BLACKFOOT HEALING CURRICULUM THROUGH STORYTELLING AND ART: *FACELESS DOLLS*, A YOUNG-ADULT ILLUSTRATED NOVELLA

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Abstract

The study "Blackfoot Healing Curriculum Through Storytelling and Art: *Faceless Dolls*, a Young-Adult Illustrated Novella" is an arts-based dissertation of creative exploration in which I sought healing through storytelling and visual art pedagogy. K-12 programs of study and post-secondary education that incorporate the arts have effectively engaged and connected with teachers and students, particularly with youth. In this thesis, I explored the research question: "How can an illustrated novella that expresses Blackfoot storytelling pedagogy promote learning and healing from trauma?" I chose a qualitive arts-based approach and methodology that aimed to create meaning from written and visual text and to expand my own and my audience's understanding of my research question. This framework recognizes that art can convey truths about knowledge of the self and others. I included 25 of my own artworks to convey such truths together with the written narrative. Under the umbrella of arts-based research, I engaged in fiction-based research, namely "social fiction" based on Patricia Leavy (2017), to write a realistic and authentic portrayal of a Blackfoot youth's experience in my home community of the Blood Tribe in southern Alberta. I based my creative and scholarly work on four Blackfoot values: aatsimoyihkaan (spirituality), kimapiitpitsinni (kindness), ikakimaat (do your best) and kakoysin (being aware/observant). I found that my own arts practice, based on these Blackfoot teachings enabled me to experience transformational change through imagination, creativity, and holistic learning and knowing. Colonization and the Residential School system have left a devasting legacy of woundedness and trauma. In doing the research for the novella, I have identified how both traditional and contemporary Indigenous art and storytelling practices can be modes of survival and recovery, heal woundedness, and garner spiritual wisdom and well-being by attending to Blackfoot values in a K-12 education context.

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Glossary of Blackfoot Language

The Blackfoot language in this thesis uses conventions of the English language. Because Blackfoot was not originally a written language, I decided to use the Blackfoot Dictionary (Frantz & Russell, 2017), as well as community resources for the spelling. With the exception of proper names, lower-case lettering is used throughout for Blackfoot words and phrases.

Aatsimoyihkaan .....prayer
Aakaipokaiksi .....Many Children clan
Aoksisowaato'p .....visiting a place as an act of relational renewal
Amaatoosiman .....to smudge
Ihkitsikommiksi .....The Big Dipper
Ihtomataihtao'p Kitsipowahsinnoon ..... our language keeps us moving forward
Ihtsipaitapiiyo'pa .....Source of Life, Creator
Ikkinainihki .....Gentle Singing Woman
Ispmokit .....help
Iyiikakimaat .....do your best
Iyinnakiikoaiksi .....policemen
Kaaahsinnooniksi .....our grandparents
Kaitama'tsin .....see you later
Ka-ko .....do it
Kakoysin .....to be aware/observant
Ki .....let's go
Kiistonoon .....you
kimmapiiyipitsit .....be kindness, compassionate
Kitaowahsinnoon .....the land that nourishes us
Kipitaakii Kookomikisomm .....Mother Moon
Kookoona .....endearing name for girl
Makoyoohsokoyi .....Wolf Trail/Milky Way
Misamiipatapiisinn .....to be blessed with a long life
Naaahsa .....Grandmother
Na'ah .....Mom
Napi .....Trickster
Napikaiksi .....white men
Natosi .....Sun
Niisto annakok Nato'yi'kina'soyi .....I Am Holy Light That Shines Bright
Niitaitsskaiksi .....Lone Fighter clan
Niitakit .....hurry up
Niitsitapi .....the real people, Blackfoot people
Niitsitapisinni .....to be Blackfoot
Oki .....hello
Okotok .....Big Rock
Si'kohksskitsis .....Black Wood Ashes
Siksikaitsitapi:.....Blackfoot People
Siksikaitsitapiipaitapiiyssin .....The Blackfoot Way of Life
Sootsiman .....painted parfleche
Sspisttsikitsikin .....cowboy boots

PART I: Introducing the Research

Figure 1: *Keep Going*, Hali Heavy Shield, Mixed Media, 2022.

Niisto annakok Nato'yi'kina'soyi: I Am Holy Light That Shines Bright

Stories make my heart/beat. They are, quite literally, in my blood. A continuous pulse of language that flows like blood platelets of who I am and where I come from. It began long before I was in my mother's womb, and she in her mother's womb, and further back still, when Blackfoot stories were only spoken and never written. Stories passed through generations, far enough back to the girl who went to live among the stars, whose mother was Kipitaakii Kookomikisomm, the Moon, and whose father was Natosi, the Sun. Stories are what sustain us throughout our growth into adolescence, adulthood, and in the latter part of life as an elder, if we are so blessed to reach such a place.

I am the daughter of Faye HeavyShield. My grandparents are the late Issitaki kii Akoohkitopii, Adelaide Fox-Heavy Shield and Eddie Heavy Shield. My great-grandparents were Cecelia and Steven Fox Sr. and Tsomisikinaa Kate (Three Persons) and Pete Heavy Shield. My grandfather Pete Heavy Shield's father was Many Spotted Horses, "Head Chief of the Middle Blackfoot," one of the original signatories of Treaty 7 in 1877. Treaty 7 was a peace treaty

signed among the Canadian and British governments and the Bloods, Peigans, Siksika, Stoney, and Tsuu T'ina, not a surrender of the land. My clans are Aakaipokaiksi kii Kiitaitsskaiksi: Many Children clan and Lone Fighter clan. I am a mom, auntie, daughter, teacher, artist, and a Blood Tribe member of southern Alberta. My English name is Hali Heavy Shield; however, I have another name, a Blackfoot name: Nato'yi'kina'soyi, Holy Light That Shines Bright.

Figure 2: *Bloodline*, Hali Heavy Shield, Mixed Media, 2019.

It was during a cool spring day in 2002 that I hosted a family gathering in my Lethbridge home. These gatherings were a regular tradition for my mom, siblings, aunties, kids, and cousins. As the day turned to evening, the living room transformed into one large sleepover. The visiting, laughter, teasing, and jokes made both in English and Blackfoot slowly quieted until there was only one person speaking—an auntie. We lay cuddled and bundled together, quiet and listening; this was a tradition that went back decades in my family, and thousands of years for my Blackfoot people, Siksikaitsitapi. One could imagine the living room walls morph into tipi liners,

and the camp not set up in a townhouse on Bluefox Boulevard, but in a lodge on the banks of the Oldman River. That evening, my mom's eldest sister Ikkináínihki, Gentle Singing Woman, Lena Russell, gave me my Blackfoot name: Nato'yi'kina'soyi, Holy Light That Shines Bright. Since that time, I've worked on *becoming* Nato'yi'kina'soyi, through learning the ways of the Blackfoot.

I am part of the first generation in my family not to attend an Indian Residential School. My mom, her siblings, and her parents attended the Catholic St. Mary's Indian Residential School: one of two Residential Schools in operation on the Blood Reserve of southern Alberta, the other being St. Paul's Anglican Residential School.

The Residential School system in Canada refers to the government-funded, church-run schools that Indigenous children were forced to attend from the late nineteenth century to 1996. Many children were forcibly removed from their homes and parents were threatened with a jail term if they did not comply. The schools aimed to strip Indigenous people of their traditions, beliefs, and languages. Many survivors have shared their experiences, highlighting the physical, emotional, and sexual abuse at the schools. The horrifying legacy of the Residential School system continues to negatively affect Indigenous people today (Fontaine & Craft, 2015).

As a young adult, I wanted to learn more about Blackfoot history, language, and culture. It was at that time that I also became educated about Indian Residential School systems. By extension, the more I learned, the more I began to understand how I had been affected by intergenerational trauma and colonization. In my efforts to attain kakoysin, a Blackfoot value of gaining wisdom through awareness, I became intensely mindful of how disconnected I was from my own people and culture. I grew up in Calgary, Alberta, where the schools' primary language courses were in the English language, with some focus on French language learning. Indigenous

languages, such as Blackfoot, weren't offered as part of the school curriculum. For youth living on reserve, they were more likely to be taught an Indigenous language, such as at the Blackfoot immersion school at Aahsaopi Elementary School on the Blood reserve as well as in the home. Statistics Canada (2010) found that 51% of First Nations people living on reserve were more likely to be able to speak a First Nation language, whereas only 12% of those living in urban areas had knowledge of a First Nation language. I was among the latter. Blackfoot was spoken at home during family gatherings and visits. However, it wasn't until I began my first year of teaching on the Blood reserve that elders insisted I learn to speak Blackfoot. It was apparent that language pedagogy was the culture of the place and it was a common understanding that the survival of Blackfoot language was correlated with the survival of knowledge and culture. Though I was not raised on the Blood reserve, my family still referred to the reserve as "back home," and it was the place where we returned every summer for family gatherings, ceremony, and powwows.

Teaching on the Blood reserve, I learned that Niitsitapi language and narratives enhance curricular and pedagogical approaches necessary to decolonize current educational practices. The craft of creative writing has the potential to provide both Indigenous and non-Indigenous readership access and insight into the complexity of relationships of Blackfoot-specific experiences, communities, protocol, significant sites, and traditional principles. Language deepens our knowledge, but as elders have often told me, listening and patience are required to inherit Blackfoot knowledge. Similarly, Archibald (2008) recounts the importance of listening as a process of taking in what is heard, not only cognitively but also allowing for an emotional response (p. 10).

As a beginning teacher teaching on reserve, I was being taught Blackfoot language and art by various elders, colleagues, and students that I worked with. I began my teaching career in my home community, the Blood Reserve, first teaching literacy and art at Red Crow Community College and later with the Kainai Board of Education. My students at Red Crow Community College were adult students, many of whom spoke fluent Blackfoot and had a rich knowledge of Blackfoot history, genealogy, and stories. I came from the university with skills to teach English literacy; however, I learned from my students that my ideas about literacy needed to change. This is when I began to view literacy in a more holistic, inclusive manner: a view that encompassed forms of literacy such as cultural, historic, and linguistic teachings as well as art and artifacts. By Western standards, my students were labelled low-literacy. However by Blackfoot standards, they were quite literate, and it was I who was low-literacy in Blackfoot language and culture.

At that time, I was required to follow the Alberta Education curriculum as mandated by the provincial and federal governments. This meant that English language learning continued to be a core requirement for both adult education and K-12 students learning and living on reserve. Despite the substantial efforts made to sustain the language, Blackfoot language learning continues to be a challenge for both on and off-reserve school systems. Some schools off-reserve still do not provide Blackfoot language classes to Blackfoot students.

It has been found that students who study Canadian literature gain an understanding of perspectives and experiences of others (Alberta Education, 2003, 2006). Yet, it was not until recently that Indigenous-authored perspectives were included in K-12 classrooms. Prior to that, much of the print material in the Alberta curriculum included misrepresented or discriminatory

narratives. Students who engage with Blackfoot literary and visual arts learn about perspectives unique to Niitsitapi knowledge systems that are both holistic and healing.

How important is it, then, to have authentic Indigenous voices represented in Alberta's K-12 curriculum? Those who study Indigenous literatures develop a respect and understanding for Indigenous history, culture, and ways of being and therefore recognize their value. Generally, when both students and student teachers study literature, they learn how writers develop meaning through various literary devices, such as character and plot development, metaphor, imagery, and symbolism, but these lessons are also delivered through humour, pathos, and various levels of meaning (Alberta Education, 2003, 2006). Opportunities to learn from Blackfoot stories and art equip young learners with an understanding of authentic Indigenous experiences that express cultural pride and identity.

Blackfoot language, stories, and teachings have wider implications for deeper learning within a school curriculum and teacher development. These Blackfoot teachings led me to the purpose of this study, which was guided by the following research question: How can an illustrated novella that expresses Blackfoot storytelling pedagogy promote learning and healing from trauma?

As a beginning teacher, I was challenged with the task of not only teaching literacy but also developing the curriculum and implementing a literacy program that supported adults in both English and Blackfoot language learning. As I researched print materials for the English curriculum, much of what I found were resources aimed at English as a Second Language learners. Even while I taught adolescents in my later teaching years, it continued to be a challenge to find print resources that included Indigenous or Blackfoot content that were age appropriate. At that time, they simply did not exist. The Blackfoot Language curriculum intended

for junior and senior high had been written and developed by my aunt, Dr. Lena Russell. However those resources need a fluent Blackfoot speaker to teach the curriculum (Russell, 2003). It was her life's work and garnered her an honorary doctorate from the University of Lethbridge in 2006. I believe this is where my inspiration to write and illustrate books first began. I wanted my students and children to have books that reflected Blackfoot language and culture. In doing so, I have spent much of my professional and scholarly life as a literacy activist, in addition to preparing myself for writing and illustrating the novella *Faceless Dolls*, around which this thesis revolves.

Storytelling has a long history in Indigenous cultures including Blackfoot culture. Just as beadwork has been adapted into Blackfoot culture in creative and practical ways, such is the approach to Indigenous storytelling and the combination of fiction writing and visual art. For example, from the Glenbow Museum Archives (2021), *Iiksisawaato'p Kainaiwa O'tookátákssin: Maana'pii ki niita'piitsitapii saatstakssin: We Visit With Kainaiwa Beadwork: A New Way and the Real Way of Design,* is an exhibit I contributed to that features photographs of traditional Kainai beadwork as well as stories of contemporary Kainai bead workers. The museum also invited the community to share their own stories of personal or family beadwork to honour and celebrate Niitsitapi language and culture.

In my early years of teaching, I did not quite consider that the people I met, the books I read, and the life experiences I had, were all storytelling material. Only now, over the course of many years of listening, reading, writing, and making art, do I realize that these were the inspirations that would converge to create *Faceless Dolls.* I believe *Faceless Dolls*, a Blackfoot illustrated young-adult novella, in this way can contribute to decolonizing current Canadian

curricula through Blackfoot curriculum development and creative arts practice. I came into this research with partial Blackfoot cultural and linguistic traditions as a writer and artist.

In writing this story, I have also been mindful about elements of the Blackfoot spiritual belief system and included them in the story, such as smudging as a spiritual practice. It was necessary to the context of the story, and I wrote about these elements in a way that is respectful of the traditions. For example, there is a scene in the novella where the main character, Quill, smudges with an elder. Smudge is a spiritual and sacred act but also a tradition that is considered an ordinary cultural practice for many Blackfoot people. Part of my intention for the inclusion of smudging and prayer within the novella is to normalize Indigenous spiritual practices. Blackfoot-specific values and experiences through character and plot development highlight Blackfoot pedagogy that may be beneficial to both Indigenous and non-Indigenous learners. I have been taught that smudging is a ceremony of cleansing and protection and speaking to Creator. Amaatoosiman, which means to smudge, and Aatsimoyihkaan, which translates to prayer, are the two main values that come from smudge ceremony.

Harnessing the medicinal power that stories provide is the basis of my research. What I have discovered is that through engaging in the artistic expression of story making comes healing energy and wellness. It is not only the story itself, the illustrated novella, that is healing; healing also occurs through the *process* of creating the original literary and visual art in the book. I am reminded of Neal McLeod's wise words: "[W]e only have to interact with our narrative traditions, try to understand our inheritances, and express our experience with a living universe as resilient, capable, and dynamic Indigenous peoples and we can encapsulate some of its power" (McLeod, 2014, p. 212). I am taking up the gift of my name on this path.

In 2015, while I was working with the Alberta Teachers' Association as an Indigenous education consultant, one of the workshops included teaching teachers about appropriate resources, and this included books that were available in the school libraries and classrooms. Removing books that are "outdated" or culturally insensitive and replacing them with Indigenous-produced literatures is one small way teachers and school librarians can take action.

As Niitsitapi, our stories are critical to the process of decolonizing curriculum, maintaining tribal connections, and ensuring that Blackfoot knowledge and language continue among future generations. Indigenous teachers, and the organizations they work for, continue to focus on the importance of language revitalization. The belief ihtomataihtsao'p kitsipowahsinnoon (our language keeps us moving forward) shows how Blackfoot language learning is connected to the teachings and relationships necessary for the survival of a nation. For this reason, I anchored the Blackfoot language in my creative and academic work. There is a collective responsibility to ensure youth have access to stories that use a language that helps them to keep moving forward in a good way.

Social Fiction as Arts-Based Research in a Blackfoot Context

Figure 3: *St. Regis Hotel*, Hali Heavy Shield, Mixed Media, 2022.

For my dissertation, I chose to frame my novella within a social-fiction framework. Social fiction is an arts-based research methodology that educator, novelist, and sociologist Leavy (2017) defines as "an emergent practice with unique capabilities for creating engaging, evocative, and accessible research" (p. 199). Leavy further notes that writing and sharing fiction narratives as a research praxis "allows for details, nuance, specificity, contexts, and texture" while also "cultivating empathy and self-reflection through relatable characters and disrupting dominant narratives or stereotypes" (p. 199).

Leavy (2017) identifies the main methods used in fiction-based research as data gathering, literature reviews, and fiction writing as a form of inquiry (p. 199). Using elements of storytelling such as themes, plot, and characters allows the researcher to explore the complexity of lived experience, delving into real-life experiences while using specific locations that are significant to a particular community context, such as Niitsitapi. Examples in *Faceless Dolls* include a field trip to Okotoks and the location of the story which takes place at the White Buffalo Healing Lodge, a fictional youth treatment centre on an Indian reserve in southern Alberta.

Indigenous fiction narratives often emphasize themes of self-determination, survivance, and sovereignty (Dupuis et al., 2016; Momaday, 1968; Rice, 2018; Robertson & Flett, 2016). Niitsitapi share a collective history, including the places where stories originate. Historical traumas and social injustices experienced today continue to inflict profound and lasting wounds on the land and its people. Stories bring people together, evoke emotion, and offer compelling ways of getting at the truth; they can inspire change and advance curriculum to reflect the diversity of experiences and core values of Niitsitapi (Gay, 2000; King, 2003).

Indeed, creative practices such as fiction have the capacity to enrich learning, specifically in ways that bring one's attention to spiritual realms accessible through imagination and understanding. By writing social fiction in this Blackfoot context, I aim to expand the boundaries of what I know to be true about indigeneity, including a response and a resistance to colonial narratives of racial hierarchy (Justice, 2018, pp. 4-5).

Engaging in fiction-based research also allows for the freedom and flexibility of using language that is not always found in conventional academic writing and discourse. Social fiction can communicate specific approaches to research that involve written text, oral narratives, and include first-language and vernacular stories, with the purpose of developing empathy and engagement with social-justice issues (Leavy, 2017). This is timely as more Indigenous elders pass on, taking with them the knowledge important to the wellness of future generations.

Writing fiction is one way for me of responding to Chambers' (1999) call to Canadian curriculum scholars to "find a language of our own," one that Canadian curriculum theorists can "write from this place, of this place, and for this place" (p. 145). In her essay "A Topography for Canadian Curriculum Theory," Chambers claims that "writing the world" further raises awareness about increasing empathy for others. As a writer of social fiction, I am deeply compelled to "understand that the topos from which [I] write is the physical, imaginary, and sociopolitical landscape [I] share with the communities and children on behalf of whom [I] work and write" (Chambers, 1999, p. 146).

While doing this research, difficult emotions certainly did arise. In fiction, emotions that involve loss, guilt, and sadness are not completely understood and therefore often require the most exploration (Oatley, 2017). These emotions can be explored safely through artmaking and can often lead to transformation by both the artist and viewer. Writing this novella helped me to

deal with some of the difficulties that I encountered as a teacher. It is through the making of this project that I was able to identify some of the difficulties that Indigenous young people deal with. Growing up with intergenerational trauma, I endeavoured to provide experiences of healing and growth by having the main character, Quill, turn inward to face her own difficulties with trauma. Quill confronts her trauma in an effort to heal her woundedness. We must do this for ourselves to keep moving in a good way, on a good path—one that is strong, whole, and in balance. Learning this as a young person provides the wisdom to learn from your mistakes, so you are in a better position to help others. The development of empathy through fiction is also explored in Oatley's (2017) research which tells us that people who read fiction can explore imagined worlds of others, while being safe in their own reality. This further increases an understanding of others.

Hasebe-Ludt (2003) refers to the embodiment of language when she writes, "embodied language here becomes part of the eternal return, of the retelling of tales, the recurrence of memory—yet with a difference, constituting new forms, new meanings, and new knowledge of the world" (p. 155). In creating *Faceless Dolls*, I engaged in a process of both new and old knowledge, new and old ways of seeing, new and old lived experiences. By finding a way to relate to fictional characters and empathize with their experiences in the context of Siksikaitsitapi, and the specific places in where they live and travel, readers have an opportunity to create affinities to these characters and sites and make meaning about their own lives as well as the larger world in relation to the story.

The novella *Faceless Dolls* provides readers a story that tells of a Blackfoot youth's experience. It is the story of 17-year-old Quill at the White Buffalo Healing Lodge. Quill is court-ordered to spend one year at a southern Alberta Youth Residential Blackfoot Healing

Lodge for killing her cousin and best friend Liv in a car accident where Quill was drunk driving. While at the White Buffalo Healing Lodge, Quill's counsellor and elder Frank requires her to keep a journal as part of the programming. This journal writing is meant to help in the healing process. Quill documents her life through memories and experiences while at the lodge.

Literature specific to Blackfoot lived experiences helps students to not only see themselves reflected in the literature but also provides the opportunity to learn about other cultures, histories, and vernacular that is not their own. Further, having students respond to texts to inform their own ideas and comprehension about their lived experience will allow them to feel a personal connection to literature, with the hope that they will communicate their own stories, as they learn about Blackfoot history and culture. This would result in a deeper social consciousness. Not seeing Blackfoot culture reflected in Alberta's curriculum had a significant role in forming my ideas, beliefs, and notions about myself and in part, led me to want to write a novella that dealt with both the trauma and healing from a Blackfoot youth's perspective. I grew up not knowing Blackfoot language other than hearing it at times in the home. The books I accessed at school and in the public library, textbooks and novels were mainly Eurocentric, and therefore my perspective was heavily influenced by the exclusion of Blackfoot ways of knowing, doing, and being. The little Indigenous knowledge I did gain from my K-12 learning was primarily focused on Eastern Indigenous groups that have significantly different geographies, language, and cultural practices than my own.

Using arts-based methodology to re-imagine Indigenous stories gave me a framework to explore social, political, and cultural truths specific to a time and place (Archibald, 2008; Leavy, 2012). Fiction has the capacity to challenge perceptions or beliefs about oneself and stimulate non-Indigenous readers to "rethink their attitudes toward Aboriginal people, other races, and

their own families" (Eigenbrod et al., 2010, p. 142). *Faceless Dolls* utilizes fiction and visual-art culture to allow the reader insight into the mind, heart, and emotions of Quill.

After reviewing the current literature, I have discovered there exists no novella quite like *Faceless Dolls*. This became a strong motivation for writing such a story. Curriculum that accurately reflects lived-experiences includes what the late teacher and curriculum scholar Aoki (1993/2005) pens as a "lived-curriculum." He explains that the curriculum-as-lived is juxtaposed with the "curriculum-as-planned" being "more or less lived out" in the day-to-day ongoings of classroom events, interactions, and realities (p. 257). Aoki (2003) advocates for teachers to dwell in the space of curriculum-as-lived and urged teacher-researchers to ask of themselves: "Where is living pedagogy located?" (p. 1). Essentially, the novella *Faceless Dolls* portrays these realities of a Blackfoot youth, including the experiences and consequences of a "curriculum-as-planned" mandated by provincial and federal institutions. It is also the location of living pedagogy. For example, the relationship between Frank and Quill are teachings between elder and student and this is where the living pedagogy takes place.

Creating a setting that is informed by the landscape of Blackfoot significant sites was important to the storyline. I wanted the audience of Blackfoot youth to have the capacity to see themselves, their place, and home throughout the story. I wanted students to come to know the main character Quill and to develop a sense of empathy for her and her situation. In Blackfoot culture, place is highly connected with identity, belonging, and the strength of relationships to family and home. The setting of the novella *Faceless Dolls* takes place in the mid 1990s at the "White Buffalo Healing Lodge" on a fictional Indian reserve in southern Alberta. Significant land-based sites used in the novella include actual places that have cultural meaning to Blackfoot people such as Okotok (Big Rock). The story follows the main character, Quill, throughout her

adolescent years as she tries to find her way through grief and loss, societal barriers, and the challenges of dealing with adult responsibilities while still being a teenager. At times staying with her Auntie, who has difficulties of her own, Quill is transient, between "homes," staying with her cousin Shania and her two kids, her best friend Liv, and a boyfriend. After a tragic accident involving the death of Quill's best friend Liv, Quill is sent to a youth treatment centre. Quill is reconnected with the people in her community and the Blackfoot teachings that eventually help her begin to heal from the traumas she has encountered. Themes in the novella *Faceless Dolls* include teenage homelessness, land-based education, Residential Schools, Blackfoot spirituality and values, intergenerational trauma and relationships. At the heart of my research was an effort to develop a language of my own, creating a braiding of my artistic expression of fiction, the Blackfoot teachings I have been learning, and my visual representations through the eyes of the main character who is growing up in a world that is at times beautiful, terrifying, hilarious, and medicinal.

