

An Indian Residential School Survivor's Journey
with Truth and Reconciliation

by

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Abstract

As an Indigenous woman and an Indian Residential School survivor, I embark on a journey that forms a roadmap of my life experiences that are part of the history of Canada. I share who I am and how I self-identify as someone born of mixed ancestry. I share stories of my Dene culture and the experience that my siblings and I had while at Indian Residential School (IRS). The question, "What is my truth and reconciliation?" opens up an array of interpretations and subsequent questions that reference many aspects of my political and cultural viewpoints. I use a blended qualitative research approach using Indigenous research methodology and autoethnography to explore Indigenous cultural ideologies to interpret reconciliation. Data was collected through a set of questions in a guided focus group with my two siblings. The focus group questions brought out thoughts, feelings, and emotions from IRS that resonated around childhood trauma. Through thematic analysis, I discovered similarities in our answers and together we gained a deeper understanding of our childhood trauma as experienced at IRS. I bridge the gap between the past and the present as I acknowledge my lived realities that enable me to move beyond personal trauma to healing in the form of decolonization and reconciliation. In my Indigenous world today those two words serve as a bridge towards my healing journey.

Keywords: healing, trauma, reconciliation, decolonization, separation, memory, survivor

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PART I - PIECING IT ALL TOGETHER

Chapter One: Introduction

Colonization and Entering Indian Residential School

In the early 1970s the social services agency removed my two younger siblings and me from our home in Yellowknife, Northwest Territories and placed us on a DC-3 airplane filled with other Aboriginal children that flew us to a small community 640 kilometers away. Upon arrival, we were met by priests and nuns and placed into the Indian Residential School (IRS).

This was the first time we were separated from our family and our hometown. The name of the IRS was LaPointe Hall in Fort Simpson, Northwest Territories. We were young children; I was seven years old; my sister was six years old, and our brother was five years old. We spent a total of three school years at LaPointe Hall. In the fourth year, we were sent to different residential schools. I was separated from my siblings who were both sent to another residential school called Chief Jimmy Bruneau School in Rae-Edzo, which is a Dene settlement 102 kilometers from Yellowknife and much closer to 'home' than LaPointe Hall. I was sent in the other direction far away to Breynat Hall in Fort Smith, Northwest Territories, a small town near the Alberta border and 740 kilometers from Yellowknife.¹

LaPointe Hall was one of 14 Indian Residential Schools that were operating in the NWT. The online archive site called NWT Timeline documents that the first mission school that marked the beginning of the IRS era in the NWT was opened in 1867 called Sacred Heart School established by the Grey Nuns in Fort Providence.² The last Indian Residential School that closed

¹ A list of residential schools in Canada can be found online:
[http://www.residentialschoolsettlement.ca/schools.html# Northwest%20Territories](http://www.residentialschoolsettlement.ca/schools.html#%20NorthwestTerritories)

² NWT Timeline (https://www.nwttimeline.ca/index_mac.html)

in the NWT was Akaitcho Hall in 1996 located in Yellowknife. Akaitcho Hall was a non-denomination student residence for students from remote communities who came to Yellowknife to finish high school.³

I had no idea how the IRS experience would affect me throughout my life, but I knew was homesick, lonely, hurt and emotionally distraught. I knew that I had to survive the ordeal. I had to make it through IRS so I could see my mother and extended family again. I tried to behave in such a way that I would not be abused. I could not understand why I was being abused when I was behaving correctly and doing what I was told. I tried to do my chores right and to make my bed each day with those perfectly folded corners, but many times the nuns found a fault in how I did these things.

I was appalled and frightened by the types of behavior I witnessed and experienced from adults. This type of behavior was completely foreign to me. I did not personally experience abuse or witness children being abused until I entered the Indian Residential School. I was afraid abuse would be perpetrated not only on me but also onto my siblings. No seven-year-old should have to experience those feelings of distress and anxiety.⁴

Vignettes of my days at Indian Residential School (IRS) during the early 1970s are thoughts that I have carried my entire life. I remember the stark contrast between the life I was forced to endure at IRS and the life I led prior to being taken away from my family.

Although back home and far away from the residential school with no worries of returning there, I was still reminded of the experience and abuse received at IRS. I realized that

³ Akaitcho Hall, Eugenics Archives, <http://eugenicsarchive.ca/discover/institutions/residential/540f60e805f79bb354000026>

⁴ The story of the IRS experience continues in Chapter Six of this paper.

although I could try and forget those days, my memory was quickly triggered whenever I was scolded. My heart pounded fast and I could feel anxiety building up quickly. I found it difficult to deal with this over the years. It became evident that I needed to find a way to heal from the trauma of Indian Residential School.

Through the personal survivor's experience of the IRS legacy in Canada, and the unveiling of its historic abusive treatment of children now in the public domain, I continue to journey through my healing and seek further understanding of how these events of the past have caught up with the present day of who I have become. The transformation that has taken place as a result of IRS has affected aspects of my culture, of how I live in society, and how I continue to recount past events to make meaning of the consequences from the lived experience of IRS.

My Personal History

I was born into a world of dualism because of my mixed European and Dene ancestry which identifies me as a Dene (Chipewyan)-German woman. I am proud of my mixed bloodline. My mother always reminded my siblings and I to be proud of our lineage. I was born in 1962 and raised in Yellowknife, Northwest Territories.

My mother's name was Celine Desjarlais, a beautiful Dene woman who was born on the land in the picturesque and serene region on the eastern arm of Great Slave Lake near the community of Lutsel'Ke. My father was Burkhard Conrad, a handsome German, who was born and raised in Berlin, Germany. I am a member of the Yellowknives Dene First Nations who are located in Yellowknife and the surrounding area.

From the moment of my birth, I became a product of two people whose background could not have been more different. They were born of two distinct cultures and originated on

opposite sides of the world. It seems unlikely that they would meet and marry in the small town of Yellowknife, Northwest Territories in 1961.

I grew up with an awareness of being from two worlds and I identified with two separate cultures. However, I identified primarily with my Indigenous⁵ roots because I was fortunate to grow up in the North amongst my extended Chipewyan family and maintained strong kinship bonds. I grew up surrounded by my aunties, uncles, and grandparents who taught my siblings and I about the Dene way of life and about the spirituality inherent in the relational connections with the land and other elements of nature.

Life was good in those early years because as children we were always surrounded by family who nurtured us, gave us love, and the security of home. As young children we were free to run around and play in the outdoors. We brought great joy to our family and they showered us with affection. However, that life was short-lived due to a series of unforeseen circumstances that altered my childhood and changed my life forever. My father died in a tragic mining accident in 1966 at the young age of 28 at the Giant Mine (the gold mine that started the economic boom in Yellowknife). My mother was devastated by grief and she never fully recovered from the loss of the man she loved. I vaguely remember him because I was only four-years-old when he died. However, I have a few fond memories of him walking through the door after work and the three of us children running towards him and getting big hugs and kisses from him. My mother always kept photographs of him around the home. She told us many stories of

⁵ I use four different identifiers for the first peoples of Canada: Indigenous, Indian, Aboriginal, and First Nations. It depends on the context as it relates to the time in history or the doctrines these titles are identified in, i.e., The Indian Act, Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. These identifiers have been accepted by First Nations depending where you come from. I use them interchangeably throughout this document.

the good life they once shared. They were so young and just starting their lives together with three babies born one-year apart.

Early Memories of School

I began school in my hometown of Yellowknife, Northwest Territories in the late 1960s. I attended grades one and two at St. Patrick's Catholic School. I had the same teacher, Miss Aubrey, for the first two years of school. She was very fond of me and I was happy to go to school every day. When Grade Two ended, I was excited that I passed to Grade Three but sad that she would no longer be my teacher. I hoped that my next teacher would be just as nice. Unbeknownst to me, my next school year would be at Indian Residential School (IRS) in another town and far away from my family. Not only would my school environment be different by this move but my life would be forever changed. Indian Residential School—a government-sanctioned and church-run institution—had the mandate to remove Indian children from the ‘harmful’ cultural influence of their parents and the aim to assimilate them into mainstream society.

The only time the IRS children were allowed to go home during the school year was at Christmas time, but we spent only one Christmas with our family. We had to wait until the summer holidays to return to our home community. The summer holidays spent back home and away from IRS was the best time. The days were long, filled with endless hours of fun under the constant daylight in the Land of the Midnight Sun. We enjoyed being with family and we received so much love because everyone missed us. The hard part about this was how the time went by so fast and then it was time to board the DC-3 that would take us back to the IRS. Once again, the separation from our family was hard on us.

I have revisited these childhood recollections many times throughout my adulthood. It was necessary for me to keep these memories alive because I wanted to make sense of what

happened to me in those early years at IRS. The pieces of my past were like a jigsaw puzzle that I wanted to piece together. How could these things happen to a Dene girl?

Little did I know then how those traumatic events that I experienced at IRS would impact my later life. I spent four years in Indian residential school. When I returned home to my family in Yellowknife, I did not feel safe in the educational environment. Although I was back home, and far away from the residential school with no chance of ever going back, I remembered the abusive treatment I received at IRS. I tried desperately to forget those days, but my memory was quickly triggered whenever an adult scolded me. I could feel my heart pound and anxiety would quickly build up like a wave was rushing over me and I could not outrun it. I felt helpless. I found it difficult to deal with this over the years. It became evident that I needed to find a way to heal from the trauma of Indian Residential School.

Haunted by IRS Memories

During my adolescent years, and into adulthood, I did not openly discuss my early childhood years spent at Indian Residential School (IRS). I did not want to talk with anyone about how my siblings and I were taken away from our families and our home or of any personal details regarding the IRS experience. For me, perhaps silence was the best way to try to forget the haunting memories.

After four school years in residential school we were so happy to return home to our family in Yellowknife. The 1974-1975 school year marked the end of the Indian Residential School era for my siblings and I. The IRS days were over. The transition into St. Patrick's Catholic School was not too difficult because we knew many kids and we were back in our home community.

My siblings and I quickly settled into daily routines with school and family life. We were all together again and that was all that mattered. I did not want to erase that happiness by thinking about the IRS. It was never talked about in our home and we did not ask any questions.

I was excited to begin Grade Seven of junior high school. There would be no more uniforms with personal numbers printed on or daily inspections. The strict orders from the nuns in the harsh regimental environment of IRS were over. We had so much freedom that was given back to us. We could mingle in a co-ed setting in the classrooms and eat lunch with members of the opposite sex. Friends would share their lunches with me; and we traded food. Nobody went hungry. There was an abundance of good food, unlike the food at IRS.

However, I could not help but notice the presence of religious symbols on display around the school, which filled me with anxiety. The symbolic crosses and statues of Mother Mary and Jesus reminded me of residential schools. Having to say prayers in school brought me back immediately to my earlier days at IRS. The most obvious reminder was the principal of St. Patrick's school—Sister Mary Lillian. She was a strict nun who reminded me of the IRS nuns. I felt that same fear and anxiety each time she looked at me or scolded me for not giving the correct answer. I avoided eye contact with her and would look down at my desk. I hoped she would not notice me but it seemed to me that she always did. She spoke to me in a manner that belittled me. I felt humiliated and embarrassed by her in front of my classmates. I became so nervous that I was almost brought to tears. Those emotions became a barrier to learning in her class. Needless to say, I was relieved when she left St. Patrick's school along with the other nuns who taught there. I was not sure why they left but I was glad they did.

The nuns were replaced by new, younger teachers and a principal from the south. During those junior high school years, the government started shutting down the Indian Residential Schools throughout the North.

Inspiration for IRS Healing and Recovery

The inspiration for this study evolved over the years from ideas and questions I had around healing from trauma as a survivor of IRS. I was uncertain of how I should tell my story. Healing takes time. I realized there was a process of personal analysis to review before I was able to conjure up the courage to talk openly about my experience.

When I was younger, I did not pay much attention to this experience. It was much easier to put bad memories into a dormant state. I was not ready to revisit or face the challenge of overcoming trauma. I ignored any signs that triggered memories of IRS and did not take the time to piece together how the past was affecting the present. I was too busy with everything else going on in life and caring for other people's needs to take time for "self" care. Therefore, many hurtful experiences in my life remained unresolved—including trauma.

The motivation to begin personal healing came to me during the days leading up to the final public event of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Hearing⁶ (TRC) held in Edmonton, Alberta, in March 2014. I attended this special event with friends who were also survivors of IRS whom I met many years ago at the same residential school. The hearing was an emotional time that was filled with highs, lows, tears of happiness and tears of sadness. Here, survivors and family members gathered to tell their truth about trauma that was perpetrated upon

⁶ The TRC was an independent commission that was established as a result of the 2007 Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement in Canada. The TRC's mandate was to inform Canadians about what happened in the 130-year history of residential schools and to guide the process of reconciliation and a renewed relationship based on mutual understanding and respect between First Nations, the government and Canadians. Alberta Native News (2014, March 19).

them by abusers affiliated with IRS. This powerful experience validated the personal need to further explore a way for me to share my experience. I wanted to participate in my personal form of reconciliation. I wanted to share how I was able to maintain my cultural beliefs and self-identity as an Indigenous woman in the 21st century, despite the efforts of the IRS to distinguish those characteristics of the children in their care.

In this research study, I document my journey of rediscovery and self-identity through a reflection of the “past self” as a result of living with IRS trauma. I set out in search of answers to questions on what reconciliation means from my personal perspective. I also share the importance of cultural identity through my mixed ancestry and how my Dene culture is the epicentre of my Indigenous worldview⁷. I grew up with traditions of the Dene culture all around me, and although there was an interruption of being away for those four years at IRS, through resistance I had the strength to avoid a total loss of culture.

