

*kistikwânihk êsko kitêhk:*<sup>1</sup>  
*Storying Holistic Understandings in Education*

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**Abstract:**

Learning alongside Dr. Dwayne Donald and Elder Bob Cardinal in a Holistic Understandings of Learning class held in Fall 2014 on Enoch Cree Nation evoked different ways of living well and wisely in the world. This course created a sacred place for the “four-part person” (mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual) to emerge, as we learned to pay deeper attention to the interconnectivity of creation in our educational practices. This multimedia métissage (Hasebe-Ludt, Chambers, & Leggo, 2009) combines life writing, readers’ theatre, and visual representations, weaving together our embodied responses to Elder Cardinal’s teachings. Each individual’s journey *kistikwânihk êsko kitêhk* (Cree: from head to heart) maintains its integrity and unique voice as it is intentionally woven into the Cree principles of *meskanaw* (pathway), *miyo waskawewin* (to walk in a good way), and the Blackfoot concept of *aokakio’siit* (being wisely aware).

**Keywords:** holistic education, place-based education, indigenous education, life writing, métissage, contemplative pedagogy

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<sup>1</sup> Following the textual practices of McLeod (2007), the Cree or Blackfoot words used in this article are not capitalized regardless of where they appear in a sentence. This is an aesthetic choice intended to emphasize difference and make the point that indigenous language use need not conform to conventions of English language use.

### **An Invitation: *kistikwânihk êsko kitêhk***

**E**lder Bob Cardinal reminds us that “the longest journey you will ever have to make is from your head to your heart” (B. Cardinal, personal communication, September 28, 2014). The Cree phrase, *kistikwânihk êsko kitêhk* (from head to heart), reminds us that this collective journey, this weaving together of experiences, is never finished, never foreclosed. In sharing our individual journeys, we hope to invite others to thread their own stories into our “ever changing tapestry” (Hasebe-Ludt, Chambers & Leggo, 2009, p. 14) of collective curricular conversations, and to “address the complicated issues of living ethically and with empathy among all our relations” (p. 14).

### **Dwayne Donald: An Introduction**

I first met Elder Bob Cardinal from the Enoch Cree Nation at a conference in March 2010. It was a difficult time for me because my dad had passed away just a week before we met. I was feeling lonely and missing the reassuring guidance he provided and that I have relied on my whole life. I was off-balance. However, when the Elder and I shook hands for the first time, it felt like I was regaining balance. In truth, it felt like I was being introduced to someone that I had been waiting my whole life to meet.

Since that first meeting, I have been given the opportunity to work closely with Elder Bob Cardinal and help him as best I can. I have learned that the Elder is highly respected as a ceremonial leader, healer, and Sundance maker, and that he understands himself as serving the needs of the people according to the teachings gifted to him by the Elders that he assisted when he was younger. In this way, his desire to connect with students at the University of Alberta is an extension of this commitment and the need to provide people with the opportunity to heal through holistic teachings that are inspired by wisdom understandings of life and living. And so, I have come to see this meeting as necessary for me to grow as an academic, but also more importantly as a human being. I see now that my dad sent the Elder to me—not to replace himself—but rather to provide me with that reassuring guidance and strength I needed to keep trying my best in the work that I do.

When the Elder told me that he would like to teach a university course with me, I readily agreed. However, as we began conceptualizing the course together, he repeatedly reminded me that a course focused on holistic approaches to learning must move people from their heads to their hearts, and so must be dedicated to healing. *Healing?* This characterization of the course process made me uncomfortable. Privately, I worried that graduate students would not be open to a process of healing and that the Elder might be disappointed. I listened to him but nuanced the course outline with the subtitle “A Curricular and Pedagogical Inquiry,” so that the course process itself would seem to be more worthy of graduate studies—at least to me.

I note with humility that wisdom insights guide us to realize that we often have the most to learn at the very moment that we think we have it all figured out. In this case, I was the one who had the most to learn about healing. Thankfully, the students were eager to engage with the holistic guidance of the Elder and, once I got out of the way, the course process flowed just like water over rocks.

The Elder facilitated this shift inside me by repeatedly asking this question: *kiikway ot'e-ohpinaman?* (What are you trying to lift?). As I now see it, holism involves honouring ourselves by honouring the various more-than-human entities that give us life. Balance

comes from that honouring and from holistic balance comes the ability to act in ethically relational ways. Thus, when we *lift* what gives us life, we simultaneously *lift* all our relations. The métissage<sup>2</sup> composed here is an expression of that lifting—of learning how to be good relatives.