Social-fiction research in a Blackfoot context acknowledges "that art has been able to convey truth(s) or bring about awareness (both knowledge of the self and knowledge of others) and includes multiple ways of knowing, such as sensory, kinaesthetic, and imaginary" (Gerber et al., as cited in Leavy 2017, p. 195). Writing social fiction with illustrations is a form of research that allows for "creative meshing of scholarly and artistic endeavours" (Knowles & Cole, 2008, p. 65). What I have discovered thus far in my scholarly and artistic work is a process that allows me to interrogate social injustices by experimenting with Blackfoot language through crafting fictional narratives. When students see themselves or parts of the culture through story it helps to ensure they have a sense of belonging in the classroom, as well as gaining social-emotional intelligence. As the writer, I was able to take many of my students' stories shared in the

classroom, journal about them, and create a narrative that resulted in the novella. I used Blackfoot language to juxtapose with English, as a hybrid of both languages. Writing and learning Blackfoot vocabulary throughout the story enhanced my own language learning.

By way of fiction, a pathway can be forged towards an understanding and re-imagining of contemporary Indigenous realities through the wisdom and emotional healing of characters. For example, Indigenous fiction such as Lindberg's (2016) *Birdie*, Armstrong's (1988) *Slash*, and Campbell's (1973) *Half Breed* are narratives with powerful Indigenous female voices which discuss themes that resonate with Indigenous and Canadian readers alike. What these stories have in common are the themes of identity, hope, struggle, and perseverance; these are elements needed for a curriculum that can provide insight into Niitsitapi experiences and values, and also a window into Niitsitapi students' experiences, evoking a language of self-expression with the autonomy to tell their own stories. They evoke a language of self-expression.

Mixing artistic techniques into Indigenous fictional narratives is also represented through juxtaposing written text and visual art. (Akiwenzie-Damm et al., 2019; Hardy, 2022) Indigenous fiction such as Tagaq's (2018) *Split Tooth* and Alexie's (2007) *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* are rendered effective in portraying lives in a fictional and artistic way, where text and visual art are juxtaposed. Becoming a better writer of social fiction as research requires developing self-expression, strength of voice, and imagination. This process teaches both the reader and the writer about being more compassionate, to embrace a deep knowing that we are not alone in life's sufferings nor its celebrations. As I have discovered, creative writing can be a way for me to express the truth about what I have experienced with my students in a cultural and community context, and to affirm their stories matter.

At the heart of my inquiry is exploring how social fiction and visual art in a Blackfoot context have the potential to mix language, land-based learning, history, and generational experiences for educational value that can help to address individual and community trauma and promote strength to not only work through it all but to also make things better. Social fiction has the potential to explore both complex past and present issues and restorative practices, including themes of cultural revitalization, forms of resistance, and Niitsitapi identity. Fictional narratives such as *Faceless Dolls* have the capacity to evoke emotions in readers, allow them to imagine a hopeful future, and engage with characters and settings within Blackfoot-specific contexts for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous readers.

Writing fictional narratives has made my own pain bearable in times of duress when I have gone through breaking-up, breaking-down, breaking-through, or breaking-open. My intention is that my readers and also other writers, teachers, and students will come to understand that a creative or literary artistic life can carry them through times of vulnerability and unbearable suffering. When we are in search of something healing, and there is no answer, the craft of writing or seeking others' narrative wisdom can be life-giving and transformational. Learning to listen to ancestral voices through prayer and quiet contemplation has helped me to write in creative and healing ways. De Freitas (2003) further explains this process: "As a fiction writer, I am always already writing; there is no collecting data before my act of interpretation. My imagination is immediately engaged in the co-construction of our shared reality" (p. 1).

According to Leavy (2018) fiction allows the writer to engage in storytelling and creativity within a specific framework of authenticity of voice, while maintaining the integrity of the writer's story. More specifically, "The emphasis on narrative or storytelling has also placed

the researcher in the role of storyteller. Narrative researchers aim to avoid the objectification of research participants and preserve the complexity of human experience" (Leavy, 2018, p. 192).

The theory and practice of social-fiction research is a holistic embodiment of student/artist/researcher/teacher, whereby as the researcher, I use the practice of making art and text to render "concepts of contiguity, living inquiry, openings, metaphor/metonymy, reverberations" to gain meaning of a particular phenomenon (Sinner et al., 2004, p. 1224). In the making of *Faceless Dolls*, the research relied equally on my teacher journals as well as my creative processes which often led to surprising and unexpected results that revealed to me the healing roots that storytelling and the arts have to offer. Teacher journaling was always encouraged in my undergrad studies to become a more reflective and effective teacher. Writing in my journal enhanced reflective practice and encouraged me to become a more critical thinker. I would write about lessons, challenges, successes, and the classroom's culture. Journal writing encouraged professional development, but it also made me become more aware of my students' perspectives about school and their learning. Having students write in their journals daily became a way to improve their writing, reflect on their lives, and it encouraged dialogue between teacher and student, as some students were very shy. My journals became the research for this study as I began to fictionalize and create a story from the writings. It was in this creative space, engaging with imagination and experimenting with storyline, characters, and plot, that I achieved a better understanding of my research question (Knowles & Cole, 2008). Writing stories and making art has taught me about my own identity—my life as a student and teacher of Blackfoot ancestry.

It can be difficult to attain a deep level of understanding of larger societal issues such as racism, social injustice, historical trauma, and poverty when they are discussed in abstract and statistical ways. Coming to know Quill, the protagonist in this story, through her journals, one

can begin to understand her lived experience more intimately. Often, a person's journal writing is in the first-person voice and can be written as a flow of consciousness. I wanted this to be the effect of the novella, to enter into Quill's thoughts so I could portray her more realistically as well as truthfully. When we understand a person's story, we are more likely to empathize, to practice kimmapiitpitsinni—kindness and compassion. In part, my intention for creating this story was so readers would develop empathy in a particular cultural context, in this case, a Siksikaitsitapi youth's lived experience.

The title of the illustrated novella, *Faceless Dolls*, is both a cultural and historical reference to a Blackfoot traditional belief. In the camp, women and older girls would often make dolls for the younger children to play with. Although the dolls had hair and accessories such as clothing, for some families, it was customary not to create a face on the doll. The belief was that if a face was created on the doll, it would trap or capture its spirit. I chose this title because of the many metaphorical references it has to the story's main character, Quill. On the one hand, dolls are playful toys, innocent and youthful. One the other hand, the title *Faceless Dolls* emerged around the same time that the Faceless Dolls Project came into existence. The Faceless Dolls Project (Native Women's Association of Canada, 2012) is a campaign that raises awareness about Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. *Faceless Dolls* is a story of Quill's life, but it also has commonalities to which many young Indigenous women and girls may relate. This is the power of literature; if done well, it can touch real life.

Decolonizing the Curriculum Through Creative Writing and Visual-Art Pedagogy

Figure 4: *215*, Hali Heavy Shield, Digital Media, 2021.

In May 2021, the remains of 215 children were found at the Residential School site of Tk'emlups te Secwépemc First Nation in Kamloops, British Columbia. Shortly thereafter, 215 orange shirts with a child's handprint were displayed across the steps of the Parliament Building in Victoria, BC, symbolizing the lost children. There have since been other unmarked graves discovered at residential schools across Canada numbering into the thousands. Figure 4 is an artwork I created after visiting the site.

One of my personal interests is second-hand books, particularly vintage and unique books. This appetite started before internet organizations began digitizing books, and while the latter are excellent resources and ensure the virtual reprint of the book, nothing is quite like the feel, smell, and visuals of a good second-hand find. As I collected such books, I noticed some commonalities among the older children's literature I was seeing. Books published and

distributed during early settler-colonial times revealed ideologies and political policies of the time. Both Indigenous and non-Indigenous children that attended the public-school systems in Canada were indoctrinated by false and harmful teachings about Indigenous peoples (Armstrong, 1988; Beard, 2018; Canada Royal Commission, 2016).

Decolonizing the curriculum entails the undoing of colonial systems in education. According to Tuhiwai Smith (2013), decolonization "is recognized as a long-term process involving the bureaucratic, cultural, linguistic, and psychological divesting of colonial power" (p. 101). Canada's history and present-day colonial and assimilative practices have caused devastating effects, forever changing the social, political, geographical, and cultural well-being of Blackfoot and other Indigenous peoples (Bastien, 2004; Daschuk, 2013; Kirmayer et al., 2007; McLeod, 2001; Statistics Canada, 2015; Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC), 2015).

Also referred to as "cultural genocide" (TRC, 2015, p. 4), processes of aggressive assimilation were enforced by the Canadian government that banned First Nations birth languages, spiritual and tribal practices, land use, and perhaps most devastating was the removal of children from their families and communities (TRC, 2015).

As a result of the TRC's 94 Calls to Action, schools are responsible for the indigenization of school curriculum to include specific teachings about the history, language, and culture of First Nation, Métis, and Inuit people. In the Blackfoot context, educational institutions who are committed to providing Indigenous curriculum in collaboration with Indigenous communities are challenged with "the development and implementation of disciplines, theories, skills, and practices" authentic to Blackfoot epistemology, the branch of knowledge specific to Niitsitapi perspectives (Bastien, 2004, p. 181). It is my contention, as shown in this thesis, that storytelling

and visual art are powerful ways to decolonize the curriculum by engaging in Blackfoot pedagogy that actualizes creativity and spiritual growth.

Episkenew (2012) shares Allison Hargreaves' thoughts on the impact of Residential Schools in Canada, stating they are the "primary site of colonial injury" (p. 117). Healing the "site of injury" has meant sharing the truth through stories. For some Indian Residential School survivors, healing from the physical, emotional, and sexual abuses they experienced has come about by being empowered to tell their stories (Merasty, 2015; Sellars & Harrison, 2013; Simpson, 2017; TRC, 2015; Wagamese, 2012).

Throughout my career as an educator, I have suffered alongside my students through overdoses, car accidents, still-births, murder, and suicides; I lived through these experiences with my students and their families. More personally, the woundedness of losing family to violence and murder, car accidents, addiction, and sickness is devastating and overpowering. I continue to be reminded of the importance of remembering Niitsitapi teachings, especially those stories of strength, survival, and healing. I recall a student had been pregnant. Though she was only a teenager and was unprepared about becoming a mother, staff and students at the school came together to help her prepare for the arrival of the little one. We were a small school so the staff and students were more like family, which made it more devastating when she'd delivered the baby stillborn. The staff at the school helped the student prepare for the funeral that we also all attended. I'd never seen a casket so small before. Being a mom myself, it all felt very unreal. There was no kind of curriculum or professional development that prepares a teacher for this kind of grief. Yet, on both a communal and personal level I continued to be reminded of the Blackfoot values that were taught by community elders that helped us go through a situation such as it was.

In Blackfoot, the concept iyiikakimaat translates to “do your best” or “never give up,” and kimmapiipitsinni translates to “compassion.” Over the years, I have learned how to apply these values to my own life and teaching. It has now been about six years since the first of four students of mine committed suicide. It changes you as an educator when you have a student who passes away. It doesn’t make any sense, until you go through the stages of grief, one of which is acceptance. I have learned many things about that life event, much of which has stayed with me throughout these years. Like many community funerals at the time, my student’s wake service was held at our school’s gymnasium. This was before the new community hall was built in the area where they now take place. The staff and students once again supported the family by attending the service and providing other students with the supports we needed to get through such a devastating time. Losing my student brought me even closer to his family. I have remained close friends with his mom; in fact, her other children call me Auntie and they refer to my mom as Grandma. We visit and try to see one another when we can. Although I lost a student—a child—I have gained a loving, extended family.

I am familiar with the extent of suffering my community has endured, as well as the efforts made in the educational system to address such challenges. Healing from my own woundedness of intergenerational trauma by learning and applying Blackfoot teachings has gifted me with strength, purpose, and perspective to keep moving forward. Writing and making art have provided a pathway of holistic and balanced living. Niitsitapi continue to share, create, and learn through the creative practices acquired through stories and art (Bastien, 2004; CBC Radio, 2010; Russell et al., 2014; Williams, 2012).

Figure 5: *Untitled*, Hali Heavy Shield, Mixed Media, 2022.

Indigenous art is often rooted in the land and culture from which it comes. Tuhiwai Smith (2013) notes,

> Each individual story is powerful. But the point about the stories is not that they simply tell a story or tell a story simply. These new stories contribute to a collective story in which every indigenous person has a place. (p. 145)

Just as words carry with them the intention in which they were offered, a story may hold healing and restorative power with the spirit in which it was created. This is my intention in the making of *Faceless Dolls*.

Writing fiction and making visual art has enabled me to translate some of the personal and professional experiences I have had in my lifetime and in my teaching. Indigenous fiction writers have used their personal experiences and cultural identity as narrative research to translate truths concerning Canada's history and legacy of the Indian Residential Schools experience, including abuse, oppression, and colonization (Bastien, 2004; Justice, 2018; Million, 2008; TRC, 2015). In many ways, these stories can be interpreted as acts of resistance, counter-narratives to Western paradigms that often exclude Indigenous voices and ideas. The colonial state has an investment in preventing healthy relationships between and among Indigenous

people. This requires a long process of undoing. My novella reflects an arrangement of intergenerational effects of residential school but also examples of the process of undoing the damages of relationships. As Simpson (2013) reminds us, "for every one of your questions there is a story hidden in the skin of the forest. use them as flint, fodder, love songs, medicine" (p. 21). I consider my own fiction narrative not so much as an act of resistance but an act of *becoming Blackfoot*. Learning and knowing how to tell stories is how to become *Niitsitapisinni*. It is our way of traditional and contemporary education. This is why Napi stories are central to the pedagogy of living a good life.

There is a story that a Blackfoot elder once told me and it has stayed with me throughout the years. Like many stories told by my elders, they seem to come at time and space when it is most needed. It was during a time in my early teaching career when I was easily frustrated and upset with my students for things like tardiness, behaviour, and poor grades. I was frustrated because I knew they had it in them to be successful. One day, an elder was visiting, and I shared with him my frustrations. He told me this story:

One day, Napi was very hungry. Looking for something to eat, he came upon a riverbank and noticed a bullberry bush, there at the bottom of the river. Right away, he dove into the water and tried to swim to the bottom. But before long, he returned to the surface without any berries. After several attempts, Napi became frustrated and was now more determined than ever. Just then, an idea came to him. If he tied two large boulders to his waist, surely he would get to the bottom, where at last he could reach the berries. And so, with two large boulders tied to his waist, Napi jumped into the river and sank straight to the bottom. Searching for the bullberry bush, Napi found nothing but pebbles and weeds. Frantically, he worked to free himself and swam to the top, choking and gasping for air. Tired and out of breath, Napi crawled onto the

riverbank and lay on his back to rest. When Napi opened his eyes, there was the bullberry bush hanging over him.

My elder stopped there, but in the full story, Napi goes on to strike the bullberry bush out of frustration, then the berries drop from the bush. And this is how berries were traditionally gathered from the bushes. There are many metaphors in the story, and it took me a long while to make connections with it, but over the years, what I have come to understand is that things are not always what they seem. Just as Napi saw the berries in the water and was convinced they were at the bottom of the river, perhaps my own perception of my students was skewed, if not wrong altogether. In part, I was trained in post-secondary teacher education that grades were what really mattered, and not necessarily in the context of the students' cultural, linguistic, or social homelife. It was then that I started to work on my frustration as a young teacher. This led me to teaching with more empathy, more compassion, practicing *kimmapiipitsin*. I started to visit with my students, understanding where they were coming from, who their families were, and what my responsibility was as their teacher. My frustrations shifted; I began to realize why things were the way they were and better understand my role and responsibilities as a community member and educator. Teaching my students that the way out of poverty was through their education was one of my own greatest teachings and learnings. It remains that way today.

Connections to my Blackfoot family and community continue to be sources of growth, healing, and strength, in both my educational and artistic journey. In many ways, applying Indigenous cultural and linguistic teachings, such as the Blackfoot values in this context, is foundational to decolonizing Western pedagogy, and to preventing the marginalization of Indigenous learners (Donald, 2009; Justice, 2018; Smith, 2013).

Stories provide a metaphorical map that tells of events and beings, both human and spirit ones, that are needed to cultivate empathy, play, courage, and love. Stories also offer opportunities to understand inheritances and ways in which we are affected by differing cultures. Indigenous peoples continue to use stories to ensure valuable knowledge is passed down through generations, keeping family and tribal relations strong and intact (Archibald, 2008). Blackfoot stories hold powerful teachings that provide guidance needed to sustain cultural, linguistic, and societal systems (Bastien, 2004, p. 77). For Blackfoot people or Niitsitapi, stories are acts of learning and renewal, and support a continuance of life and survival on the northern plains, as they were for several generations prior to European-settler contact (Dempsey, 2015; Raczka, 2017). Smith (2013) says, "Indigenous people want to tell our own stories, writing our own versions, in our ways, for our own purposes" (pp. 29-30). This novella is a way for me to express my own storytelling and story-writing capabilities. As I acknowledged earlier, storytelling is in my blood, my DNA, and I often feel inspired and responsible to write stories and make art that are both real and imagined.

It is important to teach Blackfoot youth that their stories matter and have a place in school curriculum. "The number of enrolled Blackfoot members who have written a book can just about be counted on the fingers of one hand" (Kipp, as cited in Bullchild, 2005, p. v). The now-late Blackfoot elder Frank Weaselhead (as cited in Conaty, 2015) notes:

> Non-Native researchers and writers have already written about our cultural beliefs and practices, as well as our history. These writers often interpreted what they saw through their own experiences and belief systems and have not always presented a fair or a true representation of us. It is important that we record our own history for our young people and for the wider world. We need to tell our own story, in our own words. (p. 118)

The Blackfoot epistemological system of knowing, doing, and being has much to contribute to the broader Canadian curricular landscape in the areas of language, history, and the

arts. Niitsitapi ceremonial, linguistic, and genealogical teachings can help to heal woundedness by mending fragmented pieces of identity into a holistic understanding of my novella's characters' lived curriculum—teachings that consider the social-emotional and spiritual aspects of both teachers and students living together (Aoki, 1993/2005).

For Indigenous people, the quality of life is correlated with the quality of relationships—with family, self, and the environment—and when time and space is given to prioritize those relationships, a better quality of life is expected. *How* we are taught, through stories, is transformational because these stories teach us how to be in the world and how to relate with one another. Reciprocity, generosity, kindness, and humility embody the Blackfoot teachings of how to interact and relate with one another and with ourselves. Episkenew (2012) notes, "colonial policies are the practices of the colonial bureaucracy, again designed to wound spirits by damaging relationships" (p. 2). Moreover, Episkenew (2012) says that the cause of woundedness of Indigenous people is due to the colonial "invader-settler" (p. 2) presence and the systems which were put in place to sustain harm. These "invader-settler" ideologies became the foundation for Alberta's education curriculum, with a strong focus on economic growth and the development of the land's natural resources. Curriculum scholar Donald (2019) suggests that Indigenous stories may offer something more valuable to teach us about living well with each other and with the land. As the current Alberta curriculum outlines, a framework for student learning is essential for students to become engaged thinkers and ethical citizens with an entrepreneurial spirit. An entrepreneurial spirit connotates individualism in a capitalist society. Juxtaposing the Blackfoot story of the Beaver Bundle, Donald (2019) argues the need in curriculum to include "ethical relationality, sacred ecology, and the interconnectivity of life" (p. 115).

Smith (2013) claims, “the story of struggle is also about activist leadership and collective consent, and the tension between these two processes (leading and consenting)” (p. 200). Perhaps stories of struggle can empower Indigenous youth to use their creativity, voice, and imagination to dismantle or, at the very least, address the imbalance of power regarding what counts as “legitimate knowledge” (Smith, 2013, p. 200).

Taking action and speaking out to stop oppression and colonial injury is an ongoing struggle for Indigenous scholars (Smith, 2013), and yet “theorizing the politics, psychology and pedagogy of the struggle is the role of activist scholars and the organic intellectuals who work in that intersection between the community and the academy” (p. 200). The four Blackfoot values that I to return to in this thesis are healing agents in working through the politics and psychology of the struggle. Marginalized people that struggle to survive on a daily basis can become powerful agents for transformational change (Smith, 2013).

The creation of the Kainai Public Library is one example of how grassroots efforts to decolonize curriculum through Blackfoot storytelling and the arts can be achieved. In 2014, the Kainai Public Library opened, and it was the first public library on a First Nations’ reserve in Alberta. Our committee of educators and community members, including Kathleen Good Striker, Linda Weaselhead and Mary Weaselfat, among others, acknowledged an area of need that was lacking support. We worked together so we could build a library that would bridge the gap between home and school. Kainai community members and partnering allies also helped to provide traditional storytelling and Blackfoot language activities. Building a public library on the Blood reserve was a collective effort that brought about fundamental change through the strength of nurturing relationships, having a vision, and building on a community-based approach to literacy learning.

In her research on "storywork," Archibald (2008) teaches about the value of Indigenous stories and the importance of exercising the skill of listening to engage the imagination, as the senses work interchangeably to help visualize plot, connect with characters, and evoke emotion as we listen with our heart (p. 10). Moreover, Justice (2018) notes, "Indigenous literatures are a vital expression of that imaginative commitment, righting- and writing-relations across time and space" (p. 116).

In a Blackfoot context, traditional cultural knowledge is carried on through stories, gifted and received, from one generation to the next. Storytelling is the medicine we all need and crave because storytelling creates community and connection, and this is healing. Oral traditions hold rich historical knowledge of identity, kinship, and the importance of sacred ceremonies. Being Niitsitapi is, in part, knowing the significance of Blackfoot cultural protocols and the responsibility of caring for all my relations. The opportunity to learn stories embedded within place and connected to the land further enhances curriculum in ways of understanding the Siksikaitsitapi worldview (Bastien, 2004, p. 119). I can recall one such story that has taught me about humility. As the story goes: One day, Napi came upon a camp of women and met with a beautiful woman chief. She'd told him to gather the men from the other camp and the women would choose their husbands. The beautiful woman chief returned to her camp and changed from her beautiful buckskin outfit into more modest clothing to finish tanning and cleaning hides. When it was her turn, she'd approached Napi and wanted to take him for her husband. But Napi refused, saying she was a poor-looking woman. She returned to her camp, changed and cleaned herself, then returned to choose another husband. When Napi saw how beautiful she was he got happy, but the woman chief walked right past Napi and chose another for her husband. The

woman chief told the rest of her tribe not to take Napi as their husband as he was vain and didn't deserve a wife.

This story has taught me about the meaning of modesty and the importance of being non-judgmental. Living in the Lethbridge area where there is a prevalence of racially divided people, being non-judgmental is required to show compassion. I have also used this story to teach young people about appropriate dress and hair covering during ceremony and certain events.

Blackfoot stories include oral accounts of myths and legends that are centuries old. These stories are gifts from Ihtsipaitapiiyo'pa (the Source of Life) (Bastien, 2004, p. 77) and include everything from stories of Creation to the signing of the treaties (Carter et al., 1996, p. 11). In many ways, stories are about coming home, fostering connections to family and place, and nurturing relational ties among young and old. Indeed, "they link the past to the present, and allow the possibility of cultural transmission and of 'coming home'" (McLeod, 2001, p. 17). The notion of "coming home" is not uncommon for many Indigenous people.

Stories written by Indigenous authors about Indigenous experiences need to have their rightful place in Canadian curriculum. My research is what art seeks to express: "not feelings and emotions the artist has, but feelings which the artist knows...insight into the nature of sentience, [her] picture of vital experience, physical, and emotive and fantastic" (Langer, as cited in Knowles & Cole, 2008, p. 7). To this extent, *Faceless Dolls* is meant to provide a unique voice and perspective that is underrepresented in Canadian school curricula and professional teaching resources.

Canadian curriculum scholar and writer Chambers (1999) suggests considering Indigenous epistemologies to better understand how "place" informs Canadian curricular research and writing. Such curricular and pedagogical approaches are associated with being

rooted in place, family, spirituality, and living in a good way. For example, in 2009 during a graduate class at the University of Lethbridge with Cynthia Chambers and the late elder Narcisse Blood, teachers visited a newly developed residential area on the west side of Lethbridge. Gathering together near a grassy area not far from the coulee's edge, we witnessed a turtle effigy formed from rocks by my Blackfoot ancestors. Narcisse Blood spoke about the significance of the placement of the effigy, its meaning and relation to the turtle, and the importance of preserving and protecting sites such as this turtle effigy for cultural and educational purposes. Braiding Blackfoot historical, cultural, and place-based knowledge is central to the work of *Faceless Dolls*. To render an authentic storyline that conveys a truthful, yet creative portrayal of characters, I needed to examine the Blackfoot worldview where the pedagogy of place and the spirit was central to the novella.

Many of the challenges facing Niitsitapi originate from structural systems of oppression. The Indian Residential School system nearly succeeded in its goal of "cultural genocide" (TRC, 2015). Indigenous women are more likely to experience poverty, discrimination, family violence, and overall, have less access to employment and education opportunities. Coupled with the disproportionately high rates of sexual violence and exploitation, these are reasons why Blackfoot women's representation and the education about gender equality and human rights are pertinent (National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls & Privy Council Office Canada, 2019; Note, 2010). Stories written by Indigenous women provide an ontological pathway to learn and connect through language and art. Indigenous life-teachings can then become mobilized, extending beyond the immediate community, reaching a wider audience.