The Research Statement and Research Questions

The historic abusive treatment of children in Indian Residential School (IRS) is now in the public domain. The transformation that has taken place as a result of IRS has affected aspects of my culture, of how I live in society, and how I continue to recount past events to make meaning of the consequences from the lived experience of IRS.

The overall research question for this thesis stems from these events: How does an Indigenous woman move past the experience of Indian Residential School? This research project has two parts: Part I searches for answers through a wide-angle lens of reality from self-identity

⁷ I refer to Leroy Little Bear's (2000) definition in “Jagged Worldviews Colliding” of Indigenous worldview as an “individual's personal interpretation of the collective cultural code based on the culture's shared philosophy, values, and customs.”

to a social and cultural context, to develop a narrative through Indigenous auto-ethnography. What does it mean to be an Indigenous woman and IRS survivor in the 21st Century? Part II involves a collaborative narrative with my two younger siblings who participated in a focus group with me about our IRS experience. The secondary research question asks: Was my siblings' residential school experience similar to mine? If so, how did they cope with getting through their trauma?

The fact we attended the same residential school (LaPointe Hall) for three years meant that we had a common experience. We shared an opportunity to document our experiences through a set of focus group questions. This was the first time we ever discussed our childhood experiences in Indian Residential School.

Secondary research questions include:

1. What does decolonization mean?
2. What does it mean to be Indigenous with a mixed bloodline?
3. How have I been able to live in a bi-cultural environment (Indigenous and non-Indigenous), and was it an issue?
4. Does reconciliation and an apology heal the wounds from the trauma experienced at IRS?

There is an aura that is akin to making a confession about something shameful that happened long ago. It was not to be talked about. It takes courage to speak out about the experience without becoming tearful. Writing this thesis does somehow makes me feel less vulnerable. I hope that each time I share with others about the IRS experience that it will become easier and the tears will not well up. I want people to know it is not easy to, "just get over it". This becomes my personal quest for reconciliation.

Reflexivity entails a perception from different angles. The perception of memory and experience for me is not conclusive, instead it assists in negating to deeper layers of meaning that are discovered as I keep searching. To finally arrive at essences of a phenomenon one must unify the noema (external perception) and the noesis (internal perception), Moustakas (1994).

Organization of Thesis

This thesis is organized in the following manner:

Chapter One – The Introduction includes historical background of early school days between my hometown's Catholic School and the Indian Residential School. A reflection of memories from IRS explains the causes of trauma and the inspiration and encouragement that led me to begin a journey for healing and reconciliation.

Chapter Two – This segment gives a brief literature review on Indigenous authors who have published in the area of residential schools, decolonization, and reconciliation.

Chapter Three – Explains the purpose of this qualitative research study that is developed from the IRS experience. The primary and secondary research questions are established for Part I and Part II of this thesis. I explain how I deal with the challenge of speaking about the IRS experience as part of my healing journey. An explanation is given on the methodology used through an auto-ethnography and Indigenous paradigm. The data collection of the focus group in Part II is also explained.

Chapter Four – Here, I explore the “self” through an Indigenous auto-ethnography inquiry that explores merging values of cultural grounding and socio-political values. I use Whitinui's (2013) four ‘conditions of being’ as a process of healing from the IRS experience. This chapter explores Whitinui's ideologies on identity and culture as I explore in greater detail the relationship of my own personal identity through cultural grounding and the importance of

staying connected to my Indigeneity. The fluidity of the IRS survivor's experience moves through my life in ways that were not easily identifiable. I become aware of the impacts of IRS as the story of the IRS Legacy becomes public. I continue with a description of the TRC, the IRS court settlement, and how I dealt with the Apology to IRS survivors.

Chapter Five – This chapter provides a summary of the focus group I conducted with my two siblings. A description of the data collection and thematic analysis of the questions and answers are also provided. It concludes with a theoretical narrative of the findings and last comments from participants in relation to the IRS experience and how we move forward in today's world.

Chapter Six – This chapter deals with the politics of reconciliation. I explore the relationship (or lack of) between First Nations and the Crown through a historical context based on Aboriginal rights and title and reference the Indian Act. I review the recommendations by the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples on how to deal with reconciliation.

Chapter Seven – The conclusion summarizes the importance of finding ways to heal from trauma of the IRS. The focus group was an effective way to share the story with my siblings and I learned that we experienced similar emotional turmoil from the treatment at IRS. I can take the experience of IRS and turn it into something positive. Personal experience of IRS becomes a learned experience through re-discovery and recovery from an unsettled past. I continue to learn from it as a way to heal and to do away with the effects of trauma from IRS. I recognized the impacts of IRS was inevitable, and it was not our fault. No more blame, no more shame. It does not have to hurt anymore. Indigenous people are healing together. We are decolonizing through resurgence to live in a better world.

Chapter Two: Indigenous Literature

Indigenous Resurgence is the New Indigenous Politics

In Canada today, politics between Indigenous people and the Crown continues to struggle with reconciliation and sovereignty of Indigenous people. During the 2015 federal election in Canada, Liberal Party leader, Justin Trudeau's strongest campaign message was all about rebuilding the relationship between First Nations and Canada. After he was elected as the new Prime Minister of Canada, he said that the most important relationship is the one between First Nations and the government. The state of affairs between First Nations and Canada continues to have no tone of a renewed relationship whereby Canada is giving respect and recognition of Aboriginal rights and title, (Khurana, 2018, para 1). To explain further what is meant by Aboriginal rights and title, I made reference to an online information resource website called Indigenous Foundations⁸. This resource information site was developed by the First Nations Studies Program at the University of British Columbia to support students in their studies and to provide information to the public on topics relating to Aboriginal peoples and their cultures and histories:

- Aboriginal rights are collective rights that are inherent which Aboriginal people have practiced since pre-European contact. These rights include rights to the land, rights to subsistence resources and activities, the right to self-determination and self-government, and the right to practice culture and customs that include language and spirituality.

⁸ Indigenous Foundations: https://indigenousfoundations.arts.ubc.ca/land_rights/.

- Aboriginal title refers to the inherent Aboriginal right to land or a territory. The Canadian legal system recognizes Aboriginal title as a *sui generis* or unique collective right to the use of and jurisdiction over a group's ancestral territories. This includes the occupation and relationship Aboriginal peoples have with their home territories.

For those of us who are Indigenous we are all recipients of the political colonial systems of Canada; I make emphasis here as a survivor of IRS. Times are changing and today it is a different world for Indigenous people compared to the last 150 years. We are making a stance to protect what is rightfully ours (culture and land). It is almost effortless for me to think with the mindset of anti-colonial thinkers such as Coulthard (2014), as he examines alternative politics—one that seeks to revalue, reconstruct, and redeploy Indigenous cultural practices based on self-recognition rather than on seeking appreciation from the very agents of colonialism. Alternative politics of recognition is not so much about seeking approvals around legal and political recognition rather it is more about how we, as Indigenous people, can empower ourselves. Coulthard (2014) creates new insights into the politics of a new active decolonization, as a stance against how the government's politics of recognition and reconciliation continues to serve in the best interests of settler-colonial power.

The first book that I read on Indian Residential School (IRS) is *Speaking my Truth*, published by the Aboriginal Healing Foundation (2012). This special book was personally given to me by Chief Wilton Littlechild, who was a commissioner of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and also a survivor of Indian Residential School. In this book many survivors tell stories of their IRS experiences. I experienced *déjà vu* as I read their counts because their experiences were so similar to mine. I also made a personal connection with Bev Sellar's (2013),

They Called Me Number One. She tells of the injustices and impacts of the brutal treatment experienced by her and other family members at the St. Joseph's Mission Indian Residential School in Williams Lake, British Columbia. She hoped that their truth-telling would alleviate the intergenerational trauma of IRS that was transferred down into her family.

Other books written on Indian Residential School survivors include *Magic Weapons: Aboriginal Writers Remaking Community after Residential School*, Sam Mckegney (2007) who captures life stories of IRS written by survivors throughout Canada. Ojibway writer, Basil Johnston's (1988) *Indian School Days* is about his personal account of the strict regimentation he experienced at the St. Peter Clavers IRS in northern Ontario from 1939 to 1947. *Resistance and Renewal – Surviving Indian Residential School*, written by Celia Haig-Brown (2002) is one of the first books written on IRS. This book is a compilation of disturbing stories of the oppressive environment inside the notorious Kamloops Indian Residential School as told by 13 Elders who were forced to attend this school between 1907 and 1967.

Since the days of the national inquiry led by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and its recommendations for reconciliation through the 94 Calls to Action, a growing number of schools have now incorporated teachings of the history of Indian Residential Schools into the curriculums for students. The University of Saskatchewan and the First Nations Education Steering Committee have created The Indian Residential Schools and Reconciliation Teacher Resources Guides that contain numerous lesson plans to teach about residential schools and reconciliation. There are three complete curriculum guides for Grade 5, Grade 10, and Grade 11/12. Education about the Indian Residential School history and reconciliation is key in bringing awareness of this important piece of Canadian history into the

school system.⁹ It is estimated that 4,200 children lost their lives while attending residential schools in Canada. The official number is under investigation but the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation (NCTR) hopes to change this through a project that will determine a more precise number that is likely to increase (Hobson, 2018, para.1-3).

Further to the survivors' stories written in the books aforementioned; I researched for examples from Indigenous scholars who have written on Indigenous resistance and politics. Their literature speaks volumes about the resurgence of our people's quest for transformation and decolonization from a governing colonial system. In the following paragraphs I formed a precis of examples of this literature. I include Indigenous writers such as: Margaret Kovach (2009), *Indigenous Methodologies*; Taiaike Alfred (2009), *Wasase*; Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (2008), *Lighting the Eighth Fire*; Glen Sean Coulthard (2014), *Red Skin, White Masks*; Arthur Manuel (2015), *Unsettling Canada*; Pamela Palmater (2011), *Beyond Blood*. In their books, each author writes with similar convictions and common themes about decolonization in today's Aboriginal world.

Indigenous Methodologies written by Margaret Kovach (2009) are about exploring ways to incorporate her ancestral Cree (Nehiyaw) epistemology to build into Indigenous research methodology as a way for 'giving back to the community' (p. 11). Her Indigenous research framework becomes a contribution to honouring Indigenous knowledge systems. Kovach gives examples of the use of a "self-reflective narrative research process" that seeks "Nisitohtamowin" – a Cree word for 'understanding' (p. 27), which she makes an analogy with the German term "Verstehen" – to understand (p. 23). Similarly, Taikaike Alfred (2009) reminds us that

⁹ An example can be found at this site: <https://libguides.usask.ca/c.php?g=369189&p=4058775>.

“Onkwehonwe” (Kanienkaha/Mohawk word for original people) we have to continue moving towards a future that includes the practice of traditional ways in our communities so that one can recreate our existence through a resilience that will end the forces that keep us bound to colonialism. This is about reclaiming who we are as “Onkwehonwe”.

Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (2008) attests that Indigenous people never requested colonization. Prior to colonization Indigenous people already existed in autonomous states that were governed by independent and sovereign nations under established political and economic systems that developed from strong spiritual foundations that stem from the relation to the land. Colonialism threatened these systems and almost succeeded in the abolishment of Indigenous people. It was resistance, resilience, and resurgence that interrupted the state's plan of taking full control over Indigenous people and the land. Indigenous people never became passive victims of colonialism. Our warrior instincts remain in-tact for protection and preservation of our cultures and the connection to the land. Simpson (2008) recalls a Nishnaabeg prophecy that tells of a time in today's world known as the Seventh Fire; this is the aftermath of colonialism whereby many Aboriginal people experienced great pain; and from this era a new generation emerges, known as the “Oshkimaadiziig”, who are responsible for the revival of cultural values, philosophies, political and economic traditions and our ways of ‘knowing’. The prophecy continues with the message that it is up to the “Oshkimaadiziig” to pave the way to decolonization by rebuilding and renewing relationships with other nations, and that we must return to the original Nishnaabeg visions of peace and justice. In conclusion to this prophecy, it is the work of the Oshkimaadiziig that determines the outcome of the Eighth Fire, an eternal fire lit by all nations for everlasting peace. One cannot reach this stage until the settler state exercises their part with honest intent of decolonizing their relationship with Indigenous people and the land, based on

colonial rule. Only then can a sustainable future based on mutual respect, recognition, and justice be built.

In the book, *Red Skin, White Masks*, Glen Sean Coulthard (2014), discusses the settler-colonial experience whereby Indigenous people were forced into becoming marginalized minorities in our own land. Throughout history the momentum of resistance continues to build for recognition of Aboriginal rights and to remind Canada that the treaties were formed out of good faith and not intended to be exercised otherwise through corruption, assimilation, cultural genocide¹⁰, and expropriation. There is a new movement that Coulthard (2014) coins Indigenous Anti-colonial Nationalism. This new movement is making a difference seen in the state's colonial power as it begins to change its structure that was once reinforced by policies and ideologies supporting the duality of cultural genocide and assimilation; to a structure that is supposedly centred around new practices that emphasize recognition and accommodation. Indigenous people remain skeptical in accepting this façade of a so-called relationship built on reconciliation with the Crown. It remains as a settler-colonial relationship built on domination of power that serves in the best interest of the settler's hierarchical agenda that facilitates the dispossession of Indigenous peoples' lands and self-determining authority. Coulthard (2014) concludes that the Indigenous resurgence paradigm: The call-out to all Indigenous communities to turn away from assimilative reformism of the government's approach, and instead build an

¹⁰ The TRC Final Report describes *Cultural genocide* as “the destruction of those structures and practices that allow the group to continue as a group. States that engage in cultural genocide set out to destroy the political and social institutions of the targeted group. Land is seized, and populations are forcibly transferred, and their movement is restricted. Languages are banned. Spiritual leaders are persecuted, spiritual practices are forbidden, and objects of spiritual value are confiscated and destroyed. And, most significantly to the issue at hand, families are disrupted to prevent the transmission of cultural values and identity from one generation to the next.”
http://nctr.ca/assets/reports/Final%20Reports/Executive_Summary_English_Web.pdf

Indigenous national liberation reform that derives from the revitalization of traditional political values and practices. The time has come to decolonize on our own terms and without the dictation of Western theory or opinions of the state.