Together, the composers traveled the holistic *meskanaw* (pathway) and were guided to practice *miyo waskawewin* (moving in a kind, gentle, and life-giving way inspired by our more-than-human relatives) while helping each other heed the Blackfoot invocation *aokakio'siit!* (Pay attention! Be wisely aware!).

### Strand One: *meskanaw* (pathway)

#### Antonella Bell: The Beginning

Rounding the last corner, my car sliding and slithering in the sticky mud left behind by last night's heavy rain, I come into a clearing where two Sundance lodges stand. They are breathtakingly stately—their ribs draped with sun-faded broadcloth—green, red, yellow, white, and blue. As our little convoy of cars continues past the lodges towards the learning centre, I notice a large hawk sitting quietly on a branch at the top of one of the lodges. How strange that he has not flown away—instead he seems to be greeting us, welcoming us perhaps. A good omen, I feel. I have read that the hawk is associated with increased intuitive messages—a way of learning that is sadly foreign in our Western schooling. We value only what the *rational* mind can determine. This course I am embarking upon is about holistic learning—about learning with our whole selves, not only our minds. Perhaps the hawk is present to ensure that we find our way—this indigenous way—a way that has ancient roots.

As I step out of the car, that gloriously fresh, rain-soaked air, heavy with the smell of fall, embraces me. I look around. Beautiful golden aspen trees, burgundy dogwood bushes, and flaming pin-cherry shrubs frame on three sides the clearing where the learning centre stands. The fourth side opens to the west, inviting my gaze across fallow fields waiting to be seeded. I wonder what seeds will be planted within us in the coming weeks.

Inside the learning centre, I am immediately struck by the warm and peaceful feeling that it has. Instead of sterile white classroom walls, there is the warm glow of beautiful wood paneling. Instead of irritating fluorescent bulbs, there is only natural light coming in through two windows. The only source of heat is that generated by the wood-burning stove that sits in the corner, quietly adding a mesmerizing sound as it crackles and hisses softly. We sit in a small circle around a grouping of ceremonial objects that are carefully placed on a slightly raised platform. The smoke from the ongoing smudge curls lazily into the air, cleansing and lending a sense of sacred softness to the quiet space. The journey begins.

#### Zahra Kasamali: Remembering Balance

Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth. The example of His light is like a niche within which is a lamp, the lamp is within a glass, the glass as if it were a pearly [white] star lit from [the oil of] a blessed olive tree, neither of the east nor of the west,

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<sup>2</sup> Please click the link to view the métissage: <https://youtu.be/MyvPtNLXegg>  
All photos in the multimedia métissage are original photos taken by the authors, except as listed in the references.

whose oil would almost glow even if untouched by fire. Light upon light. Allah guides to His light whom He wills. And Allah presents examples for the people, and Allah is Knowing of all things. (The Qur'an, Surat An-Nur [The Light], 24:5, Pickthall edition)

I have heard this Qur'anic *ayat* recited many times....I am brought back to the place of the prayer hall....The beautiful recitation awakens my heart...at large community gatherings...in my home with my parents and sister...but most of all...this *ayat* takes me back to Karachi, Pakistan...to my grandparents' home. It is July 2001. My mother and I have come to Karachi to visit my Nani (grandma) who has been sick for many years. I sit with Nani in her bed while she rests. Her lungs may be failing, but her calm voice is powerful...her words radiate *Hikmah* (wisdom). Nani tells me her *life story*, as she calls it ...her survival through war...the economic hardships her family faced while she grew up...constantly having to move from place to place...her dreams for receiving more formal education...the birth of her six children. Every particle shared in Nani's story is guided by a common thread. Nani would often say, "Zahra, always remember balance." Remember what Islam teaches us. Remember to balance the *zahir* (material) with the *batin* (spiritual). Remember that your *iman* (faith) will give you strength during hardships. Remember to always seek a balance between your *aqal* (intellect), *qalb* (heart), and *nafs* (soul).

If my Nani was physically with us today and I were to ask her why there is much disconnect in Creation, our conversation would perhaps emerge this way:

Zahra: *Insan mein kyun itna nafrath hai?* (Why is life plagued by much hatred?)

Nani: *Rishtadar Allah ki saath ghaib hoga ya hai, is liye.* (This is because the relationship between God and creation has become hidden.)

Zahra: *Phir hum log kya karengey?* (As people, what should we do?)

Nani: *Allah ka naam laylo aur ibadaat karo. Phir, socho...aur zyada bhi socho.* (Take the name of God and meditate. Then think...and think even more.)