While working with and listening to elders and community members across Alberta who have attended Indian Residential School, I have heard them say time and time again that we must first have the truth before advancing to reconciliation. Writing Quill's story is a way of truth telling. It includes empathetic pedagogy to explore the many facets of societal injury but also provokes discussion about what courses of action may work to heal such injuries (Chambers et al., 2012; Fontaine & Craft, 2015).

Whereas previously Indigenous voices have been absent, the landscape of Canadian literature has changed over the years to include Indigenous perspectives. I am encouraged by the emergence of contemporary Indigenous voices in academia and the literary arts, because they provide learning in authentic, compassionate, and generative ways. Our ideas and stories have always mattered. It seems only now they are increasingly being considered legitimate by Canadian curricular and literary publishing circles (Culleton, 1983; Dimaline, 2017; Hanson, 2020, Jordan-Fenton et. al., 2010; Wagamese, 2012). Storytelling is a way of teaching freedom of expression (Phillips, 2013). Speaking up can take many forms. In my case, it is through pen and paintbrush.

A Blackfoot Healing Curriculum

Figure 6: *Untitled*, Hali Heavy Shield, Mixed Media, 2022.

Historically, health determinates of Indigenous people have been limited to the physical wellness of an individual or based around the disease model (Van et al., 2020). However, Indigenous people define health and well-being from a holistic approach that includes physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual balance and well-being. The resurgence of culture and arts is an important factor in the healing and wellness of First Nations people. In a Blackfoot context, to live a good life is to live a long life. The Blackfoot prayer taught to youth in schools includes the term misamiipatapiisinn—to be blessed with a long life. Living in a good way includes living long enough to become an elder.

Art is a form of self and collective expression for Indigenous people and is closely linked with overall health and wellbeing. Through arts-based explorations, youth can express themselves freely, work collaboratively, and take on physical tasks that encourage social bonds. Arts-based work that stimulates healing and well-being include drumming, writing, dancing, beadwork, film-making, and painting, to name a few (Linds et al., 2020). More specifically, Blackfoot people have created and used healing materials such as traditional paint, medicine pipe drums, jingle dresses and painted parfleches or *sootsiman* which used designs and colours specific to a nation's clan and family. Some of this knowledge has been lost due to colonization; however, they reflect the relationships of Blackfoot people (Carter & Glenbow Museum, 2008).

Many Indigenous and Canadian curriculum writers and scholars have worked to address the impact of social injustice by encouraging a "decolonizing" approach to curriculum (Archibald, 2008; Battiste, 2013; Blood et al., 2012; Donald, 2019; King, 2003; Smith, 2013). Donald (2014) proposes we may need "a new story" to guide us towards a more inclusive, equitable, relational, and holistic curriculum (p. 29).

Episkenew (2009) argues that contemporary Indigenous literature serves

> [t]wo transformative functions—healing Indigenous people and advancing social justice in settler society—both components in the process of decolonization.…When their testimony reaches a large and diverse audience, it is possible for Indigenous writers to effect healing by advancing social justice. (pp. 15-17)

Storyteller and poet Momaday (2007) encourages Indigenous people to become writers themselves, suggesting that "If we can imagine a time when dogs could talk, we must imagine a time when language was intensely creative, full of power and magic" (p. 17). Moreover, "Fictional explorations allow us to penetrate more freely and intimately into the particular subject matter, to identify with the characters and situations in new ways, and to speak from the perspectives of others" (McNiff, 2008, p. 38). For Niitsitapi, stories hold great healing power and are often inextricably connected with place. My intention for making art, such as writing this novella and creating the illustrations, is to access what is "intensely creative, full of power and magic"; this is where the medicine is found. Creativity is medicinal (McNiff, 2008, p. 38).

An example is the Blackfoot name gifted to the University of Lethbridge, "Medicine Rock," meaning the power of the institution itself, a place that provides learning as medicine. Elder Wolf Child (2015) teaches, "anyone who comes here will be strong and solid as a rock" (para. 3). Similarly, social fiction that explores values relevant to Niitsitapi, such as ikakimaat/never give up, can be a pathway towards healing. For example, the story of the woman warrior Running Eagle, as told by Hungry Wolf (1982), provides a sense of pride, strength, and encouragement for Niitsitapi. Running Eagle was the name given to Brown Weasel Woman for dedicating her life to protecting her clan. Though her mother initially disapproved, Running Eagle's father taught her how to hunt buffalo and how to be a great warrior. She eventually refused the traditional role of a woman and instead became successful at capturing horses and

participating in war parties. Running Eagle's story is a living example of the spirit and vision of Blackfoot women and a powerful ancestor to call upon in times of need.

Art can be a cultural healing practice (Linds et al., 2020) and it is my way to communicate my humanity to Ihtsipaitapiiyo'pa. My artistic practice often includes elements of Blackfoot spirituality through remembering, being present, and seeing forward. For example, the following journal entry was written during a graduate class I had taken in 2009:

I stand atop the coulees in Lethbridge, Alberta, one of the places I consider to be home. It's July and the summer's heat rises in waves off the land. The dry grassland is the colour and texture of elk hide, beaded with cacti, wild roses, and milkweeds. I am facing east, where in the mornings I usually greet the Sun. But it's mid afternoon now and the Sun is behind me warming my back. Below is the Oldman River and if I continue walking east, down the ravine, I will cross the bridge to Indian Battle Park where I can sit and rest by the river. There is a slight breeze that ripples the prairie grass, giving the illusion of flowing water. It's difficult to imagine where I'm standing was once covered in glaciers thousands of years ago, leaving behind deposits of bone, minerals, and stones as if like a trail: either to be followed or found, but never to be lost. Like my own history, there are remnants and artefacts of lived experiences, family blood lines and language that is a constant flow of past, present, and imaginings of a future. Just as the Oldman River has carved its path through the coulees, I continue to shape my own path, making my way through life, writing dreams and learning how to be content with not knowing. I gather stories left by my parents and their parents before them and so forth, while seeking the creation of something new. Always with the intention of leaving an offering for those that will eventually take their own path: my daughter, my students. Life depends on the stories we tell—ourselves and the people we love—especially when we are faced with difficulty. It is in the language we use

that shapes our lives, as words are what sustain us as individuals and as a collective. Much like calling on our ancestors, writing is like prayer as it empowers the spirit and is faithful in times of uncertainty.

McLeod (2001) notes that "part of surviving is remembrance: when you remember, you know your place in creation" (p. 170). Art making has taught me about my place in creation and the wonder of my own creativity. With the intensity of focus during a period of making art, dreams and visions are abundant; this keeps my mind and heart strong and healthy even when dealing with challenging subject matter. Historically, my ancestors would prepare themselves with a period of fasting, solitude, offerings, and prayer with the expectation of receiving a dream or vision for their lives (Bastien, 2004). A Blackfoot healing curriculum embodies elements of sacrifice, focus, reciprocity, and language which are practiced through the four values aatsimoyihkaan (spirituality), kimmapiitpitsinni (kindness), kakoysin (being aware/observant), and ikakimaat (do your best).

Some of my practices in art and literacy have their roots in traditional Blackfoot spiritual practices: spending time in solitude, meditating, praying, and being on the land. Though not always, through disciplined practice, such moments can often lead to spontaneous bursts of creativity, insight, and clarity. Much like a dream-state, ideas come to me through visions and dreams. I recognize these as gifts from Ihtsipaitapiiyo'pa, the Source of Life. Through creativity, I become attentive to the inner and outer workings of healing and the art itself becomes the language in which to communicate. Learning to listen to ancestral voices through prayer and quiet contemplation helps to guide my writing in creative and healing ways. This is a natural pedagogical process, much like the changes in seasons, or life cycles; it is the reciprocity of intention, attention, retention. A Blackfoot healing curriculum includes a balance of

considerations to body, land, emotion, and spirit/heart teachings, one that acknowledges a total inter-connectedness of self, relations, and place.

A Blackfoot curriculum that includes a novella such as *Faceless Dolls* is important because "we can see that the histories and experiences of Aboriginal peoples are necessarily positioned as outside the concern of Canadians" (Donald, 2009, p. 3). Furthermore, looking to Hasebe-Ludt and Scholefield's (2012) thoughts on the power of narratives can teach us how to relate to one another and offer hope in "conversations that can come out of living through injustice and discrimination" (p. 114). Introducing social fiction as a pedagogical and curricular approach to address such challenges may provide a way to have conversations about these issues, with the possibility of helping to alleviate trauma and collectively work together to seek solutions to such complex and delicate matters. Storytelling enables traumatic experiences to be expressed while offering curative narratives through characters' experiences, which may prove empowering. Similarly, creative practices in making meaning of the lived curriculum for Niitsitapi will further ensure that young Blackfoot students have hope and confidence as future knowledge and language carriers and story-makers.

For Blackfoot people, "ways of knowing are dependent upon relationships, which create and generate knowledge," and therefore "all life experiences are a source of knowledge" (Bastien, 2004, p. 77). Herein lies the philosophy and intrinsic nature of a lived curriculum and a curriculum of place. Stories teach us about who we are as Niitsitapi, connect us to one another, and make space and time for the creation of new, original narratives, ones that bridge old knowledge with contemporary experiences to which young people can relate.

Significant efforts to relearn, rematriate, and revitalize Blackfoot teachings endure. To come to know Kitaowahsinnoon, the land that nourishes us, and what is appropriate to do in that

place, takes a long time (Blood & Chambers, as cited in Chambers, 2008, p. 116). The main character in *Faceless Dolls*, Quill, had to first become acquainted with the land and place from which she originated, so she could then turn within to examine the inner landscape of her being. To grasp the implications and the meanings that we are the land, and the land is us, is what it means to be Niitsitapi. This is deserving of a lifetime's study. Blood et al. (2012) tell us:

> We are particularly inspired by the Blackfoot concept aoksisowaato'p, which refers to the ethical importance of visiting a place as an act of relational renewal that is life-giving and life-sustaining, both to the place and to ourselves. Stories told of places where aoksisowaato'p has been enacted have the organic power to give and sustain life in similar ways. (p. 48)

The craft of creative writing and storytelling requires one to engage in the many facets of intellect, spirit, and body—a holistic pedagogical approach to gain an awareness and attention to words, language, and the story being told. Chambers (2008) leans on Tim Ingold's use of the term *enskillment*, which proposes that learning is inseparable from place and doing; this process of "enskillment requires an ongoing perceptual monitoring of the emerging task" (p. 118). Using the example of a carver, Chambers (2008) teaches that "the carving only comes into being as the carver continually monitors the emerging form of the carving with his hands, his eyes, his ears, and his entire body" (p. 118). The same could be said for the craft of making art and creative writing. The stages of my artistic practice often include a non-linear and continuous process of research, concept development, sketching, design, play/experimentation, and refining elements of story that I wish to portray in the work. At times, what I think I envision may have quite a different result than what I had originally planned. It is through the process of enskillment that I have been able to become a better creative writer and visual artist.

Within Blackfoot territory, there are diverse and incredibly beautiful landscapes that have an extensive history and significance for Niitsitapi. These significant sites can be used as a

pedagogical tool, not only through the sharing of stories of the place, but also by emphasizing the importance of preserving and protecting them for all people. An example of this is Bighead's (2009) "Strike Them Hard!" theatre production, where the author created a play that was based on actual oral accounts of the Baker Massacre. Another example of this is Robinson's (2000) novel *Monkey Beach*, where the author provides the setting of her home territory of the Haisla, of the west coast of British Columbia, as the setting for her fiction, including language and descriptions, as a fundamental account for the social structure of Indigenous people in this context.

It is a matter of cultural sensitivity and ethical responsibility to be mindful of fictional narratives that may portray characters and places that are based on the lives and environments of real people and/or events. As Indigenous writers, we have a responsibility to our families and communities to do things in a good way, one that does not bring harm (R. Van Camp, personal communication, March 27, 2019). This is also reflective of the Blackfoot value of living with kindness of others and land, kimapiipitsinni.

Blackfoot teacher and artist Big Head (2012) shares the process of writing, recalling how becoming a playwright and expressing herself through her art has helped her work through the painful memories of her daughter's death. She shares, "to move forward, I had to uncover the layers of atrocities..." (Big Head, 2012, p. 60). In my own research, I continue to work through my own struggles with the "layers of atrocities" that impact my life, family, and community. It has been the relationship between art and knowledge that I have found most valuable in my learning and teaching worlds. As Eisner (2008) notes, "One wants to encourage rather than to discourage the sweep of imagination in learning how to notice and understand what is not literally there. The arts contribute to the realization of such an aim" (p. 11).

Big Head's (2012) words indicate how creative writing processes can help heal wounds suffered through personal traumas, as she notes, "My own personal trauma had given me the gift I needed to write. I know what it feels like to be so terrified and helpless when death is right in front of you" (p. 61). Seeking guidance through aatsimoyihkaan/prayer and offering tobacco to a place while starting a personal or scholarly endeavor is a way to bring direction, healing, and wisdom to the process. What is more, the writing itself becomes the prayer, a connection to the imagination, faith, and both the real and imagined relationships with people and events.

Archibald (2008) demonstrates the spiritual and intuitive connections that stories evoke, "Knowing the stories intimately, as though they are a part of one's being, is essential if a Storyteller is to use her/his intuitive sense for telling stories" (p. 94). When attempting to understand her beginning journey as an Indigenous storyteller and the gifts which stories can provide, Archibald (2008) tells of the energy that nourishes and revitalizes the mind and soul. She further shares how connections to elements of stories such as characters, setting, language, and plot may challenge our perceptions and actions, rendering stories spiritual in nature.

Through creative practices such as writing social fiction and making visual art, I am engaged in traditional Blackfoot pedagogical approaches through memory, production, and transmission of cultural language and knowledge. For example, one of the main Blackfoot values that will be revealed in the novella *Faceless Dolls* is the notion of sharing and reciprocity. In the old days, Niitsitapi families always shared in the efforts of caring for one another. This ensured the survival of the collective. The Blackfoot story of the Wolf Trail, Makoyoohsokoyi, also referred to as the Milky Way, tells of a man, his wife, and their children who would have starved and froze to death if it were not for the deer, buffalo, and birds that cared and provided for the family. The man and his family were forever indebted to the animals for saving them and

realized the value in sharing, henceforth the family would live by a gifting economy. The story of Makoyoohsokoyi is the spiritual knowledge that comes from aatsimoyihkaan, the most powerful of all pedagogical and curricular approaches that respond to the challenges of Blackfoot people.

Together, social fiction and visual art are powerful ways to engage in Blackfoot pedagogical practices as a way of actualizing creativity and spiritual growth, one that reflects potential and possibilities for healing. Words are medicinal (Bastien, 2004; Justice, 2018). If one is suffering in spirit, often the healing comes from encouraging words, in the form of prayer, deep reflection, and possibly even dreams. Blending dreams, imagination, and experience is a method of taking what is already known to the possibility of something completely new. My braiding of written text and graphic art makes for a new language, a hybrid of Blackfoot and Western linguistic and cultural meaning making.

Traditional cultural knowledge is carried on through stories, gifted and received, from one generation to the next. Oral traditions hold rich historical knowledge of identity, kinship, and the importance of sacred ceremonies. Embedding Blackfoot language through fictional stories enables me to learn Blackfoot and gain an appreciation of traditional knowledge expressed in these stories. As such, the opportunity to learn from these stories will further enhance a healing curriculum.

Connections to my family and community continue to be a source of growth, healing, and strength, in both my educational and artistic journey. I was recently invited to create a mural at the new Red Crow Community College building. I was one of 17 Blackfoot artists that showcased their work during the grand opening. My mom, Faye HeavyShield, was one of the artists that contributed to the collective. Over the years, I have been fortunate enough to travel

and attend art meetings and exhibits with my mom. This has influenced my work tremendously. As a parent and mentor, my mom has taught me many ways of applying Blackfoot cultural and linguistic teachings. This type of pedagogical practice is foundational to decolonizing the current curriculum and cultivates healing changes from an intergenerational perspective (Justice, 2018; Smith, 2013). I continue to share what I have learned through my art practice and *Faceless Dolls* is an intentional effort to do just that.

PART II: *Faceless Dolls,* a Young-Adult Illustrated Novel

White Buffalo Healing Lodge

May 13, 1996

I arrived at the White Buffalo Healing Lodge a week and a half ago. My lawyer made a deal with the Crown prosecutor. Because I'm still 17, I'm spending 12 months at this youth treatment center instead of the three years in jail that the prosecutor was asking for. I just wish I could have been sent somewhere away from the Rez. I guess the good thing is that Auntie is close by, and Shania and the kids can come down from Calgary to visit. But I'm stuck here. And everyone knows what happened. Auntie says there's always going to be people that don't let you forget the mistakes you've made. But what's important, what's *real,* she says, is that you put in the work and forgive yourself.

Figure 7: *Untitled*, Hali Heavy Shield, Mixed Media, 2021.

Walking into the Lodge, there's a big sign in the entryway. It reads, "One Day at a Time." I hope I can do that. My best friend is gone. Taking it day by day seems like it's the only choice I have.

I woke up late this morning. I haven't been able to sleep since the accident, so my doctor prescribed me sleeping pills. They're supposed to help with anxiety too. I've been having these pains in my chest, like I'm having a heart attack. I've suffered from panic attacks since Na'ah died. But my doctor says it's also from the shock of the accident and from smoking too much dope.

My counsellor Frank is making me keep a journal. He says it's supposed to help me. My lawyer says to make the most out of being here, and to try and work on my myself. Sometimes I think it would've been better for me to go to jail, to get what I deserve, but my lawyer and Auntie decided I would get the help I needed here, like in the traditional way.

So, writing in this journal is what I've committed to. Frank says it'll help me share things during Circle when I'm ready. Jake used to tell me I had enough drama in my life to write a book. I'm not sure what happened. I used to love writing. But before the accident, I was doing more partying than writing. Eventually I just stopped. Especially when I started smoking pot every day. I wasn't motivated to do much of anything besides hang out with Liv and get high.

Writing has always made me feel better. I don't like keeping things bottled up inside. It's dangerous to keep things inside. Especially secrets. They churn away, right in the pit of your gut, until they come out another way. Not in words, but in more scary ways, like the thin white scars on my wrist.

During journal writing this morning, Ms. Swanson, our teacher, had a journal prompt written on the black board: "Write about your earliest memory." My memories are like a beehive. They can be dangerous. I know they serve a purpose, but I wish they'd quiet down when I want them to. It seems they swarm in chaos, threatening to sting even with the good memories. Ms. Swanson says journaling helps get close to them, in a safe and healthy way. So, I

can sort them out, see them for what they are: learn from the bad ones and keep the good ones close to my heart. Afterwards, she says, I might just be left with honey.

My Earliest Memory: I must have been about four or five at the time. Summers on the Rez could be so much fun. Powwows, riding, and swimming in the river was all me and Liv did. We lived out in the country, but I liked going to visit Auntie in townsite, but it usually got rank at the end of the month when everyone got social allowance. That's when police and ambulance sirens would flood the neighbourhood. The distant sound of men laughing, women fighting, and babies crying would flow in the air like bedding on a clothesline. We'd walk to the Trading Post and buy loads of candy, and pop, and Cheezies with the can of change Auntie kept in the cupboard above the fridge. "As long as you share and there's enough for each of you," was her only rule for taking the can. We gave our left-over change to Benny, the guy that hung around bumming for change and smokes. He was always so thankful.

Anyway, one summer afternoon, we played hide-and-seek. I tried to find a good hiding spot. Somewhere I wouldn't be found. I knew the basement would be the perfect place. No one would look for me there. When Liv started counting, I snuck downstairs to the basement with only a slight shaft of light to guide my steps. It smelled damp, like the way wet bathing suits smell when they're left in a bag too long and not hung out to dry. I could see from the bottom of the stairs that behind the furnace was a good place to hide. Liv would be too scared to look for me there and the others would think I was the brave one.

Barefoot (and trying not to smell the mouldy air), I crept over the laundry and toys that were scattered across the cold concrete floor. Just as I got close to the furnace, I stepped on something sharp. I lifted my foot to see what it was. A small shard of broken glass jutted out

from the base of my heel. As I pulled it out, droplets of blood trickled down my heel like a string of tiny red beads.

I stepped onto an old T-shirt and leaned my weight against the cloth to try and stop the bleeding. I looked again but it wouldn't stop. I turned to go back upstairs and that's when I saw it: a deer carcass hanging underneath the staircase. I screamed. Then froze. I didn't cry right away. Milli, Liv's older sister, came down to look for me when Liv couldn't find me and was too scared to check the basement herself.

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Auntie told me Mom was a writer too, but she wrote mostly poems and music. A couple of her songs had been sold to a band and played on the radio, which I think is cool. I've heard other people say her writing had *soul*. Auntie says that's why any kind of art is important. It can live on even after you're gone and still make other people's lives better, as if it's got a life of its own. Frank, my counsellor, says there's power in Blackfoot songs, because they're alive and they've been here long before we were born and will live on long after we're gone.

I remember once, before the fire, we went to a music festival. Na'ah brought me on stage with her and afterwards they smoked and played guitar and told stories. But my favourite part was when it was just me and her. We were wrapped in a sleeping bag in the back of the car, and she'd sing to me until I fell asleep.

I wish she could be with me now. I imagine listening to the sound of her guitar and her hum and that makes me feel like everything's going to be okay.

Sometimes, loneliness comes in waves, heaving me by the ankles like a river's undertow. Other times, it creeps in slow and dim, like a train down a track, distant and far—then suddenly, bam! The roar and speed are so big you don't know what hit you. The first couple of nights I

cried myself to sleep, but then I woke up with night terrors. I dreamt of the night of the accident repeatedly. When I woke up, I realized it wasn't just a dream and this horrible thing really did happen. Liv was dead and it was my fault.

A New Roommate

June 4, 1996

The first two weeks here took a lot of getting used to. I settled into a routine and got to know most of the staff. But by the time the third week rolled around, I returned to my room to discover someone had moved in. A black hockey bag was set neatly on the other bed. It seemed that whoever left it wasn't planning on unpacking. I reached for my journal. Yes, it was exactly where I had left it, between the mattress and the box spring and towards the back where anyone looking would likely miss it. I was holding up the mattress with one hand and clutching my journal in the other when I heard the door open. I dropped the mattress, letting it partially hang over the box spring.

"Hey." A stranger walked over to me and held out a hand.

"Hey," I said without returning the gesture, but instead clutched my journal closer to my chest.

"Why keep it in the most obvious place if you don't want anyone reading it?"

"Where am I supposed to keep it?" I said defensively. "As you can see, there are not a lot of options here." I waved my hand in front of her, trying to make a point. The room was stark and sterile. She turned her back to me and reached for her bag, unzipping it. I fussed with the mattress and positioned it back against the wall, then sat back and observed my new roommate. She kept her back to me. Her oversized sweater covered her like a cloak. The words "Vancouver Friendship Centre" were written on her back in bold purple letters.

“You know, you’re not supposed to have your hood on in here. It’s one of the rules.” I regretted sounding surly, but it just came out that way.

“Sphf!” she spat. My new roommate turned around to face me. Wisps of dark hair covered her eyes and in one swift motion, her bangs tossed to the side. She looked at me with wide eyes. She wasn’t a girly-girl type, so it surprised me to see how dark and thick her eyelashes were, almost as if she were wearing makeup.

“Forget it. You’re not worth it.” She shook her head. I think she wanted me to know she wouldn’t back down if it came to that.

Had I met her on the street, I could’ve mistaken her for a guy, but it was her voice that gave her away...and her hands. Her hands were slender and delicate like the twigs of a flower stem. Only her fingernails were dirty, the way Leo’s got after a day of fencing or working in his garage.

The door squeaked open.

“Everything okay in here?” It was Edna, one of the counsellors.

“I guess you’ve met Jessica. She’s joining us all the way from Vancouver.” My roommate shoved a stack of neatly folded clothes in a top dresser drawer.

“It’s Jess,” she corrected firmly, standing over the hockey bag.

“Quill, I hope you’ll help make Jess feel comfortable. It’s only going to be for a few days until one of the other rooms come available.”

It wasn’t all the time clients shared rooms. But I overheard one of the workers say this was an emergency booking. They were going to make room until the end of the week when one of the clients would be discharged. This would only be temporary, I kept reminding myself.

"Anyway, supper is in 20 minutes and I need you girls to come down and help set up the tables."

I leaned my head back against the wall and groaned. Then I shoved my journal at the bottom of my hamper of dirty clothes. It took a few days, but Jess and I became fast friends. She was easy to talk to and had all sorts of stories about where she was from. I'd never been to the ocean before, but the way she talked about it made me want to see it someday.

Na'ah: Mom

June 10, 1996

Writing helps me to figure out what I'm thinking. How I'm feeling. Well, that's where the conversations with both Frank and Ms. Swanson usually end up. Writing leads to stories. Stories lead to healing. Healing leads to love. And love, well love is enough of a reason to live. Anyway, this is what I'm learning.