Mi'kmaq scholar, Pamela Palmater's (2011) book, *Beyond Blood* is a testament to driving advocacy on determination for change; in particular when it comes to the Indian Act¹¹ and its membership provisions for legal identity of an "Indian". She writes about the inequalities of the Indian Act, and the right to determine Indigenous identity and belonging. My brief example of this is my own bloodline on my mother's side. My mother's family were all registered Indians through the Indian Act that allowed them to have Indian status. When she married my father, she lost her status because he was white. Oddly enough, the opposite would happen if an Indian man married a white woman, he would not lose Indian status. This became known as gender discrimination of the Indian Act. After years of lobbying and legal action taken by Aboriginal women, Bill C31 was introduced in the House of Commons to amend the Indian Act to return status to those who lost status through forced enfranchisement. In 1985, Bill C31 was passed which amended the Indian Act to return status to women who were enfranchised as well as their children. My mother regained status and this is how my siblings and I became entitled to apply for Indian Status which we did receive and today we continue our membership with the Yellowknives Dene First Nations band.

In summary, of this brief examination of Indigenous resurgence and decolonization; Arthur Manuel's (2015) shared visions of his own lived experiences of Indigenous politics in *Unsettling*

¹¹ The Indian Act is the Canadian federal law that governs all matters pertaining to Indian status, Indian bands, and Indian reserves. The Indian Act is a result of separate colonial pieces of legislation; the Gradual Civilization Act, 1857, and the Gradual Enfranchisement Act, 1869, and in 1876 these acts were consolidated into the Indian Act. (https://indigenousfoundations.arts.ubc.ca/the_indian_act/). The Act is available online on the Canadian Justice Laws Website, (<https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/i-5/>).

Canada, A National Wake-up Call, continues to resonate throughout Indian country. It is a reminder to the state and the rest of Canadians that it was the agreements of the Supreme Court of Canada; the doctrines of the Canadian Constitution; and, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples that give recognition to the rights of Indigenous people over their land as practiced by sovereignty to determine their own future.

Chapter Three: Research Methodology

The qualitative approach for this research is a two-part collaborative narrative taken from the standpoint of an Indigenous research paradigm. As an Indigenous researcher I use my own personal and cultural knowledge gained from life experiences to assess and guide my research. From the perspective of a strong Indigenous identity that is formed from these life experiences, I create an Indigenous research paradigm. I look to Wilson's (2008), rationale of the four concepts of an Indigenous research paradigm:

1. Ontology – beliefs in the nature of reality; my reality comes from life experiences; where I come from; how I grew up; and where I am today.
2. Epistemology – how I think about this reality and how I structure the elements of its existence is how I gain more knowledge about my reality.
3. Methodology – how I find out more about my reality (blended approach through autoethnography and a collaborative narrative).
4. Axiology – guidance through a set of morals and ethics is imperative in research; it benefits my story both in an academic and personal setting; knowledge is gained from the truth of those realities.

Part I involves more of an auto-ethnographic approach (Ellis, Adams, & Holman Jones, 2015) in relation to self and culture which also includes identity and ethnicity, and its

significance about my life experiences in IRS. The narrative is about my life before, during, and after IRS and how I piece together the past to define reconciliation and decolonization from my Indigenous worldview of today.

Part II includes the collaborative narrative of stories shared with my siblings of our IRS experience through the reflexive approach of a dyadic focus group interview that is fostered through a set of questions. The focus group discussion transforms into a combination of shared thoughts that shows evidence of similarities of all three IRS experiences. This study would be incomplete if my siblings were not involved in some aspect because collectively, we are part of each other's memory of that experience. As we revisit the past through memory of those years so long ago; it re-enforces that we did not forget the shared IRS experiences. Although our stories are similar in nature, they are unique to each person, meaning that we each have ownership of those personal experiences and therefore, it should only be told in relation to our own story. Kovach (2009, p. 94), refers to stories from an Indigenous methodology perspective as containers of knowledge that are relational between the teller who conveys insights from the experience of a phenomenon. Therefore, the reflexive approach involves the overall research both from my interpretation through introspection of self and my experiences along with those of my siblings in relation to IRS.

Telling the Story Through a Blended Qualitative Research Approach

Auto-ethnography. This method of qualitative research approach is for telling stories from our lived experiences and associates these experiences with theories in culture and communication. Therefore, I do not consider this an auto-biography per se, because although I use my personal experiences as primary data I am not focusing on 'self' alone. I incorporate others (siblings in the focus group) and attempt to gain more insight into cultural understanding

through analysis and interpretation. In auto-ethnography, the researcher uses personal experiences to delineate and critique cultural beliefs, practices and experiences by using reflexivity to inquire about the intersections between self and society:

Auto-ethnographic stories are artistic and analytic demonstrations of how to come to know, name, and interpret personal cultural experience; using our experience to engage ourselves, others, cultures, politics, and social research; confronting the tension between insider and outsider perspectives, between social practice and social constraint (Ellis, et al., 2015, p. 1-2).

The concepts of auto-ethnography became clearer to me through the expertise of seasoned auto-ethnographer Heewon Chang (2016) who puts into perspective the characteristics of auto-ethnography:

- Auto-ethnography uses the researcher's personal experience as primary data.
- Auto-ethnography intends to expand the understanding of social phenomena.
- Auto-ethnographic processes can vary and result in different writing products.

Auto-ethnography mixed with a narrative style of qualitative research method is an appropriate way to tell this story. It evolves from my lived-experiences and it also embarks on a journey of re-discovery of self and identity of being an Indigenous woman and survivor of Indian Residential School. I use my personal experience to explore analytic demonstrations of personal and cultural experiences and subsequently acknowledge and value my personal relationships with others that share the same lived experience. This then becomes an extended version or composition of auto-ethnography that I call Indigenous Auto-Ethnography.

Chang (2016) further explains about positioning "self" and "others" in auto-ethnography. Auto-ethnography is not only about self because as an individual we are part of a culture that

includes many others. Therefore, others can be family members, friends, colleagues, and neighbors that are integrated in autoethnography. When we write about a certain life experience, we can include others who have experienced the same or something similar who then become co-participants in the study, but the research is still focused on the overall experience of the self (p. 65). The others' experience is then an important source of data. My example in this study is the focus group with my two siblings in relation to the IRS experience.

Interpretation is an active process that involves going back and forth between the experience and assigning a meaning to it. The things one comes to know from these experiences are also subjective. Personal knowledge is gained from the experience. Perhaps this is how I arrive at a definition of my IRS experience in later life. In an ambiguous way I had to continue experiencing the effects of the impacts of IRS in order to interpret meaning and understanding. It becomes the source of knowledge. It has taken many years to overcome my obsessive-compulsive disorder; anxiety and anger; nervousness in front of people of authority; fear of conflict and abuse; and an inferiority complex. In later years, I learned that these are all attributes of trauma from the IRS experience. Now that it was identified it was time to take action and do something about it.

A segment of this research will also include an identity project to assist in my inquiry of self-identity. In furtherance of building the connection with the self, sociologist, Anthony Giddens (1991) describes self-identity as a project; one that is created. It is how one thinks of themselves now as a result of the past and what one would like to become in the future. We need to acquire the ability to sustain a narrative of biographical continuity. For me, this means I need to continue reflecting on where I came from; the place of my primary ancestral roots of Dene culture that continues to sustain what I call my Indigeneity (the Indigenous world I come from).

Indigeneity is my cultural grounding of the relationship I have with my Indigenous roots. It identifies everything about my Indigenous world as taught through the Dene traditions of who we are as Dene (the people). Alfred (2009) says basically the same thing that our "Indigeneity" is our cultural rootedness; our identity of who we are as First Peoples of this nation. The existence of self-identity is developed from my Indigeneity. I dig down to my cultural Dene roots to stay in tune with my identity. The IRS system did its best to erase my Indigeneity. If it did not succeed in accomplishing this through the system's abuse of children, it ultimately left the scars.

The blended qualitative research methodologies used places me in a dual role as researcher and subject matter. Through reflexivity, this research becomes my story as seen through the lens of culture, identity, ethnicity; all of which created my realities. By pulling together a reconstruction of various memories of the past that reflect my life's experiences; memory becomes an instrument of reconstructed data that tells the story.

Indigenous Research Methodology

I developed my research for this thesis by incorporating the concepts of an Indigenous research paradigm through an Indigenous autoethnographic approach which involves using my own personal and cultural knowledge to assess the type of methodology for this research. Indigenous research methodology is still a fairly new phenomenon with no shortage of critique and limitations from the tightly guarded gates of the non-Indigenous research academia built on Western theoretical constructs (Kovach, 2009). The more I learn about Indigenous research methodology, the more I become drawn into the knowledge of Indigenous inquiry based on Indigenous epistemology, and ascertain how it becomes relative to the Indigenous world I live in. As I continue to discover answers to many questions that I have carried throughout my lifetime it also opens new doorways for more questions.

I use Tuhiwai-Smith's analogy of the four directions of pathways in my journey - decolonization, healing, transformation, mobilization (2012). It is analogous to the custom of the four directions used in Indigenous cultures that morph into my own four cardinal points to guide me along the way. As much as Indigenous auto-ethnography becomes personal and political for me; it is my story to tell through locating 'self' within the balance of Indigenous methodology and qualitative research methodologies. This involves writing from various perspectives of my experience: reflexive/social/cultural/political and comparative perspectives. Indigenous research inquiry that includes an auto-ethnography of my Indigenous story then becomes evidence of my "owned enculturation."

The Indigenous perspective is a complex one especially for someone like me who walks in both worlds and treads across cultural boundaries. The process of self-analysis and exploration allows me to locate myself at a deeper level of identity, to explore and answer questions such as: "What is it really like walking in both worlds made up of a colonized country that I was born into, but also growing up in an Indigenous world?" How have I been able to live in a bicultural environment? According to Boyd-Krebs (1999), I am an Edgewalker-one who has significant lived experiences within different cultural communities; developing solid cross-cultural competencies while maintaining a strong understanding of "self" (pp. 9-11).

Situating Self through Indigenous Autoethnography

Further research brought me to an article on Indigenous Auto-ethnography by Paul Whitinui (2013). As I reviewed this article, I pondered Whitinui's (2013) key questions of how to frame 'self' as an Indigenous qualitative method of inquiry; how is new knowledge created from this method, how is it shared and critiqued? From these questions, as it relates to my own identity of self, I generate further questions such as; what does it mean to be Indigenous with a

mixed bloodline; what is it like to be a survivor of IRS; why do I live with shame and guilt; does 'reconciliation' and an 'apology' heal the wounds?

Whitinui (2013) demonstrates how an Indigenous auto-ethnography approach is applicable in answering questions around what is "Native" about Indigenous auto-ethnography that deserves to be told? As Indigenous people, one needs to dig further down to the roots of self-identify. In order to reach an understanding of what Indigenous self-identity is all about for myself, I pay close attention to how Whitinui (2013) explains about the need to search for understanding of our realities by exploring the nature of our own "cultural encounter" and then one can transcend into a state of cultural and critical consciousness. Whitinui (2013) references Maori teacher and cultural leader, Charles Royal (2009), "the gift of Indigeneity lies in our ability to re-discover and re-centre our culture from within." To have this knowledge in discovery of our own Indigeneity is very empowering.

To better comprehend my own sense of Indigeneity, important questions that Whitunui (2013) poses will help me answer or at least to explore further are: How do I know what a Native way of knowing "self" is for me? What constitutes being Indigenous? The answers can be found in identifying who I am and where I come from. How well do I know myself as being an Indigenous person? Answers to these questions come from an Indigenous world view and are intended to highlight some of the critical themes on values one will likely hold about themselves and those they interact with. I know myself more as an Indigenous person than a person of European descent because I was enculturated into my Dene traditional ways at a very young age.

To talk about an "ethnographic self" as a Native inquiry method is also to consider blending cultures (Whitinui (2013) is speaking of his Maori culture with white culture), this is very similar to how Indigenous people in Canada 'blend' with Western knowledge constructs.

Whitunui (2013) states a very important analogy of coming to know “self” as something one shares but it is how one does this that requires cultures and society to willingly accept differences in race, ethnicity, gender, age and knowledge.

On the contrary, one continues to thrive to survive as Indigenous people; because it is the connection that one has to our cultural value systems that enables us to cope. This is where resilience becomes the coping mechanism. Through resilience and pride Indigenous people always find a way to cope by returning to their ancestral lands to hunt, fish, set-up traditional camps, do ceremony, drum, be one with nature like our ancestors were. This is the place one calls ‘home’. For those of us that live in urban environments of the cities, one continues to embrace Indigeneity through creating cultural space for inner-city Pow-Wows and other cultural gatherings. These Indigenous programs and events offered within the urban setting enables us to connect or reconnect to our Indigenous cultures. Our Indigeneity will always exist wherever we relocate because when we leave our traditional territory, one brings the Indigenous knowledge with them. It is important for both cultures of Indigenous and non-Indigenous groups to understand the differences between their cultural societies. I would like to think that for the most part, as individuals of either culture, we respect each other and find a way to live harmoniously in a shared environment. After all, neither is leaving anytime soon.

