 100% <input type="checkbox"/> |                   |
|                   | 70% - 100% <input type="checkbox"/> |                   |
| Medium Attention: | 40% - 60% <input type="checkbox"/>  | Please check one. |
|                   | 50% - 60% <input type="checkbox"/>  |                   |
|                   | 50% - 65% <input type="checkbox"/>  |                   |
|                   | 50% - 70% <input type="checkbox"/>  |                   |
| Low Attention:    | 60% - 0% <input type="checkbox"/>   | Please check one. |
|                   | 50% - 0% <input type="checkbox"/>   |                   |
|                   | 49% - 0% <input type="checkbox"/>   |                   |
|                   | 40% - 0% <input type="checkbox"/>   |                   |
|                   | 39% - 0% <input type="checkbox"/>   |                   |

2. Which do you consider an accurate rating for pupil attention to seatwork, as opposed to pupil engagement in other unassigned activities during seatwork time ?

- |                   |                                     |                   |
|-------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------|
| High Attention:   | 60% - 100% <input type="checkbox"/> | Please check one. |
|                   | 65% - 100% <input type="checkbox"/> |                   |
|                   | 70% - 100% <input type="checkbox"/> |                   |
| Medium Attention: | 40% - 60% <input type="checkbox"/>  | Please check one. |
|                   | 50% - 60% <input type="checkbox"/>  |                   |
|                   | 50% - 65% <input type="checkbox"/>  |                   |
|                   | 50% - 70% <input type="checkbox"/>  |                   |
| Low Attention:    | 60% - 0% <input type="checkbox"/>   | Please check one. |
|                   | 50% - 0% <input type="checkbox"/>   |                   |
|                   | 49% - 0% <input type="checkbox"/>   |                   |
|                   | 40% - 0% <input type="checkbox"/>   |                   |
|                   | 39% - 0% <input type="checkbox"/>   |                   |

Please check to see that your choices are consistent. Please return to your principal for mailing tomorrow. Thank you very much for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,  
Sister Judy Pellerin, SSND

Grade taught by teacher doing this questionnaire: \_\_\_\_\_

### Appendix B

#### Copy of Table 2 in: Pellerin, Judith. 1982.

A Case Study of Three Students at Wandering Spirit Survival School in Toronto.  
Masters thesis. University of Saskatchewan.

Percentage Time - Totals for Behaviour of Ss During Periods of Total-Class Instruction (291 minutes)						
Type of Teacher Instruction	Percentage of Time Spent Watching or Participating			Percentage of Time Spent in Other Activities		
	Jim	Donald	Agnes	Jim	Donald	Agnes
Making announcements, discussing events, assigning seatwork	14.8%	51.9%	57.4%	85.2%	48.1%	42.6%
Reading or discussing poem	17.4%	23.9%	56.5%	82.6%	76.1%	43.5%
Mathematics	71.4%	46.4%	50.0%	28.6%	53.6%	50.0%
Science	70.3%	55.8%	30.4%	29.7%	44.2%	69.6%
Video-tape	100.0%	94.7%	100.0%	0.0%	5.3%	0.0%
Oral reading by teacher	83.3%	55.3%	88.8%	16.7%	44.7%	11.2%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>71.6%</b>	<b>62.4%</b>	<b>63.8%</b>	<b>28.4%</b>	<b>37.6%</b>	<b>36.2%</b>

### Appendix C

#### Copy of Table 4 in: Pellerin, Judith. 1982.

A Case Study of Three Students at Wandering Spirit Survival School in Toronto.  
Masters thesis. University of Saskatchewan.

Number of Times Different Kinds of Oral Participation Were Engaged in By Ss During Periods of Total-Class Instruction						
Ss	Answering Questions	Asking Questions	Reading Poem	Sharing Weekend Experiences	Other	Total
Jim	9	0	0	0	1	10
Donald	3	4	0	1	0	8
Agnes	11	1	2	0	0	14