I remember Nani...I can see her...this memory resonates in my being during many sessions of our holistic learnings class. Elder Cardinal speaks of the symbolism of the teepee and balance...he shares that humbleness and humility are important as we walk the *meskanaw*....How do we remember and live this balance?

### Jodi Latremouille: Scarring Trails/Trials

My fingers trail over the body-marks of my life-learning trails/trials: smile lines, wrinkles, and age spots, wounds, memories wrapped up in aches, pains, illnesses, birthing stretchmarks, joyful-fearful internal scarring. The substances, blows, thoughts, and emotions that my body endures/enjoys leave unseen scars that can manifest through chronic disease, self-defeating thoughts, extraneous suffering, and systemic breakdown.

Unhappy circumstances or poor decisions often leave ugly gashes that require attention. The act of *curing* is commonly oriented towards isolating and remedying a health problem, trying to isolate and fix it in such a way that it may be forgotten. And yet, despite these curing efforts, the scar remains. The act of *healing*, in contrast, is oriented towards a form of health which is never perfect, never finished, yet always *whole*. Through healing, scarred bodies may become sites of remembering: sites of difficult, hopeful, joyous learning.

Our earth is also learning: strip mining, roadways, re-planting, oil spills, parklands, agriculture, deserts. Our human activities often brew hidden poisons that are seeping into the waterways, soils, air, and organisms, causing little undetected dyings all around us. "When we are dead in life we don't notice when little miracles around [and in] us die before our deadened gaze" (Okri, 1997, p. 52).

I have a faded trailing burn mark  
across my belly  
received  
at age three  
from sidling up to a red-hot  
campstove.  
I was trying to warm myself  
too closely by the fire.

After Calgary's 100-year flood  
they asked Mayor Nenshi:  
What was he going to do  
about the river?  
They couldn't hear the answer.  
They kept asking:  
How was he going to  
*fix* the river?

### *Mandy Krahn: Camino*

It is Day 28 of my trek on the Camino de Santiago through the summer heat of northern Spain. My sister and I average 25-30 kilometers a day, and we have surpassed 700 of the total 800. The end is near, and my body is thankful. This path, *camino* in Spanish, *meskanaw* in Cree, has demanded much of me: physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. We wake up at the crack of dawn to walk all morning before the scorching mid-day sunshine. Afternoons are spent exploring the small town we have reached, sleeping, writing, or drinking *vino*.

Today I am called to soak in a stream, to rinse off the dirt of the journey. Eager to feel the cool water on our feet, we make our way from the old stone building where we've dropped our packs to the adjacent river, stripping out of our sweaty gear as we go. The narrow, shaded brook invites us into her cool water. This river is barely flowing, and it feels like a magical, secret place as we slip under the sheltering branches hanging down, secluding us. I am giddy as a school girl, stripped down to my underwear, cautiously stepping on the mossy boulders until my toes touch the cool water, at which point I move even more tentatively, allowing my body to sink in to the unknown realm of the river. My body and soul thank me for this refreshing reprieve: from my calloused feet, to my stinging bug bites and heat rash, to the utter exhaustion caused by both the long days of walking and long nights of listening to the snores of fellow pilgrims.

We are each forging our own path, each facing our own demons, each embodying a quest for understanding our way in life. With roots in both Catholicism and an ancient pagan ritual of walking to meet the sea, the Camino has literally forced me to move from my head, to my heart, and into my body: one step at a time. Now, in the quietude of the water, I begin to appreciate myself as I am. My shoulders soften as I feel the heat of the sun poke through the trees and onto my back. It pours beyond me, through the surface of the water, all the way to the river's bottom, illuminating each suspended fragment and creating glorious beams of light refracting through the *agua*. The beauty of this place is enhanced by the interaction of dark and light, each held within the water—much like life—itsself.

## Lesley Tait: The Song of the Land

His mother folded him into her wings and whispered into his waiting ears, "Sense is the song you sing out into the world, and the song the world sings back to you. Sing and the world will answer. That is how you will see" (Berk, 2012, p. 5). Flying higher than he'd ever flown, Chiro began to sing, listening, listening....The music of the land rose up in all its many textures, each tree, each cliff, each place he'd passed, until finally the song of home added its voice to the others. His cave called out from the blanketing shrubs and pillows of moss at its mouth, and Chiro followed the familiar sound back into the sheltering earth (Berk, 2012).

Between 1880 and 1958, the entire 25,600 acres of Michel Reserve north of Edmonton were lost to enfranchisement and surrender.