Whitunui (2013) talks about when one explores the “self” based on cultural and political values as a method of inquiry, they are seeking an implicit revision of Indigeneity; by enacting a resistance counter-hegemonic discourse that allows Indigenous people to narrate our own lived experiences and as it pertains to restoring a cultural balance with others and the environment.

There are four ‘conditions of being’ that Whitunui (2013) refers to—survival, recovery, development, and self, that can be parallel to the four directions of pathways referenced in

Tuhiwai-Smith (2012, p. 120)—decolonization, healing, transformation, mobilization. Through this process Indigenous people are resilient, and have the knowledge to reclaim, reconnect and realign their existence in today's world. It is imperative that the experience of learning about self is antecedent to enable conduciveness in activating the healing process. In my daily life, I continue to search for ways to incorporate Whitunui's (2013) 'four conditions of being'. This is part of my personal journey. I understand and empathize with his Maori people; their plight is very similar to that of Indigenous cultures in Canada. Many have experienced the same struggles through the process of colonization, and through perseverance and determination did not surrender to the agenda of the government's plan of assimilation, but it was not without an atrocious and oppressive history. Indigenous people are the only ones that can truly tell the stories about the "lived experiences". We do not require someone else's interpretation.

Data Collection

Qualitative data is easily accessible from various autobiographic data such as memory, memorabilia, documents about self, official records, photos, focus groups, interviews with others, and ongoing self-reflective and self-observational memos. Furthermore, Chang (2013) makes an important point of the advantage the auto-ethnographer has over other researchers: one can access our own personal data that permits unique contributions to the overall understanding of the human experiences within socio-cultural contexts (i.e., IRS experience as survivor, the barriers to Indigenous rights and sovereignty within the doctrines of Canadian law such as the Indian Act that continue to dictate authority over Indigenous people in Canada).

The data sampling strategy used for data collection was a collective interview process known as a focus group. The format was through open-ended questions in a casual setting (more details in Part II). The participants included my siblings and I (one brother, one sister). This

method of data collection was best-suited for collecting information about my siblings' IRS experience together with mine as it was a way to share information and corroborate similarities of those experiences (Bradford, L., Meyers, R. A., & Kane, K. A., 1999). The focus group session with my siblings became our own sharing circle of stories about the IRS experiences.

To distinguish between a focus group and a sharing circle, I made reference to an article titled *Sharing Circles* (Tachine, Amanda, R., Yellow Bird, Eliza, & Cabrera, Nolan, L., 2016). A focus group is usually a small group made up of three to six participants including the facilitator, who engage in discussions by answering questions on a specific topic or set of topics. Focus groups are the standard and mainstream methodological approach used to collect qualitative data. A sharing circle is an ancient and traditional technique used amongst Indigenous groups to share stories and transfer information through taking turns speaking. Some groups use a talking stick that is handed to each speaker; which shows a sign of respect by allowing each speaker to tell his/her story without interruption from other members of the group. Sharing circles are still used in modern times as an Indigenous methodology approach to collect stories of the lived experience; or to share stories of folklore that have been passed down through the generations (also known as oral tradition).

The last year of IRS for my siblings and I was 1974. Since then, the impacts of IRS left a life-time of memory that becomes data stored in our minds, always there, always a reminder of that horrible time during our early childhood. Memory recollects the past in fragmented 'auto-ethnographic vignettes' that resurface through revisiting and retelling certain emotionally memorable events in my life; and those of my siblings as well.

Data Analysis

This qualitative study also takes on an inductive ethnographic process where I begin the process of developing themes from the interview transcript through the process of coding. I used a model developed by Carl Auerbach and Louise B. Silverstein (2003) in their book titled, *Qualitative Data: An Introduction to Coding and Analysis*. It is in scope for the research question behind this focus group on discovering if there were similarities of IRS experiences. In the analysis of the interactive focus group with my siblings and myself, I explored perceptions through the questions and answers in order to find out more about the experience on an individual basis.

I used my iPhone to record the interview of the focus group with my siblings during a visit to my home community in Yellowknife, Northwest Territories in August 2018, and once I returned to Calgary, I uploaded the audio interview onto my iMac desktop computer. I then purchased NVivo for Mac; a qualitative and mixed-methods data analysis software tool manufactured by QSR International, that stores and sorts data into one platform and performs an iterative process that codes, categorizes and classifies data. This in itself, was a learning curve for me as it was the first time working in a software program for qualitative data analysis.

The next steps involved copying the audio interview from the iMac desktop into NVivo. I then manually transcribed the audio interview into NVivo. I found this part user friendly, although time consuming, but at the same time it was nice to hear my siblings' voices again, and repeatedly as I hit stop, rewind, play, over and over, while transcribing. This is the only audio recording I have of the three of us together on one occasion.

Once I completed transcribing, I began coding by creating 'nodes' - a container or file to store data for topics. In this instance, each node represents one of the 12 questions from the

interview. I uploaded all the responses from the interviewees into the reference areas of the nodes. I reviewed the responses to each question to identify the similarities and grouped them into themes. Six of the twelve questions had answers that were similar in nature. I based the questions on the similarities I found in the literature review about what other survivors of Indian Residential School experienced and to the common experiences of what my siblings and I shared. I also used the TRC's 94 Calls to Action to gain further insight for questions of how we view reconciliation today as a result of being a survivor of IRS.

Ethics

Upon review of the Royal Roads University Research Ethics Policy I acknowledged that since my research involved human participants, a requirement of the policy is that I conduct the research in compliance with the Tri-Council Guidelines and Policy Statement (TCPS): Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans. I reviewed the TCPS carefully and understood the roles and responsibilities I had as the researcher. Once I received approval from the Royal Roads University Research Ethics Board, I was given permission to proceed with my research. I then wrote the letter of invitation (Appendix B) to the participants and explained that the interview process, through the focus group and sharing circle, would only take place upon their permission and confirmation by way of free and informed consent. Furthermore, taking into consideration that the participants are survivors of Indian Residential School (IRS) I listed counselling services for survivors of IRS that are available if they require this service.

PART II – MAKING SENSE OF IT ALL

Chapter Four: Personal Identity and Culture

Personal identity is about how I view myself (who I am; where I come from; my values and ethics) and social identity is how I relate with others through socialization and acculturation.

I take on certain personality traits that best suit the social environment; whether it is in a private setting of the home or out in public. Social identity is not static as it evolves to best suit a person's location and situation. It determines how we interact with others.

I define the term 'dichotomy of cultures' (a term that I thought of, and if it exists as defined by someone else; I am unaware), as a culture made of two parts; one is the Indigenous culture I was born into and the other is being of European descent. Essentially, I can say that I have two forms of status; one that identifies me as a registered Indian and the other is status from being registered as a Canadian citizen (I did mention in this paper that our Indigenous world is a complex one). I was socialized into Canadian society at the same time as I was enculturated with my Indigenous heritage. Growing up in the north with this background after IRS was during a time when Indigenous politics was manifesting. I soon realized that Indigenous governance meant something totally different to the Canadian government.¹² Indigenous governance from the perspective of Indigenous people was about self-determination. It was difficult for both parties to come to agreement about renewable and non-renewable resources of the land that the government wanted to exploit for economic gain over Aboriginal rights and entitlement of our traditional lands.

Seeking Cultural Grounding

It was important to find a way to understand more about the world around me. I wanted to discover the meaning of things I felt a connection to that was part of my Indigenous culture and to discover the similarities with other Indigenous cultures such as art, language, governance, politics, and spirituality. The more I learned about Indigenous cultures within Canada and in

¹² The Canadian government is also known as the federal government, the state, and the Crown. I use the terms interchangeably throughout this document.

other countries the more I wanted to continue building my knowledge base. I immersed myself in higher education to attain that knowledge. However, further to the prerequisites required for a post-secondary education was the personal need to pursue and learn from Indigenous people. I do this by participating in discussions on various topics pertaining to Indigenous views and opinions on the importance of maintaining culture, language, resource development for economic growth, education, and healthy community living. I attend special events whenever possible such as cultural gatherings pow-wows, plays, concerts, seminars, lectures. There is always something to learn. I am fortunate to have these opportunities while living in Calgary and working on the Tsuut'ina Nation reserve. I extend this process of inquiry to other places I travel where Indigenous people are living so I can make that connection.

I have never asked the question, "Where do I belong?", or "Where do I fit in socially?" By 'socially' I mean being out there in public and having to interact with others. Was I more comfortable being a part of a crowd made up of only non-Indigenous people? Did I choose between my Indigenous friends or with my non-Indigenous friends? I was glad that I did not have to choose one over the other. In reality, there was no need to segregate because growing up in Yellowknife there were children whose parents were from many different ethnic backgrounds. People from different ethnicities got to know and become friends with people who were different than themselves. Everyone mingled. Yellowknife was a mining town that attracted people from different parts of the world came and work and raise their families. Many of these families welcomed the opportunities to work and live among the Dene. It was common to see White people assimilate into the Dene lifestyle out on the land. They wanted to learn the Dene survival skills. These skills were needed to live in the wilderness during the long cold winter months

while different skills were needed to survive the short summer months of endless daylight under the midnight sun. It is a magical balance if your heart and mind are in the right place.

In my earlier years I understood that I was of two worlds as a result of my mixed ancestry – European and Dene. Notions of self-discovery was based on trying to find the right balance. I could never be one or the other. My identity was more aligned with not letting myself slip away from my culture. I was always proud of my background. This continues to give me the security and confidence to do my best and to not lose my sense of pride and self-respect. If something did not feel right, a choice had to be made; either stay and find a way to cope and accept the situation and live with the consequence or to remove myself and say, “This is not right; it is harmful and I have to leave this situation.” It also meant knowing where I came from by remembering the cultural values of being Dene and what directed me to where I am today.

That sense of knowing and always checking in with my self-identity kept me grounded, but it was not without many struggles along the way. I overcame obstacles that were detrimental as a result of IRS trauma that in part, was because I did not know how to heal which led to many life-changing situations. I stayed determined and worked hard all my life to ensure I could provide for myself and my children. I continued to seek out good job opportunities and was successful at job interviews for various positions; mainly with government. I have worked in a variety of positions over 23 years with various government departments in the Government of the Northwest Territories and the Alberta Provincial Government. I have been working with the Federal Government for the past 10 years.

I decided that in order to further my career I had to go back to school to achieve a post-secondary education. I left Yellowknife with my two young children in 1995 and drove 1,952 kilometers down to Lethbridge, Alberta. I enrolled in full-time studies at the University of

Lethbridge. I spent five and half years at the University of Lethbridge. During that time my marriage fell apart and it was a struggle to try and maintain composure while I was going through a divorce. There were many dark chapters in those years, but I got through it. I persevered and promised myself for the sake of my children that I would finish university. Believe me, there were times that I could not take the pressure of the emotional stress. The triggers of trauma of being a survivor of IRS quickly set in. Somehow, I found the courage and perseverance to get through the difficulties. I had no choice but to complete my schooling. I had to make some tough choices, but I knew that they were the right choices. I earned a Bachelor of Arts degree and several certificates from two different universities in Alberta and at the present time I am writing this thesis for a Master of Arts in Professional Communications through Royal Roads University. I value the institution of education. It is probably my most powerful investment. I have always been of the mindset that there is always a way to learn more. Through education I have gained knowledge and new skill sets that have contributed to attaining good jobs and secured income.

It has taken a lot of hard work and determination to accomplish what I have so far in my life. It is difficult at times to let go of the past and to overcome barriers that try to block my journey forward but as my sister reminded me it is not good to be bitter about the past. I remain humble and walk a daily path of healthy living which keeps me steady on my healing journey and somehow over time the heavy burden has lightened. There are many of us who are survivors that have reached out to help one another. Indigenous people in Canada are connected in one way or another to the IRS legacy. Indigenous people have a deep-rooted understanding of respect. We know it is not right to look down at someone who is less fortunate and not living a good life, and we should always try and help in any way one can.

Loss of Culture

My life could have turned out much differently as it has for thousands of Indian Residential School survivors; and especially a survivor who is an Indigenous woman. Many IRS survivors lost their culture while attending IRS because they were away from their families and communities and it was forbidden to represent our Indigenous cultures in any way, shape or form. We were doomed from the moment we stepped through the doors of IRS. There was no longer the protection of our parents and extended family members. Our culture was all we had to hold on. We were punished for that reason alone. The priests and nuns did not need an excuse to abuse us. The abuse that children received at IRS caused more than just physical harms but also ravaged their psyches with trauma that for many survivors was beyond repair.

The trauma became impossible for many survivors to live with. The memories and scars of IRS trauma were unbearable. The only way to escape the trauma was to numb the pain through substance abuse of alcohol and drugs which led to further pain and life-threatening consequences. Unfortunately, for many of our brothers and sisters, death becomes the winner in the battles against trauma, pain and suffering. I cannot forget about the many thousands of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) in Canada that remains an ongoing and unresolved crisis and human tragedy that is a result and direct link to the inter-generational legacy of the IRS, also known by a phenomenon labeled Intergenerational Trauma.