## Appendix D:

**WANDERING SPIRIT SURVIVAL SCHOOL: ANNOTATED TIMELINE**

<u>Date</u>	<u>Place</u>	<u>Details</u>
summer 1976 -unnamed-	Pauline & Vern's livingroom 100 Bain Avenue # 2 Maples	Private School 6 Pupils Parent Council 1 Volunteer Teacher Volunteer Cree Language Teacher Volunteer Class Assistants
September 1976 - WSSS -	Native Canadian Centre 1 class on 2nd floor , Spadina Road	Private School 8 Pupils Parent Council 1 Volunteer Teacher Volunteer Elder Volunteer Ojibway & Cree Language Teachers Volunteer Culture Consultants Volunteer Class Assistants
Sept. 20, 1976 - WSSS -	Native Canadian Centre 1 class on 2nd floor, Spadina Road	Private School 10 Pupils 6-Parent Council 1 Volunteer Teacher Volunteer Elders Volunteer Ojibway Language Teacher Volunteer Culture Consultants Volunteer Class Assistants Volunteer Fund Raiser
Feb. 10, 1977 - WSSS - adoption by the Toronto Board of Education	Native Canadian Centre 1 room on 2nd floor, Spadina Road	Public School 13 Pupils 6-Parent Council 1 Volunteer Teacher Volunteer Elders Volunteer Ojibway Language Teacher Volunteer Culture Consultants Volunteer Class Assistants Volunteer Fund Raiser
March 31, 1977 - WSSS - - partial funding	Winchester Public School 1 class on 3rd floor & office on 1st floor	14 Pupils 6-Parent Council 1 Toronto Board Class Teacher Volunteer Ojibway Language Teacher Toronto Board French Teacher Volunteer Cultural Consultants 2 Culture Program Assistants Volunteer Administration

Date	Place	Details
1977	Winchester (continued)	Volunteer Class Assistants Volunteer Fund Raiser Team Volunteer Lunch Programme After 4 Programme
1978 - WSSS - - member of Federation of Survival Schools - partial funding	Sackville Public School 2 classes on 2nd floor & office on 1st floor	25 Pupils: 19 Native 1/3 <i>Special Education students</i> 1 Toronto Board Teacher (4-8) 1 WSSS Teacher (1-4) 6-Parent Council Volunteer Ojibway Language Teacher Toronto Board French Teacher 2 WSSS Culture Assistants Volunteer Administration Volunteer Class Assistants Co-op Students (Inglenook) Native Family Worker Adult/Child <i>buddy system</i> Volunteer Fund Raiser Team Volunteer Lunch Programme After 4 Programme
1980 - WSSS - - member of Federation of Survival Schools - partial funding - Kindergarten programme	Sackville Public School 2 classes on 2nd floor & office on 1st floor	38 Children, 1/3 <i>Special Education</i> 1 Toronto Board Teacher (4-8) 1 WSSS Teacher (1-4) 6-Parent Council Volunteer Ojibway Language Teacher 2 WSSS Culture Assistants Volunteer Administration Volunteer Class Assistants Co-op Students (Inglenook) Native Family Worker Adult/Child <i>buddy system</i> Volunteer Fund Raiser Team Lunch Programme (partially funded) After 4 Programme Free Spirit Club for boys

*Note: The school population rose to about 85 students before Pauline Shirt retired due to illness in 1982. Since then, the school replaced the Parent Council with the AKEC Board (1986), was renamed First Nations School (1990), & replaced the AKEC with a Native Principal (1996).*

**Appendix E:****THE SEVEN STAGES OF LIFE**

by Pauline Shirt

The following stages of development are taught:

**The First Stage**

The first stage is the Good Life. This stage begins when the spirit chooses parents as its vehicle for its entrance into this world. The parents are the main teachers of the Sacredness of Life. It is our belief system that the little spirit builds its spiritual lodge during the nine months preceding birth. From birth to the age of seven, all the emphasis is on the survival of the little spirit.

**The Second Stage**

The second stage is the Wonder Stage and begins at seven and goes to approximately fourteen.. This is the very crucial period for the young person because this is where the shaping of the individual's world view occurs. The young, at this time, marvel at the beauty in the world. At this stage, the Aunties and Uncles are essential to the well-being of the individual in addition to parents and grandparents. This is where the young are taught about connectedness and their relationship to all Creation, where they are taught the rituals of sacredness such as Fasting, Sweating and Puberty Ceremonies.

**The Third Stage**

The third stage begins at age fourteen to age twenty-one and is called The Fast Life. This stage is where the young integrate their learnings, including the sacred learnings, into the practical aspects of their lives. The Elders keep a very close watch on the youngsters at this time because of all the competing distractions of the dominant culture.