[Enfranchisement] was one of the most significant events in the history of Canadian Indian policy....Its premise was that by eventually removing all legal distinctions between Indians and Non-Indians through the process of enfranchisement, it would be possible in time to absorb Indian people fully into colonial society. (Canada. Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, Dussault, & Erasmus, 1996, p. 249)

Throughout the Edmonton area, one can find parks, schools, and monuments named after one of Alberta's most prominent and powerful politicians, Frank Oliver. He held various titles within government including Minister of the Interior and Superintendent-General of Indian Affairs. As Minister of the Interior, Frank Oliver was instrumental in changing the face of Canada. Whereas the main initiative of his predecessor was to attract immigrants on the basis of occupation, Oliver implemented a plan that sought immigrants on the basis of ethnicity and race. Oliver's department wanted to encourage British immigrants above all other prospective immigrants in order to maintain the racial integrity of Canada. Oliver himself stated his immigration policies were "restrictive, exclusive, and selective" (Michel First Nation, 2016, n.p.). In maintaining these views on immigration, Frank Oliver did his utmost to obtain the surrender of various Indian reserves in and around Edmonton as he believed that "agricultural lands were for better men than Indians" (n.p.), and that the assimilation of Indian peoples into colonial society would only be possible if they were removed from their lands.

One of these reserves, located in what is now northwestern Edmonton, belonged to the Michel Band. With the promise of horses and farmland, and under intense pressure from government officials in the Indian Department such as Frank Oliver, Michel Band members agreed to surrender part of their reserve lands. In total, 8,200 acres of land were sold off in an auction, which was personally supervised by Oliver. This land was sold at a fraction of its retail value at \$9 an acre. The vast majority of the sales of those lands went to two political allies of Frank Oliver's, Frederick Grant, and Christopher Fahrni.

Four years after the initial auction, neither man had actually paid for the land he had purchased. If the Indian Act was to be followed, both sales should have been cancelled immediately due to non-payment. This was not the case. It was not until 1927, 21 years after the initial sale, that the Grant sale was officially cancelled after repeated requests for payment. The Fahrni sale was indeed cancelled by Indian Affairs in 1910. That cancellation, however, was quickly reversed with no explanation and Fahrni sold his newly purchased land at a fraction of his purchase price to J. J. Anderson. Four years later, Mr. Anderson simply transferred the title of these Michel lands over to his father-in-law, Mr. Frank Oliver.

In 1958, for the first and only time in Canadian history, the Canadian government unilaterally enfranchised the remaining and vastly depleted lands of the Michel Band as a

whole and sold them to various parties. With this final loss of Michel land, the pathway of a people and a land was irreversibly altered. My family became scattered and we struggled to hear the song of the land.<sup>3</sup>

## Strand Two: *aokakio'siit* (being wisely aware)

### Antonella Bell: A Story

Today Elder Bob Cardinal told a story about two boys and a cocoon. The boys sat all day watching a cocoon as it moved, the butterfly wriggling inside, trying to free itself. Wanting to speed up the process, they found a small sharp stick and poked open one end of the cocoon in order to help the butterfly. Indeed, a beautiful butterfly emerged quickly but died shortly afterwards. The boys were most upset and brought the dead butterfly to their grandfather wanting to know what had happened. The grandfather told the boys that in helping her to emerge, they had inadvertently killed her. He explained that when the butterfly moved around inside the cocoon struggling to get out, she was building up strength in her wings. Because she had not been allowed to do this, her wings were not strong enough for her to fly away.

How timely is this story for me! It makes me think about my own children who are presently struggling to find their way in the world. Young adulthood can be such a difficult time in one's life! Trying to embrace independence and chart a course for one's future is often an overwhelmingly daunting task. As a mother, I just want to swoop in and save them from suffering by *helping* them. This story is a reminder for me that the best thing I can do is to let them figure things out for themselves. We are each walking our own path, and the challenges we have along the way are intentional—they are our own lessons. This story also reminds me that we cannot rush things—life is a process—it will emerge and unfold as need be. As frustrating as this might be at times, I will remember that in order for a beautiful butterfly to emerge and fly away, I must be patient and embrace all experiences—easy and difficult ones.