For a lot of kids, September is a time of excitement. A season that includes fresh school supplies, the hope of a kind and fun teacher, and the possibility of making new friends. It was the year I was to start grade 2 that I would come to hate September and the feelings it brought back. It's funny what the body remembers, like the musky scent of decaying leaves or the crisp cold air on a clear fall day. Na'ah brought me to town for a new haircut, a backpack, and bought me a brand new yellow jumper ordered special from the Sears catalogue. Eight years old and I still slept with the doll she made for me, just like the one Na'ahsa made for her when she was little. The soft canvas doll with a flower print dress, yarn for hair, and a scrap piece of deer hide for a belt. It didn't have a face; dolls never have a face. The old people say it traps their spirit, Na'ah told me.

That morning, we got up especially early. Na'ah made me a hot breakfast: fresh out-of-the-oven bannock, a soft-boiled egg, and juice.

"Kookoona." Her eyes sparkled with the same brilliance as the stars on a clear prairie night. "Looking out the window every other second is not going to make the bus come any sooner." The forest fires in nearby Montana were moving north and were made worse by the strong winds. The memories I keep from that time are further confused by the hazy sun and thick smoke that covered the sky, as though morning was afternoon and evening was morning. On some parts of the reservation, traffic had to be re-routed, making it difficult for people to get to town for groceries, and for the water and garbage trucks to get through.

Finally, the bus pulled up to the house just as Na'ah finished braiding my hair. I was about to get onto the bus when I heard Na'ah yell, "Quill! Quill!"

I turned around to find her rushing down the front steps, half waving with one hand and holding my doll in the other. She was still in her nightshirt. A large wet spot on her T-shirt marked her belly where she'd been leaning against the kitchen sink, rinsing dishes. My face burned with embarrassment. Everyone on the bus would know I still played with dolls. I didn't want to take it, but she must've known that soon enough I'd get lonesome. She said something to the bus driver in Blackfoot and then gave me another hug and kissed my forehead.

The reserve and surrounding towns declared a state of emergency that afternoon. What I understood at the time was that "it was too late", at least that was what the adults kept saying. We didn't own a car and the winds picked up too quickly for emergency crews to rescue her. It still gets me upset to think that if we just had a car or even a phone, things could've turned out differently.

The fires swept northeastward, creeping quickly and quietly across the prairies. The foothills glowed and pulsed with vibrant hues of orange and red that could be seen for miles. At night, people gathered at Auntie's.

Figure 8: *Untitled*, Hali Heavy Shield, Mixed Media, 2022.

That is when everything changed. Everything burned so viciously, there was nothing left of home but white dust. Ash.

During that time, the school on the reserve closed for a couple of weeks. I missed Mom so much. In those early days, Auntie did her best to take care of me. But as I got older, the lonesome feeling for Na'ah seemed to get worse. I tried to escape from life, but I got stuck, sometimes in physical places but mostly the dark places in my head. I held myself hostage, and I was afraid of what would happen if I set myself free.

Indian Days

July 23,1996

A lot changed for me the summer I turned ten. I started drinking. I started wearing makeup and I developed sooner than most girls my age and that got the attention of boys. Much of the time it was unwanted attention. Like the first time a guy flashed me his penis.

Mom had been gone for a couple years, but I did my best not to think about it. By that time, I'd been staying with Auntie on and off. We always fought and she'd say she needed a break. She didn't have kids of her own and said I "stressed her out" and would call my social worker for respite. At first Auntie mostly made the threat, but things changed after the first time she sent me away. I had such hatred towards her after that. That's when Children Services usually put me with a foster family for a few days. Sometimes longer. I sort of stopped caring about anything, about anyone. It kind of worked too, because then I couldn't get hurt.

That summer, I went to a powwow with Liv. We shared a $5 Indian Taco and watched the dancers come in during Grand Entry. The brilliant colours of beadwork, fabric, and designs made me hopelessly wish I were one of them. I especially adored the jingle dancers.

Auntie sometimes took me to powwows, but her idea of dancing had more to do with beer and guys. The nights when she partied normally ended up with yelling and fighting and crying. I think losing Mom really hurt her too. Like broke her on the inside. I kept bothering Liv to bring me to the rides, so she finally relented. Her and her new boyfriend walked slowly, stopping every few feet to kiss and whisper in each other's ear. I ran ahead to get my spot in the ticket line.

"We'll wait for you over here!" She propped herself up on the edge of a utility trailer, and her boyfriend leaned against her as he adjusted his straw cowboy hat. She was always ditching me for guys. Liv had been bullied so much that year. People were jealous because her dad was on council. Her mom kept her home for the month of June. Liv made out with a boy she liked, and he told his friends that they went all the way. Only that wasn't true. That's when her mom came to the school and threatened to beat up the boy and a teacher, and the principal. Things at home weren't that great for Liv either, it was around the same time Liv's mom caught her dad

cheating with a woman from Calgary, and her dad kept going back and forth between Liv's mom and his mistress. Liv dismissed it and said that's just how boys were.

Liv's black curly hair was pulled back in a messy bun with a few ringlets around her face. I complimented her earrings and black choker. Her face was flush and looked like she had been in the sun too long. Thick black eyeliner made her eyes seem brighter and tiny gobs of black gum pooled in the corners. But I didn't say anything, thinking I might hurt her feelings.

A crowd of teenage Hutterites giggled as the carnies teased them and gave them free rides on the Ferris wheel. I only had 10 dollars, but it was enough to buy a strip of tickets. Liv's uncle, Leonard, brought us to the community hall to get our Treaty money. He said I was lucky that I didn't pick it up last year so now I was "rich." The Red Coat stood there as still as a mannequin and I swear I could see my reflection in his shiny black boots. The community was happy because we also got Distro, a small amount money distributed by Chief and Council. Auntie said she was going to "save" it for me. I'd heard that one before.

"Liv, I want to go on the Spider!" She was flirting with the guy at the Darts' game, while her boyfriend was at the Snow-Cone place. He wore a red bandanna and tilted his head to the side while taking a drag of his cigarette.

"Liv, come on," I yelled to her, "ride with me!"

I knew she could hear me and pretended not to. I felt a tap on my shoulder. It was the carny waving me on. I'd been waiting in line for what seemed like forever and didn't want to lose my place, so I decided to ride without her. As I climbed into the seat, a tall older boy with shaggy chin-length hair and a sleeveless T-shirt slipped in the seat beside me. He pulled the steel bar down hard and it clicked loud like the sound the doors make at the drunk tank. I looked around for Liv but couldn't see her.

“I’m Doug.” He spewed chew from his lips. It shot out and left brown drops on his chin that he wiped away with the bottom of his shirt.

“Don’t be afraid, precious, I got ya.” He nudged himself towards me. I froze and closed my eyes tight. The sounds of powwow: drumming and singing, dancers laughing, babies crying, and firecrackers echoed from the arbour while the ride started to lift and spin. I squeezed my eyes tighter and tried to hold myself from sliding toward him. The Indian Taco I ate earlier was coming up.

I squinted, opening my eyes just enough to see the blinking smears of fluorescent lights and whirls of dust hovered over the summer sunset. I always loved this time of day, when the sun goes down and the sky turns to shades of pink and purple. I tried to focus on the Snow-Cone Shack, thinking it may help with the nausea. That’s when I noticed the guy had pulled out his thing and it was poking through his zipper. I saw skin that didn’t look like skin. I felt sick. I couldn’t hold my grip anymore and I felt myself slide against his skinny body. His face was pulled back from the whirling and I could see he was much older, and it made me even more scared.

When I finally got off, I ran towards the row of mint-green Porta Potties, but I didn’t make it. Liv chased after me, calling out my name. “Quill! Quill? What the hell, girl?”

Trying not to puke all over myself, I leaned against the bumper of a dusty minivan and let it all go. The sour taste of fry bread and hamburger burned my throat and left a foul tang in my mouth. When I told Liv what happened, she just laughed at me. Then she couldn’t stop laughing.

We walked back to the arbour to watch the dancers. Liv put her arm around me. “Come on, I’ll buy you a water,” she offered. I hung my head and leaned myself into her.

Jess

July 31, 1996

My roommate Jess is from the west coast. Her dad was Haida and her mom left when she was still just a baby. She grew up with her dad's family in a small fishing village. But then her dad passed away and she moved to Vancouver with a friend. That didn't work out, she said. Things were too different in the big city. Too many temptations, she said. Too many bad influences. She got into some hard drugs, and that's when she heard about this program and decided to make a fresh start. We have a lot in common and it is easy to talk to her. She knows what it is like to lose a parent.

Figure 9: *E Hastings St.*, Hali Heavy Shield, Mixed Media, 2022.

We visited late into the night. The moonlight shone through the large window between us.

"I'm starting to get lonesome for home. I miss the water. I miss the ocean. The smell of salt and salmon and cedar, there's just nothing like it."

"I've never been to the ocean. I've seen it on TV but that's about it," I said. I always wondered what it would be like to be close to all that water. It almost scared me.

“It’s amazing,” Jess continued, “it’s probably like how you feel about all this open land here. You see it. You feel it. You know it’s home.

You know, the week before my dad died, a mother whale had given birth to her calf. My hometown was so happy. We had ceremony and gatherings and everything. Scientists even came with a camera crew because, in the area the whale gave birth, there hadn’t been a sighting for years.” Jess got excited in her storytelling and half sat up in the bed.

“The elders were saying it was because of commercial fishing and the pipelines, so the community was really psyched to see this mother and her calf out in the bay.” She was almost giddy. “But then, out of nowhere, the calf started to get sick.” Jess lay down on her back. In the moonlight I could see her put her arm up over her face. Her voice quivered, “then it died.” There was a long silence between us. “A few weeks later, my dad had a heart attack.”

“My auntie, who’s also a nurse in our village said Dad went from a broken heart. I believe it, you know, just how close he was to the water and the animals. His love was so strong, like he was an extension of them or something.”

I hesitated and partly stuttered, “Bet he loved you too.”

“Yeah,” Jess wiped her tears with a sleeve.

“The funny thing is,” Jess continued, “the mother didn’t leave the calf for weeks. It carried it around with her for days. Like it was grieving or something.”

I thought about Na’ah and how I’d managed to survive this long without her. I know things would be different if she were here with me.

Jess took a drink of water and sat up. “I stuck around for a while after Dad’s funeral. But what happened next, I’ll never forget. One morning, my auntie woke me before sunrise. We rushed down to the dock. There must’ve been 20 orcas that came into the bay that day. And

that's when they were last seen. The mother whale had left with the group. It was weird you know, it was as if they came to be with the mother."

Figure 10: *Untitled,* Hali Heavy Shield, Mixed Media, 2022.

Again, there was a silence between us.

"I guess that's why I came out this way for awhile. I need to figure out how to let go. How to move on. But it's fuck'n hard, you know?" Jess said.

"I can't imagine what it's like to lose a child. I mean, it's rough losing your parents, but your child?" I said.

Jess lay down on her back and exhaled. "Yeah."

"I'll be your family," I said.

Jess turned to me. "I kind of feel like you are," she said.

A Night in Jail

August 5, 1996

I haven't been at the Lodge very long, but I'm starting to see and feel things more clearly. I'd sit on the front steps with Frank while he drank his coffee and I'd listen to the wind echo off

the cliffs. Hawks and eagles screeched. I had heard these sounds before, but I feel there is something awakening inside of me.

Figure 11: *Untitled*, Hali Heavy Shield, Mixed Media, 2022.

I also noticed some of my bad memories came back just as clear. I think about how my life would be different if I had gone to jail instead for what happened to Liv. It still sucks not really having my freedom. But I've been feeling a different kind of freedom here. Jail is a scary place. I had a taste of it a few years ago.

I remember it was just after my fifteenth birthday when the cops threw me in jail for the night. Liv and I had been partying at a house in townsite and I stole a pair of shoes and a few video games, hoping to hawk them for a little cash in my pocket for some weed and gas money to get to Calgary. Most of the Band cops weren't from the Rez; most weren't even Native. It didn't matter if you were female. Leonard said nothing's changed since the Red Coats came, raping both the land and our women. I think the police are supposed to be the ones to protect

you. But ever since I could remember, whenever I see the red and blue lights my heart starts to race and I break out in a cold sweat.

It was around the time I started running away from Auntie's place. She called it rebellious, but I had just had enough of her handsy boyfriends. The cops roughed me up and said I was resisting arrest, and I better not tell anyone because no one would believe me anyway. I was scared and I believed them.

One of them grabbed me by the hair, threw me to the ground, and dug his knee into my back. I passed out after that. When Auntie asked why I was limping around, I told her I got bucked off a horse at Liv's place. I was scared to tell her what really happened.

At the holding cells, the cops searched my bag and found my pipe and an empty prescription bottle and my doll. They gave me the strangest look when they pulled out my doll and tossed it on the counter.

"Is this some voodoo shit?" The cop with a thin mustache asked. They made it seem like it was worse for me to have the doll than the pill bottle.

What the cops didn't find was my pouch full of rage that I always carried around with me. At times it would swell like a water bag, the kind the old people used to haul water, made from harvested buffalo bladder. But instead, mine seeped rejection, uncertainty, and hate.

Hate is a scary thing. It can eat you up inside, like cancer. I've met people, so angry and full of rage. Anger can make you do things that are crazy. Like when I started cutting. Cutting was a way to get the inside pain on the outside. Until, one time, I cut too deep. It's a wound that I know is real because I can see it. Feel it. Deserve it. It sounds crazy, but in the moment, it feels good, like ripping off a Band-Aid: it hurts like hell, but once it's done—relief. Sometimes, I think about cutting deeper. When Liv first saw my scars, she got pissed off at me, called me

crazy and stopped talking to me for a while. But then we made up and I promised her I wouldn't do it again. I decided it was better to just wear long sleeves.

The jail cell was cold. I lay down on the hard cement bench and curled up, trying to draw warmth from my own body. The metal door slammed shut, echoing throughout the cells, making my ears and chest cringe. There was a dried pee stain on the edge of the silver metal toilet. It morphed into a man's face. The sink dripped. I counted the endless drops until my eyes grew weary. A small black dome studded the ceiling. My feelings of paranoia were justified. I wondered what would be more humiliating: peeing on the toilet in front of strange men or pissing my pants and smelling when I got out. Privacy is something so many people take for granted. Like having your own bedroom or having something that you can truly say is yours. That's why I love my journal: my words and drawings are the only thing I can call my own. I tried to use the toilet without any part of my skin touching the rim, but when the cold metal met the fleshy part of my thigh, I fell back and let it gush. Fuck. No toilet paper. Before pulling up my pants, I turned around and stuck my ass in plain view of the camera and slapped it hard, then held up two middle fingers, before curling up on the bench again.

That night I fell asleep and dreamt of Mom. How I longed to sleep forever if it meant being with her again. The flashes of her blue nightshirt with the pandas on the front and the smell of berry hand cream. Her warm belly—giggling, tickling, teasing.

She knew I loved porridge and would make it any time I wanted, even if it wasn't morning. I could almost taste the hot oatmeal grains, milk, and a big lump of brown sugar. Slightly burnt toast drenched in butter, not like the watery stuff foster moms use. I was released early that morning with a "promise to appear" and a court date at the Cardston Courthouse. Auntie picked me up and I had to listen to how irresponsible I was and how I was almost an adult

and needed to make changes if I didn't want to end up dead or in jail, permanently. I kept quiet. My back ached and my bones chilled from a cold and restless night in a cement room. Auntie didn't let up. She lectured me, lighting one cigarette after another before finally cracking the window; inhaling deeply and exhaling, her words released in thick grey swirls of smoke.

Figure 12: *Untitled,* Hali Heavy Shield, Mixed Media, 2022.

We drove into Lethbridge and she agreed to drop me off at the Friendship Centre downtown. The sun was bright and burned my eyes. Before dropping me off, we stopped at my favourite bakery, and we had pie and coffee. We didn't talk. She must've pitied me. Then we drove around town for a while until she pulled into the driveway at the Friendship Centre and put the truck in park.

That's when she turned to me and said, "You know I would let you come stay with me, but—" I put my hand up, as if to stop the words before I had to hear them.

"It's okay Auntie, I know…don't worry about it."

"It's just…" She dropped the cigarette butt into an empty pop can. It hissed. "We just don't have the room and—"

“Auntie,” I insisted, “it’s okay. Besides I should stay in town, you know, get back into school, get a job.” I tried to believe this myself.

“I’ll keep in touch,” I promised.

Auntie nodded. “Ma.” She reached into her purse and pulled out 3 cigarettes and a ten-dollar bill. “Get something to eat.”

“Thanks, love you.”

“Ah,” Auntie replied.

Meeting Jake

September 12, 1996

Every time I start missing Jake, I try to think about how messed up of a relationship it was. I’m not even sure you could call it a relationship. He was mean to me, but he was there for me when no one else was. It was a couple winters ago when I met Jake. I remember that day because I had gone to Social Services to receive help for that month, but they were holding the cheque until I submitted a job search. I was with Liv and we stopped at a convenience store for Slurpees. Jake was at the counter fixing a coffee, emptying small cups of creamer. His fingers were dirty, black, and soiled like a mechanic’s. I was hung over and didn’t feel like talking to anyone. I noticed his stare. The scruff around his face made him look older but I could see his eyes and features were handsome. He wore brown overalls and a grey hoodie and a black Flames cap with wisps of hair sprouting behind his ears.

I shoved bags of Skittles, a pack of gum, and a strudel pastry in my bag. I was good at stealing. Liv and I worked the young cashier, one of us flirting and distracting him enough so the other could steal without getting caught. Lenny said not to be ashamed of stealing. He said it’s sometimes the way we survive. As long as no one gets hurt, the big corporations won’t feel it.

The man in brown overalls stared at me with sharp blue eyes as he blew into the coffee and took a long lingering slurp. His stare penetrated me, with the kind of confidence a wolf inflicts on his prey when he knows he's going to eat good. He reached into his pocket and flashed a large roll of dollar bills.

I smiled, nervously, but enough to let him know I was slightly interested. I thought about what I could eat with that kind of money, the stuff we could score. It would be enough to last us awhile. The man nodded towards the back, to the bathroom. He left his coffee and sub at the counter with the cashier. The young cashier stood behind the counter and bobbed his head in approval.

His heavy boots clunked loud with each lazy step. I looked towards the cashier. By then, the cashier was serving an elderly lady at the till, buying Scratch and Win cards, taking her time scratching them with a coin, or maybe it was a key, then wiping the small silver chunks to the side, blowing at the cards and squinting hard at them. Hoping for some lucky strokes. The machine at the till was going off with a sharp "woo-hoo!" indicating a win. Liv went back outside and waited in the truck.

I opened the bathroom door with the cuff of my sleeve. I entered slowly, but then he grabbed my arm and pulled at me with force. He fumbled as he struggled to lock the door. It was almost as if I was watching myself, like in a movie or something. At that point, I'd become so detached from my body, I was able to numb myself and only think that when it was over, I'd be able to score some drugs or a bottle. Once, I overheard the school counsellors talking to my then foster-mom, agreeing this behaviour was likely due to my FASD. I'd never been officially diagnosed—enough people attributed it to erratic and unpredictable behaviour. "Fuck'em, what do they know," was always my response.

"It's as if she goes on autopilot," one teacher had said to another in the school staff room. "My husband did some research online, and the way he explained it was like sometimes when you're driving and you've driven all the way home one day after a busy day at work, only to realize you don't even know how you got there?" That's when the other teacher said, "Well I guess I'm FAS because that happens to me all the time!" They laughed, throwing their blonde heads back and dabbing the happy tears away. I still don't know if they knew I'd been standing there the whole time, or they just ignored me, or if I really did have the power to become invisible, like I'd believed for many of my younger years.

My head throbbed with clouded but racing thoughts. Just get this over with. He kissed me hard on the face, missing my lips and instead pressing his mouth and tongue along my cheek and ear, some strands of my hair making it into his mouth. He had already unbuttoned his overalls and pulled them down to his mid-thigh. I could see his thighs were white and hairy, and it made me want to laugh. He turned me around and tried to get my pants off. I undid my belt for him and let him pull them down. He was rough but I kept quiet. I'd learned that men don't like it when you cause a fuss, especially when they're getting it on with you. He ripped my underwear, and it caused a slight burn. I clenched my teeth, trying my best not to make a sound. He shoved my head forward over the sink, and I came face-to-face with myself. I didn't recognize my reflection. You slut! You deserve what he gives you!

His breath and body smelled of coffee, diesel, and weed.

"You're so tight," he grunted. I knew when he was done because he stopped suddenly, leaned over me, and panted, then struggled to pull up his pants. He put two 20-dollar bills on the counter and I sheepishly snatched them before he changed his mind, then tried to dress myself.

There was a loud *thump, thump, thump* at the door.

“You gonna be much longer? I gotta go too.” It was the cashier. I could tell by the heavy immigrant accent.

“I guess I should’ve introduced myself,” he said as he leaned in and kissed my forehead, “I’m Jake. What’s your name, kid?” Gently, he touched his rough and blackened fingers over my cheek. I found this odd after he was so rough with me.

“Quill.”

“Quel?”

“No,” I said, “Quill, like you know, a porcupine quill.”

“That’s cool.” He offered me a small white paper. It was his business card. “You need anything, or…you want to do this again, you give me a call ok? You are really fucking gorgeous, you know that?”

His words made me fill with confidence. Nobody ever called me gorgeous before. I’d only ever seen that word in Seventeen magazines beside models and famous actresses.

When he left, I could hear him threaten the cashier guy to back off.

I turned and looked at myself in the mirror and wiped myself down with a damp paper towel.

“Holy, woman, that took forever!” Liv was mad. “My dad’s gonna give us shit for taking so long with his truck.”

“I know, I know, the guy was really watching me, I didn’t want to get caught.”

“Yeah, okay whatever, can we just go?”

I pulled the stuff out of my jacket, “Score!”

Liv stared at me. “Why is your face like that?”

I laughed, “Too mean, like what?”

“Tss, well look at yourself. You look all sweaty or something.” Liv laughed, “Jokes, hey, don’t get mad.”

I put the back of my hand to my cheek and bowed my head cheaply.

It seemed sex was all that men wanted.

“Make a stop on the North side? I’ll pick us up a hit.”

Liv didn’t ask any questions. She knew I had my ways. And when it benefited the both of us, she never asked questions.

***

Sometimes, when the weather was nice, Frank wanted to have Circle outside. There were things I’d never noticed before, or did but didn’t appreciate. Like the colour of the sun when it came up over the prairie bluffs, or the way the grass seemed to flow like a river on windy day. I was grateful to be learning these things for what seemed like the first time. I talked to Edna about it one day while she chopped carrots.

“That’s what happens when you get sober, my dear, your mind gets clear. And just you wait, once it gets clear,” she shook her head and smiled, “it gets strong. And that’s when you become unstoppable!”

I was happy to be having this newfound perspective about small things, like appreciating the sunset. But there was also remembering the ugly stuff. Like what it was like to be with Jake.

It was only a few months after I first met Jake when he started to act obsessive with me. Jake bought me a warm winter jacket, gave me money for drugs, and would sometimes let me stay in his basement apartment, until he got annoyed with me and said I needed to start “pulling my weight.”

He was constantly talking about money. I hated that. I resented how he would give me nice things, buy me food and alcohol and drugs, only to make me feel shitty about it afterwards. It was his sick way of keeping me down I suppose. He knew I didn't have any way of paying him back, not in money anyway. He'd slap me around pretty good, then he'd hold me and stroke my hair and I'd let him have rough sex with me because that was the way he liked it. I was good at blocking things out. I went numb to the realities of my daily pain. I was with Jake the first time I tried using a needle. Not long after that, it was the only way I could get high.

One time, I showed up at Jake's and I showered and borrowed one of his T-shirts and boxer shorts. I hand washed my leggings and panties in the bathroom sink and let them hang dry on the clothesline in the back yard.

His place always smelled of greasy cooking and second-hand smoke. The landlady Margo lived upstairs. She was a heavyset woman with thinning red hair and greying roots. She made it a point to stand on the porch or at the top of the stairs wearing nothing but a see-through nightgown. It was easy to see her pear-shaped body because of the way the light came through from her kitchen. She mumbled to herself and smoked as she glared at me as if I were an insect. When she thought I wasn't looking, she'd scratch at her belly or armpit or worse. Her breasts sagged to her waistline and the thin shiny fabric did little to conceal them. I didn't think she owned any normal clothes. I'd only ever seen her in that style of nightgown, only with different floral patterns.

Jake would get raging mad when I teased him about her. I overdid it one time when I accused him of screwing around with her. I was only half-kidding, but he popped me a good one, right in the mouth. I lost a tooth. I didn't tease him after that. But I stayed mad at him for a long

time because when I lost that tooth, I looked at least 15 years older, and I didn't have the cash to get it fixed.

I had fallen asleep on the couch after snacking on a bag of Spitz. When I woke, the streetlamp was dim and shone through the basement window. I woke up feeling damp and sweaty and groggy. I sifted through the half-empty ashtray and straightened out a squashed cigarette butt, lit it, smoked two long drags, until I burnt my lip on the filter, then I butted it out again.