**The Fourth Stage**

The fourth is the Wandering Stage, age twenty-one to twenty-eight. During this period of time, the young person goes out into the world and experiences the Good Life as taught by the Elders.

**The Fifth Stage**

The fifth stage is the Teacher stage, age twenty-eight to thirty-five. This is where the responsibility sets in. The young now become the parents and begin the

intergenerational task of teaching what they have been learning and experiencing.

#### The Sixth Stage

The sixth stage is the Grandparent stage, age thirty-five to forty-two. This is the working stage where all spiritual knowledge reaped throughout the other stages comes to fruition. The young will be taught at the knees of the Grandparents.

#### The Seventh Stage

The seventh stage is the Elder stage, age forty-two to old age. This is where all the knowledges learned are distilled into universal wisdom. As Black Elk (1863 to 1950), Oglala Sioux Holy Man, stated:

You have noticed that everything that an Indian does is in a Circle. And that is because the power of the world always works in circles and everything tries to be round. The sky is round, and I have heard that the earth is round like a ball, and so are all the stars. The wind in its greatest power whirls. Birds make their nests in circles for theirs is the same religion as ours. Even the seasons form a great circle in their changing and always come back again to where they were. The life of a man is a circle from childhood to childhood, and so it is in everything where power moves.

So it is that all First Nations' teachings are taken from the metaphor of a circle. The Medicine Wheel is often used as a teaching tool, whereas the dominant culture uses measurement and evaluation, often quantitatively. Whereas, the First Nations' culture values the holistic, experiential, qualitative aspects of learning (Tooker, 1979). If one follows the Sacred Teachings for the Good Life, then the circle will continue from the Unborn to Seven Generations onward. So throughout the seven stages of the lifespan, First Nations' teachings address the child within us, the Awasis. Each stage incorporates all that goes before and adds those tasks which are new, so that the Circle of Life continues in greater and greater richness. *All My Relations*..

an excerpt from:

The Awasis (Child) in Us: The Role of a Grandmother Teacher in an Awasis Setting.  
unpublished paper. York University. 1997.

## Appendix F:

### A MIDE QUAY'S QUALITATIVE RESEARCH METHODS

by Pauline Shirt

Boozhoo ! My name is Niimki-quay (Thunder-Woman) Quebonisey ni-dodum (Red Tail Hawk Clan) from the Plains Cree Nation.

I have spent 54 Fall seasons on Mother Earth. I was born and raised on a reserve called Saddle Lake, which is part of Treaty Six under the Canadian state.

My parents, Louisa (née Cardinal) and Felix Shirt, were successful farmers who raised 13 children (three adopted from her sister Margaret McGillvary<sup>1</sup>) in the traditional ways of the Plains Cree. Though my parents raised us according to Native tradition during the Good Life years,<sup>2</sup> teaching us the Cree language and how to care for the land, we were required to attend Blue Quills Residential school from the age of eight. The Good Life is the first of seven seven-year stages in life, according to the Mide teachings about the Lodge of Life. My grandparents were the ones who kept the Sweats and ceremonies alive on our reserve though the Mite<sup>3</sup> way of life was outlawed by the Canadian government. During this time, the Department of Indian Affairs had control over our formal educational rights and health services. In our ways, education and health cannot be separated out in the circle of life. Previous to this, my great-great-Grandfather, Wandering Spirit, (Big Bear's War Chief) had tried to keep our people together by protesting the control of the Canadian government. He was accused of treason and hung by the RCMP for his actions, but his words and his life energy still live on through the legacy of his song and his life story.

When the final preparations were made for his hanging, Wandering Spirit told the RCMP that he was going to sing a *love song* for his wife, my great-great-Grandmother, Spotted Calf. This song encourages our people to continue strong through living our cultural ways. He passed this song on through his wife because woman is the keeper of all

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<sup>1</sup> This information comes from stories told by my relatives. McGillvary is the family name given to some of Wandering Spirit's descendants (it differed in every reserve) because the name Wandering Spirit was stricken from the registry of Status Indians at the Department of Indian Affairs. This happened, partly, because his family members were shamed into rejecting this name when Wandering Spirit was black listed by the RCMP.

<sup>2</sup> Benton-Banai, Edward. 1988.