In the report, *Intervention to Address Intergenerational Trauma*, University of Calgary, (2012), this type of trauma is described as a result of continuous effects of trauma that is passed down through generations that become escalated and cause other unpredictable impacts (Brave Heart and Debeurn, 1998; Quinn, 2007). A definition of intergenerational trauma can be found in Evans-Campbell (2008):

A collective complex trauma inflicted on a group of people who share a specific group identity or affiliation—ethnicity, nationality, and religious affiliation. It is the legacy of numerous traumatic events a community experiences over generations and encompasses the psychological and social responses to such events. (p. 320)

What Does Decolonization Mean to Me?

In order to come to terms with the past experience of IRS I wanted to find a way to unfold memory and deconstruct history of the bigger picture of why this happened in the first place. It means finding a way to decolonize. This begs the question, “What does decolonization mean to me?” All of this is part of our history between Indigenous peoples and the Confederation of Canada. It is a huge learning curve for someone like me because a lot of this was never in our history books of our earlier school years. How would I ever know that my siblings and I would become part of this history through being documented as part of the IRS legacy?

I have come to understand in my own terms that ‘decolonization’ is about the message of the Indigenous resurgence movement that is gaining momentum across Indian country¹³. Examples of these movements are 1) Idle No More; 2) Families of Sisters in Spirit; 3) Unist’ot’en Camp. The message is one of recognition to take back what is ours through empowerment that exercises our inherent rights over the protection of land and culture. It is about breaking down the colonial authoritarian regime that has caused so much damage to the point where it almost succeeded in cultural genocide of Indigenous people in Canada. The Summary of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015) defines cultural genocide as:

¹³ Indian Country is a term widely used amongst Indigenous people that is synonymous to a definition that geographically encompasses all First Nations.

Cultural genocide is the destruction of those structures and practices that allow the group to continue as a group. States that engage in cultural genocide set out to destroy the political and social institutions of the targeted group. Land is seized, and populations are forcibly transferred, and their movement is restricted. Languages are banned. Spiritual leaders are persecuted, spiritual practices are forbidden, and objects of spiritual value are confiscated and destroyed. And, most significantly to the issue at hand, families are disrupted to prevent the transmission of cultural values and identity from one generation to the next. (2015, p. 1).¹⁴

According to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's findings through the research and testimonies of Indian Residential School survivors, cultural genocide did prevail through the IRS legacy, but because of the fact that we are still standing today, we, as Indigenous people did not succumb to those post-colonial strategies of the Crown. Although, it was not without serious adverse consequences. This also comes from my perspective of being an IRS survivor and an Indigenous woman in the 21st century.

I am learning that what it means for me to decolonize is the mere fact of knowing that I do not need to live under the terms of a colonized state that leaves me discriminated against for being Indigenous and a survivor of IRS. The world has changed and today we are challenging the state to break down the barriers of oppression and racism inflicted upon Indigenous people. It is about realizing our potential to exercise our human rights and to find ways to work together and somehow come to terms with the past. My search for decolonization and reconciliation

¹⁴ Summary of the Final Report of The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: http://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2015/trc/IR4-7-2015-eng.pdf

extends well beyond this paper; but it is through this research that I try to make sense of this complex reality that I live in. It is a journey that begins with my past and extends into the future.

It was imperative to continue building a platform for knowledge by merging the academic resources of post-secondary institutions along with engaging Indigenous cultural knowledge. I cannot know one without the other in order to form opinions and convictions which encompass my Indigenous world. As an Indigenous person I think that Indigenous cultural knowledge is about searching for answers to as many questions that cross your mind about the Indigenous world. The answers are with the people of the communities, not in outdated textbooks in the classrooms. It becomes a personal quest that involves time and effort. It is important to know one's Indigeneity and then with the added benefit of knowledge gained from the institutions of post-secondary education one will gain the best of both knowledge systems.

Former IRS Students Bring Canada to Court

In the early 2000s, former IRS students (including my two siblings and myself) brought forward serious concerns and allegations of the personal abuse to the public domain. Former IRS students stated that, as children, they experienced emotional, physical and sexual abuse while under the watch of IRS authorities. Those responsible included priests, nuns, brothers, and other staff members of the churches from various religious affiliations, but the Roman Catholic diocese was the predominant sector in the NWT residential schools. The church administration had full control and authority within the walls of all the residential schools and complied with the orders of the Canadian government. As a result, the Indian Residential School Settlement Agreement became the largest class-action settlement in Canadian history (Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement, 2012). This was the beginning of understanding my own 'reconciliation' and coming to terms with the past.

My Response to the Apology

I was two weeks into my new job with the federal government, located on the Tsuut'ina Nation Reserve near Calgary, in June 2008. Alberta. I was excited to begin my new career working for an organization that manages and regulates oil and gas resources on First Nation reserve lands in agreement with Chiefs and Council members and in partnership with oil and gas companies. I was nervous as I sat down in a large boardroom among strangers to watch the televised historic landmark apology of June 11, 2008. Prime Minister Stephen J. Harper's Statement of Apology was delivered in the House of Commons to former students of Indian Residential Schools.

As I watched this important event, I did not experience joy or a sense of relief. I was overwhelmed with sadness. It was a sadness that was so hurtful. I can only describe it as a sadness created from mourning the death of a loved one because my heart ached in the same way. It took every ounce of courage to not cry in front of strangers. As the event ended and everyone shuffled out of the boardroom, I wondered who else might be a survivor of IRS. The tears could not stay welled up inside and I could not stop crying. I could not bear to look at anyone because I felt embarrassed. Maybe others were feeling pain and they were crying as well because I do remember hearing sniffles. I became entranced on the event and did not pay attention to anything or anyone else in the room.

I was accompanied to a smaller boardroom by an Elder from the Siksika Nation Reserve. All I knew about the Elder is where she came from and that she was a highly-respected member of her community who practiced Blackfoot traditions. Immediately she made me feel at ease and talked to me in a quiet way that reminded me of my Granny and other Elders from back home. I was so thankful to have her with me. She soothed the pain of that little girl who for so many

years carried Indian Residential School trauma. At that moment, I knew that my own personal journey had to continue on a healing path.

The apology was described as the government's necessary "first step" on the long road to forgiveness and reconciliation (Coulthard, 2014). Many survivors and First Nation members across Canada later questioned the integrity of the former Prime Minister of Canada and contend that he failed to meet those obligations and promises that were set forth in the apology. The Harper government's policy direction was in contradiction to the spirit and intent of the apology. An example is Bill C-10, the Crime Omnibus Bill also known as the Safe Streets and Communities Act that was passed shortly after winning the 2011 federal election (MacKinnon, 2012). This was a combination of nine separate bills that did not pass in the previous sessions of parliament. It was stated by the Canadian Civil Liberties Association that Bill C-10 will change every component of Canada's criminal justice system. Instead, Bill C-10 will increase the number of people in prison by imposing unjust and perhaps unconstitutional punishments. Crime and poverty go together in a lot of cases and the rate of poverty among Aboriginal people in Canada is amongst the highest in the country along with incarceration rates.

The Harper Apology did not exterminate the damage done by Indian Residential Schools and policies like Bill C-10 only perpetuate the damage. First Nations want a commitment from the government to support a new policy aimed at assisting Aboriginal people to get out of poverty. I have a copy of the official apology that remains rolled up like a secret scroll tucked away but not out of my sight. I have not unrolled it since June 11, 2008. Although where it sits in my home atop a shelf; it is a visible reminder of my past experience and it is now an artifact.¹⁵

¹⁵ A copy of the Apology is inserted as Appendix A.

My own journey of reconciliation begins with reconciling with my past. It is about my healing journey, to repair the damage done to me from the abuse at IRS and the pain I carried for so many years afterwards. I do not think that, as an IRS survivor, I can accept the 'Apology' by my own act of forgiveness. Although IRS survivors received the apology from the head of the state, the Indigenous people of Canada still await an official apology from the head of the Roman Catholic Church—the Pope. In late April 2009, CBC reported that a delegation from Canada's Assembly of First Nations were invited by Pope Benedict XVI to visit the Vatican for a special meeting where he spoke in Italian with an English translator expressing sorrow and offered his sympathy and prayers. For many Indigenous people in Canada including IRS survivors this was not an official apology.

The one who commits the crime should ask for forgiveness. Even at that point I am unsure if the victim can forgive. I am not sure if I can. The harshest abuses inflicted upon children of IRS by adults who were responsible for the care of the children is appalling. The damage done to the children can be permanent. It is important to understand that I have a choice in this matter. I can either accept the abuse received at IRS by forgiving or accept the fact it happened and rebuild areas of my life that were broken resulting from the treatment I received. I chose the latter of the two. The journey of my reconciliation of coming to terms with my past begins by extending the morals of Indigenous self-identity and reaching outward to join the dialogue of a movement in Indian Country that defines reconciliation through decolonization that is built from a renewed Indigenous worldview.

The IRS system and the government's assimilation plan ensured that Indigenous children would lose their Indigenous identity. The system created a gap in cultural teachings of our traditional Indigenous values and way of living. Although Indigenous culture outlived the IRS

system many of us had to build or rebuild our own Indigenous identities to define who we are as Indigenous people. Unfortunately for many others it was already a lost battle, their innocence was stripped away, and with that their spirit was never regained. Their culture ended for some.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC)

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) was formed as an important element of the settlement agreement to open an inquiry into these allegations against the church and the Canadian government. Between 2007 and 2015 the TRC spent six years travelling throughout Canada to provide former IRS students the opportunity to share their stories and experiences. The TRC continued its commitment to work with thousands of IRS survivors through various events to educate people about the history of the IRS legacy, and share and honor the experiences of former IRS students and their families.

The TRC concluded in June 2015 at a special closing event held in Ottawa with a presentation of the Executive Summary by the TRC Commissioners (Hon. Murray Sinclair, Marie Wilson, and Chief Wilton Littlechild) of the testimonies and findings contained in a multi-volume Final Report. Within the report was the 94 Calls to Action—the recommendations that would set the tone and dialogue for reconciliation between the government, Indigenous peoples, and Canadians.

I was excited to see one of my cousins in the crowd who was sitting in front of a well-known Elder from back North; both are survivors. I listened to every word of the TRC Commissioners as they gave their remarks on the work they did with the survivors. The unforgettable moment was when Chief Commissioner Hon. Murray Sinclair reported that the TRC highly recommended that the government open up the MMIW Inquiry as soon as possible. The cheers and applause became so loud that only the drum beats of the drummers could be

heard above everyone as they cheered. The Minister of the day for Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada (formerly INAC), under the Harper government was the only person in that entire hall who remained sitting with his arms folded and nothing but a scowl on his face. The person that stood beside him glared at this Minister with utmost disgust was the New Democratic Party leader, Thomas Mulcair. Other participants in the crowd caught this and took pictures with their cell phones and immediately uploaded the photo onto social media and it went viral.

The TRC has brought the IRS legacy to a national level; it is no longer a dark-kept secret of Canada's colonial past. I am pleased about this, but we still have a long way to go. I believe it is now up to each and every one of us to do our part for reconciliation. We are so diverse as Canadians in our way of thinking. We have different beliefs, attitudes, perspectives, culture, and language. If the Calls to Action are not implemented on a national level through the institutions of government, justice and education, alongside with Indigenous traditional knowledge, we can never reach reconciliation as a nation.

Chapter Five: Siblings and IRS Survivors Speak

The focus group conducted with my siblings becomes a narrative created from components of storytelling through "recounting and accounting for" that is relative to truth about the human condition; that which is our IRS experience as children. Within the narrative paradigm, the goal is understanding what is being told. My goal for this narrative was to tell the stories of my life as seen from an Indigenous phenomenon and perspective. It also permits my siblings and I to share our IRS experience in order to allow the reader an opportunity to understand what it was like for us during those years at IRS.

The objective for this focus group discussion was to offer my siblings and I the opportunity to share our experience of Indian Residential School and to identify some of the impacts it had and still may have on us today. I wanted the three of us to be engaged as much as possible because it was our 'shared' experience. My role placed me as the researcher and third participant, and because I was one of the subjects telling a story of an experience that was shared with my siblings, it was not the typical ethnographic research study; whereby I was the outsider looking in. We have always been fair to each other and deeply respect one another, taking turns sharing many things throughout our lives. I wanted this experience to be shared the same way.

Many decades have now passed since those early days at Indian Residential School. Throughout the years we never sat down to discuss our experiences at IRS. One thing was certain—we were glad that those days came to an end and we could get on with life as normal kids back in our hometown of Yellowknife. I was uncertain what we would remember or wanted to remember, but I knew we never forgot the experience. I wanted to capture some of our history of those years and knew that if they agreed to a focus group it would perhaps be the only chance to document this important era of our lives.

At first, I was undecided on what steps I was going to take in developing this part of my research study. I wanted to be certain of the approach of how I would ask my siblings to participate. I was a little hesitant at first because I did not want to disturb their lives by bringing back thoughts and bad memories of those years at IRS. We have always been very close throughout our lives. The fact that we survived the IRS experience brought us together even closer. We respect one another through an unconditional love that has never been tainted by remorseful words or displayed with bad actions upon each other. We are now in our mid-fifties

and continue our special relationship. We hold our bond close to our hearts and have always taken care of each other.

Through the formal process of the Ethical Review and Approval ethics of Royal Roads University, I was granted approval to begin my research. After discussion with my siblings, I received their consent verbally and again they were in agreement through an official written letter explaining the purpose and process of the focus group along with the list of questions.¹⁶ We decided that this event would occur during my visit home in the summer of 2018.