### Zahra Kasamali: Patience and Slowing Down

And I continue to hear *don't rush* in all parts of my being. I recall Elder Cardinal's words...we are always rushing through life. I especially pay attention to these words and the feelings of sadness and being torn in many directions...the disappointment and emptiness that emerges when I have been unable to attend ceremony in the place of *Ismaili jamatkhanas* (houses of prayer) because I feel I need to attend to worldly matters first....I am reminded of this as we slow down during smudging. We begin each class with Elder Cardinal's beautiful song and drumming. Smudging helps me to begin in a good way...a calm and present way. Patience is embodied as we smudge....We become quiet...silent....We wait for each other to smudge....I ask for guidance to share in humble ways...to speak from my heart....I wonder about these experiences for many days to follow...I wonder about them now. I am brought back to the traditions of Ismailism and its emphasis on remaining committed to living in patient ways. I sit with these experiences and teachings. Again, I hear Elder Cardinal, reminding us that "we need to be patient with ourselves." His teachings take me back to my realizations over the last year: "If I cannot honour myself, how can I honour Creation?"

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<sup>3</sup> For more information on these events, please see: Michel First Nation. (2016). *Frank Oliver and the Michel Band*. Retrieved from <http://www.michelfirstnation.net/frank-oliver--the-michel-band.html>

I ponder....

Elder Cardinal continues to teach me the importance of learning *with and through* other traditions and cultures rather than learning *about* other ways of being (Donald, 2003). Engaging in ceremony throughout the course helps me to live teachings integral to Cree sensibilities rather than solely intellectualizing them.

As I connect with Cree sensibilities I find myself relating with and understanding Ismailism in deeper ways. This experience is a magnificent gift and teaches the beauty of attending to difference as a way to embody the Oneness of being. I understand difference as a way to honour Mystery and submit to Allah's will. It is difference that informs commitments to live in ethical ways, remain humble, and refrain from managing Creation. If I do not engage, learn from and with difference, how will I understand that Creation is everything? In missing difference, I feel that I am also missing the Spirit.

### *Jodi Latremouille: Visiting Places*

Rock Island Lake, in Nehalliston Country, Southern Interior British Columbia, is where I spent my first summers as a child. This is the place where I learned to respect and love the wilderness and water. My young sister, cousin, and I were afforded the freedom and responsibility of rowing our own boats across the lake to the rocky islands, lifejackets tied tight, of course. We knew about lightning and windstorms, and we knew not to tell our parents when we were careless enough to fall off the dock into the cold mountain water. We learned how to gut fish, how to put up ice for the summer, how to find our way back to the cabin after dark.

Nicola Lake, BC, where my parents live today, is a place where time stretches out before us. Each day, there is nothing to do but everything to do: we can go for a walk, read a book or play the guitar, kayak along the shore, chop some wood or haul some rocks and sand for landscaping, go for a swim in summer or build a snow fort in winter. The lake has no interest in cooperating with our desires and dreams. Its personality dictates the rhythms of our days: when the wind changes direction, we retreat into the house for the oncoming storm; when the lake is glass we drop everything to go waterskiing or fishing; in wintertime we wait for the day when the ice is thick enough for a safe walk to the other shore.

The lake is one place where I learn to pay attention, and to dwell, to visit, in scarred and sacred places. This physical act of being intimate with a place, with a lake, with a landscape, with a body, requires my attention, suffering, and joyful heartache. Dwayne Donald shares that

the Blackfoot term for visiting a place is *âakssissawâato'op*. It means that when you visit a place you give that place life [by] honour[ing] the presences there and enliven the place with food, drink, respectful relations, and prayers. In return, that place gives life back to you. (D. Donald, personal communication, December 10, 2014)

What does it mean to visit a place, to sit in a place, to stay put, to love, to live up to my responsibility for giving and receiving life there: in communion with a resource-stripped and polluted natural landscape; with the humming, self-important heart of a bustling city; with the scarred and curled hands of my grandmother?

Healing  
bodies  
relations  
earth.



Visiting conversations remain  
open to...  
suffering through...  
abundant in...  
whole and incomplete.  
Tread lightly  
take good care of the  
marks  
scars  
trails  
that you leave  
behind/through/with.

### *Mandy Krahn: Feminine Energy*

Every week, I drive north to teach classes for the distance Aboriginal Teacher Education Program. Crossing my fingers that the weather will cooperate as I find myself winding down highways new to me, I venture further into northern Alberta than I have ever been. These hours pounding the pavement are my best time for pondering life. All autumn, I notice the changes in my surroundings: the trees turning colours and losing their leaves, the frost on the grasses and branches next to the road, the lakes freezing over with thin layers that turn thicker, the snow that finally blankets the earth. The moon in her many forms is my constant companion: at times early if I leave at the crack of dawn, other times late as I drive on through the dusk. What is the wisdom she has to offer?