<sup>3</sup> This is the Cree version of the Mide, practised by the Anishinabe (or Ojibway) people. The Cree and Ojibway groups are both Algonkian, making them language family relatives.

traditions in creation. This is a song of hope and love for the Universe that was passed on to me six years ago. When I feel discouraged, or when I'm with a group of people that need extra help, I sing this song. This great inheritance of song from Papamacheykway, or Wandering Spirit, is an example of inter-generational communication. It is a rallying call that has already passed from my Grandpa through three generations to the present, sowing the seeds of wisdom and love that will be passed on into the next generation.

In earlier times, it was unthinkable, even unforgivable, for Native people to write about our culture. Although our culture is oral, Elders and teachers like Edward Benton Banai explain:

*I firmly believe it is time for Indian people to come forward with teachings, prophecies and insight. It is time to talk to our Brothers and Sisters of other nations, colours and beliefs. The world family is at a time when ideas and philosophies of yesterday may be the key to the family future (Benton Banai, 1988: back cover).*

It is the sharing of the teaching of the Four Original Men and Women that will allow both the Four Races and Mother Earth to survive. The Native approach to the spiritual teachings, through our life ways, is also an expression of a qualitative research methodology.

I would like to offer an example of the traditional Native approach to qualitative research, as it applies to the field of Education. In 1987, I asked a friend of mine, Sharon Berg, a woman from the Flower Road<sup>4</sup> of Swedish and British-Irish descent, to write the history of Wandering Spirit Survival School, which I founded in 1976. This school was a Vision that manifested in action on the physical plane as the first Native Way School in Canada.<sup>5</sup>

At that time, in 1987, Sharon recognised she did not have the necessary background knowledge to write the history of a Native school. In qualitative research we have to listen to the voice of our research partner. My response was to tell her that she could seek the Native teachings, and that I would walk with her all the way. This is an example of how, according to the Two Row Wampum Belt agreement, the people of The Flower Road and the People of The Sweetgrass Road can walk and work together while always respecting and honouring the differences in each others' ways. In my understanding, our collaboration is an example of people who are preparing for the Great Council Meeting which is prophesied by all nations' spiritual teachers as a part of the Eighth Fire. That Great Council Meeting is the coming together of the Four Races, and their spiritual teachings, for the future survival of all people.

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<sup>4</sup> Native traditionalists refer to non-Natives as The Flower Road People whose Flower Children came to the Elders for spiritual teachings in the 1960s. Our own life path is The Sweetgrass Road.

<sup>5</sup> Wandering Spirit Survival School was adopted as an Alternative School by the Toronto Board of Education in 1977.

Sharon asked me where she could pursue an academic program in Native Studies. I said I would have to conduct research to answer the question. At that time, I burned tobacco and asked the Good Grandfathers and the Good Grandmothers to give us the right answer. In the 1970s and 1980s, there were only a few universities that implemented an understanding of Native thought through Native teachings. Laurentian University was one which offered a degree under the supervision of Dr. Newbery. It had several Native professors who practised the Mide way of life through The Three Fires Society,<sup>6</sup> one of the Midewin Teaching Lodges. One of those professors was an Anishinabe man named Jim Dumont. At that time, Native people were deeply immersed in the Seventh Fire (Benton Banai). It is stated in the prophecies of the Mide that during the Seventh Fire "a little boy"<sup>7</sup> will lead the way to a better life for us (Benton Banai: 93). As keeper of the Eastern Doorway, Jim Dumont of the Fish Clan, was looking after the Little Boy Water Drum. This was the answer to Sharon's question.

I also gave personal spiritual teachings to Sharon. In 1992, I encouraged her to go Fasting (sometimes called a Spirit Quest) in order to find her own relationship to the Wandering Spirit story. There were several Good spiritual Grandfathers who supported the school, and my great-great-Grandfather Wandering Spirit was one of them. Fasting for the Wandering Spirit story would help Sharon to find her inner power in the position of a War Chief, because Wandering Spirit was a War Chief. Paula Gunn Allen<sup>8</sup> is a Native historian. She says:

*There was an old tradition among numerous tribes of a two-sided, complementary social structure... corresponding to internal affairs and external affairs... [The Peace Chief or] internal chief functioned in harmony-effective ways... administered domestic affairs. The... war captain... was concerned with mediating between the tribe and outsiders (p.18-19).*

The War Chief takes a more public position than the Peace Chief, and they act as a spokesperson. Paula Gunn Allen explains that anthropologists call this a moiety system.