Journey Home to Meet with Siblings

I traveled from Calgary, Alberta, in early August of 2018 to my hometown of Yellowknife, Northwest Territories for my annual visit. The location of the focus group session with my two siblings took place at my sister's house on August 10, 2018, down in Old Town. The house sits on the same lot where the original house once stood; it was where we spent many of our early childhood years. The property where the current house sits (the original house was eventually torn down and replaced by a new house), was originally bought by our deceased father back in the early 1960's. After his death, our mother kept the property and refused to sell it. After her death, the property remains under ownership of our sister. This way, it always remains in the family as a place to call 'home'. This is where I return to for my annual visits; and the majority of my time is spent in the Old Town part of Yellowknife.

We sat together in the living room around the small table with cups of tea and each with our page of questions and mini booklets of the Truth & Reconciliation Calls to Action. This is the first time the three of us have sat together in an intimate setting to talk about some of our

¹⁶ The letter is inserted as Appendix B, which includes the focus group questions.

experiences at Indian Residential School. I recorded the session on my iPhone. Through answering the set of questions, we recalled those early childhood memories and it brought back emotions of how one felt during that time as little children, but we were together now and safe in our own environment to console each other. We gave each other as much time needed to answer the questions. The discussion took approximately one hour in duration. Upon completion it was a moment I will never forget. I could immediately a sense of relief, release and peacefulness overcome us, and with that we embraced in hugs.

Data Collection: The Questions and Answers of the Focus Group

1. How did you feel when you were separated from your siblings at the Indian Residential School?

Repeating thoughts from participants' answers. *"We were separated by the nuns; it was really hard on me; never broken up like that before in our life and taken from our family and home town; we were separated from our little brother, this was the hardest part; always worried about him; couldn't sit beside him; loneliness; missing each other; especially our little brother, the youngest of the three of us. He was immediately separated from my sister and me. I was scared and lonesome; I would cry and cry; never seen my two sisters; very hurtful; I was very young and didn't understand what was happening to me."*

Theme. Each participant explained how they felt when separation from siblings occurred. Feelings from separation among siblings are revealed; separation in IRS caused great distress for siblings. Our brother was just five years old when arriving on our first day at Indian Residential School back in 1971 (LaPointe Hall, Fort Simpson, Northwest Territories, – a small northern settlement, and a long way from Yellowknife). There we were; three little siblings in a strange land entering into a strange and scary place. Separation was very hard on us because on top of

everything else (being removed from our family and home community and taken away to an unknown place hundreds of kilometers away), we never experienced separation before and being very close in age, all a year apart, it was always the three of us together.

2. Can you recall good things that happened at IRS; if yes, please explain.

Repeating thoughts from participants' responses. *“Meeting kids from other communities in the north; certain connection remains as a result of the IRS experience; met a lot of good friends; still have strong friendships today; played together to stay together; kids would play baseball; we used to go swimming; go sliding; outdoor picnics; taught how to sew and do macramé; we ate three times a day; we had good winter clothing.”*

Theme. Friendships form through playtime and other activities. Playtime results in new life-long friendships. Basic needs were met (food and clothing). The limited basic needs that were provided were seen as the good things that happened at IRS. This included playtime with other kids which is an important way to socialize, bond and gain friendships; learning to sew and do crafts is a good experience in gaining new skills; having three meals a day avoids hunger; good winter clothing avoids getting cold especially in the winter climate up north. The three of us each mentioned meeting other kids from different northern communities. We created friendships through the common experience of being children of IRS. We recognized our similarities at a young age: all Aboriginal children, all from different communities, just young innocent kids who wanted to play together when we had the chance, when we were not under strict regimental and abusive treatment. Capturing moments in time when we could have freedom as kids in the playground or other outdoor activities. We all bonded quickly. Many of these childhood friendships from IRS remain in place today. No matter where our life journeys

have taken us and the circumstances that have placed us where we are today; we never turn away from someone we met so many years ago as children of IRS.

3. Are you impacted by your IRS experience today? If yes, how do you deal with this now?

Repeating thoughts from participants' responses. *The IRS took advantage of their power by.... "crucifying our bodies, minds and spirits; genocide of our culture and trying to beat the Indian out of us; mental and physical anguish; trauma; haunting memories and crying; I had to make a better life for myself; this is something that never leaves you; it travels with you through life and becomes part of the journey." A promise made to the young child is never forgotten.... "to dream big." The experience of IRS "brought us closer together than ever; through resilience we survived, and our spirits became stronger."*

Theme. Treatment by the IRS authorities created negative impacts. Survival from the atrocities of IRS turns into something positive later in life. As young children who experienced trauma from abusive treatment and who were able to survive the negative impacts later in life is, in itself, truly amazing. Was it because we experienced this together that it made us understand each other more and to show greater love, protection, and respect for one another throughout our lives? To experience something together allows for a deep understanding and empathy towards each other.

4. Can you recall bad things that happened at IRS? If yes, please explain.

Repeating thoughts from participants' responses. *"Always fearful of the nuns; punished for trying to comfort my sister who was crying; forced into a dark hallway late at night to kneel on cold linoleum with grains of sand or other substance that was so painful to the knees and forced to say the rosary and punished because the prayers were wrong; forced to watch the nun*

abuse another child was very frightful and heartbreaking; the abuse was my personal holocaust.”

Theme. Siblings become recipients of abuse. The abuse we experienced as young children in the IRS was traumatic. All siblings either received abuse and/or witnessed abuse upon other children at IRS. The experience of abuse in IRS is unforgettable. The extent of abuse to a child had to be so malicious and evil that it was described by one of the siblings as the child's "personal holocaust".

5. Which Calls to Action apply to you as an Indian Residential School Survivor?

In reference to the Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action booklet, participants chose number 3 and number 6 of the Guiding Principles of the TRC; and numbers 63 and 65 of the Calls to Action; as follows:

- Guiding Principle 3 - Reconciliation is a process of healing relationships that requires public truth sharing, apology, and commemoration that acknowledge and redress past harms.
- Guiding Principle 6 – All Canadians, as Treaty peoples, share responsibility for establishing and maintaining mutually respectful relationships.
- Calls to Action 63 – We call upon the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada to maintain an annual commitment to Aboriginal education issues, including: Sharing information and best practices on teaching curriculum related to residential schools and Aboriginal history.
- Calls to Action 65 – We call upon the federal government, through the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, and in collaboration with Aboriginal peoples, post-secondary institutions and educators, and the National Centre for

Truth and Reconciliation and its partner institutions to establish a national research program with multi-year funding to advance understanding of reconciliation.

Repeating thoughts from participants' responses. *“The IRS is like a dark cloud in the history of our country; now is the time to talk about what happened; it is not for any Canadian to feel ashamed, but to turn the Calls to Action into something positive; treaty is for all people; people have to understand the native ways of family; this has been their whole life for tens of thousands of years; it was always the family that stuck together; people have to be more educated in the Indian way of thinking; the federal government needs to ensure that multi-year funding is provided for the purpose of education on reconciliation; this is not just a one-sided thing.”*

Theme. We need to come to terms of the IRS legacy and put it into perspective in view of honoring Treaty because we are all in this together. Reconciliation is about coming to terms with the historical past and wrongdoing of the IRS system. We cannot turn our back on history, but we can move forward in a good way. If we gain understanding through education about Indigenous people and to acknowledge that together with all Canadians, we are all treaty people, we are taking a huge step in the right direction to reconciliation. The TRC Calls to Action is an important guide through its 94 recommendations that can help put into motion the process of reconciliation in Canada.

6. How did IRS impact your family then and now?

Repeating ideas from participants' responses. *“The separation from our family and home community was hard. Boarding the plane meant we were going somewhere far away without our loved ones from home. The three of us were so young; all we had was each other. Separation in*

the IRS was devastating to all of us. we needed to find ways to be together; find a way to survive as family. As young children, thoughts went through our minds of how life would be better later on. No bitterness; do our best; take care of our children. There would be no more separation. There would be no more IRS."

Theme. As young siblings we knew we had to find a way to stay together as family. This was part of our survival in the IRS. There would be a brighter future because one day IRS would no longer exist. The impacts of separation from our main family back home and from each other inside the IRS was a traumatic experience. Survival was important. We had to find ways to stay together and think of a better future. A connection is made between separation; survival; searching for ways to stay together or spend time together was a way to survive and to be together as family. To experience trauma through the atrocities of the Indian Residential School created ways to survive. This survival was also a means of resistance and resilience. We found out at a very young age what survival meant. Although we experienced trauma in the IRS and separation was so hurtful; we knew that we had to think of ways to stay together as family. It was the only thing we could do while we were under the rule of the nuns and priests of the IRS. I think during survival mode, unknown to us at the time, our instincts kicked in, something was generated between the three of us through an understanding of hope and faith. We believed that if we stuck together and watched out for one another we would make it back home. Even if it meant catching only glimpses of each other in the cafeteria or during 'line-up' as we shuffled into the chapel and church.

Comments and Last Thoughts on IRS Experience

The IRS experience eventually becomes the victory of survival for the three of us; a two-edged sword that cuts deep at times with the painful memories; but we cannot give up, so we

continue on a journey throughout life that is contiguous with those childhood memories of our experience in the Indian Residential Schools. It becomes a bittersweet kind of synergy. I would be remiss if I did not mention Vizenor's (1994) term *Survivance*; a concept meaning a step away from survival; a "moving beyond our basic survival in the face of overwhelming cultural genocide to create spaces of synthesis and renewal" (p. 53).

The personal experience and impact of the phenomenon of Indian Residential School (IRS) developed a continuous cycle for change. Through Whitiwai's (2013) four conditions of being (survival, recovery, development, self) I can make the relational connection between the IRS experience and who I have become. Survival from the trauma of IRS meant more than surviving; it is about recovery through a healing process that has developed over time by discovering realizations and coming to terms with the past. This process involves exploring the self; taking the necessary journey to reconnect and settle with the past so that we can rekindle our true spirit of who we are as Indigenous people. I now view Whitiwai's (2013) four conditions of being as the nucleus of an internal process for self-determination which can be utilized as a precursor to Tuhiwai-Smith's (2012) four directions of pathway (decolonization, healing, transformation and mobilization); setting the tone for a new approach in structuring the outer layers of an Indigenous research agenda to further explore. The journey continues.

My sister recalls a contract she made with herself at the young age of nine years old; she had a big dream that when she got out of IRS; she made a promise to herself that one day she would travel the world, and she wanted to be very educated. She never broke that promise to that little nine-year old girl. To this day, she has travelled the world extensively, she is extremely educated and is now a lawyer. It became her life journey, knowing that because of the very fact

she survived through her horrific experiences at IRS, she can overcome anything in life. Her journey continues today by doing the best she can in a healthy and positive way.

My sister further added to her last comments a reference to the impacts of the IRS experiences in her life today. She said that the promise she made to herself at nine years of age was also about not permitting her IRS experience to turn her into a bitter person. Bitter people are miserable people; she did not want the bitterness to become a rotten thing that would take over her entire being and destroy her life. She knew she survived something very horrible and for that reason she could make her life better. She promised herself at such a young age to not allow the experience of IRS destroy her life. She wondered where this wisdom came from at such a young age that gave her a vision and dream of what her life could be. She is content that she has never broken her promise to that nine-year-old child. That is a very powerful testament. I am so proud of her.

We had no idea that the plan of the government and the church was to remove us from our families and communities and take us far away to Indian Residential School. They saw us as little Indian kids and they scooped us up along with others from our hometown. For many kids this is their memories of starting school. The first day of school is usually a happy event under normal circumstances. Instead the month of September turned into the "crying month" inside the residential school because we all cried out of loneliness for the comfort and love of our homes and families. We all wanted to go home. My sister kept her own little secret from the nuns whereby she pretended she was not ready for grade two and somehow convinced the school to be put back into grade one so she could be closer to our little brother. It was a way to see him each day at school and out in the field and playground; and to make sure he was ok. That is where they would meet and walk to school together. Each time I think of this memory, I can visualize

the two of them, so small, so happy to have a few moments of each day together. It brings tears to my eyes because it is the memory of yearning for love and missing each other because of separation inside the residential school.

We do our best to overcome the damage done, to learn how to live with our memories of those days in the IRS, to soothe the pain in whatever way possible. Later in life we become parents, aunties and uncles; giving all the love, care, and nurturing to our children; making sure we give them the best life possible. In a sense we are making up for those lost years that we did not receive love, care and nurturing inside the walls of the IRS.

As a parent, it was not always easy for me, in fact inter-generational trauma was passed down to my two children. They are both adults now, and I continue my best to show them how much they are loved, more than anything in this world; they are my everything. They have been so forgiving, and I support them in every way I can.

While glancing through the mini booklet of the TRC Calls to Action, my brother makes a closing statement about the strength of 'Native people', and where that strength and strong spirit comes from—it comes from the family and the land. It is a delicate relationship created with the elements of nature. Families had to stay together to survive on the land otherwise you would perish. This is where we get our strength and spirit from. All of that was taken away by the government when the kids were taken from their families. They were taken from their loved ones and from the land they loved and thrown into a different world. Many kids never regained their strong spirits again. It was destroyed. Indigenous families were never meant to be separated. He thinks of this often as he looks at his own son who is now the same age as he was during those years at IRS. He also recalls a memory when he was a small child in IRS that when he grew up and had his own family, nothing would separate them. To this day he is a wonderful, kind and

loving father and husband to his son and wife. He is their protector who ensures no harm comes to them.