I ponder my work. At times I sing. I laugh. I remember stories. I cry. During one of the Holistic Learnings classes that I am a student in, Elder Bob asked us, "What is the heartbeat of your culture?" (B. Cardinal, personal communication, October 25, 2014). He shared how no matter what your individual response may be, in some way it must be linked to your mother's heart...The nine months in the womb is the beginning of a powerful feminine energy. I found it apt that one of the classes I was in the midst of teaching was comprised of all women. This feminine energy was flowing amongst us all term, providing the opportunity to be wisely aware together.

### *Lesley Tait: Remembrances of the Land and Rocks in My Pocket*

The hands of my children are continually picking up rocks and stones. Their fingers grip tight to their latest treasure. Each groove and bump is felt as their small fingertips run over the surface. Soon their hand is overturned and an open palm allows their eyes to examine each facet of its being. These are not necessarily the prettiest rocks or the biggest, but simply stones that somehow meet their unknown needs at that particular moment in time. After this thorough examination, these same hands unceremoniously shove these stones into pants pockets, coat pockets, and, when all other options are full, their mother's pockets. These stones then find their way into all aspects of our home. They become bath toys, decorations for a Christmas centrepiece, pets for various stuffed animals, and toppings for delicious mud pies. I have watched my children lament over the loneliness of a solitary stone, create entire stone families, and stop mid-sentence to address the needs of a distant rock calling out to them. To them, these stones are precious. They have the ability to feel, be lonely, cold, and afraid. They can also be comforted and feel love.

It is easy to dismiss these activities and attachments as childish: to view these understandings as make-believe or simply the games of children. It is more difficult to see

them for what they are: deep and true understandings of the world and our land. Rocks are grounding. They provide us with a weight and gravitas and pull us back to the earth in a way that does not first surround us with a protective layer. Rocks are foundational; they are markers of meaning. They seek to remind us of our long forgotten relationship with the land.

This is how my children travel through the world: attentive, wisely aware, hands at the ready, in search of a stone needing saving in their pocket.

### **Strand Three: *miyo waskawewin* (to walk in a good way)**

#### **Antonella Bell: Going Within**

Standing, waiting for the final preparations for the sweat lodge, I feel both apprehensive and excited. It is such a privilege to be able to participate in this ancient sacred ceremony, and I want to show the utmost of respect. I clasp my tobacco and broadcloth to my chest while I wait for my turn to crawl into the opening of the lodge.

Inside we press together in the dim light, making room for everyone to join the small circle. When the last two hot rocks are brought in, the entry flap is lowered, ushering in a complete and utter darkness. I remember that Elder Bob Cardinal had once likened the sweat lodge to a womb—now I could see how very apt this description was. I feel a momentary twinge of panic, but then find myself soothed, mesmerized, by the vibrations of the drumming and the beautiful chanting. Breathing in the pungent smoke, moving my cramped legs just a little to ease my discomfort, I settle into the experience.

The darkness invites me to go within. We were instructed to pay attention to images or visions that might occur during the sweat. At one point I get a strong and clear image of a quiet pool of water. Rain was just starting and each individual drop was creating a beautiful, perfectly circular ripple moving slowly outwards. How appropriate! For many indigenous people, the circle is a sacred shape. It is the symbol of wholeness, of completeness. This image also reminds me of how seemingly random events can ripple out, touch others, and cause subsequent events in often unforeseen ways. I think of how important it is to carefully consider my actions, my intentions. Emerging from the sweat lodge, back into the bright daylight, I feel a bit as if I were a butterfly emerging from my cocoon. I feel new and light, yet also ancient and heavy. I walk away from the others, wanting to relish the feeling a bit longer, hoping to integrate it into my being.

Reflecting on this experience, and this unique course, I realize that I have been gifted important lessons. Like the hawk, I must be quiet, calm, in order to become wisely aware. I must let my intuition guide me. Like the butterfly, I must let things unfold, not rush them. I must not want things to be always easy. The ripple reminds me that life is circular: I began in darkness and I will end in darkness, and along the way I will touch many Others. I fear the dark, and often struggle against it, but without the dark, there would be no light. I need both. As Elder Bob says, life is a mystery. There will always be something missing—there will always be more for me to learn. This makes me humble. In walking this path from my head to my heart in the right way, I will need to embrace all of me and all that I encounter along the way. The journey continues.