Sharon was successful in her quest for spiritual help through the Fast. By accepting my invitation to conduct her research through the traditional Native approach, Sharon was brought into a more equal relationship, and was able to *hear* the Native voice. According to Native ways, through her Fast, she has also been empowered to protect the ways of Wandering Spirit's people and negotiate an understanding with outsiders because that was *his* role in life. She is a Grandfather Person now, because she has that relationship, and Sharon understands this. This is what she is doing by writing the history of Wandering

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<sup>6</sup> Edward Benton Banai is the Grand Chief of The Three Fires Society.

<sup>7</sup> This prophesy refers to the sounding of the Mide Water Drum, which we call The Little Boy. The drum is used as a rallying call among our people.

<sup>8</sup> Allen, Paula Gunn. 1986.

Spirit Survival School as her Master of Education thesis, under my direction. She says:  
*My relationship with Pauline plays on this same social pattern in the creation of this text. Symbolically, and pragmatically, this narrative addresses academics and other outsiders as a statement of position on education, rather than negotiating harmony in the home community.*<sup>9</sup>

The Native way of life sets out the steps that need to be followed in order to Fast. This is a brief description of the methodology laid down in print by Black Elk's collaboration with John Neirhardt.<sup>10</sup>

- 1) You give pipe, or tobacco, to a proper medicine person, who acts as a guide on the spiritual journey which lasts 'x' number of days. (In Sharon's case, it was four days and four nights, full completion of a circle.) The proper medicine person is the medium between this Earth plane and the spirit world.
- 2) Upon acceptance, one is told about the proper preparations to make. When we say acceptance, that means whether the Good spiritual Grandfathers and Grandmothers indicate to the medicine person that they think you are ready for your journey.
- 3) The preparations consist of :
  - a) locating a Fasting site (with spiritual guidance)
  - b) making the Fasting Lodge
  - c) preparing Feast food
  - d) the Going-In Ceremony
  - e) the Coming-Out Ceremony

The Coming-out Ceremony involves the relatives, friends, and community of the participant. At this time, the participant will be told, through the medium of the medicine person, whether their Fast was successful or not. What is meant by successful is that the Good Spirits communicate how successful the process was through the instructions the participant must follow in order to fulfill their spiritual contract. It is up to the participant, at this time, whether they will accept the terms of their spiritual contract through a commitment to these instructions.<sup>11</sup>

In other words, to conduct a complete circle in holistic research:, first you *give*, second you *ask*, third you are *accepted*, fourth you *prepare*, fifth you *do*, sixth you *receive*, and finally you make *commitment*. It is a seven-step process, in partnership with the Good spiritual Grandfathers and Grandmothers. In our understanding, the most sacred ceremony is the act of union between man and woman. You enter the world through the vehicles you have chosen while you were still in the spirit world, your mother and father. Your spirit starts building your Life Lodge in the womb of your mother. Then you walk

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<sup>9</sup> Berg, Sharon. 1998.

<sup>10</sup> Neirhardt, John. 1932.

<sup>11</sup> The Fast is a long process which actually deserves a more detailed explanation.

through that life according to a plan you made in partnership with the Good spiritual Grandfathers before you entered the Earth plane. However, along the way on the physical plane, there are many distractions, what the Good Grandfathers call *the shining objects*, that can unbalance you and lead you away from your chosen life path. When you Fast, you are reconnecting with the spiritual plane, and you make a fresh commitment to that original life plan. This is why Fasting is considered research. It is also one of the tools in our educational system, because through Fasting we connect with all of our relatives in the Universe, the birds and animals, the plant life, and the seasons.

In 1995, Sharon and I took the qualitative research process a step further. We entered the Master in Education program at York University, where we established a partnership, each assisting the other through our class work. Sharon and others at York have helped me adjust to the academic world, though I am not an academic person. In 1996, we established a collaborative model for research of the Wandering Spirit Survival School history. Sharon has combined her spiritual and academic work under my direction, in a process that incorporates the traditional Native methods of conducting research. The traditional Native research methods include: daily smudging & tobacco-burning; Circles; personal counselling; the Pipe; the Four Season ceremonies; the Sunrise, Shaking Tent, Naming and Give-away ceremonies; Scrolls and Petroglyphs; singing & drumming; walk arounds; Sweats; Fasts, etc.