Jake should've been back by then. I decided to check on my clothes; they were still damp, but dry enough to put on. I shoved the last few cans of Budweiser in my bag and locked the door behind me. It was above zero but still felt cold. The snow on the ground began to melt but I could still see my breath.

I didn't know where to go. The night sky pulsed with stars and the moon lit up the coulees as if it were midday. I decided to stop and sit at a bus shelter. I reached into my bag and pulled out a small notebook and tried to write.

I started to get cold. The inside seam of my leggings was damp, but I decided to keep walking. When my body gets cold, so do my thoughts. I had to keep moving. I walked clear across town that night, until I ended up at a friend's place. She let me sleep in the basement, only if I promised to be gone in the morning before her kids woke up. It took me awhile to warm up. I didn't sleep much. But I was grateful to have her cat curled up at my feet. It seemed like forever since I'd been comforted that way, even if it was from a cat.

Buffalo Harvest

October 15, 1996

I waited outside with Frank for everyone to load into the van. Edna brought him coffee. She lit a smoke and sat on the steps beside me. Two dogs, Rocco and Wally, were curled up by the entrance. It was a warm October morning, but the mountains had gotten some snow.

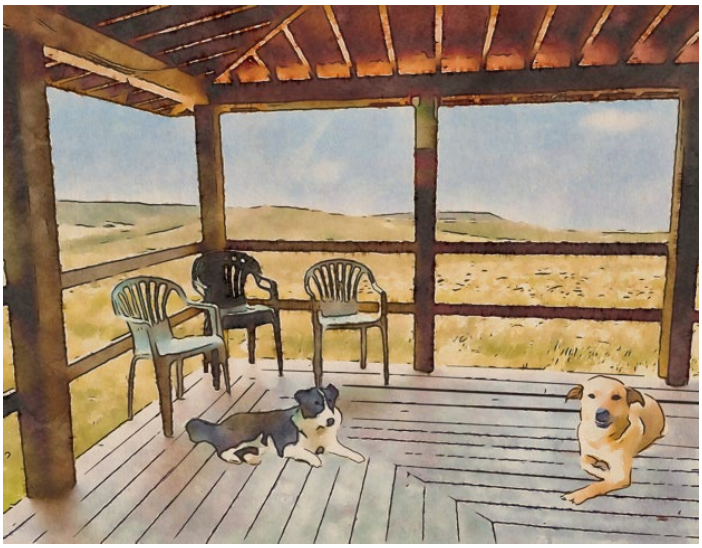

Figure 13: *Untitled*, Hali Heavy Shield, Mixed Media, 2022.

Edna took a long drag of her smoke then put it out in the dirt and tossed the butt into a coffee can. “Ki, help me with the lunches,” she said.

Jess helped me load a case of water and a box of lunches into the back of the van.

I liked Edna. She knew how to tease and make us laugh in a funny way. Not like some of the other workers. There’s a difference between teasing in a way that everyone laughs and teasing in a way that makes you feel you are being laughed at. Edna never made anyone feel that way. She also seemed to know exactly when you needed a hug.

We loaded up and drove almost an hour to the elder’s ranch. One by one, we got off. Frank had explained to us a few times that we were going to a buffalo harvest, but I still wasn’t sure what that meant exactly.

As we approached the others, I saw there was a large buffalo carcass hanging from a tractor, and beside it was a flatbed truck with two or three additional buffalo carcasses that lay in

a heap already skinned. Frank got off first, and then Edna and they shook hands and hugged the group of people waiting for us.

Edna opened the side door of the van. “Come on you kids, Niitakit!”

A buffalo was hanging from the front of a large green tractor. Three men stood near the front of the tractor; their clothes and gloved hands were stained with blood.

“Watch where you walk, there’s puddles of blood over here.” The elder signaled to the red and clumpy puddles that were scattered around us in the dirt. It was as if there had just been a heavy rainfall of blood. To the west was a corral that had been fenced recently, with new wooden posts and wire. I decided to walk over to get a better look at the large buffalo and two calves that huddled together within the enclosure.

I peered in and came eye to eye with the large animal. I’d never been this close to a buffalo before. I wiped the tears away quickly, before the others could see me. I didn’t want to seem weak. We always tease each other for crying. In a way it’s seen as a sign of weakness, but Frank and Edna are always telling us there’s a reason we have tears; Creator gifted them to us so we could shed tears and cleanse ourselves when we need to.

“Did you know that there used to be buffalo in the millions that roamed this area. Imagine that, eh?” Frank said.

“So what happened?” Cheeto asked.

“They were killed off. Overhunted by the settlers, explorers. I guess they thought that if they cut our food source, us Indians would go too,” Frank said.

“But we’re still here,” Skye said.

Frank laughed. “Yes we are, Skye.”

The emotions that surfaced from being so close to the buffalo were unexpected. Gasps and commotion disrupted my gaze. I turned to witness one of the workers cut through a leg of the hanging carcass. He sliced off each hoof in a motion that was effortless and passed it to a young woman who tossed it into a pile of dark wet fur and hooves. The eldest of the men, likely the most experienced of the butchers, sliced through the buffalo's neck severing its head. Seeing all that blood made me sick, like the way I did when Liv first left.

The massive piece dropped to the ground in a pool of dark blood, liquid dripping from its neck like cherry cough syrup. It took the strength of two men, who picked it up by the horns and rested it beside another buffalo's head. The sky suddenly grew dark with heavy storm clouds and it began to rain, at first a cool drizzle, then a downpour. We were offered plastic garbage bags to help keep us dry and I took one willingly. Tearing holes in it, I pulled it over like a poncho, but my hair and jeans were already soaked and my whole body chilled.

The tractor's grinding metal chains rumbled loudly as it craned the swaying body onto the flatbed truck.

"We're going to do another one," a low voice called out. Eagerly, we gathered on the north side of the corral and peered through the fence. We watched as a young man stood confidently inside the corral with the buffalo, holding a rifle like a skilled hunter. The elder stood with him and I felt my heart pounding in my throat. I was torn between something like acceptance and sympathy. The adult buffalo got excited and paced back and forth along the fence, the calves blocking a clear shot. The man's aim stayed with the buffalo as it trotted along the fence.

A collective scream came from the crowd as we dispersed, some ducking, while others ran back towards the van. My ears were ringing, and I kept my hands over my ears, protecting them.

"Okay, you kids need to be quiet," the man scolded us before hoisting the gun to his shoulder and taking aim.

We became silent and me and Jess watched through the gaps in the fence. The buffalo continued to pace nervously, and then halted. Steady. The blast from the rifle seemed to echo across the prairie floor. A flock of geese suddenly appeared from the pale grass, panicked, and flew away. The buffalo fell over.

"He's twitch'n out!" Cheeto yelled. The buffalo's legs jerked violently for a moment. Then, motionless. The animal's large glassy eye seemed to look right at me as its spirit left.

"Oh my god, that was rank," Skye muttered under her breath.

"Awesome," Cheeto said and yelled out a warrior's cry.

Another man went into the corral and took hold of the buffalo's hind leg attaching it to a large chain. The elder opened the gate allowing the tractor to drive in. Slowly, the buffalo was dragged from the corral and hoisted up into the air by its hind legs. The tractor parked in the same place where the last buffalo had been slaughtered and skinned. A silver farm pail was placed under its head and with a swift cut of the blade, blood drained out. One of the men grabbed the buffalo's foreleg and massaged it back and forth, pumping any remaining blood into the bin. The pail was removed and the buffalo was positioned on its back with its spine between a set of railings that were raised a foot off the ground. Another man, slit through the fur along the length of the leg, and began skinning the animal. The other two men joined in on either side and

within minutes, the hide was completely removed from the buffalo's underbelly. We all gasped when a greenish liquid drained from its anus, dripping down its tail and onto the ground.

"Must be coming from its shit bag," Cheeto said. The butcher, who was hovering over the buffalo's head, turned around to face us.

"Anyone wanna lick?" he joked as he flapped the massive tongue in front of us. Me and Jess screamed and stumbled backwards. Then, the heart was removed. An old lady said something in Blackfoot. It makes good soup.

I heard Edna lean towards Frank and say, "Napikoaiksi are doing all the cutting."

"Ah," Frank said, "wasn't always this way. This is why we have to teach these kids. They're the ones that will be doing this in the future."

The buffalo was hoisted up again. The hide was completely removed, its naked body was covered with patches of white fat and muscle. The robe was dragged to a fresh area of grass, folded neatly, and taken away. A cut was made along the animal's underbelly, revealing its innards.

"Careful with the cut or it will spoil the meat." The man reached inside the buffalo. Slicing. Cutting. A bright orange tarp was dragged over and put under the buffalo. With one solid gush, a large, bloody mass spilled out onto the tarp. "Drag this over to the old lady and she'll show you how to cut it up."

Three of us dragged the tarp over to a blue truck where an elderly lady got off, wrapping her head in a scarf (the way grandmas often do when there's a chill). She put on yellow rubber gloves.

"Does anyone want to try?" she asked. The weather turned and it started to drizzle. I volunteered.

The old lady crouched down and told me where to cut. A rancid smell wafted upward and burned my nostrils. The old lady asked if anyone else wanted to try. I held the knife towards Skye.

"No way." Her hand was up over her mouth and nose.

"I'll try," Cheeto volunteered and took the knife. "Aarhh! That must be the stomach. Look at all that grass," he said in a muffled voice, as he covered his nose and mouth with his sleeve. Small pockets of shredded grass poked out of a large balloon-like organ. The old lady directed the stomach to be dragged away and emptied. After putting on blue latex gloves, Cheeto knelt and helped to drag it away. He gagged, coughing out the words, "Oh, that's rank!" Edna laughed.

A few feet away, the stomach was emptied and washed out near a water truck. The old woman worked hunched over the orange tarp for a while longer, then gave me a plastic bag with the liver and kidney. "Give this to Edna."

The afternoon seemed to pass by quickly and when it was time to head back to the Lodge, a couple of hours had passed. As we drove away, the tires spit up gravel and mud, knocking the underneath of the van.

Figure 14: *Untitled*, Hali Heavy Shield, Mixed Media, 2021.

Edna told us that her grandpa used to have a herd of buffalo.

"When a calf is in danger, the rest of the buffalo will form a circle around the calf, to protect it from the wolves or coyotes or any other predator. That's what we should be doing here at the Lodge," she said, "protecting each other. Because we are from the same tribe, we have that same blood. Just like the buffalo."

Halloween

October 23, 1996

A few years before Liv passed away, I was in spending more time in Calgary. But I'd overstayed my welcome at my cousin Shania's. I'd been partying hard and she found me passed out, when I was supposed to be watching her kids. She said it would be better if I'd gone home for a bit. Home. I'm not sure if she was trying to be funny or just cruel. Then I made her cry when I said I would go home if I had somewhere I could actually go home to. Then she said I can't keep playing that card and so many young people have lost a parent or both, but it wasn't a reason to give up. I knew she was right, but at the same time, she had her mom and couldn't really relate, even when she tried. I found myself sick, lonesome, and out of options.

It was Halloween and I had made it back to Lethbridge. Liv had this great idea of taking acid. I wasn't sure about it, but she promised me it was going to be smooth and that all we were going to do was chill and laugh. I believed her. I always believed Liv. Besides, she said, we could always go to her house if things got crazy or if I started to trip out. Her dad and his girlfriend were going to Calgary for the weekend, so we'd have the house to ourselves. Liv and I made plans to dress up, her as a sexy witch and me as an old man. We went to the Bargain Shop in Cardston and picked up some scary masks. Lenny suggested we go to Value Village to get some old-man clothes.

“Tss, we’ll just raid your closet,” Liv teased.

Liv punched him playfully in the arm. In the end, we decided to wear the scary masks and stayed in our regular clothes, in case we went out to a party or Lenny could sneak us into the bar.

That night, Liv gave Leonard $100 for gas money to drive us around. Before heading into the city, we went to the Community Hall for the annual Halloween powwow.

Afterwards, we begged him to bring us to Lethbridge where we could trick-or-treat in the rich neighborhoods. Liv knew all the houses that gave out regular-sized chocolate bars and bags of chips and cans of pop.

We approached one house, rang the doorbell, waited, and giggled. That’s when an older man in a brown sweater vest opened the door. A small white dog barked at his ankle.

“Trick or Treaty!” we screamed. We held out our pillowcases Liv’s dad had left out for us. But instead of candy, we each got a “Watchtower” magazine. Then he asked if we believed in God, and if we knew his name was Jehovah. At first, we were silent, then Liv burst out laughing and we screamed back to Leonard’s truck. The man stood in his doorway as if still waiting for a response.

“Geez that falls into the same category of getting homemade treats and toothbrushes.” Liv dug around in her candy bag and pulled out the pamphlet and stuck it between the seats of the truck.

“Hey, get that outta here,” Lenny ripped it from the seat and tossed it out the window. “Shit, maybe they don’t like random people coming to their house,” he chuckled and turned up the stereo. Liv pulled out a pint of vodka and we took turns taking shots. Leonard pretended not to know what we were up to.

“You feel anything yet?” Liv asked. We’d each taken a small tab of acid back at Liv’s but it hadn’t kicked in.

“Right here Lenny!” Liv pointed towards the lights and festivities happening at Galt Gardens. It was an outdoor Halloween dance with tables of face painting, games, and prizes for best costume. Dance music thudded the truck windows and lights pulsed, making the tall trees seem as though they too were dancing.

The Halloween dance was one of those things that was meant to bring the Lethbridge community together, but police paddy wagons lined the park and young men barely past puberty strutted around in security uniforms. Leonard said it seemed the racism in Lethbridge was at an all-time high. A news report showed a recording of a woman saying they should make a “Shoot an Indian Day.” It was scary the way things were. It was around the same time when young Native girls were going missing, but no one seemed to know where they were going or who’d taken them.

Figure 15: *Untitled*, Hali Heavy Shield, Mixed Media, 2022.

I watched as two of the security guards hauled a man off in handcuffs, his long wisps of hair shrouded his face. It reminded me of the time Leonard was picked up by the cops on too

many warrants. The cops roughed him up, leaving Liv and I with no ride home. We hitch-hiked all the way back to the Rez. My chest tightened. I didn't like seeing my people get treated this way.

"I have to pee," Liv said.

"Let's go over to the mall." I searched through my candy bag and opened a small Coffee Crisp. "Ki'" I managed to say with a mouth full of chocolate wafer.

The mall was packed with people.

"What a cesspool. I swear I'm never having kids," Liv said as she nudged a bathroom door stall open with the tip of her boot. I stared at myself in the mirror. I hated the way I looked. My lips were too thin, my boobs too big, and the breakouts on my chin never seemed to heal. Liv said it was because I was always stressed out and anxious about everything. But I couldn't help it. My weight was also something I could never get a handle on.

Liv shuffled next to me at the sink. She washed her hands and pursed her lips together. You're so beautiful, I thought. Just as we were leaving the bathroom, Liv dug around in her purse for loose change and worked the tampon dispenser like a gumball machine. Turning the metal knob several times until the long paper tube dropped into her hand.

"These tampons are so low-budge," she complained.

"I know, hey? And they right hurt."

Back out in the food court, I ordered small fries and a root beer from A&W.

"Look what I got from the candy machine," she said in almost a whisper. Liv held out her hand just enough show me two small pills. The acid had just started to make me feel dizzy and happy.

"Liv, what the—?!"

"Shh…" she cut me off, looking around to be sure we didn't attract attention. The mall security guards didn't need a reason to search us or kick us out. It was bad enough being Indian: your skin colour alone made you guilty and something to be feared.

"Please," she continued, "I don't want to try it alone."

"What's it like? Also, aren't you high enough yet?" I asked.

Liv shrugged. "Like kissing Jesus."

"Eew," we laughed. A white-haired elderly couple a few tables over looked annoyed.

"Tss, well I don't know, that's what he told me."

"Who's he?"

"The dealer."

"What dealer?"

"My dealer."

"So now you have a pill dealer?"

"It's Halloween, I just want to have a good time." Liv took out the pint of vodka. We turned into a hallway near one of the exits and took a shot, chasing it with the root beer. She never needed a reason to party. In fact, anytime she got money, which was all the time, was enough reason. Joints, pills, coke, liquor. We even tried huffing lacquer together at a party once. That was rough. I'd never puked so badly in my life and my head hurt so bad.

I was trying to sound brave, "I don't know about this, Liv." The vodka warmed my chest.

"I'll take care of you. We'll take care of each other. I promise nothing's going to happen."

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The mix was starting to give me a buzz, giving me false courage about taking the pill Liv was offering. She swallowed hers first. Then, it was my turn.

I applied some of Liv's raspberry lip-gloss and combed my fingers through my hair. We walked through the mall and headed for the movie theatre arcade. Kids screamed for candy, store workers dressed in slutty cat costumes stared at me and Liv suspiciously. Parents chased after Ninja Turtle toddlers and baby bumblebees. That was the last thing I remembered. My eyes got heavy and my legs buckled. I just wanted to sleep.

"We can't stay here," Liv held onto me, propping me up alongside her. I leaned into her, my eyes closing and head bobbing. We managed to walk back to the park where we found a bench. Liv clutched our candy bags as I slouched over, and then fell onto the grass. I was trying to talk but my words came out in mumbles. Later, Liv told me my lips turned blue and white stuff was coming out. Liv was screaming but I didn't hear her. It was as though my whole body was submerged in sludge, heavy, and unable to move.

Leonard told me later that he noticed a crowd of people started to gather around us. A little boy tugged on his mom's jacket and pointed, "Momma, what's wrong with her?"

Frantic screams and shouts echoed throughout the park. The ambulance carried me away on a stretcher. I blacked out after that.

Once I was at the hospital, the doctors pumped my stomach. I had overdosed. My head was cloudy, making it hard for me to remember exactly what had happened.

For the most part, the nurses were kind to me. One nurse came in and puffed up my pillow and helped me change my gown (I'd hit my head pretty hard and also had a concussion). They gave me a heated flannel sheet to keep me warm. It had two blue stripes and was stiff and smelled like bleach, but did it ever feel like a warm full-body hug. The nurse talked to me about

making good decisions and how I was a strong, smart, and an otherwise healthy young woman. It was weird, no one had ever called me a woman, let alone strong and smart.

She put her cool thin hands on my wrist, where the scars told of my other sickness. The nurse made me promise to stay away from the hospital; it was for really sick people and I was young and healthy. I didn't like making promises I couldn't keep. I had seen people in the hospital, suffering. Really suffering. Fighting for their life kind of suffering. Here I was, wasting mine away.

In the days that followed, Liv came to visit. She teased and laughed at me for making such a scene and pointed out that I was famous and made the front page of the Herald. Liv unfolded a piece of newspaper. There it was, on the front page: a photo of me being carried off in an ambulance, with the headline "Lethbridge Native Teen Overdoses."

"At least you can't tell it's you," Liv shrugged.

"I could've died Liv and you're just making a joke of it?!"

I wanted to grab her and shake her.

"Hey, I didn't force it down your throat," she snapped defensively. "Plus, I didn't know how strong it was. Like, I was fine and we took the same amount. Leonard already gave me shit, so ease up." I lay back on my pillow, trying to hold back the tears.

"Look, I gotta go, my dad's been raggin' on me ever since all this went down. So…" Liv swung her bag over her shoulder.

"Here's some smokes." She pulled a couple out of her pack and placed them carefully on the bedside. She took her hand in mine. Her nails were chipped with black nail polish. Then she leaned over me, laying her head on my chest, "I'm glad you're going to be ok. I don't know what I'd do if I ever lost you." Her silky black curls tossed in my face. Then she was gone.

I was released from the hospital the following day. It was a sunny Monday morning. I lit a smoke and was grateful Liv brought me a change of clothes: a pair of panties, jeans, and a clean hoodie. I tried to call her, but it kept going to voicemail. I was thirsty and my eyes kept watering, but otherwise I felt good. I was optimistic. I couldn't help but to feel grateful to be alive, knowing how close to death I'd come.

Horseback Riding

November 1, 1996

They keep us busy at the Healing Lodge. It seems like there's always something planned. For the most part, I don't mind it, but it can be a little exhausting. Frank says it's because they're trying to teach us "healthy ways of having fun," like without the drinking or the drugs. Today we're going horseback riding. I used to ride when I was little, but I haven't been on a horse in a long time.

Figure 16: *Untitled*, Hali Heavy Shield, Mixed Media, 2022.

When we got to the Agriplex, the large arena felt cool. The smell of livestock feed and the stink of manure burned my nostrils. I didn't mind being there. It was a change of scenery from the Lodge and it reminded me of the times I used to visit Liv's place during the summers.

They always had lots of horses and cattle. Her dad was a ranchman and one of the best cowboys in Blackfoot country, or so they say. He let us kids ride all day if we wanted to. Sometimes, we went as far as the coulees and down the ravine behind the barn. We'd ride until the sun would set and the hills turned a coppery orange colour. That's how we knew when to come home. Liv's mom would have a meal of fried potatoes and barbequed meat waiting for us.

One time when Liv and I went riding, her dad warned us not to go near the river. It had rained a lot that spring and the river was higher than usual. But there was no telling us what to do, we were curious and wanted to know just how high the river was. I knew deep down we shouldn't have gone, but I felt safe because Liv was a little older than me and braver and after all, her dad was never going to find out. Once we got to the river bottom, I could hear the river raging and splashing through the trees. We got closer to the forested area and that's when I knew why her dad didn't want us down there. The river had risen so high that bases of the trees were immersed in a current of muddy rainwater from the run-off.

Liv and I rode doubles, her in front and me holding on behind her. At first, she struggled to steer the horse away from the water, but the horse's front legs got stuck in the mud and the more it struggled, the more it got stuck.

The horse fought and kicked, trying to free itself from the mud. I held onto the saddle and gripped my thighs tight around the horse, exactly how Liv taught me.

Twigs and floating debris swept by until I couldn't hold on anymore. And then, I let go. I went under. I wished I could've just held on. But later I realized that's what happens when there's just too much force against you, and there's no one there to rescue you and you can't even rescue yourself. You have to just let go. I think people let go too easily and then they just go under. I feel that way sometimes.

I didn't die that day. But that's when we started to joke that I had nine lives.

"Quill!" I heard someone call my name, yanking me away from my thoughts of Liv.

Then again, "Quill."

We gathered on some bleachers where the horses had been tied to the railing and were waiting patiently for us. Frank called my name one more time and motioned for me to take my hood off. The elder was going to pray.

"Okay, before we ride, we'll start with a prayer. It's always good to start with a prayer." The elder gestured with his hands as he spoke. I put my hood down and fidgeted with my bangs. Ever since I cut my hair, I couldn't get comfortable with it.

"Ayo Ihtsipaitapiiyo'pa..." the elder's voice faded and my thoughts turned to Mom and Liv and how much I missed them both and how I wished things could go back to the way they were. A horse's neigh brought me back to the elder's prayer, and as he finished, I put my hand over my heart, to accept the prayer.

"Quill," Rita, the other counsellor, called out, "do you want to ride?"
I shook my head and pulled my hood back up.

"Maybe in a bit," I mumbled.

I went over to one of the horses and ran my hand over the bridge of his nose. His glassy eye seemed to look right through me.

"You're beautiful," I whispered as I caressed his large muscular jaw line. I read somewhere that horses are one of the smartest animals on earth. They can communicate with you, but you have to talk to them, and more importantly, you have to listen.

Skye held out her hand secretly, so only I could see what she was holding. She gave me a sly grin, turned her back and walked towards the shoots.

“Can I use the bathroom?” I asked Frank as he helped one of the boys saddle up.

“Come right back. You know where they are?” he asked.

I nodded, then patted the horse and told him I’d be back. I walked towards the doors where we first came in but instead of heading to the bathroom like I was supposed to, I climbed through the metal bars of the shoots and towards a door that had been left open just enough to let a shaft of light through. When I got outside, the sun shone in my eyes. Skye and Jess were standing there, huddled together against the wind.

“Hurry, we’re gonna get busted!”

Skye put the joint in her mouth and pursed her lips as she tried to light it. Plumes of smoke surrounded us and Skye passed the joint around until it was just a roach and we were laughing and dizzy and everything felt peaceful.

When I finally got back inside, my heart was pounding. Could anyone hear my heartbeat? I started to get paranoid. We managed to get back to the group without getting caught.

Skye and Jess laughed as they tried on different sizes of boots and helmets. That’s when I decided maybe I should get on a horse, just so it didn’t seem obvious how stoned I was. Marvin, the elder, told me in Blackfoot to put on a pair of cowboy boots and a helmet. I recognized the word sspisttsikitsikin, cowboy boots, because I had heard it before. I listened to him and knew enough not to be told something twice, especially by an elder. I found a pair of boots that were a size too big, but they would have to do.

Rita turned to me and said, “You know Blackfoot?” she sounded surprised.

I shrugged my shoulders and didn’t feel like talking. Plus, I didn’t like her, she acted mean and I saw the way she looked at us kids.

I put on my helmet and stood beside the horse I had befriended earlier. There were about six of us riding, and Cheeto, but he sat on the bleachers alone. It looked like he might've still been praying. But I doubt it.

"Have you ridden before?" A young guy in a faded mackinaw asked.

I nodded.

"She doesn't spook easy, but they can sense your fear," he said, "so as long as you're cool."

"Yeah, I know," I said.