My brother comments further that for thousands of years, the survival of our people was always tied to kinship of the land and the environment, and it was the family that passed on knowledge of how to live and love. Emphasis was given on the importance on how the general public needs to be more educated in the “Indian way of thinking”. It does not involve an individual thinking only for themselves; it has always been about thinking “as family”. This statement really resonated with me because I often thought about what it was like for the rest of the families back in the communities. If we cried for them all the time because we yearned for their love, then they must be crying too. The children were gone.

Chapter Six: Bridging Reconciliation and the IRS Experience

Overview of Reconciliation

The word reconciliation takes on varied definitions from my perspective as a survivor of Indian Residential School. Firstly, reconciliation is not a singular act, rather it is about the transformation that should take place after a breach or contravention has occurred between two or more parties by coming together out of respect so that a new relationship can be built on trust. Secondly, instead of calling it a “renewed relationship” between Canada and First Nations, maybe it should be a “new relationship” that we need to think about because to “renew” a past relationship can be potential for risk of a repeat in history to occur, and I do not think this is what First Nations have in mind. The politics of reconciliation is about transition from a colonial system that was set up to fail on both sides to working towards finding ways to correct an unbalanced democracy. First Nations are gift-bearing people; a lot of hard work has already gone into setting an agenda for a framework through the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's

recommendations. Canada cannot build a new relationship on their terms alone, instead it should accept this gift of what reconciliation looks like from the First Nation perspective and add it to a national holistic approach.

Reconciliation between Canada and Indigenous people is a slow and cumbersome process that will hopefully not take another 150 years to come to fruition. Reconciliation in Canada also means that if Canada wants to build a renewed relationship with Indigenous people it has to abide to the Crown's owed recognition of the equal right of First Nations' self-determination. The Crown has a fiduciary obligation to protect those inherent Aboriginal treaty rights under Section 35 of the Constitution Act 1982, and to give recognition of First Nations to have empowerment to exercise control over their land resources.

Today in Canada the government's message is widely publicized on setting priorities for rebuilding a relationship through reconciliation with Indigenous people of Canada. I need to question on what terms are they going to reconcile? Is it on the government's terms as to their definition of reconciliation? I need to further examine the politics of reconciliation in order to help form my own stance on it. Does the government include decolonization in their message regarding reconciliation? These are important questions that Indigenous people are asking.

Reconciliation is a society's responsibility to act on, it is not one-sided or determined by one political party. In order for the TRC's recommendations for reconciliation in Canada to be effective, the Commission established a reconciliation framework for Canada to help all Canadians to move forward with reconciliation through a respectful relationship that will assist in dismantling centuries-old political and bureaucratic culture developed on colonialism. The term "politics of reconciliation" is used by Kymlicka and Bashir (2010) in *The Politics of Reconciliation in Multicultural Societies*, as a form of transition to a new stable democratic

order. New democracies hope to build a democratic system that is inclusive for all citizens and not perpetuate an exclusive one that characterizes post-colonial states (pp. 2, 4). In Canada we still witness-enduring effects through older practices and ideologies of exclusion all stemming from colonial rule. The legacies of history still linger in a wide range of social attitudes, cultural practices, economic and demographic patterns and institutional rules that continue to obstruct efforts to build genuinely inclusive societies of equal citizens (p. 1). Indigenous people continue to be the oppressed instead of existing in a world of equal partnership. Finding ways to overcome this problem is a major challenge.

Politics of reconciliation through international prominence, for example in South Africa ends apartheid through reconciliation. They embarked on a TRC experiment that contributed to the successful transition from apartheid to democracy. This success encouraged other countries to adopt similar forms of reconciliation as a way of dealing with difficult historical legacies of violence, oppression and human rights violation (Kymlicka & Bashir, 2010, p. 2). The IRS legacy is Canada's prime example, but a lot of work still remains on the agenda in achieving true reconciliation with Indigenous people. Canada continues to exclude the Indigenous political body from major decision-making policies in Ottawa, instead what is occurring today is quick decisions of the government that changes current policies within legislation or to create new legislation that benefits the best interest of the government behind closed doors and without the consent of First Nations (Walters in Kymlicka & Bashir, 2010, p.165).

Before putting in place an "all-inclusive" multicultural democracy as in Canada's case; we have to ensure reconciliation takes place first with First Nations who are after-all, the Indigenous peoples of this country; the First Peoples. Treaties were signed during the confederation/colonial era and were broken by the state. This needs to be fixed first prior to

stabilizing a democratic order that best fits both sides (always them and us: will there ever be a society of equal citizens?). Could a pluralistic society for Canada be part of the solution?

Pluralism. A state of society in which members of diverse ethnic, racial, religious, or social groups maintain and develop their traditional culture or special interest within the confines of a common civilization (Kymlicka & Bashir, 2010, p. 5). The fact that Indigenous people are the First Nations of this country, do we belong in this category? I believe many First Nations people would disagree that we do; including myself, because we are the Indigenous people of this country, we are not the 'ethnic and diverse groups', instead this refers to all settlers and newcomers to this country. I read this definition of pluralism in two ways, where the "common civilization" is referred to the Canadian democratic society as a whole; and as I thought about this further, it could also refer to the common civilization within those diverse groups that have the opportunity or choice to continue their traditional practices within a larger democratic society.

In Canada today, pluralism does exist, as defined by Kymlicka and Bashir (2010), but it seems unfair that Indigenous people were not granted this same opportunity back in the days after the treaties were signed; instead histories became a history made of broken treaties. Traditional practices became outlawed and the Pass System was created where all First Nations people were confined to specific geographic reserves by government regulation. First Nations people could not leave the reserve unless granted permission by the Indian agents who issued special passes. Although these bans were lifted, the Indian Act (1876) is still the piece of colonial legislation that is built into the constitution that holds steady onto the laws that are entrenched from colonial British rule that does not apply to the best interests of Indigenous people. Alternatively, it permits Canada to continue the control over everything from First Nations

identity, governance, cultural practices, education, to political structures (band councils on reserves with Chiefs and Council members are based on electoral votes; again, this is not the traditional ways of self-governance of First Nations that were traditionally practiced long before colonialism). I cannot see Canada giving up all this control so easily.

Canada seems to offer more rights and freedom to newcomers into Canada than to oblige by honouring the true definition behind the treaties. I think because Canada is a diverse society of multicultural democracy, it wants to remain on the world stage as a first-world country that ensures its dedication and commitment to multiculturalism for all the newcomers who migrate to Canada. The government states that Canada continues to build a multicultural democracy that does not allow forms of exclusion of any group of citizens. Many Indigenous people argue that Canada welcomes new migrants into Canada and treats them better than Indigenous people. The notion out there in Indian Country is that immigrated newcomers are set up with all the amenities and funding to live comfortably in Canada so that they can transition and 'assimilate' into their new society with ease and without hardship. In the meantime, Indigenous people, especially those living in remote reserves are dealing with daily struggles of extreme hardship. In many cases, their living conditions are comparative to third world countries.

Section 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982, with later inclusions that were developed in 1983-1984 is the closest we get to recognition and affirmation of Aboriginal rights. Those rights by definition include the right to land, to fish, hunt and practice one's own culture and to establish treaties. More than three decades later Aboriginal people continue to hold Canada accountable for breaking treaty and not honouring our Aboriginal rights to the land. Since then there has been great debate about whether this truly represents the rights of Aboriginal people, because it is entrenched within the Constitution, it therefore is ruled under the Supreme Court,

which ultimately is still the creation of law as a result of colonialism. It does not define a true nation-to-nation relationship. The Act still excludes inclusion of true Indigenous laws and governance with its concepts of ideologies.

In Canada, colonial power is still the over-arching supreme law that dictates to Indigenous people what the laws of the land are, and that compliance has to be exercised by everyone in those terms set out by the constitution. Many Indigenous people within Canada feel that the state still holds ultimate power with little autonomous decision-making power given to our people. If we decide to break away completely from these colonial ties, are we going to be better off? Or do we try and work within the system to exercise our rights and hold Canada responsible and accountable to the treaties? If Canada continues to be non-compliant by continuing to break treaty and legislate new laws that overrule Section 35, Canada will never reach reconciliation on these terms.

The Royal Commission of Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP, 1996) report details the long history of the Crown's colonial domination and oppression on Aboriginal people in Canada to become 'wards' of the Crown instead of granting Aboriginal people their sovereign treaty rights. It is no hidden secret that over a century and a half of disrespect for treaties and tribal customs the Crown continued to assume traditional lands for their own settlement and develop resources on those lands without consent (Walters in Kymlicka & Bashir, 2010, p.173). History reveals examples of the Crown's oppressive government laws that permitted unruly treatment towards Indigenous people by removal of self-government customs, displacement onto reserve lands, banned ceremonies that have been customary since time immemorial, IRS; these are just some examples of the atrocities committed against Indigenous people.

RCAP makes recommendation to the government that it is time for Canada to learn from its mistakes of the past and puts in place a national policy of reconciliation and regeneration that values mutual recognition, mutual respect, sharing and mutual responsibility. The idea is to develop a new relationship between Canada and Indigenous people of Canada (Walters, in Kymlicka & Bashir, 2010, pp. 172-173). In adherence to RCAP's recommendation in its 1996 report, Canada issues a 'Statement of Reconciliation' which it formally regrets the past oppressive policies that enabled surmountable disrespect and dispossession towards Indigenous people and accepts reconciliation as a new process that recognizes rights to self-government and a new treaty relationship. To date, the most substantive invocation of reconciliation has been the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement that was signed in May 2006 (Walters in Kymlicka & Bashir, 2010, p. 174).

As a survivor of IRS, I am cognizant that reconciliation in any form does take time, dedication and commitment, along with patience. I am personally grateful for the work of RCAP and the TRC in bringing reconciliation to the forefront of Canadian democracy and holding the government accountable for its wrongdoing. For survivors like myself, I am on the road to reconciliation through the route of decolonization. I continue to seek ways to offset the past atrocities of IRS and to learn from the experience in a positive way.

It is with great respect that I give recognition of the closing remarks on reconciliation with the message from Arthur Manuel (2015) that stands as a constant reminder to each and every one of us and should be taken very seriously:

We cannot have reconciliation until the extinguishment policy is off the table and our Aboriginal title and treaty rights are recognized, affirmed, and implemented by Canada and the provinces. We need to negotiate the dismantling of the colonial system, not

bargain for cash deals that extinguish our rights and produce nothing except more debt and dependency. We need to stand up and fight colonialism in all its manifestations. We are talking about fundamental change that recognizes our title to our territories and our right to self-determination. It is where we are heading. We invite all Canadians to join us to help move the final obstacles together (pp. 226-227).

Chapter Seven: Conclusion

It takes a lot of courage to speak openly about the IRS experience and to disclose emotions and feelings that have been suppressed for a life time. The personal is no longer personal. My hope was that the focus group with my siblings would allow us to speak our truth and to have this time together to benefit our well-being. The focus group was our way of finding some closure and to know that it was ok to talk about the experience of IRS in a safe setting, and to also discuss ways we can move forward in life in a healthy and balanced way. The data analysis revealed that during separation inside the IRS, we experienced similar emotional pain, and as siblings, it was heartbreaking that we were not allowed to spend time together to console one another. All we wanted was to be together and go home.

Many survivors never get to this point in healing because it hurts too much to recall the bad memories and the trauma they experienced, and they continue to battle with this on a daily basis. Somehow it feels safer to keep trauma hidden away or locked in a dark chamber within our memories. At this point many survivors are not easily convinced that by talking about it we can heal. Nobody wants to relive trauma.

As we each tell our stories we are contributing to Indigenous knowledge by capturing parts of the history of the IRS legacy. Personal stories come from lived experiences. For Indigenous people, it is always culture-based, or if it lacks culture, it is because something

happened along the way; a separation occurred whereby it prohibited a person(s) to connect back to their culture. When a forced disconnect occurs from one's culture for whatever reason it creates a gap and the sense of belonging in a traditional environment is lost. This happens when a person is removed from their culture, their home, and their families. Nobody should experience separation against one's will from family, especially not during the most important years of a person's life, which is childhood, at a time when the self is formed in relation to people, place, and social values and worldviews. The action of separation of children by removing them from their homes and family is an action that is devastating in itself, and subsequent to this act is the trauma arising from what they witness and experience by and with strangers from a culture that is not their own. There is no protection.

As a child survivor of Indian Residential School, I became familiar with the unfamiliar emotions of pain, loneliness, anxiety, fear, especially at night. I was always praying that the footsteps would not stop at my bedside. So fearful, I use to curl up in fetal position under the blankets and hope that I would never be noticed. It was hard to fall asleep until somehow the fear that was continuously racing through my mind and making my heart pound exhausted me and drifted away; then finally sleep would settle in.

Although our stories are similar it was important for me to further investigate my own perceptions and to dig a little further about questions around why I think the way I do with regards to who I am, what I experienced, and where I am today, and where I want to be in the future. I would feel honored sharing this story with other survivors and their families, and to also extend out to the public for their learning. I believe I am ready for this. There are more stories to tell.

Doing this research on re-discovery of self was about picking up the pieces of a life that was shattered as an abused child in residential school and dealing with the repercussions of abuse throughout my life. We all want a good life, and the chance to build on bringing hope and dreams to reality. It takes determination and courage to take a stance and face head-on those unwanted memories and fears. I no longer have to live with the impacts of trauma, although at times, it became obvious that words can sometimes be stronger than actions. For years, as certain things in life were coming together for me, there were many times when I felt overwhelmed with not getting to the resolution fast enough. At times, it felt like an uphill battle that would set me back for one reason or another. I found that the struggles were hard to overcome but it was a necessary journey to venture back into memory and to brew in it while I try to connect the dots as to why things happened the way they did. There is no turning back and it makes no sense to speculate on the “what ifs, why nots, if only.”