As part of our research partnership, we begin our meetings by smudging or offer an exchange of tobacco. We have also held Four Season ceremonies for our community in Riverdale Park, close to our home, for seven years now. I have read and comment on all of Sharon's papers and she has given me veto power in editing her Masters thesis. I have also directed her to the people who should be interviewed for the Wandering Spirit history. A person like me, a traditional person, finds it hard to be heard in the academic setting. I can never be myself or be relaxed, I always have to defend and explain my perspective. That's why the dominant educational system has to be brought into a more balanced thought through collaborative research. Dominant culture does not have the only tools for research. The gift that traditional Native research methods give to qualitative research in the academic setting is that traditional Native research recognises the spiritual relationship between the researcher and the participant. Traditional Native research methodology is holistic.

In order to conduct *meaningful* collaborative cross-cultural research, each person has to be well-versed in their own traditions, and live that way of life. They also must be respectful of their research partner's life ways. In her paper Choosing Border Work,<sup>12</sup> Celia Haig-Brown refers to the need for a process which enhances the "life chances" of research participants. It is important to know it is not a *compromise* to explain one's position as a traditional Native person in terms that the dominant culture group can hear.

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<sup>12</sup> Haig-Brown, Celia. 1992.

In 1993, Ontario's NDP Government had recognised the need for a collaborative process that enabled people to honour their differences in equal partnerships. I worked with the Management Board Secretariat, as a traditional teacher-consultant on Employment Equity issues. Participants in my workshops reported that it was *life enhancing* to participate in the traditional Learning Circles. They were later able to implement the teachings in their personal lives, as well as in their own Ministries.

Russell Bishop<sup>13</sup> worked on collaborative research with his Maori relatives. He says: *The research participants collaborated to create the kind of knowledge recognised as valid by people in research institutions and governments while at the same time working within knowledge and definition processes recognised as valid and authoritative within the culture of the participants. They did not feel that reporting the research in such a manner compromised the cultural integrity or cultural preferences of the participants. It was a necessary step to gather the collective voice of Otago Maori communities and to present this in a way that would speak to the national decision-makers and thereby incorporate them into the whanau of interest. What was most important was that the process was valid. That is, the process had authority in Maori terms and was conducted within Maori cultural practices (p.187).*

It is important to know that collaborative research can build that bridge of understanding wherever you are.

In the same period as I was collaborating with Sharon Berg, from the mid-1980s into the late 1990s, I was working with the Native inmates at the Prison for Women (P4W) in Kingston, Ontario. I was entering the prison as a Councillor/Elder. In 1994, the media reported on a so-called riot at the Prison. The women were strip-searched by male guards and the public outcry in support of the inmates prompted the Arbour Inquiry:

*In the aftermath of the 1994 incident, Pauline Shirt, a Cree Elder, or "auntie" as she prefers to be known, earned the respect of the prison authorities for her healing and counselling work under the federal chaplaincy program (Dinsdale, 1997: L18)<sup>14</sup>*

I tell the women in Prison that they need to do their research. I tell them to look within and be responsible for themselves. They need to get their spiritual Lodges in order and pick up their medicine bundles to walk in a balanced way. It is through learning to respect themselves and deal with their deepest issues that they can begin their healing journey and return to their chosen life path. The Cree Matriarch Dorothy Smallboy, of Small Boy's Camp in the foothills of Alberta, told me this summer, "Tell the women the power is within them. That's all they need to know, and the Universe will look after them." Woman is the life-giver, and when she knows that power is within she will support that life force.

In a Toronto Star article on faith counselling in Ontario's Prison system, Barry Friel, a

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<sup>13</sup> Bishop, Russell. 1996.

<sup>14</sup> Dinsdale, Margaret. 1997: L18.