## Zahra Kasamali: Meaning in Form

And I wonder...how ought we to walk the *meskanaw* alongside each other in Creation? How ought I pay attention to that which is visible and invisible in interconnected ways? I am reminded of Rumi's poem *Spiritual Vision* (as cited in Dunn, Dunn Masceti, & Nicholson, 2000, p. 118):

The way you see  
is the measure of the world.  
Your imperfections are the veil.  
    Wash your senses  
with the water of the spirit,  
    as the Sufis wash their garments.  
    When purified,  
the spirit will unblind you,  
    and you'll see  
with the eye of loveliness.  
    But suppose  
that you bring the ear instead,  
    and show it an adorable beauty.  
    The Ear will say "I cannot see,  
    but utter a cry and I'll hearken."  
    And bring forth the nose  
and present it with light,  
    what use is this to the nose?  
    If there's musk or sweet water,  
the nose will know,  
    for this is the art  
and science of smell.  
    How can I see  
the face of the beloved,  
    don't expect me to know who He is.  
    Until I am purified in my frame,  
    I cannot see beyond myself.  
    But once I'm delivered  
from out of my frame,  
    my ear and nose can be eyes.  
    Every hair will be given sight,  
    for the eye had no eye at first,  
    just an embryo,  
flesh in the womb.  
    Adam came out of the earth,  
    but how does he resemble the dirt?  
    The genie came out of the fire,  
    but how come he doesn't burn?  
    Life relates the unrelated.  
    This is the spiritual cycle.

We are sitting in Elder Cardinal's teaching lodge. Elder Cardinal begins guiding us through sleep. His guidance is always calm, patient, humble, and loving. We hear drumming and humming...Mother Earth is beckoning us...she is in trouble. In these moments, I see glimpses of Rocky Mountain House...during a Grade 9 year-end field trip...It was the only time I had seen pure water...water that would not make you sick. Energy within my body

begins to shift and travel...I find a strong presence in my knees...my stomach...my forehead. I find myself wondering...what have I been forgetting?

Elder Cardinal says that "sometimes we take things for granted—remember to give thanks to the wind and sun." If I do not pay attention, how can I walk the *meskanaw* in balanced ways? Elder Cardinal's repeated "don't rush" awakens within me.

### Jodi Latremouille: Healing Relations

In the summer of 2014, my family moved to a new house on the fringes of the inner city of Calgary. Our new backyard was tiny, disappointing, filled nearly to bursting with a double garage and an oversized deck which sported two rectangular wooden planter boxes set symmetrically on each end like guards against some mysterious *wildness* out there that was actually too distant to pose any kind of threat.

The front yard tree was a mountain ash, filling our second-story bedroom window with intertwining fingers and limbs. One strong and crooked branch dropped down with an elbow, bent deeply, beckoning for a tire swing to be tied to its joint. The day that we moved there, I set out two wooden lounge chairs beneath the tree, and made a commitment to sit each day in those chairs and look up through the branches. Last fall, we added a bird feeder to one of its branches.

During Calgary's September 2014 record snowfall, the most shocking and devastating result was the damage to our city's trees. The entire citizenry of Calgary mourned the trees, which—often seen as a commodity to be imbued with monetary value, haggled over by concerned citizens and developers—on that day very clearly and suddenly became *our* trees, once again. As the clean up continued into the weeks that followed, the scars remained. Because I had had the opportunity to visit my mountain ash over the summer, my grief had its own face. It only lost one branch, a high, small branch that would easily go unnoticed, if you didn't know my tree.

Trees are the healing lungs of the earth, inhaling our expired human-breath and exhaling fresh tree-life back into our bodies. I often wonder about the diminished urban landscapes that our clear-cut settler culture (Sheridan & "He Who Clears the Sky" Longboat, 2006) has built for us to live in, our sterilized cityscapes paved with miles of sidewalks and roadways. I wonder if our culture has irreversibly severed our connections with the more-than-human world. And then I notice the tree-lined roadways, the backyard beekeepers, the volunteers maintaining an outdoor ice rink in the park down the street. These little plantings, these relationships and conversations, may not be sufficient for fixing the world, but if our aim is healing, then...

perhaps  
small, radiant acts  
of getting to know one another  
again  
may be enough.  
And perhaps  
renewing my intimate  
sensuous  
reciprocal  
relationship with trees  
may be enough.

“Every word,”  
body,  
tree,  
scar,  
“breaks forth”<sup>4</sup>  
out/into/through  
its intimate relations.

I say, only, that it may.