I walked around the front of the horse, reached out and ran my hand down its neck and patted it gently. His fur was chestnut brown and silky under the arena lights.

"You always mount and dismount on the left," the elder said.

I reached for the horn of the saddle and lifted my foot into the stirrup. I wasn't as fit as I used to be and my thighs burned from the stretch. I was out of shape and I needed to bob myself up and on the third count, wranglers hoisted me up by my hips, giving me the extra lift I needed. I couldn't stop laughing because Skye was laughing and soon we were all laughing and the elder and counsellors started laughing too.

I held the reins for the first time since the accident. I tried not to tremble.

"You might want to just walk him for now. He's a bit frisky, but he's a good horse."

It felt good to be riding again. I held on tight and didn't let go.

Circle

December 2, 1996

Every morning, we gathered in the common area for Circle. We each took a chair near the windows where they were neatly stacked. Edna, the cook/janitor/sometimes receptionist/sometimes driver, got after us if we didn't stack them back when we were done.

"And don't be dragging them across the floor like you do. It marks up my floors and it makes that awful noise."

"Like this," Cheeto dragged the chair across the floor, making faint black streaks and a thunderous screech.

"Yes," Edna said, "like that. Thank you for showing us what *not* to do with the chairs." Edna was cool like that. She didn't get upset easy. Edna gave us lots of chances. But she was still strict and most of us knew how far we could push it with her. I once heard Edna say that it's ok to give kids like us more than one chance. Especially because of all the stuff we've been through.

"As long as you learn something from your mistakes," Edna said. "Don't be going and doing the same thing over and over again, expecting something different. It'll drive you crazy. Believe me, I've been there." I liked how real Edna was. She swore sometimes. Even raised her voice, but she never yelled.

"Always start your morning with a prayer," Frank said. "Be thankful. Be thankful that you've seen another day. That you've got to see the sun rise. That you have your youth. Your strength. And it's good to pray for other people. Your families. You know, some people aren't as lucky as you are here. I know it doesn't seem like that now, believe me! But I know. Pray that you can take this time to do some healing. And to let go of that bad stuff." Frank prepared the smudge. He tore small pieces of sweetgrass, and the smoke soon coiled up around him.

"You can pray in your own way too," Frank said. I never really prayed before. Auntie would sometimes take me to church with her and I'd have to go with the foster families if they were religious. But when it came time to pray, we usually had to kneel down, bow our heads, and stay quiet. I'd usually just think about what we were going to have for lunch. But Frank taught me I could just talk to Creator. Like how I would to a friend. He even said it might help if I talked to the people in my life that had passed on. He said it was like calling on the ancestors, for strength or guidance or whatever. I wasn't there yet. I didn't mind talking to God, but trying to talk to Mom or Liv was something totally different.

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When we finished smudging, Frank asked the group, "If you could be anything in life, what would it be? What kind of person would you be?" He told us that it would be the topic of our journal writing later so we were going to go around the circle and talk about it first.

Frank said, "Part of your sobriety is that you set some goals for yourself."

A few of the guys shrugged, not wanting to participate. Skye said she didn't know, another girl said she wanted to be a professional barrel racer. When it came to me, my heart was racing. My palms were clammy. I hated talking in front of people.

"I don't know," I said. I held my hand up over my mouth when I spoke. Or laughed. It was a habit ever since I lost my tooth from the time Jake hit me. A few people snickered.

"Well," Frank said, "what is it you like to do?"

I shrugged my shoulders, "I guess I like to draw," I mumbled through the sleeve.

"You should see her writing," Skye interrupted. "She's a good writer."

“Thank you, Skye,” Frank put up his finger just over his mouth, “but what did we say about when someone’s talking during Circle?” If it wasn’t our turn in the Circle, our only job was to listen.

“Do you know what kind of writing you like?” Frank asked.

“Mostly stories and stuff,” I said.

Cheeto raised his hand. “I’m going to be lawyer.”

“That’s excellent, what makes you want to become a lawyer?” Frank asked.

“I see all the stuff that our people are going through right now, like us Native kids, but our families too. It’s unfair. Other kids don’t go through the same stuff we go through. The lawyer I had before told me to plead no contest to an assault charge I didn’t even do. I wasn’t even in town when it happened. He said I wouldn’t win because I just look guilty. I was like, what does that even mean?” Everyone went quiet. “Other kids don’t have to worry about getting followed around the store every time they wanna go buy something. Regular kids don’t get stopped on the street and harassed by the cops. Anyway, so I pleaded no contest thinking there’d be no problems, but now I have a record and it just got me into more trouble. What’s worse is now there’s no one to take care of my grandma. She old and depends on me for stuff.”

Skye interrupted, “My grandma went to Residential School. When she was little, she was just taken away.”

Cheeto said, “That’s another thing I want to do. I’m going to help my people.”
Frank had been a Residential School survivor (that’s what he called it). I wasn’t sure exactly what that meant. Auntie never talked about it, and she didn’t ever say anything about Mom going. Still, I listened.

“When I was a small child,” Frank continued, “it was a time when I felt free, just like a kid is supposed to be. Running around at Sundance, being around ceremony, hearing everyone talking Blackfoot. Then when we had to go to those schools, it was against the rules to even speak in our own language. We had to pray in their way; I couldn’t wear my moccasins. You see, they tried to take even our Indianness away.” The room was silent.

Frank cleared his throat, “But you know what happens to a campfire when you try to put it out? The embers are still hot, maybe even hotter than the flame itself.” Frank continued, “The embers just need a little air and the flame appears. I want you kids to understand something: No one can ever put that fire out. Because it’s in you. Right here,” Frank tapped his chest with his fingers.

Christmas Dinner at the Lodge

December 20, 1996

Christmas holidays were coming up and Frank and Edna said they’d be on shifts and Ms. Swanson would be off for a few days. We all pitched in and decorated the cafeteria. In the weeks before the dinner we cut out giant snowflakes with construction paper, glued long green and red chains, and made snowmen with cotton balls and pipe cleaners. The kids with family from town or from the Rez could invite their relatives. But I felt bad for some of the others, like Jess, who didn’t have anyone coming. I invited her sit with me and Auntie. Edna and some of the other workers and community volunteers cooked all day, preparing turkeys, hams, mashed potatoes, stuffing, gravy—the works! Edna said we had to save our appetite, so for breakfast we had yogurt and granola bars.

Me and Skye braided each other's hair and helped Edna in the kitchen. I liked it when Edna put me to work or gave me a special job to do. It made me feel good. It also helped me to keep my mind focussed.

We grabbed a pair of blue latex gloves, inflating them with a quick blow and wedged our hands in. They were the same kind we used during clean up. I snapped the wrist a little too hard and this made Skye giggle.

"Ok, we have work to do," Edna's face was changed from a relaxed easy smile to a slight frown. That's when I knew she meant business. She pushed her glasses up with her wrist. Her face was shiny, the way a cook's is when they're in the kitchen all day stirring pots, slicing vegetables, kneading dough, and wiping countertops down. Edna put me in charge of distributing the plastic utensils and condiments.

"One packet of butter for now," Edna instructed, "I'm not sure we'll have enough to go around."

The line-up got bigger. I was starting to sweat. I kept looking over at the meat and mashed potatoes area; I worried there wouldn't be enough left over for me to eat. I sometimes got that way: always thinking there might not be enough. That's because there usually wasn't. I know what it's like to go hungry. One foster family I stayed with used to lock everything up in the kitchen at night. They even deadbolted the fridge. And for punishment for talking back or giving attitude, they'd send me to bed without supper.

It was almost four o'clock and Auntie still hadn't arrived. I started to wonder if she'd forgot. But when Edna saw me looking out the window, she reassured me she'd be here.

"Com'on, now," Edna said, "don't be a nosy parker."

Just then, I heard Skye almost scream, "Grandpa! You're here!"

Edna gave me a nod. “Why don’t you go out there, see to it people have coffee and tea and are seated okay.”

Boots thudded across the floor like the clacks of horseshoes. The hum of visiting and laughter seemed to lift the Lodge right off its foundation. Just then, Ms. Swanson walked in the front door with a young man. They both stomped their feet and removed their heavy dark coats. Ms. Swanson had on a bright red sweater with a pearl broach and red nail polish to match. The man she was with had on a suit and tie and his cheeks were as rosy as apples. Jess took their coats and hung them on the rack.

“Thank you, girls. Jess, Quill, this is my friend Alex. Alex these are my students.” Alex extended his hand. It was cold and dry. We both shook it.

Then Ms. Swanson reached for both of us, “Oh, come here you! Merry Christmas,” she gave us both a hug.

“Friend…?” Jess said in sly tone after they walked off.

“Sure,” I said. We laughed. I always found it weird to see teachers outside of school. Like, when they’re in normal clothes, out at a store. Just then, I saw Auntie’s truck pull up. I’d never been so happy to see her. I ran out and wrapped my arms around her even before she could get off the vehicle. She laughed.

“Quill, this is Ray.” I would’ve been disappointed she brought a new boyfriend with her, but I was so happy to see her.

“Hi Ray,” I said.

“Oki,” he said.

“Hope you’re both hungry, we’re almost ready to eat.” I walked them both up the steps where we met Frank. He shared a friendly nod as he took a long drag from his smoke. Ray and Frank visited in Blackfoot, while Auntie followed me in.

“I have our spot at this table,” I took Auntie’s purse and set it down. She looked sharp. She wore a suede fringed jacket and a dark green skirt that flowed down to her ankles.

“Do you want tea or coffee Auntie? Or there’s pop?” I asked.

“Mmm, maybe a Diet Coke,” she said. I brought her the can. She visited with another family at the table.

Christmas music played on the radio. The melody crackled through an old stereo. Fluorescent tubes of lighting buzzed overhead. Elders smiled. Kids ran around with candy canes pointed out of their mouths. That’s when I heard Frank’s voice over the speaker. He spoke in Blackfoot for a long while then switched to English. He thanked everyone for coming and said how proud he was of the kids and workers for cooking and decorating and making everything look nice. Then he shared that he’d been sober for 24 winters and encouraged everyone to live a good life. He took off his cap and combed his fingers through his hair to the side and prayed in Blackfoot. I bowed my head and clasped my hands together. Frank’s voice and the hum of the other elders who were also praying softly, was comforting. When the prayer was done, people started to get up and make their way to the line-up. I was ready to help serve, when Skye pulled on my sleeve and motioned for me towards the door. I glanced around. Everyone seemed to be in their own world of conversation and Christmas cheer. I met Skye outside where she and Jess were huddled off to the side. Then they ran around to the back. I ran after them.

Figure 17: *Untitled*, Hali Heavy Shield, Mixed Media, 2022.

The glow from the windows spread out like big white blankets alongside us.

"Wait up," I half yelled at them.

"Hurry," Skye whispered, "you're gonna get us busted."

I caught up with them behind the shed. Jess was hunched over an old wooden box where the staff kept old tools and pieces of scrap metal. She pulled out a flask and took a long hard shot. Her face winced as she tossed her shiny black bangs to the side. Skye lit a joint.

"You guys are crazy," I laughed nervously. I took the flask from Jess and contemplated.

"Don't think," Skye said. I took a shot of the whiskey. It warmed my throat. The dim farm light cast shadows around us like dancing Northern Lights. I took a drag from the joint and said I'd had enough and that if we didn't get back soon, someone would notice.

"Come back out after supper," Skye said. "My cousin gave me enough to make a night of it."

My head swirled as I ran back into the Lodge. We were giddy and high and I stopped and looked up at the night sky before I went in. It was dark out now and the stars were bright. The Big Dipper hung overhead like a string of white Christmas tree lights. Just then I realized it was

only a few months away from Liv's memorial. I couldn't believe she'd be gone for almost a year. Time goes by so fast, I thought. Then, out of nowhere, I heard Liv's voice whisper to me, "Ikakimaat."

"I won't give up, Liv," I said in almost a whisper.

When I got back inside it felt like we'd been gone a long time, but people were still lined up. Auntie and Ray were served a plate though. I went over to Edna and grabbed a Grape Crush and some fresh gloves. I took a long drink and tried my best to seem normal. I felt as if I was in slow motion. Maybe I was, because that's when Edna spoke,

"Com'on Quill, get those napkins ready." I folded napkins for some time until the line died down. Then Edna asked, "Why are your eyes so red?"

I shrugged my shoulders as if I didn't know.

"Go on and serve yourself," she said. By the time I got to the table where Auntie was sitting, she turned to me and said, "There you are." She reached down beside her and pulled out a small gift bag. "Me and Ray got you something. It's nothing big, but we hope you'll like it."

I took a small bite of turkey and stuffing and chewed. "Thanks, Auntie," I said with my mouth full. I unwrapped the gift. It was a notebook with the letter Q on the front and a new set of coloured pencils.

"Thanks Auntie," I held them to my chest, "I'm gonna save the notebook for when I get out. But the pencils I'll use now." I took out the green pencil and sketched a small area on the back page.

"We're gonna head out now. Ray has to work early tomorrow." Auntie reached for her purse and pulled the strap up over her shoulder.

"Really? Ok," I said.

“Yeah, but Shania told me to tell you, the kids miss you and can’t wait till you get out so you can visit.”

I smiled, “Yeah, I talked to them last weekend. The kids were pretty excited about Santa and the tree and their school concert.”

“You’ll see them soon,” Auntie looked deep into my eyes and put her hand on the back of my neck, “You just have to finish here, and then—“

“I know” I said.

Charcoal

January 2, 1997

Some of the time at the Lodge was spent for school. Because most of us were under 18, Frank said we had to go to class. It wasn’t like a regular school. Mostly because we couldn’t leave the Lodge. And it depended on how many of us were at there at any given time. Sometimes kids were in there for 30 days, sometimes 12 months, like me. Most afternoons we were in one big classroom at the back of the Lodge with Ms. Swanson. We were given booklets to do, but sometimes she assigned us group activities and projects.

The last grade I finished was Grade 9. By that time, I wasn’t really learning anything anyway. Well, nothing that I could use in the real world. Sure, I could add and subtract polynomials, but when it came time for me to apply for a Social Insurance Number, nothing about school prepared me for filling out that application. And they definitely don’t teach you about the real history of stuff. For example, when Ms. Swanson needed some information about the last school I was enrolled at, I told her Sir John A. MacDonald Junior High.

That’s when she said, “Did you know that Sir John A. MacDonald was the first prime minister of Canada? He was also the man responsible for the Indian Residential School system.”

“Well, why would they name a school after him?” I asked, “and why wouldn’t they teach that?”

“It’s a long story,” Ms. Swanson said, “for maybe for another time.”

One of our assignments was to research a Native hero. Ms. Swanson wanted us to find examples of people that we looked up to. Then we were going to make posters and present them and put them up in the classroom. Some of the others picked hockey players, musicians, Blackfoot chiefs. I remember Frank telling a story about Charcoal, a legendary Blackfoot warrior. It was on our way back from Pincher Creek. We’d gone on a field trip to Frank Slide, a massive rock avalanche that wiped out an entire town in the mountains.

I searched through the classroom’s library and Ms. Swanson’s personal book collection. She was picky about who got to handle those books, so she’d photocopy a page or two when we wanted something. I liked sitting at her desk. She had an electric typewriter and a computer in her area, which was two desks positioned in an L shape. It seemed to box her in when she was sitting there. When I asked why she liked her desk like that, she said we all need our own space, especially when there are so many of us. She was always going on about privacy and boundaries. That was something I knew I wanted someday: a space all to myself. My own room. My own apartment. Nobody telling me what to do or how to live my life. I’d have a shelf full of books, just like Ms. Swanson.

Ms. Swanson’s name suited her. She was just like a swan. Her hair was blonde and fine, and her neck was milky white and long. Everything about her, the way she spoke, the way she moved, was delicate and elegant. She reminded me of my Edmonton foster mom.

There were white boards and dry erase markers in the new portable addition to the Lodge. But in the room that we were in there were still chalkboards. Ms. Swanson's hands would get dry and powdered with white or yellow chalk, depending on the kind she used that day.

When I couldn't find anything about the story of Charcoal, Ms. Swanson arranged for an elder to come in and talk to the class. Skye couldn't join the class. She was on lock-down. Which meant she had all her privileges taken away for getting caught with a couple of joints in her room. The Lodge had a zero tolerance for that stuff. So, she got put to work in the cafeteria with Edna after lunch. I felt bad for her. She suffered from anxiety pretty bad, and she said weed was the only thing to calm her down.

I was surprised when Ms. Swanson introduced the guest as an elder, because he was much younger, like Auntie's age. The elder had a long dark braid and scratched his chin before he spoke.

"Oki, how's everyone?" he smiled. "Your teacher here tells me you want to know about Charcoal. I'm going to tell you about him. You know, one of my grandfathers knew Charcoal back in those days. And he passed down some of those stories to my dad. That's how we share our teachings you know, in the Blackfoot way." He reached for his coffee, blew on it, and took a gentle sip.

Figure 18: *Charcoal*, Hali Heavy Shield, Mixed Media, 2022.

His voice was like velvet. “This man, Charcoal, he was a true Indian outlaw. You see, when the Red Coats came, at that time, they were called the North West Mounted Police, and later became the RCMP, you know, iyinnakiikoaiksi.” The elder spoke with elaborate hand gestures. Ms. Swanson seemed to be only half-listening. She looked up every so often from the stack of papers in front of her, stroking them with a red pen.

“Did you know, iyinnakiikoaiksi, the policemen, they hanged people in those days?”

Ms. Swanson interrupted, “I’m sorry, but what’s the literal translation of een-ha-keeks?” Ms. Swanson was going to night school when she wasn’t at the Lodge teaching us. She was studying languages, so she was always talking with Frank, asking him questions. Reminding him to speak to her in Blackfoot.

The elder half laughed and told her, “Well, I guess you could say the literal translation is kind of like, ‘those that grab you’.” The elder said Ms. Swanson asked a good question, and that we should all be learning Blackfoot and asking questions just like our teacher.

“The signing of Treaty 7, happened in 1877,” the elder continued, “but I won’t go into all of that just yet, but at that time, the settlers, you know, the white people started to come and build farms and houses and businesses on the land, and us Indians, were made to live on the reserve.”

“Also, you know, at that time, you couldn’t just leave the reserve, you had to have a permit.”

“Wait what?” Cheeto asked.

“That’s right,” the elder continued, “you had to go see the Indian Agent, and if he said it was ok, like if someone needed to go to town to shop or work, you needed a card.”

“Like a passport,” Cheeto said.

"Yeah, like a passport. Except, it wasn't a legal thing. It was just something that the government did to further try and control us Indians. Anyway, they called Charcoal Si'kohksskitsis Black Wood Ashes, and in those days, you know, our people would travel all over. Camp along the river, and we would go way up to the North Saskatchewan River near Edmonton, to hunt and camp. I bet some of you been to Edmonton?"

"I have." Cheeto raised his hand.

"Ah. So anyway, Charcoal had a beautiful wife and what happened was that Charcoal found out his wife had another lover, who was also one of her cousins."

"Tss, kissing cousins," another student said.

The elder sort of laughed. "I'm sure she brought a lot of shame to her family after that."

"Charcoal became very angry and shot and killed the other man." The elder made a motion as if he was holding a rifle. "He was a great hunter, a warrior, so it took him a single shot. He knew after that the police would be looking for him, so he took his family and headed to the Timber Limits, you know, to camp out. The iyinnakiikoaiksi went on a big chase for Charcoal, especially after he'd managed to steal two of their horses. That's when one of the Mounties spotted his campfire, you know he could see the smoke, like uh, smoke signals."

"Hey, I saw that movie," Cheeto said.

"Shh," Ms. Swanson replied.

"But what ended up happening was that Mountie must've not known what he was in for, you know, trying to hunt down a Blackfoot warrior." The elder nodded then continued, "So when that Mountie went looking for Charcoal, Charcoal knew it was either the Mountie or Charcoal, so Charcoal shot and killed him."

We cheered and clapped.

"And in the end, you know what?" Everyone was silent. "In the end it was Charcoal's own brother, Left Hand, that helped turn him in. This is what they did back then, even in Residential School." He seemed to drift off someplace else while speaking. "They pitted us against our own family, they threatened us with jail and beatings so we would be loyal only to them. This is why you see now a lot of our Native families are broken down."

"So did Charcoal escape?" Cheeto asked.

"No," the elder continued, "he didn't escape this time. They put him in jail until his trial. Then they found him guilty and sentenced him to death."

"To hanging?" Jess asked.

"Aah. Death by hanging." The elder clasped his hands together.

"That's rank." Cheetoh said.

"Where did this happen?" I asked.

"You know Ft. Macleod?" He asked.

"Is that that town when we went to that Buffalo Jump?" Jess said.

"That's it. Believe it or not, Charcoal was executed right in that town."

I thought for a minute, if I'd been living at that time, I'd be hanged for what I did to Liv.

The Accident

February 12, 1997

One day, I sat at Ms. Swanson's desk after class while she pushed in chairs, collected papers, and picked up chewed pencils off the floor. I traced my fingers across the books on her bookshelf and picked up a small grey book with tattered edges. It had *Modern Poetry* written across the front. I fanned the pages and it smelled musty. Then I opened it at random. There was poem entitled *Nothing Gold Can Stay* by Robert Frost.

Ms. Swanson leaned over my shoulder, “That’s one of my favourites,” she pointed.

“Read it for me, will you?” she asked.

I paused. I hated reading out loud.

“Please?” she insisted.

I cleared my throat, and began to read,

“Nature’s first green is gold,

Her hardest hue to hold.

Her early leaf’s a flower;

But only so an hour.

Then leaf subsides to leaf.

So Eden sank to grief,

So dawn goes down to day.

Nothing gold can stay.”

Ms. Swanson hummed with satisfaction. I didn’t really understand all of it, but it made me think of Liv.

After supper, I lay in bed and decided it was time to write about the night of the accident.

It was the middle of January and there was a snowfall warning. Liv insisted I drive. We’d been drinking and doing lines of coke all weekend at a house on Bannock Ave. in Lethbridge. I’d been spending a lot of time at Liv’s out on the Rez. She didn’t like staying there alone and not having my own place to stay, I was more than grateful. Her dad always made me feel like I had a home there. I sometimes imagined it was my own home.

There were parts of the highway that had patches of black ice and the wind was blowing, causing a complete white-out. I managed to stay somewhat close to the partially covered yellow

line, but the snowflakes were large and the blowing snow was disorienting. We'd come close to a head-on with a semi-tractor trailer. They don't slow down for anyone. One year earlier, there was a massive crash that happened.

The truck driver had barreled through a red light, T-boning a van full of kids from a Cree reserve on their way to a hockey tournament. The driver of the truck, who caused the accident, was a white guy from Alaska. He got off with 1-year probation and a fine, even though he was the one that ran the red light. Liv's dad said if it were the other way around: a van full of white boys and a Native driver, you bet that driver would be in prison for a lot longer than that. I didn't doubt that.

Liv kept turning the indoor cab light on. She had a bit more coke left. She snorted, then reached over to me and held it under my nose and I snorted.

"Here," she said.

She opened a bottle of Crown Royal and a bottle of Coke.

Liv turned down the music, took a slosh of whiskey, passed it to me, then did the same with the pop.

She let out a wild scream, "Oh my god! This is one of me and my dad's favourite songs." She blared the stereo and started to sing along to Alan Jackson. Reaching up, she turned off the light and sparked cigarette after cigarette. I knew we were going to be sick the next day, but I didn't care. I didn't want to think about that. We'd have another line and chase it with sweet whisky and coke. We started to make big plans about one day moving to Calgary. We'd get an apartment near Mount Royal. No, downtown. Liv insisted that was where all the classy people lived. We'd go to hockey games and take classes together and go to all the cool clubs. We'd find

boyfriends and have babies at the same time, then buy houses next door to each other. Live happily ever after.

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My body filled with a wintry chill. Cold blasts whipped at me in all directions. I was freezing. My breath came out in plumes of frozen breaths. My face was wet. When I tried to get up, I couldn't. My wrist was pinned between the console and truck door. My vision was blurred, but it was clear enough to see the smashed windshield. It smelled like exhaust and liquor and gasoline. I realized the truck was on its side, the headlights glowing. It was a horse. We rolled.

"Liv," I mumbled, my head swirling. "Liv," only this time, a bit louder. "Li—," I turned and looked in the back seat. I started to panic. "Liv? Liv!" It may have been the adrenaline or the cocaine, or both, but I yanked my wrist free. I could hear something snap. I knew it was bad, but everything went numb. I managed to climb out of the drivers' side window. "Liv!" I screamed. I turned around in circles, searching for her. I cradled my wrist, not wanting to further the injury. I cried hysterically, making a pact with God that I wouldn't do anything bad again if only she'd be okay. "Oh God Liv, please!" I sobbed.

The snow suddenly let up. I crawled through the ditch, looking, searching. Prairie grass poked through the snow-covered fields. My head throbbed and moisture dripped from my forehead. The truck was tipped on its side, its lights shining over the injured horse. I could see it was still breathing as it lay on its side. Icy plumes formed around its head as it struggled.

"Liv!" I slipped on the snowy gravel. A set of headlights appeared down the road. My head spun and my stomach swirled from the taste of booze and blood.