Deputy Warden at P4W says:

*Shirt's work is of critical importance in enabling the women to gain a sense of their spiritual beliefs and values... She helps give them a better sense of what direction they will take... That's what corrections is all about (Dinsdale, 1997).*

I do not call myself a Healer. It is the traditional Native research methodology that reconnects these women to their life path, though Tobacco-burning ceremonies, Sweats, Fasts, Circles, and personal counselling. I am only a conductor. One of the inmates summarized her experience in a hand-written note to me in February 1997. She said:

*The little time you spend here. Then I see you, looking, I tell you, "I'll be alright." I see you leave, I continue the walk. I get thrown to the ground, sometimes it feels like my spirit [has] taken a good beating. It's then I hear you say "helpers, the power is within". I know from experience that it's there. I've seen it, heard it.*

When I founded Wandering Spirit Survival School people said that Native Way education was new. This kind of educational research is not new. Our ancestors used the same system. What is new is that dominant culture is listening, allowing Native people to return to their own life ways and the Universal educational system.

The Joe Duquette High School is a Native Survival School in Saskatchewan. It was designed for the Native youth of Saskatoon in the late 1970s and it is partners with the Separate School Board. Some Native youth had stopped going to school and gotten into trouble on the street. Some had broken the law. At that time, Native people had a very hard time in the educational system. Joe Duquette High School has been recognised as an exemplary school<sup>15</sup> that offers "a balanced approach to education" with "a focus on healing" (49). One of the Parent Council members was recently asked if the students' lives were more successful than her own "troubled" life. She said she was not participating for the benefit of principals or her place on the Board but so she could "be there" for the students:

*A lot of the students are made to feel not wanted by society. Eventually success is finding who you are and where you sit with the Creator. There are so many successes. Success cannot be defined in one word. I feel like I am on my red road to success (Haig-Brown: 168).*

For this parent, success is recognising your responsibility and taking up a role that supports the children of the community.

In my work with the women at P4W, my success is found in sending the women who have been labelled the most dangerous female offenders in Canada from the maximum security Prison setting into the minimum and medium level Healing Lodge settings. Recently, the Warden at P4W has recognised the success in my work as a Councillor and empowered me to sit on the Parole Board Hearings, where I can comment on the women's situation as a traditional person. The Prison system has recognised that the teachings and

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<sup>15</sup> Haig-Brown, Celia & Kathy Hodgson-Smith & Robert Regnier & Jo-ann Archibald. 1997: 169.

opportunity for research I have offered these women has helped them to return to a balanced way of life. They can walk in a Good Way now. They have learned the Good Way through the traditional Native education system. Participatory research leads to participatory consciousness in all settings, but it only works if it is done in a holistic way and the voices of all participants are heard.

But to me, my success as a teacher is more than that. To me, success is personal things, like being invited to my granddaughter's Feast and looking at the research being done to find her spiritual name. It is recognising that my children are walking in my moccasin trail because they trust that those steps have been laid down on Mother Earth in a good way. It is seeing my children and their children finding happiness through learning and practising this traditional way of life. It is in seeing that Wandering Spirit's song is being picked up by the next generation. When I walked into the house for my one-year-old granddaughter's birthday celebration today, Julia looked up and started to sing the song that I always sing to soothe her, the song that we have collaborated on. Though she is young, she is so intuitive that she turned to soothe her aunt, who was tired from working late, putting her hands on Linda's face as she sang it. She put that song to work.

On other occasions, her five-year-old brother Joseph, Soaring Golden Eagle, re-enacted the Midewin Initiation ceremony by shooting his sister with the pelt of a mink. This is how they play. He was dancing and singing, holding the pelt out in front of him, and he *shot* her with its spirit as he danced. Every time he shot her, Julia would laugh. Joe had seen his father initiated to the First Degree Mide, the Good Life of the Three Fires Lodge, this spring. Now he has drawn this ceremony into his play. My grandchildren don't play the games of dominant culture, like pat-a-cake. They play out the roles that are relevant to their culture, practising the ceremonies that initiate them to a Good Life. My success is seeing this, and knowing I have done my own research that well, that I have laid my moccasin trail that well as a traditional person, that my children and my grandchildren are picking up their medicine bundles to walk the Good Life on our Mother Earth.

In closing, I would like to thank the Creator, the Good Grandfathers and the Good Grandmothers, my family, my personal friends Hugh Russell and Sharon Berg, and my supervisor Celia Haig-Brown who have all offered me support. I thank *all of my relations* in the Universe. A voice has been heard and a reconnection with the Universe has been made. Hai, Hai.

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