I like to dwell on optimism in believing or at least have hope that somehow Canada can come to terms with Indigenous people on all fronts of justice and to honor the treaties and extinguish once and for all the colonial ties that are binding us in the 21st century, because for the most part, more harm than good is the consequence and we fall back to square one; and nothing changes. Indigenous people will remain as the oppressed in an unfair democracy that will always initiate conflict and benefit the Crown. Canada is now under the watch of the powerful political bodies of the United Nations and all humanitarian groups. One only has to watch the news or follow social media to see what is going on between First Nations and Canada.

As Indigenous peoples, we remain vigilant and are acting quickly on protecting what is rightfully ours for the future generations—traditional lands and resources, and our inherent Aboriginal treaty rights to self-government. Coulthard's (2014) “Indigenous Anticolonial

Nationalism” is the new movement for resurgence of Indigenous people in Canada. There will be no backing down from exercising our Aboriginal rights sanctioned in the doctrines of law to see justice served. We need to listen to the stories again; we are in the time of the Seventh Fire, and change is happening now as we begin to mobilize and decolonize our way; the Aboriginal way.

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Appendix A – The Apology



Statement of Apology – to former students of Indian Residential Schools

The treatment of children in Indian Residential Schools is a sad chapter in our history.

For more than a century, Indian Residential Schools separated over 150,000 Aboriginal children from their families and communities. In the 1870s, the federal government, partly in order to meet its obligation to educate Aboriginal children, began to play a role in the development and administration of these schools. Two primary objectives of the Residential Schools system were to remove and isolate children from the influence of their homes, families, traditions and cultures, and to assimilate them into the dominant culture. These objectives were based on the assumption Aboriginal cultures and spiritual beliefs were inferior and unequal. Indeed, some sought, as it was infamously said, "to kill the Indian in the child." Today, we recognize that this policy of assimilation was wrong, has caused great harm, and has no place in our country.

One hundred and thirty-two federally-supported schools were located in every province and territory, except Newfoundland, New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island. Most schools were operated as "joint ventures" with Anglican, Catholic, Presbyterian or United Churches. The Government of Canada built an educational system in which very young children were often forcibly removed from their homes, often taken far from their communities. Many were inadequately fed, clothed and housed. All were deprived of the care and nurturing of their parents, grandparents and communities.

First Nations, Inuit and Métis languages and cultural practices were prohibited in these schools. Tragically, some of these children died while attending residential schools and others never returned home. The government now recognizes that the consequences of the Indian Residential Schools policy were profoundly negative and that this policy has had a lasting and damaging impact on Aboriginal culture, heritage and language. While some former students have spoken positively about their experiences at residential schools, these stories are far overshadowed by tragic accounts of the emotional, physical and sexual abuse and neglect of helpless children, and their separation from powerless families and communities. The legacy of Indian Residential Schools has contributed to social problems that continue to exist in many communities today.

It has taken extraordinary courage for the thousands of survivors that have come forward to speak publicly about the abuse they suffered. It is a testament to their resilience as individuals and to the strength of their cultures. Regrettably, many former students are not with us today and died never having received a full apology from the Government of Canada.

The government recognizes that the absence of an apology has been an impediment to healing and reconciliation. Therefore, on behalf of the Government of Canada and all Canadians, I stand before you, in this Chamber so central to our life as a country, to apologize to Aboriginal peoples for Canada's role in the Indian Residential Schools system.

To the approximately 80,000 living former students, and all family members and communities, the Government of Canada now recognizes that it was wrong to forcibly remove children from their homes and we apologize for having done this. We now recognize that it was wrong to separate children from rich and vibrant cultures and traditions, that it created a void in many lives and communities, and we apologize for having done this. We now recognize that, in separating children from their families, we undermined the ability of many to adequately parent their own children and sowed the seeds for generations to follow, and we apologize for having done this. We now recognize that, far too often, these institutions gave rise to abuse or neglect and were inadequately controlled, and we apologize for failing to protect you. Not only did you suffer these abuses as children, but as you became parents, you were powerless to protect your own children from suffering the same experience, and for this we are sorry.

The burden of this experience has been on your shoulders for far too long. The burden is properly ours as a Government, and as a country. There is no place in Canada for the attitudes that inspired the Indian Residential Schools system to ever again prevail. You have been working on recovering from this experience for a long time and in a very real sense, we are now joining you on this journey.

The Government of Canada sincerely apologizes and asks the forgiveness of the Aboriginal peoples of this country for failing them so profoundly.

In moving towards healing, reconciliation and resolution of the sad legacy of Indian Residential Schools, implementation of the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement began on September 19, 2007. Years of work by survivors, communities, and Aboriginal organizations culminated in an agreement that gives us a new beginning and an opportunity to move forward together in partnership. A cornerstone of the Settlement Agreement is the Indian Residential Schools Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

This Commission presents a unique opportunity to educate all Canadians on the Indian Residential Schools system. It will be a positive step in forging a new relationship between Aboriginal peoples and other Canadians, a relationship based on the knowledge of our shared history, a respect for each other and a desire to move forward together with a renewed understanding that strong families, strong communities and vibrant cultures and traditions will contribute to a stronger Canada for all of us.

June 11, 2008

On behalf of the Government of Canada
The Right Honourable Stephen Harper,
Prime Minister of Canada



Appendix B – Focus Group Participant Letter

July 15, 2018

Dear Participant:

I am in my final year of the Master of Arts Degree in Professional Communication at Royal Roads University. For my thesis I am doing a research study through an auto-ethnography about growing up as a survivor of Indian Residential School. Part of my research methodology will include spending time with other survivors to share stories and experiences of our time at Indian Residential School (IRS).

I would like to invite you to participate in a collaborative and interpersonal interview session with me. I am inviting two participants including myself who are survivors of Indian Residential School (IRS). This will be done through a holistic process of informal and interactive inquiry that will include open discussion through various questions. The answers that we share freely will generate dialogue and will benefit each of us with deeper insight and understanding of the impact that Indian Residential School had or that continues to resonate with us to this day. By sharing our stories through memory and experience of IRS, this academic process, we are contributing to educating the public about the IRS legacy.

You are welcome to ask me questions pertaining to this project before, during, and after the interview. Your identity will remain confidential and anonymous, and only pseudonyms will be used such as interviewee #1, interviewee #2, unless you give me permission to be identified by your first name or your first names and last names.

I would like to hold this session privately with the three of us in Yellowknife, NWT, during early August 2018 when I return home for my annual visit. To ensure comfort and ease I thought it would be a good idea to spend a day together out on the land near Yellowknife.

The following questions will form the dialogue in our sharing circle. I will take turns asking each of you the same questions and I will also answer the same questions or if you wish, either one or the both of you can take turns asking the same questions for me to answer. Please know that you are not obliged to answer the questions if it makes you feel uncomfortable or it is upsetting to you. You also have the choice of removing yourself from the sharing circle at any time without prejudice and consequence. I will respect your wishes.

1. How did you feel when you were separated from your siblings at the IRS?
2. Can you recall good things that happened at IRS? If so, please explain.
3. Can you recall bad things that happened at IRS? If so, please explain.
4. Have you been impacted by your IRS experiences today?
5. If so, how did you deal with them at that time?
6. Are you still impacted by your IRS experiences today?
7. If so, how do you deal with them now?

8. How did IRS impact your family life? Then and now.
9. Would you say that “walk in both worlds” as a person of Settler and Indigenous heritage?
10. If so, how does this apply to everyday life for you?
11. What do you know about the Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action?
12. Which Calls to Action apply to you as a IRS survivor?
13. Do you find the TRC Calls to Action useful for you as a IRS survivor? Why or why not?

For further information on the TRC's 94 Calls to Action please visit the site at: www.NCTR.ca, http://nctr.ca/assets/reports/Calls_to_Action_English2.pdf. I will also provide copies of the mini booklets entitled, “Truth and Reconciliation – Calls to Action” published by the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation, University of Manitoba.

If you wish to seek counselling services for survivors of Indian Residential School; the following services are available:

- Dene Wellness Warriors, located at 4902 – 50 Avenue, phone number (867) 446-0412. This is an Aboriginal-owned business with qualified Aboriginal counsellors who specialize in counselling survivors of IRS.
- Shake the Dust Hope Consulting, main office located in Fort Providence, NT, email: frankhope@hotmail.com, Beverley_bagnall@yahoo.com, phone number (867) 445-5787, or (780) 721-8287. The service providers will travel to the communities, including Yellowknife.
- NWT Help Line (available 24/7), phone number 1-800-661-0844.
- A National Residential School Crisis Line has been set up to provide support to former students. This 24-Hour Crisis Line can be accessed at: 1-866-925-4419.

If agreed by all participants, by way of free and informed consent and confirmation to this request through email; would you be open to an audio recording of the interview as a means of data collection? Each participant will have access to this data collection for review and comments. I will delete any part of your comments according to your wishes and advice if you do not want them included. Would you also agree to a group photo of the three of us at the conclusion of the interview?

As a Royal Roads University student, I am required to submit a copy of my thesis for publication in Royal Roads University's open access repository, Library and Archives Canada, and ProQuest; this aligns with the university's academic regulations and graduation requirement.

If you agree to participate as an interviewee by giving your free and informed consent for this project; please reply back to this email by the following date: *(To be determined upon Ethics Review Board approval)*.

For further information or if you have any questions pertaining to this project, please contact me either through email: [email address], or by phone: [phone number]. You can also ask any questions up to the date of the interview or at any time during the interview.

I assure you that I am in compliance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement on Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (2nd edition, 2010). The following link to the website is provided for your reference: <http://www.pre.ethics.gc.ca/eng/policy-politique/initiatives/tcps2-eptc2/Default/>.

I have listed the project and thesis titles of my research along with academic staff that are supporting me:

Project Title: An intimate conversation about Indian Residential School in the North. (This is a sub-title for the interview section of my thesis only which forms part of my data collection).

Main Thesis Title: An Indian Residential School Survivor's Journey with Truth and Reconciliation

Program Head for Master of Arts in Professional Communication: Dr. Jennifer Walinga, School of Communication and Culture, Royal Roads University, Victoria, BC
Phone: (250) 391-2600, ext: 4869

Project Advisor/Thesis Supervisor: Dr. Cora Voyageur, Professor of Sociology, University of Calgary, Calgary, AB
Phone: (403) 220-6507

Thesis Coordinator: Dr. Zhenyi Li, School of Intercultural & International Communication, Royal Roads University, Victoria, BC
Phone: (250) 391-2600

I would like to thank you in advance for your approval in participating in this important project.
Mahsi Cho.

Respectfully,

Shirley Conrad

Appendix C – List of Interview Questions

1. How did you feel when you were separated from your siblings at the IRS?
2. Can you recall good things that happened at IRS? If so, please explain.
3. Can you recall bad things that happened at IRS? If so, please explain.
4. Have you been impacted by your IRS experiences today?
5. If so, how did you deal with them at that time?
6. Are you still impacted by your IRS experiences today?
7. If so, how do you deal with them now?
8. How did IRS impact your family life? Then and now.
9. Would you say that “walk in both worlds” as a person of Settler and Indigenous heritage?
10. If so, how does this apply to everyday life for you?
11. What do you know about the Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action?
12. Which Calls to Action apply to you as a IRS survivor?
13. Do you find the TRC Calls to Action useful for you as a IRS survivor? Why or why not?

Appendix D - Counselling Services for Survivors of Indian Residential School

- Dene Wellness Warriors, located at 4902 – 50 Avenue, phone number (867) 446-0412. This is an Aboriginal-owned business with qualified Aboriginal counsellors who specialize in counselling survivors of IRS.
- Shake the Dust Hope Consulting, main office located in Fort Providence, NT, email: frankhope@hotmail.com, Beverley_bagnall@yahoo.com, phone number (867) 445-5787, or (780) 721-8287. The service providers will travel to the communities, including Yellowknife.
- NWT Help Line (available 24/7), phone number 1-800-661-0844.
- A National Residential School Crisis Line has been set up to provide support to former students. This 24-Hour Crisis Line can be accessed at: 1-866-925-4419.

Appendix E – Websites

Table A1 Websites cited in Footnotes throughout thesis

Footnote No. and Page No.	Description and URL
Footnote 1, p. 10	A list of residential schools in Canada can be found online: http://www.residentialschoolsettlement.ca/schools.html#Northwest%20Territories
Footnote 2, p. 11	NWT Timeline: (https://www.nwttimeline.ca/index_mac.html)
Footnote 3, p. 11	Akaitcho Hall, Eugenics Archives, http://eugenicsarchive.ca/discover/institutions/residential/540f60e805f79bb354000026
Footnote 8, p. 23	Indigenous Foundations: https://indigenousfoundations.arts.ubc.ca/land_rights/ .
Footnote 9, p. 25	Residential Schools: Teachers' Resource Guide https://libguides.usask.ca/c.php?g=369189&p=4058775 .
Footnote 10, p.28	The TRC Final Report describes <i>Cultural genocide</i> : http://nctr.ca/assets/reports/Final%20Reports/Executive_Summary_English_Web.pdf
Footnote 11, p. 29	A description of the Indian Act: (https://indigenousfoundations.arts.ubc.ca/the_indian_act/). The Act is available online on the Canadian Justice Laws Website, (https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/i-5/).
Footnote 14, p. 49	Summary of the Final Report of <u>The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada</u> : http://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2015/trc/IR4-7-2015-eng.pdf