Liv's Funeral

March 28, 1997

I couldn't bring myself to attend Liv's wake and I don't remember much about Liv's funeral. I'd cut my hair the same way Auntie did when Na'ah passed away. I wrapped my braid in a scarf and placed it in the casket, along with a picture of us. We were just kids in that photo, making faces and being silly. It was March and there'd been a snowstorm. The wind blew snow and ice. It was the kind storm that made its way up over the mountains and whipped across the prairie floor. The kind of prairie storm that felt like you were getting poked with a thousand needles.

I still wasn't sure if I should even attend the funeral. Following the accident, they released me from emergency, and I walked down the hallway to where Liv was. They didn't tell me yet that she had died. But I think I already knew. I saw Lenny. He had this look on his face, I'll never forget. He was walking towards me, but when I looked at him, his eyes were searching, his expression blank. Puzzled. When I reached for him, he seemed to dismiss me. Nudged me aside and kept walking. No eye contact. Nothing to acknowledge anything was going to be the way it used to be. That was it. A look. A glance.

The church was lined with at least 50 people. So many people loved Liv. That's how she was, easy to love. My mind and heart swirled in confusion, pain, and guilt.

Auntie had come with me to the church. I'm glad she wore her winter boots. A part of her dress pant dragged at the heel and was muddy and wet. We sat out in her vehicle for a long while and watched people come and go. Some people gathered around outside the church and smoked. Hugged. Wiped away tears. Offered tissue.

The white hearse was parked on the north side of the parking lot, towards the back of the church. As we walked up the church steps, a cold burst of winter wind whipped around us, blowing with it a cloud of light snow. There was a young man standing at the door. He offered us an armband and program. It was a small pin with Liv's picture. I didn't recognize it, but the mountains were in the background; maybe it was taken in Waterton. I recognized the photo in the program. It was from her last birthday barbeque. Her black curls always seemed to fall perfectly around her. She often complained about her "out-of-control" hair. But it was wild and beautiful and natural. Just like Liv.

A bar of amber light shone through the church's stained-glass windows. Tiny particles of dust floated above, as if there was a small galaxy suspended over the coffin.

I kept my head down and wanted to disappear, but I knew I needed to say good-bye to Liv. Pay her respect. When I saw Lenny, his shoulders were slumped. His chest hollow. I reached out to give him a hug. He didn't hug me back but then his body started to shake like he was holding in his cries. Then he held onto me, and we both cried. He'd lost weight. He was pale and his cheeks were sunken. He seemed to be partly confused, the way funerals seem to bring out that uncertainty in people. The realization of how delicate life is, never to be taken for granted. How they make you think about your own mortality.

The church was split between Liv's family. Her dad and his girlfriend on the left and Liv's mom and grandma on the right, and both of their extended families filling the rows behind them. Auntie told me that during the funeral preparations, the family had a big fight about where Liv would be buried. Liv's dad wanted her up on the hill at his ranch, and her mom said she was Catholic and insisted Liv be buried at the church cemetery. The fighting went back and forth like that for days.

A man played the guitar at the front of the church. He wore a black vest and a cowboy hat. The music was melancholy and only made me want to cry more. Before taking our seat, Auntie brought me up to the casket. I was overcome with fear and I felt like I was watching myself in a movie. Liv looked just like Liv. White lace covered her, and it seemed as though she was sleeping. A blue rosary was placed neatly over her hands. We sat down. The music stopped. They closed the casket, and wails from her mom and others who were sitting near her pierced my heart.

The priest's voice echoed to the back of the church saying words like father and heaven and comfort and eternal life. Then Lenny shuffled to the front and gave the eulogy. I don't remember much about what was said but he did make people laugh. That's how Liv was, always making people feel good. When the service was over, the church doors opened and a small group of uncles and cousins cradled their hand drums and sang for her.

Easter Powwow at Treatment

April 4, 1997

It rained all night and into the morning. Explosions of thunder hurled over the valley and woke me in the middle of the night. I had a tough time falling back to sleep. The next day the dusty gravel roads turned into mush. Puddles turned into small lakes and backroad ditches into flowing rivers. Frank wasn't sure about driving into town because of the flooding. There was a powwow in town Easter Monday and the Lodge planned on bringing all of us. I didn't care either way, but I thought it might be good to get out for a while. I was restless and was getting cabin fever.

We left the Lodge around noon after we ate lunch, and I took a seat at the back of the van. I felt embarrassed riding around in the van because it had “White Buffalo Healing Lodge” stamped across both sides.

It was about an hour’s drive to town but we made it to the powwow in time for grand entry. The powwow was at the community hall. The dancers gathered at the east end of the arena behind the flag bearers. The emcee called out over the speakers, his voice crackling from the speaker system.

We found some seats on the bleachers and sat while the announcer did a call for all the drummers. Grey Feathers started off with Grand Entry and three men held the flags, carrying them in as other dancers followed them. Among them was the Chief, who wore a headdress and stood proud, despite the rumours that he was having an affair with one of the other council members. But that’s how it is around here, a whole lot of gossip.

“This is really cool.” Jess turned to me.

“Haven’t you ever been to a powwow before?”

“No, not like this. Our dancers and drummers are different.”

I shook my head. I couldn’t believe she’d never been to a powwow before. The drumming started and I stopped talking and my heart started listening. As the flags and dancers approached, two RCMP dressed in their red coats danced proudly beside the Chief, trying to keep pace with the beat of the drum.

“Please rise as we honour the flags of our nation, and our leaders,” the announcer boomed over the speaker. Indian Princesses, followed first, with their fully beaded crowns placed with perfection. The Men’s Buckskin, then Traditional, then Grass Dancers and Chicken Dancers

followed. The drumming made the tiny hairs on the back of my neck stand up. As they danced in, the feathers and beadwork and intricate designs went swirling by.

I'd been learning to bead at the Lodge, but it was nowhere near the kind of beadwork that was in front of me. Some of the ladies' traditional outfits were fully beaded and I imagined the amount of time it must've taken to do something like that, the amount of patience. Shania used to say the greatest artists are the patient kind. Don't wait to get inspired, she'd tell me, just start the work and see how the magic flows through you. I think that's how she felt about becoming a chef.

Figure 19: *Untitled*, Hali Heavy Shield, Mixed Media, 2022.

After the opening prayer and the honour song, the announcer continued with an intertribal.

"Come with me to the bathroom quick," I told Jess.

I nodded in the direction of the lobby.

"I need the bathroom," I said.

Frank gave me a slight nod of approval. As we walked towards the lobby, I could feel stares darting towards me. People were whispering and pointing directly at me. I tried to ignore it

and I kept walking. I'd always be that person who killed Liv. My heart raced and I could feel myself get hot. Just get to the bathroom, I told myself. My heart was beating so hard it felt as if someone was beating on it with a hand drum. *Boom-boom, boom-boom*. Jess followed close behind me. When we finally got to the lobby I ran into the bathroom and splashed my face with cold water. Jess waited for me by the door outside. I locked myself in the furthest stall from the door and leaned myself against the door. I felt myself going to be sick. I missed Mom and I missed home and I didn't understand what I was doing here and how my life went so incredibly wrong.

I heard a group of girls come into the bathroom. A pair of black Converse stood at my stall door. I heard girls giggling and banging on the pad dispenser. I wadded up a handful of toilet paper and wiped my tears away. Just then, there was a loud bang on the stall door, making me flinch.

"Hurry up in there, some of us have to use it!" a snarky voice demanded.

Another girl chimed in, "How could she live with herself? She should just do everyone a favour and drown herself in that toilet bowl!"

"Just kill yourself already," someone replied.

I recognized that voice from somewhere. It was Milli, Liv's older sister and the one person I never did get along with. She was always jealous of how close me and Liv were. Another loud bang on the stall sent me a message. I knew I wasn't going anywhere.

"She's dropping a gangster!" A roar of hate-filled laughter sent chills down my spine. My heart was racing. I needed to get back to the group where I knew I'd be safe. Where was Jess?

"What are you, chicken shit? Get your sorry, fat ass out here!" The voice came directly through the crack in the stall, the way mice sneak into spaces you'd never think they could. I

could see an eyeball staring at me through the crack. I took a deep breath and slowly unlocked the door. The door forced open, slamming me against the wall. I got a glimpse of four or five girls. They surrounded me like a pack of wolves.

"So you kill my sister and all you get is a year holiday?" There was a long silence. I was trying to be strong, but I could feel the tears dripping from my eyes.

"You're the one that needs the healing, eh?" She continued, "I couldn't even see her face at the funeral it was so fucked up." She shook her head, her bangs falling over her eyes.

"I, I—" I mumbled.

"I, I—" another girl mocked me in a shrill tone. Milli pointed her fingers hard into my chest, "You think you were going to get away with what you did?" The fluorescent light made her sweaty brow shine.

I looked towards the door and by this time, they had shut the main door and locked the deadbolt. The drumming was so loud it seemed to pulse in sync with the pounding of my terrified heart. They had backed me into the stall and Milli spat hard at my face. The next few moments happened fast. She grabbed me by my hair and started punching me over and over again. I couldn't really feel anything; by the second hit, my face went numb. I tried to fight back, but the other girls piled me, getting a scratch and a kick in where they could. Milli got me in a headlock so my face was pressed against the side of her stomach. She smelled like cigarette smoke and perfume. I could feel the pressure of the punches and the severe wrenching of my hair. I stopped trying to fight back. My body went limp. I deserved it.

"Come on! Is that all you've got?" I screamed as loud as I could, but my throat was raw and I could taste my mouth fill with blood. I felt a sharp thrust of pain to my kidney, like it had

been hit hard with something metal. It was sharp and in the blurry haze of bodies, fists, and legs, I saw a black high heel boot, kicking me repeatedly.

"Quill! Quill!" I could barely hear Jess banging on the door. Her voice muffled over the drumming and singing and dancing.

"Jess," I tried to say, but I couldn't speak because my mouth was full of liquid, I assumed it was blood from the rusty taste. I was all too familiar with this taste. It brought me back to the night of the accident.

I couldn't see anything, just flashes of stars and blackness. Noises surrounded me, laughing, breathing. I heard the faucet turn on and I tried to feel my way to the door. Instead, I lost my balance and for a moment it felt as though I was floating. I let go, somehow expecting Liv to catch me, the way she always did when I was hurting. But instead, I fell and hit the side of my head on the counter, knocking myself out completely.

I woke up in the hospital. My left eye was swollen shut and I could barely open my other eye. My head pounded like I had a hangover times ten. My lower back pierced with pain. Then I remembered the fight.

"Auntie?" She got up and rushed to my side, her eyes swollen from crying. I reached for her, my arm draped with an IV.

"I'm here, what do you need?" She looked me over and began to cry.

"It hurts" I said.

"I know it does," she said.

My tears stung my face the way lemon juice does when it seeps into a paper cut.

"What about work?"

“Don’t you worry about that, I’m here,” her voice quivered as she spoke the same way it does when she tries to be strong.

“Do you want me to get you anything?” Auntie stood over me and wiped her tears with a tissue.

“It hurts,” I managed to say when the nurse came in.

“Well hello there, you’re up,” the nurse said in a cheery voice. Her skin was leathery, tanned. As she leaned over me, her neck drooped, and I noticed it was the same colour and texture of elk hide.

“Okay then,” she cracked her gum as she checked the IV, “the doctor will be in to see in a minute okay, hun?” She smiled and left the room.

“Someone from the band police is coming to speak to you about pressing charges.”

“I don’t want to, Auntie.”

“Quill, those girls could have killed you, they are not just going to get away with what they did.” Her voice began to quiver in anger again.

“I’m not pressing charges, that’s only going to piss them off even more.” My head began to pound. “This is all my fault anyway.”

“You listen here, this is not your fault. What happened that night...what happened that night was an accident!”

I almost believed her. I think she almost believed it herself. But it wasn’t an accident. The judge knew that, my lawyer knew that, Liv’s family knew it, and I knew it.

Just then, the doctor came in, “So, looks like you got into some trouble?” Those were the only words he said to me before he turned to Auntie, as if I wasn’t even in the room.

“She’s extremely lucky. Her kidney and ribs are bruised. Her head injury is what concerns me the most. Her x-rays show there are no fractures or internal bleeding, but she did need seven stitches.” Then he turned to me. “You’re going to have some discomfort over the next few days, so you will need to take it easy,” he smiled.

“I’ve got a prescription I will leave at the front, something for the pain and you will need to keep that cut clean. Other than that, she’s ready to go this afternoon. However, we can only release her to the Centre’s care.”

He looked at me with raised eyebrows, “No more bathroom brawls, okay?” Auntie and I looked at each other as he left the room, annoyed by his comment.

Frank was there to pick me up. The sun was still bright even though it was evening. I put on the sunglasses Auntie had bought me from the hospital gift shop. I could barely walk upright and Frank’s gaze was intent and sympathetic. When Auntie opened the door, Frank said I looked like a “kipitakii,” an old lady. Jess jumped off the van and rushed towards me.

“Man, you look like shit!”

“Good to see you too, Jess.” She helped me into the front seat of the van. “I’ll die happy if I never see this place again,” I said.

When we got back to the Lodge it was late. Frank didn’t say much to me. He looked tired. Frank put the van in park and turned off the ignition. Just when I was about to get off he said my name.

“Quill.” I let myself relax back into the seat but left my hand on the door handle.

“I’m going to tell you a story, and I want you to listen. Listen really good, my girl.” He’d never used the words “my girl” before. It was an endearing term. I’d only ever heard one of the dads use it during family visits.

"I used to have a little brother, you know." He continued, "We went swimming one day and I was supposed to be watching over him. When we got to this swimming hole, some of my friends were there and they had tied a rope to a tree and were swinging off it. I told my baby brother to stay put. I wanted to try swinging off it too. They made it look so fun. They were laughing and teasing each other. We were swinging off it, then swimming to the other side of the river. My little brother, you know, he slipped in. I wasn't watching, I kept swinging and playing with my friends. When I finally noticed he wasn't where I told him to stay, I saw his little arms waving up out of the water, half ways down the river. I started swimming. I never swam so hard in my life. My friends were screaming. Screaming for help. But the current, the current, you know, it was just too strong." Frank bowed his head and rested his hands on the steering wheel.

I sat there, feeling as though I was going to be sick. The Tylenol was wearing off and my stomach was queasy. I didn't want to hear this right now. I just wanted to go inside and lay down.

"Quill." He turned to me, his hand directed right at me. "You listen to me. There's always going to be someone who has something to say about what happened, how things should be different. You know what it's like on this reserve, we want to forget our own mistakes, but we never let other people forget theirs."

The tears came suddenly. My ribs hurt and so did my heart. The pain within me wasn't just from my ribs being broken; I know it was something more.

"The main thing," Frank continued, "the main thing," he repeated, "is that you learn to forgive yourself. The only thing that will ever matter is that you ask the Creator for forgiveness, and he'll give you the power to forgive yourself. I was an old man before I learned that. You

don't want to do that, you don't want to carry that kind of guilt around with you your whole life. You'll heal, and you'll be free. It just takes time...and work."

That night, we sat in the van for over an hour, talking. While I stared out the van's windshield, the spider-web of cracks reminded me of a map I'd once seen of Alberta's rivers and lakes. I told him everything. I told him how we were laughing and partying one minute, and how I was reaching for Liv the next. It felt good to talk. And Frank made it easy.

When we got inside, Frank helped me through the door. I could walk, but barely. Jess was at the table working on her loom. She jumped up and rushed over to me.

"Jess help her, will you?"

Jess came on the other side of me and put her arm around my waist, careful not to get close to my rib cage.

"Easy," Frank kept saying. Edna had met us down the hallway and opened my door for me, her keys clanked around her neck.

"You try and get some sleep now," Frank said.

"My journal, I left it outside in the van."

Frank motioned Jess to follow him out. A few minutes later, Jess peeked her head in the doorway and held out my notebook.

"Could you put it over here?" I pointed to the nightstand beside the bed.

"Do you want the lamp off?"

"Naw, just leave it on." I'd gotten used to sleeping with the light on. I heard Jess close the door behind her and I drifted off to sleep.

Forgive yourself. Frank's words floated around me.

I mostly stayed in bed the next couple of weeks. It took that long to walk upright and for my head to stop throbbing. Jess was good about helping me with stuff like bringing me food and helping me up for Circle every day. My eye was healing too. The swelling went down. It turned from black to purple to green and it's now a tinge of yellow.

I missed a couple of classes because my eye was too swollen and my head hurt too much to do any school work. But I decided to go when Ms. Swanson encouraged me to join class. Jess managed to avoid school so I had to convince her to come with me. That afternoon we sat together at the back.

Okotoks Big Rock

May 19, 1997

The smell of freshly baked bread wafted from the kitchen and throughout the Lodge. Edna spent the early hours of the morning making bannock and buns and cinnamon rolls. Curled up in my bed, under the heavy weight of my blankets, I couldn't remember the last time I'd slept so deeply. We were going on a field trip, but I was still tired.

Frank sat in the front seat. He wore a purple cap that read "Montana Ropes Ltd." Edna drove the van, as she often did when Cory, our other driver, wasn't around. Edna and Frank visited, and Frank would turn around to Ms. Swanson, who was sitting in the next seat. Ms. Swanson looked up from her book and stared out the window and looked back at the rest of us, when the boys were getting too loud.

The last time Auntie came to visit, she gave me a CD player, with two brand new CDs: Smashing Pumpkins and Nirvana. I listened to them over and over until the pack of batteries ran out. Edna was generous in giving us some when we needed them, but she said we had to make them last. Me and Skye swapped CDs, but she was more into rap music.

We stopped in Claresholm for gas. Frank said we each could get something, but it had to be under five dollars. I got a Pepsi and salt-and-vinegar chips.

I was glad we stopped. I was beginning to feel claustrophobic in the van. When we got back on the road, Frank got on the van microphone and turned around towards us.

"Ah, I'll tell you a story," he said. My head was clouded. I was tired even though I'd had a good sleep. With the headphones draped around my neck, I let the sound of his voice and spoken Blackfoot words soothe my wounded soul. I felt better after closing my eyes, taking deep breaths, just like Edna taught us: in through the nose, out through the mouth.

We exited the main highway and went down another long road, passing farmhouses, grain elevators, and fields of prairie grasses. After a long while, Edna pulled over and said, "Here we are!"

Figure 20: *Okotok*, Hali Heavy Shield, Mixed Media, 2022.

The rock looked odd, out of place. There, in the middle of the prairie, was a giant rock at least two or three stories high. It looked like it had dropped from the sky. It was disorienting seeing this enormous boulder out in the middle of nowhere. Frank helped the elder and asked one of the students to take the case of water and the chair and carry them closer to the site. A few of

us wandered around and some just sat and stared into the deep crevasses. Beatrice, an elderly woman, sat in a folding chair and reached into her bag. She put a smudge box on her lap and prepared it, first lighting the charcoal then tearing the sweetgrass. She spoke in Blackfoot and said she was going to pray.

"The rest of you, pray in your own way. Your prayers are strong. I'm going to pray that each of you have a good day, and your families are safe. I'll pray that each of you take the learning from this place and take the teachings from this rock and remember it and share it with others. Kiistonoon, you are Niitsitapi. This is who you are. But don't forget," she continued, "this rock has something to offer you, what can you offer it in return?"

Frank removed his hat, and the others did the same. As she started to pray, I felt a sudden but familiar wave of something inside of me. I felt good and sad and overwhelmed all at the same time.

"If there's anyone that wants to smudge, just come up here and you can smudge." I felt too shy. Skye tapped me on the arm and nodded for me to go with her. She walked up towards the elder and we both smudged.

"OK, I want to tell you a story," the elder said. "It's the story of Napi. Napi and the Rock. Aah. One day, Napi was wearing a nice buffalo robe. It was shiny and thick, you know. Napi, he was a trickster and he was always getting into trouble. But Napi did things because he was selfish and he didn't always use his common sense. Frank's told me about all of you, that you're generous and kind and good students. But Napi wasn't this way. He liked to play tricks, you know. He was a trickster, but somehow it always backfired on him." She laughed.

The elder continued. "It was a day kind of like today, hot and dry, and Napi, he had on that buffalo robe because he thought he looked good. He was really hot with the buffalo robe.

Finally, it got too heavy and hot, and so Napi told Coyote, ‘Go give this to the rock.’ And so, Coyote went over and gifted the rock with the buffalo robe. This made the rock happy, you know. So Napi and Coyote were satisfied about their gift and went on their journey. And as they walked, they noticed a big storm cloud up ahead and the wind started blowing. It was windy.

Napi didn’t want to be cold so he told Coyote, ‘Could you go back and get my robe from the rock? I’m starting to get cold.’ So of course, Coyote, you know, he's so loyal. So Coyote goes over to the rock and tells him, ‘There's a big storm coming and Napi wants his robe back.’ Then the rock told him, ‘But you gave me this nice robe, you can’t just take it back.’ So Coyote goes back to Napi and tells him what happened. Napi got angry and frustrated and said, ‘The storm is almost here, go get my robe, I want it back!’ Coyote got shy to ask for it back, you know he didn’t want to feel cheap. Finally, Napi got so angry at Coyote and went to the rock himself and said, ‘You know, you can’t do anything to me, you have always been here and you're going to stay here. You're not going anywhere! I’m taking my robe back.’”

The group of us sat quietly, listening to the elder just as a dark cloud rolled in and seemed to hover over us. Large raindrops fell from the sky, hitting the pale dirt like inkblots. But the cloud moved over us as quickly as it came, leaving us in the hot sun again. The elder continued.

“So Napi covered himself in the nice robe and heard a noise. When Napi turned around the big rock was rolling after them. Napi and Coyote both started running away. That’s when Napi saw two deer out in the field, and he ran after them and asked for help. You know this was back in the day when animals could speak. And anyways, so the deer tried to stop the rock but then the big rock rolled over them. And killed them! Then Napi saw a small herd of buffalo and he called out to them and asked for their help. Napi called out, ‘Could you help me stop the rock? It's rolling after us!’ The buffalo were so faithful, they tried to stop the rock by running in

front of it, but it rolled right over them and killed them. Coyote noticed that the rock was only chasing after Napi. So Coyote, he ran away. Then, Napi saw some hawks in a tree and called for their help. The hawks, they swooped down on top of the rock, and they started pecking at it. This split the rock so he couldn't roll anymore.

While the birds were pecking at the rock, Napi noticed some chicks in a nest and he went over and stretched their beaks wide open. The hawks went back to their nests and they saw their chicks' beaks were now long and wide. So the birds got angry at Napi and aimed their droppings over Napi as they flew by. The birds chased Napi and continued to poop on his head. There was only one chance to escape and that was in a river nearby, so Napi ran to the river and dove into the water." The elder laughed and said Napi was so crazy. "Gyen, that's the story of Napi and the Rock."

I'd wondered how the rock really got there, so I asked Frank.

"Well it's up to you if you want to believe the Napi story, but us Indians, we know the truth. That story was told to Beatrice from four generations back. But I guess it's up to you to decide."

Skye waved from the top of the rock.

"It says on that sign that a giant glacier carried it down this way from way up north," she yelled.

"Hey, you get down here," Edna yelled.

"C'mon, we're headed into the city." Frank helped Beatrice up and carried the chair. Cheeto threw pebbles out into the grassy area, like he was skipping rocks on water.

We got into the van and headed into Calgary. Frank wanted to treat us for how good things had been going at the Lodge and suggested we spend the afternoon roller skating. I'd planned to meet Shania and the kids at Roller Land. I was excited to see them.

I'd been on skates before, but I was nervous because it had been a few years. When we got there, Shania was already sitting in her little car. I got off the van and the kids screamed joyfully and gave me hugs. There's something about being around kids, no matter what kind of day you're having, they make everything better. I was really excited to see them. They always made me laugh and feel good. Hopeful. They both had matching toques and mittens strung from their jacket sleeves. Shania got off and gave me a hug. It was an extra-long hug. We hadn't seen each other since I went to the Lodge. Frank got off the bus and I introduced them. Frank teased the kids. I bet he's a good grandpa. We went inside.

Skye came over and helped lace the kids' roller skates. Edna said the Lodge booked the rink just for us and reminded us to thank Frank. Ms. Swanson tied her laces and was the first on the arena floor. They played music and turned the strobe light on. Cheeto didn't do his laces up. Ms. Swanson kept asking if he needed help. But he refused and insisted he wanted to leave them undone. He stayed on the edge and pulled himself along in a stiff motion. Skye got her skates on. She giggled and put her arms out as she glided across the floor. She said she used to be in figure skating. Me and Shania held hands. Ms. Swanson sat with the kids and me and Shania visited, and she told me all about how her culinary classes were going. I told her Edna's cooking wasn't as good as hers and we laughed. When it was time to go, the kids didn't want me to leave and that made it harder. Shania teared up and I told her not to cry.

Kaitama'tsin: I'll See You Later

June 5, 1997

The day before I was to leave the Lodge, the heat was unbearable. It settled on me like a heavy wool blanket. Frank and a few of the other workers set up a tipi and planned a bonfire. Edna was cutting flank and making frybread. I'd never slept inside a tipi before. I'd never even been inside one, so camping out was a lot of fun. Made me feel like a kid again. I brought out my doll and stuck her in my sleeping bag.

