



Healing in the Joys of Creation: Mystery as Teacher and Medicine

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Abstract:

This work explores the importance of including, in the curriculum, Indigenous teachings regarding making, creating, healing and mystery. Found in the teachings of many Indigenous peoples, mystery, or (not) knowing, is vital to coming to know how to be human in a good way and so it must be centred and honoured in our walk through this world. Drawing on what I have learned from my many life teachers, I humbly offer the suggestion that mystery is vital in our route to the healing of ourselves and our world. In this work of Indigenous *métissage*, offering up my own experiences, I narrate how, through making and creating practices such as beading, drumming, weaving, poetry and life writing, I, and the youth with whom I teach and learn, have been invited into spaces of (not) knowing, where we have been made available to joy and healing. In this essay, I bring forward poems, stories from my teaching and making life, and images of my beading and painting, as an offering of one path of surrendering to mystery in the search for *mino bimaadiziwin*—living in a good way for the good of All My Relations.

Keywords: mystery; Indigenous *métissage*; making and creating practices; *debwewin*; healing; *mino bimaadiziwin*

La guérison dans les joies de la création : Le mystère comme enseignant et comme médecine

Résumé :

Cet ouvrage explore l'importance d'inclure, dans le programme scolaire, les enseignements autochtones concernant la fabrication, la création, la guérison et le mystère. Présent dans les enseignements de nombreux peuples autochtones, le mystère, ou le (non-)savoir, est essentiel pour savoir comment être humain d'une bonne manière et donc doit être honoré et au centre de notre marche à travers ce monde. En m'appuyant sur ce que j'ai appris de mes nombreux professeurs de vie, je suggère humblement que le mystère est vital dans notre chemin vers la guérison de nous-mêmes et de notre monde. Dans cette œuvre de métissage autochtone, offrant mes propres expériences, je raconte comment, à travers des pratiques de fabrication et de création telles que le perlage, le tambour, le tissage, la poésie et l'écriture de vie, moi et les jeunes avec lesquels j'enseigne et apprends avons été invités dans des espaces de (non-)savoir, où nous avons été rendus disponibles à la joie et à la guérison. Dans cet essai, je mets de l'avant des poèmes, des histoires de mon enseignement et de ma vie créatrice, ainsi que des images de mon perlage et de ma peinture, comme une offrande d'un chemin d'abandon au mystère dans la recherche de *mino bimaadiziwin*, de vivre d'une bonne manière pour le bien de Toutes Mes Relations.

Mots clés : mystère; métissage autochtone; pratiques de fabrication et de création; *debwewin*; guérison; *mino bimaadiziwin*

Ceremonies of Beginning: Introductions and Invitations

I have been musing about mystery my whole life, I think. As a new-ish scholar and an old-ish educator, I have been seeking ways to create spaces of honouring for *All My Relations*.¹ Mostly I engage in this inquiry through making and creating practices such as painting or beading, and life writing or poetry writing.² Before I begin the sharing, it is important, from an Indigenous perspective, to situate myself in regard to the work and to the teachers who brought me here through their example as scholars, artists and seekers. It is also important for me to introduce the words—and the teachings—which may be unfamiliar to you, dear Reader and co-traveller, so you feel welcomed to this space, so you feel honoured in this work. I introduce myself to you, in the hopes of inviting you into mystery with me, so we are not separated by fear of the unknown but are invited into it together.

Introducing Myself

*Aaniin. Tansi. Boozhoo.*³ I live in a world between worlds—a place where I live as a descendant of *Anishinaabe*/Métis peoples on my late mother's side and Celtic/Germanic peoples on my father's side. My mixed ancestry pulls many threads together in me: Indigenous and visitor; creator and created; walker between worlds of spirit and flesh; carrier of knowledge and one obliged to share the knowledge I carry. I wander in the mystery of how to live in a good way as a "teacher",⁴ a learner, a student of life, of ceremony and of all creation. As a teacher, the high school where I work is approximately 60 km east of Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, located on the traditional lands and waters of the Katzie, Whonnock and Kwantlen peoples. In British Columbia, as a requirement for graduation from high school, youth must complete at least one Indigenous-focused course in English or Social Studies/History. This is where I do my work, learning with and from the youth in our classroom communities. Many of these youth are non-Indigenous or come from other countries. In this context, we lean into the Indigenous literacies and pedagogies (Charnley, 2019) of drumming, singing, weaving, beading and story work (Archibald, 2009), in the hopes of creating a space where the cultures and beliefs of all members of our classroom communities are honoured. For this reason, even though students are required to take the course in order to graduate, they do not have to participate in a practice that they are either not comfortable with or are not permitted to participate in due to their own cultural beliefs or protocols.

¹ *All My/Our Relations* is an *Anishinaabe* term used to describe all beings around us, which include the more-than-human beings from spirit and beyond-earthly worlds. Other Indigenous peoples have other ways of describing such beings (Cajete, 1994).

² For me, "making" is a practice which is not unlike "crafting". In my learning spaces, these practices include: Coast Salish weaving, beading, drawing or painting, and carving. "Creating" leans more into practices such as life writing or poetry. I do see "making" as a creative practice, but to blend the two concepts may become confusing. For purposes of this work, the two may be thought of as separate from each other.