### *Mandy Krahn: Finding My Roots*

I grew up on a farm. Our home was surrounded by acre upon acre of sown fields—quite literally for as far as the eye could see. Living in the flat prairies of southern Manitoba, the expansive sky held a full range of emotions. My family grew many crops: wheat, barley, canola, flax, soybeans, oats....As a youngster, I enjoyed many tractor and combine rides. A highlight each harvest was using the grain truck as my personal playground, allowing my body the freedom of fully releasing into the tiny particles of often-itchy grain. It was divine. We had family picnics in the field from the back of the half-ton, stamping down the stubble to find a suitable location to lay the patchwork blanket from Grandma. Throughout adolescence and early adulthood, I worked as a hired hand alongside my dad and my Opa, both in the barns and out on the fields.

Much as I loved country life, ever since I can remember I yearned for more. Something bigger, better...something out there that was bound to hold all that life can offer. I wanted to be a *town kid* who could ride my bike on actual pavement, not dusty gravel, and who could hang out with friends after school with the convenience of walking to the corner store to buy a Slurpee. No such luck. Early on, I can recall being embarrassed of my life: from the old, practical farm house we lived in, to my mom who didn't work outside the home, to our staunchly Protestant Christian beliefs, to the simplicity of life as I knew it. It was never exciting enough for me. I longed for something more.

One clear, crisp Saturday during the Holistic Learnings class Elder Bob instructed us to search for a *found object*. Anything that might speak to us about what it means to live holistically. I bundled up and headed West on foot with only my thoughts for company. Bob's learning lodge is located in a stand of trees with farmland all around. I set out for a grove west of the barren field, envisioning that I would find a significant object among the stately deciduous beings. As it was shortly after harvest, the field was full of chaff and fallen stalks of wheat that the combine had missed. I trampled on over this, oblivious to its beckoning. I approached the periphery of the barren trees, hoping for something to speak to me. To *find* me.

Nothing did. This bush, these trees...they had nothing to say to me except, *turn around*. I looked back over the golden expanse of the rutted field, glancing down at my feet. For the first time I saw what had been there in front of me all the while. Bearded wheat, found in small, trampled clusters next to tire tracks from large machinery and excrement from the hordes of geese gorging on the leftovers. It was my turn to gather some of this sustenance, at last. I did not yet know the significance of this object; I only knew that it felt right. *It found me*. Holding the wheat, it finally hit me that I have been turning away from my roots for so long: pushing away the family values, Protestant beliefs, and connection

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<sup>4</sup> From Hans-Georg Gadamer's (1975/2004) *Truth and Method*, p. 454.

with the land for most of my life. Now, this wheat is demanding something of me. It is calling me to pay attention, beckoning me to live life more fully, more holistically. To not search for life in all places foreign, but to be willing to sink in to the loving arms of Mother Earth and what she has had in store for me all along. To honour this way of life, to see how it speaks to me and how I might respond to it. Listen. Receive. Dwell.

Amen...

### Lesley Tait: A Scattered People

Cynthia Chambers (2008) tells us:

People receive nourishment from particular places and the inhabitants of those places, as they learn the skills necessary to live in those places. And as they learn and practice the skills necessary to live in that particular place they become who they are. (p. 117)

We are a scattered people. A people without a cultural and ancestral homeland. A people without our extended family around the next corner. A people with no land on which to share our stories both with ourselves and with others. We, the Michel Nation, are disconnected and disjointed from each other, our heritage, and our land.

Would this be different if we were not *landless*? This experience of landlessness and *enfranchisement* has many far-reaching implications. The stories are not as strong as they need to be. The traditions are beginning to fade, the understandings of the land are beginning to dwindle. And if we take an idea from Thomas King (2003) that all we are is our stories, where does that leave the people of Michel? We don't live with our relatives, in the same community like other bands, like other indigenous families. We don't have a place to come together, to celebrate, to mourn, to be whole. I would assert that the dispossession of our lands has led to the breakdown of my family and our connection to one another, our culture and our land. It is not that that land belonged to us, it is that we belonged to that land.

My four-year-old grandson is now following his father and me over some of the same countryside that I followed my father and grandfather over. When his time comes, my grandson will choose as he must, but so far all of us have been farmers. I know from my grandfather that when he was a child he too followed his father in this way, hearing and seeing, not knowing yet that the most essential part of his education had begun. (Berry, 2000, p. 151)

Wisdom exists in places (Basso, 1996). Learn to walk in a good way.

*miyo waskawewin*  
Walk gently on mother earth  
Pay attention  
Tread lightly  
Recognize its wisdom

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