Figure 21: *Untitled*, Hali Heavy Shield, Mixed Media, 2021.

Things still got as noisy for me on the inside, but Edna taught me about being silent, being still. She said if I ever get too overwhelmed or if things get too much for me to handle, I just needed to get outside, out on the land, breathe, and pray to Creator. I noticed even being in the city was sometimes too much. People always seemed to be in a rush. Construction, traffic, shopping. But coming out here, none of that seemed to matter. I could just be me. Niitsitapi.

We sat around the large fire pit. Cheeto chopped wood and started the fire when the sun went down. The smell of woodsmoke reminded me of when me and Mom went camping. I still wasn't sure what I was going to do with my journal. I had some good sketches, so I knew I didn't want to get rid of those. I thought it would be cool to hang onto it. Maybe in a few years, I could read it again. Read what I wrote, remember some of the things I will forget, and maybe want to forget.

Auntie once told me it's ok to remember the bad things and remember some mistakes. Not to punish ourselves, but so we can learn from them. So, we don't make them again.

That made me think about Frank and how he sometimes talked about his own mistakes. "It's what makes us human" he'd say.

I've always respected Auntie's point of view. She can be crazy, but she's smart. The sun was going down, the grass had turned a bright green almost overnight. The trees had bloomed with bright green buds. We all sat around the fire, told stories, and teased each other and laughed. Cheeto reached into the chest of his jacket and pulled out his journal and tossed it into the fire. Its pages curled. He stared into the fire; his eyes dazzled with flames. Then it was Skye's turn. She had already torn out some pages.

She said, "these are all the things I don't want to carry with me anymore. They don't do anything for me, except make me sad. I don't want to be sad anymore." She took the stack and tore them into strips and tucked them beneath one of the wood logs that crackled with fire. Her pages of blue ink coiled into black dust until they disappeared into white ash and were gone. Her words were now somewhere in the sky, carried off by the woodsmoke. It was my turn.

I simply shook my head and patted my journal, "I think I'm going to keep writing, hold onto it for a bit longer."

Frank nodded. Cory pulled out his guitar and strummed and played a couple of tunes. We roasted hotdogs and s'mores and told stories and laughed.

By the time evening came, I had mixed emotions. I had doubts about staying clean. I looked up to the stars and just stared for a while. It was curious how steady the stars are no matter what happens here on earth. The sun will still rise, the sun still sets, despite the chaos. Despite the craziness. I wanted to be like the stars. Steady. And maybe something bright for people to look to when it's dark.

Edna came down the steps with cups of hot tea in each hand. She handed one to Frank.

"Aa-haay!" he said as he sat up in his camp chair. Edna sat in an empty chair beside Skye.

She put her steaming cup down beside her and took out a cigarette from her jacket pocket.

"Can I?" Skye asked.

"Ka-ko," Edna said. Skye took the smoke, and with the stick she'd been stoking the fire with, carefully lit the end of the cigarette, puffing on it a few times before it smoked. The fire crackled, spitting out an ember near Cory's ankle.

"Ooh, shit!" He flinched back in his chair and stomped his foot in the dirt.

"Aah," Edna said. There was a pause before she began. "You see that up there?" She pointed to the sky with her cigarette. "Look there, you see that milky smear in the sky?" She paused again and took a sip of her tea. We leaned our heads back with our faces to the sky.

"Makoyoohsokoyi," Frank said.

"Ah, Makoyoohsokoyi, the Wolf Trail," Edna said. "In the old days, our families always shared. There was no such thing as being stingy." She took another drag of her smoke. "There's

a few different versions of the story, but what the old lady told me was, was that there was a man and his wife, and their children were very hungry. It was a hard winter. They almost starved to death, froze to death. But the animals gathered, the deer, the buffalo, the birds, they all came together and provided for the family. They saved the family."

Skye poked her stick into the fire causing one of the logs to shift. Orange sparks lifted above us.

"So the man and his family were forever indebted to the animals. You know, they were so grateful. And that's where our generosity comes from, you should always gift someone something. Even if it's words. Or maybe a nod. When you do that, you make the old people happy." Edna took one last drag before tossing the butt into the fire. She reached into the bag beside her. "Tomorrow is Quill's last day with us, and we wanted to gift you something Quill. Something that will help you on your journey. Something that will help guide each step you take." She got up a gave me a package wrapped in tissue.

I unfolded it and held in my hands the most beautiful pair of moccasins I'd ever seen. I didn't want to cry in front of the others, but I couldn't help it.

"Go on," Frank said, "try them on."

I kicked off my runners and gently put on the moccasins. They fit perfectly. I hugged Edna and then Frank.

"We're very proud of you," Frank said, "and those will help you on your path." He pointed down to my feet. "They'll help you walk in a good way."

The next day was the day of my release and Auntie was picking me up. She invited me to stay with her for a few weeks until there was an opening at the Lethbridge transition home. I'd already put in an application for classes at the community college. Ms. Swanson helped me. She

even wrote a support letter to the college admissions. Jess invited me to go to Vancouver. She'd be getting out in a few weeks. She said we could take the Greyhound out to the coast together. I could meet her grandma, she said, and see the ocean. Auntie said she'd help me with the bus ticket. The next morning, my bags were packed. Jess came down the stairs.

She said, "I hope we can travel to the coast together. I know you'd love the water. There's trees so big, it takes 10 people to wrap your arms around them."

Frank gave me a hug. "I'll always be here, whatever you need."

I found Edna in the kitchen. She said how proud she was of me and encouraged me to keep going. She gave me a braid of sweetgrass and a long hug.

Everyone watched on the front steps as I loaded up my bags into the back of the truck.

"It's never good-bye," Edna said. "Kaitama'tsin, we'll see you later."

Figure 22: *Untitled*, Hali Heavy Shield, Mixed Media, 2022.

As we drove down the gravel road, I decided I was going to do all the things me and Liv were supposed to do together. I'd do it for Mom too. I was going to do it for me.

PART III: Reflections on the Making of *Faceless Dolls*

The arts are essential to the holistic healing and overall wellness of Indigenous people. The four traditional values I have experienced and embodied throughout the creation of *Faceless Dolls* were transmitted through my relationship with the material, my imagination, the story, and its illustrations, and are so deeply interconnected it is difficult to speak of them separately. The following reflections are an open door to invite the reader into my process in relation to my research question and to generate further interest into the nexus among visual art, creative writing, Blackfoot pedagogy, and a healing curriculum invoked by this fiction writing.

The Blackfoot teachings aatsimoyihkaan (spirituality), kimapiitpitsinni (kindness, compassion), ikakimaat (do your best), and kakoysin (to be aware/observant), were present throughout my creative process. Writing about life and my experiences with my students has been healing because it became a way to understand where and how I am situated within the classroom, the community, my students, as well as with my familial and other relations. When I engage in creative writing, it is a form of truth telling. For example, losing a parent or relative to drugs, alcohol, or violence is an increasing occurrence for my students. How are students expected to learn and heal when they have suffered the loss of a loved one? I turn to creative writing to help me understand these realities that my students endure. To be able to write from my own experiences in a creative way helps me to gain a greater empathy for my students in addition to understanding what my role is as their teacher. Working with the arts provides an opportunity to further nurture and cultivate positive relations with others. Writing *Faceless Dolls* was reflective work which is necessary in education and teaching because it has contributed to my own healing and spiritual growth. I wanted to show a different context of learning, being, and doing. The text also draws attention to the varied experiences of Indigenous youth: poverty,

institutional racism, trauma, and discrimination in the classroom. I found this experience to be curative because I was writing a different kind of story, a story that explores realities and truths that I encountered as a teacher. It also touched on some of the grittier experiences growing up as an adolescent that involved substance abuse, grief, and loss. Ultimately, I shared the narrative hope that comes from a good ending.

Creativity is a gift to me from Ihtsipaitapiiyo'pa, Creator. In turn, my ability to use creativity in thoughtful and ethical ways is an offering back to Ihtsipaitapiiyo'pa. Each morning before my writing time, I light a smudge and ask Creator to help me use my imagination and to set me on a good path, one that includes communication, articulation, and ideas. Though I was writing from my teacher journals, I set specific intentions to write creatively during the writing of *Faceless Dolls*. Aatsimoyihkaan (spirituality or prayer) helped in my creativity as I reflected, invented, and crafted the story. There was a flow of energy when working on *Faceless Dolls* and a vulnerability in the creative process that linked me to the topics in the novella such as healing from grief, learning from elders, and self-awareness.

Woundedness and pain may be symptomatic of disconnection from one's environment and community, and, in turn, this leads to a disconnection from oneself. Healing through the arts is critical because it also allows for relationships to heal. This creative process instilled a greater awareness of my own relationships, with both my environment and the people in my life. This initiated efforts to spend more quality time with family as well as to care for myself. Part of caring for myself includes making the art, with the hopes that it makes connections with community.

Public art installations, for instance, foster a togetherness among community when the artist initiates conversation and dialogue about the story or message behind the art. In the fall of

2021, I completed a mural at the westside Lethbridge Firehall #5. While painting, community members and people passing by would stop and inquire about the mural, asking questions and offering positive comments as to the significance of Indigenous placemaking through the arts. I thoroughly enjoy bringing together visual art and text that provides an uplifting message from a Blackfoot perspective.

Figure 23: *Iiyikitapiiyi: Be Brave; Fearless*, Hali Heavy Shield, Mural, 2022.

These literacies of combining art and text can be engaged through traditional Blackfoot learning such as re/search, storytelling, contemplation, and creation. During creative moments of art and craft making, such as journal writing, sketching, bead working, painting, or photography, I am reminded of the relational presence—text and image, emotion and thought, time and space, intention and imagination, myself and the material. This is how a Blackfoot healing curriculum strengthens identity, solidifies connections, and taps into experiences that are life-giving—animating and transmitting life-energy.

When coming up with the idea to write a young-adult novella, I wanted to include elements of Blackfoot history and contemporary knowledge from a youth's perspective. I understand what it was like to grow up with little to no knowledge of Blackfoot values in the

classroom. When teaching with Blackfoot values in mind, students can understand their identity, and that may provide strength and increase confidence. When Blackfoot values are part of the curriculum it is healing for various reasons. For example, students have a sense of belonging and it provides them with the language to articulate who they are and where they come from. This in turn confirms their rightful place in a community context of the classroom, their families, and the greater community.

Through the legacy of Residential Schools, day schools, and in some instances of Alberta's K-12 system, Blackfoot knowledge and values were intentionally non-existent in the curriculum. This has been damaging to generations of students, including myself. For example, the message of past Eurocentric and settler colonial curricula taught me was that my culture, my language, and my place in the world did not matter. Creative writing and art provided me with a way of theorizing from which I could build my resistance. The first and perhaps most difficult step was simply getting these thoughts down, but doing so allowed me to make sense of what was happening around me. Encouraging students to stretch their curiosity is also an effective healing tool or strategy because it teaches students how to see things from a different perspective. Experiencing the viewpoints of others is key to the teaching of empathy.

Land-based learning is most effective because it provides students with an opportunity to reconnect with the land and helps define their relationality to the natural world. This is healing for the main character in the story, Quill, because she learns from an elder about the protocol of making an offering to a place and the meaning of storytelling.

The Blackfoot value of kimapiitpitsinni (kindness, compassion) takes on great meaning through art and storytelling as Blackfoot pedagogy. Care and compassion are not only embodied through the lives and actions of the characters but also through the relationship between the

reader and the story itself. In particular, youth reading the novella may develop compassion because they may imagine the main character's situation and the circumstances surrounding her story. Compassion for the main character, Quill, is instilled in the reader by her efforts to keep trying or her resolve to stay on her healing journey. What is more, as the writer of this story I was able to connect kimapiitpitsinni through fostering relationships with other writers and artists while we engaged in the learning and sharing of knowledge through the craft of writing. In recent years, I have attended the Banff Centre for the Arts and Creativity. During my time there, I was able to work on the manuscript and share with others what I had written. Through the exchanging of Indigenous texts, we were able to learn from one another and develop a deep respect for both the writer and his/her writings. There was dialogue about the act of writing and how writing can be a means of resistance, but also how we as the writers were able to write ourselves into the text. These ideas included the importance of having our text go beyond our group to reach broader audiences.

Writing my experiences through journals and life writing, I have collected a body of work that represents the messiness, joys, frustrations, but also the successes of students. I have since been able to revisit the collection of journals and create a work of social fiction. Building connections through Quill's story has an abundance of Blackfoot pedagogical possibilities in K-12 and post-secondary education settings. Teachers may ask students to relate to their own realities and imagination by using Quill's story as a springboard to conversations and connections with the themes within the story. As a starting point, teachers may ask students to reflect on their own realities. Such connections may include engaging students in life writing as empathetic inquiry (Chambers et al., 2012; Hasebe-Ludt et al., 2009), foreshadowing events, creating alternative endings, and examining the relationship of elders as teachers. These

connections are a type of mindful practice of having students relate, respond to, and perhaps reconcile Quill's situation and how it is shared through the illustrations and the use of Blackfoot language.

While I currently witness and experience the racism and injustice in my home area, such as the closure of Lethbridge's safe consumption site, the Opioid crisis, and loss of young Blackfoot lives, particularly young Blackfoot men, I ask myself if things are getting better for my community. I felt I had an ethical responsibility with the making of *Faceless Dolls* to reveal truths of a broken and flawed system but also to provide hope through Quill's story. Offering hope through *Faceless Dolls* may inspire youth and others to tell their own story as well as encourage them to become writers themselves so they can see for themselves how stories and art are a form of healing and strength. This is what the current K-12 education curriculum must call for if it is to serve Indigenous students and to respond to the calls to action through reconciliation.

My research was a process of false starts, intense flows, dead ends, edits; and it began to develop after nurturing and tending to the heart of the story. Journal writing and life-writing are effective ways for teachers and students to *do* research to investigate life experiences. Through the act of writing, I have been able to develop my writing skills which in turn generates and articulates ideas for artistic self-expression. Life writing and fiction writing may also be tools for being in dialogue with the teacher or another student. They have helped me to become more cognizant of how writing can address social justice issues or issues that matter in my community. Journaling can be used in a classroom setting as an effective pedagogical tool for both students and teachers. Reflective journaling provides teachers a means to reflect on their theory and practice and can also be a dialogic tool for students and their peers. In my experience, journaling

has been a source of personal and professional growth as well as a way to document the happenings in and around the classroom. This led me to use some of the themes in the novel because I could write about what I was seeing.

Many themes in the novella are connected to real-life events for vulnerable populations and that may be the same for students who read the novella. They may see themselves or their experiences reflected in the text or artwork. For instance, Figure 8 depicts a real grass fire that happened on the Blood Reserve in 2019. Living on reserve, there are limited resources such as fire and ambulance, which leaves residents susceptible to these kinds of devastating events. House fires are common on Indian reserves. In fact, one study found that First Nations living on reserve are 10 times more likely to die in a fire than non-Indigenous people and First Nations people are four times more likely to be hospitalized due to a fire-related injury (Malone, 2022). As much as the text has something to say, so do the illustrations. Perhaps they will foster an emergence of critical reading practices when one "reads" the artwork. The illustrations provided in *Faceless Dolls* offer readers another perspective and may help to build literacy skills, such as story analysis, and nurture creativity and imagination.

Faceless Dolls is a story that tells of the memories and experiences of the main character, Quill, who has gone through tragic and devastating events, some of them out of her control, as in her mother's death, and some of them from the consequences of her own decision making. My intent was to capture an Indigenous teen's experience during a specific time and place of reserve and urban life. Deciding to write the story as a young adult novella had many benefits. Young adults or teenagers are in constant development from childhood to adulthood and, as mentioned before, this genre was lacking in Indigenous youths' perspectives. It was important to write from the viewpoint of an adolescent because I felt I really understood what my students were

experiencing. When I think about what it was like for me to be teenager, many of the themes come up, such as transiency, addiction, grief and loss, and teenage angst.

My artistic process of writing social fiction and creating 25 accompanying illustrations is a means of communication in an educational setting and therefore bridges the divide among current Western curriculum and Indigenous ways of knowing and doing. During my writing, the spaces in between creativity, memory, and poetic imagination are where I found the truth of the story, because that is where the layers of connection and empathy became apparent, and art and experience became inseparable. My years of teaching in K-12 and adult education, and my professional leadership with the Alberta Teacher's Association, prepared me with the extensive research required to achieve verisimilitude, the truth of the story. As a Niitsitapi writer of fiction, I am also an observer and participant; my relationships to students and community provided me with much detailed description off and on reserve and insights about the themes, event, and characters.

I trusted that however Quill's story wanted to be told, it was my responsibility, as the writer, to respond in ways that honoured her truth. This meant I needed to trust my own imagination, memories, story-writing skills, and reflections about the research I have been doing as a teacher and community member working with Blackfoot Indigenous youth. Asking students about what matters to them is how I motivate my students beyond passivity. For example, when students learned about what a public library could do for the community, they wanted to help. They were able to see the use and value in having access to the internet in the evenings and on weekends, and taking out books and materials on topics that interested them. While building the new library, my students helped with everything from putting shelves together to hauling boxes of books. They became invested in the library because they had a hand in the creation of it.

During the creative process, I learned to be less cerebral, less intent on being in control of every aspect of the writing and art making. Once I decided to rely more heavily on my imagination, the writing began to flow in unexpected ways. For example, it allowed me to lean into the non-academic topics in K-12 educational circles such as mental health, grief, addiction, poverty, and recovery.

The novella *Faceless Dolls* is crafted as a journal, because in my own creative practice, journal writing has enabled me to express thoughts, ideas, and pictures that are not typically seen by others. In a way, this allows for the reader to experience an authentic and deeply personal rendering of Quill's lived experience. I have used journal writing and drawing in a sketchbook as a pedagogical strategy with my students as a tool for personal growth and wellbeing. Professionally, it has helped me to document and understand things I have learned and to sort out my own feelings about teaching and learning. A journal as the central literary modality of a social-fiction piece provides a deep level of access into the character's innermost thoughts, feelings, memories, and perspectives. This allows readers a greater insight into a character's lived experience. During the process of writing fiction and making the story's visual art, I have learned to cultivate my attention to the characters, events, ideas, and the development of the plot.

Throughout the writing of the story, I thought it was important to include culturally significant practices. I decided to have the main character, Quill, receive her first pair of moccasins. This was a significant event in her recovery journey. When a child is born, their first pair of moccasins is important and celebrated. At birth, my cousin gifted my daughter her first pair of moccasins. When my daughter was eight years old, I made her a pair of moccasins. Nobody told me that once you've completed a pair of moccasins for a child, it's best to start on the next pair, because their feet grow so fast! It was a challenging learning process, and a skill

that took several attempts; however, it became a meditation as I beaded and sewed them together. Creativity and intention went into the work knowing who and what they were for; at the time, Marley was learning the Blackfoot girl's traditional dance. My grandmother, her great-grandmother, often danced, and it made me proud that two generations later, she would be taking the same steps as women in our family generations before her.

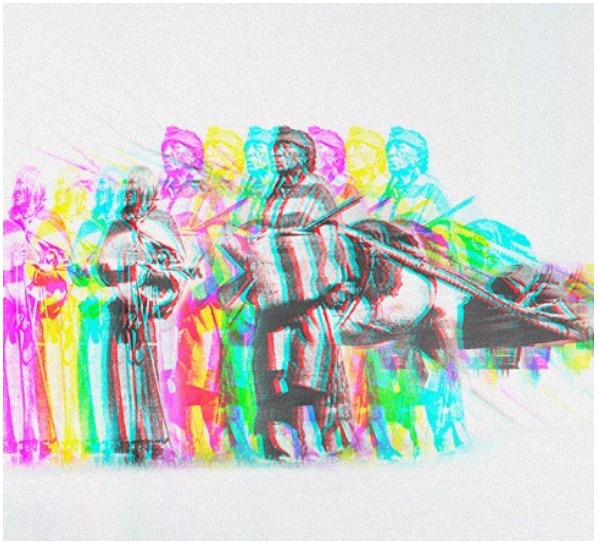

Figure 24: *A Good Journey Home*, Hali Heavy Shield, Mixed Media, 2022.

My friend Shannan recently lost her adult daughter and needed moccasins in preparation for the funeral. Generally, it is to ensure the deceased have a good journey home to the spirit world of the Sand Hills. I contacted a community elder and friend and asked if she could make them. When I picked them up from the elder, I thanked her and delivered them to my friend. Shannon was so appreciative and though I knew it did little to ease her pain, we both knew this was an important and necessary tradition for her daughter and the family. There is a relationship between the maker, the craft, and the recipient that unfolds with the presence of an expressive power guiding the process. This is Ihtsipaitapiiyo'pa, Creator.

I have dedicated much time in my life to education and scholarship, trying to make sense of life through wisdom teachings. To go beyond words and images, to a place of kakoysin (to be

aware) one can come to *know* through the senses and Niitsitapi spirit. Art is a pathway to gaining such wisdom. While practicing kakoysin the senses are engaged: how the pen strokes across the page, the way clay forms from your fingertips, the smell of engraved or burning wood. These creative acts are how I experience the essence of being Niitsitapi. By teaching my daughter Marley about these Blackfoot values, she has embodied them and is now giving back to her community through Blackfoot educational programming. Often, it is my mom Faye that now teaches us Blackfoot. Through a school initiative, Marley created a Blackfoot "word of the week" for her school community. This entailed recruiting others to learn a Blackfoot word and make a recording on YouTube. Some of her guests have included Canadian astronaut Chris Hadfield and musician Gord Sinclair of the Tragically Hip.

It was through this growing awareness of the Blackfoot language that allowed me to embed Blackfoot words and phrases throughout the fictional narrative. This in turn enables readers to see an element of Blackfoot culture reflected, and thus they can gain an appreciation of authentic knowledge expressed in language and literacy. In my experience, students who visited Blackfoot significant sites such as Okotok, Big Rock, gained traditional knowledge of Niitsitapi. The main character, Quill, had to first become acquainted with the land and place from which she originated, so she could then turn within to examine her inner landscape.

During the creative writing process, my own inner landscape called for me to connect with life itself. What I mean by that is situating myself on and within the land and engaging with creation, meaning water, sunlight, trees, animals, and other animate beings. This became part of my discipline. Daily walks during writing became necessary. Noticing the sky, being in motion, letting my mind wander, greeting the neighbours' dog, listening to the snow crunch under my feet, absorbing the sun, all became a habit that heightened my consciousness about myself and

where and how I was situated in this world. Many times, this is when ideas would come. It was thrilling to be gifted an idea and I could not wait to get home to write it down or draw it out. Perhaps our Indigenous ancestors were such gifted innovators because of their time in motion with the land, a practice that cultivates creative ideas with depth and abundance.

It has been healing for me to write this story and create the illustrations because I have been engaged in the process of creativity. In doing so, I sought out aatsimoyihkaan (spirituality) that heals woundedness—a woundedness that I continue to experience, witness, and walk through. Using my own creativity to bring a story into being is a healing power. Writing a story of my own gave me agency over what I wanted to write about. To include the voices of elders was important to the story because I could portray conversations I have overheard or have had with elders. This in turn helped me to communicate how elders as knowledge carriers can provide guidance and advice as I began to become aware of the forms of colonial trauma I was experiencing.

Figure 25: *Untitled*, Hali Heavy Shield, Mixed Media, 2020.

There is a Blackfoot story about a woman who went to live among the stars. Despite being warned not to dig up a particular turnip, she did. Consequently, as she looked closer at the hole in the soil, there was a view of her camp and the family she had left behind. Thus, her heart became lonesome. To be lonesome is a human emotion and the wisdom comes from seeking out connections with others, both human and other-than-human, and the energy that comes from the sun and the cosmos. Seeking connections through making art is an antidote for woundedness. With my public art projects, time and again I witness my work bringing people together. In 1996, The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples shared the correlation between Indigenous health and the arts, and since then there has been a "growing body of evidence…that art is beneficial in healing processes, cultivation of good health, and maintenance of well-being for individuals and communities, particularly for Aboriginal peoples" (Muirhead & de Leeuw 2012, pp. 2-3).

The art of storytelling remains timely and essential, particularly in the political and ecological climate young people and future generations are now facing. It is especially urgent that Niitstitapi mobilize agency and write themselves into a new narrative (Donald, 2019). Historical misrepresentation, erasure, genocide, and Eurocentrism: these are the forces of settler colonialism that generations of Indigenous students, including myself, are writing against. Suppressing negative or traumatic experiences potentially compromises a person's wellbeing. Creative writing has become a restorative tool because it allowed me to understand some of the traumas I have experienced alongside my students. Throughout the creative writing process, I intended to establish a dialogue about significant themes regarding education in the lives of teachers and young people. For instance, what are the challenges facing young Indigenous students at home and in the classroom? How do we, as educators, address issues like student transiency, addictions, grief and loss and suicide within our current curricula and educational

paradigms? Creative practices such as social fiction, together with visual-art practices, are pathways to bridge the gaps among generational relations and instill curiosity in young people. Such practices not only teach us *why* these stories are important to healing wounds, but also provide a framework, one founded on Blackfoot values and ways of knowing, for *how* to survive and move beyond intergenerational trauma and live life well.

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