³ Each is a way to say hello. *Aaniin* and *boozhoo* are *Anishnaabemowin*, the language of the *Anishinaabeg*; and *tansi* is Michif, a language of the Métis peoples of Canada and the United States.

⁴ I am not merely a teacher. I cannot separate myself into pieces: one part of me is a teacher, another a learner. I am always both of them. This is why I placed "teacher" in quotation marks.

Introducing the Work

This work is an offering of gratitude for the practices and beings which allow me to walk in the teachings of my Elders and Ancestors,⁵ the ways of *mino bimaadiziwin*—living in a way such that we not only *do no harm* but do *good* for All Our Relations (Kelly, 2021a; Simpson, 2011; Vukelich Kaagegaabaw, 2024). Through the research approach of Indigenous métissage (Donald, 2012), I seek to weave together these threads of inquiry regarding mystery:

- Why is making or creating a key site of encountering mystery?
- How does the mystery we encounter in making or creating become a medicine or healing place in our lives and the lives of the people with whom we walk?
- How does mystery, or the state of (not) knowing, teach us how to become better human beings, in community, together?

Each of these threads offers connections, discussions and observations of ways in which our encounters with mystery, through creative endeavours, invite learning how to be human, how to trust the uncertainties of life and how to heal ourselves in order to heal our world—something needed now more than ever. This métissage, with its interweaving of stories, poems and images from my own making and creating practices, is an offering of teaching (or medicine) emerging from my relationship with mystery, from *Anishinaabe* teachings of “truth” or *debwewin*, and from observations of encounters with (not) knowing (encounters with mystery) in my classroom communities. Each thread offers important invitations to consider mystery as a key teacher in curricula of all kinds.

Indigenous métissage (Donald, 2012) and other métissage practices, have been taken up by arts and education scholars (e.g., Hasebe-Ludt et al., 2009; Kelly, 2019, 2021a; Leggo, 2015, 2018; Snowber & Bickel, 2015) who wish to weave together multi-faceted elements of their work in the hopes of addressing the wholeness (spirit, body, mind, heart) of our lived experiences and in the hopes of finding patterns of connection—webs of relationality.⁶ Sharing knowledge in this way holds space for Indigenous literacies⁷ (Charnley, 2019), which are different from Western educational literacies, which I find are often focused on words alone (whether written or oral). Through the weaving of my poems and life writing, along with the images of my beading and paintings, I long to

⁵ I have capitalized “Elders” and “Ancestors” to show that these are terms of respect. Elders, in many Indigenous cultures, are folk who are not just older in age than many others in the community but are folk who hold wisdom and have a responsibility to the community to share that wisdom. Ancestors are the people and beings who have come before us and will live after us, who teach us from a spiritual place because they cannot be with us physically. I also capitalize Ancestor to honour the Spirits of those who have walked into the Spirit World before me. These Ancestors may be related to me directly, but they may also be the Ancestors of the places where I live, work or play. These beings live in and on the lands and waters, offering wisdom, love and guidance when humbly recognized and honoured through ceremony.

⁶ The idea of relationality invites humans to consider that there is a connection to all of creation which calls humans to become responsible to those connections, as if/because we are all related. Scholar James Vukelich Kaagegaabaw clarifies this beautifully in his 2023 work *The Seven Generations and The Seven Grandfather Teachings*.

⁷ Charnley (2019), describes Indigenous (Coast Salish/Katzie) literacy this way: “strengths-based and community oriented, includes family and community ‘funds of knowledge’ as interfaced with territorial lands and waters, and values multimodal forms of literacy and expression including oral storytelling, Hun’qumyi’num language, and performative narrative events (e.g., dance, ceremony and canoeing)” (p. xvii).

lift up, or honour, my teachers, the Spirits of all those who brought me here and all the ones who walk with me from the Spirit World. Through this work I hope to offer gratitude for all I have learned from the great mysteries that these teachers hold.

Introducing Some Pertinent Teachers, Teachings and Terms

Teachers

I have, from the time I was a little girl running through the soft Saskatchewan soil, struggled to walk humbly through the world, as I longed to be open to the lessons of all the beings around me. As I have gotten much (much) older, I still struggle (daily) to walk softly, slowly and humbly, in order to stay open to all the teachers around me—both human and more-than-human.⁸ Part of that learning journey, as an adult, included participation in a profoundly transformational program which was a collaboration between the *Skw̓wú7mesh Úxwumixw* (Squamish Nation), the *səlilwətaʔ* (Tsleil-Waututh) Nation and Simon Fraser University—the Indigenous Education: Wholistic Teachings and Transformative Pedagogies Graduate Diploma.⁹ I am every grateful for all who shared their teachings with me. These teachers included members of the *səlilwətaʔ* nation—the late Elder “Uncle Iggy” George, Elder “Auntie Dee” George, Gabriel George and Angela Paul—as well as members from the *Skw̓wú7mesh Úxwumixw* (Squamish Nation)—“Splash” (Aaron Wilson-Moody), Spelexilh (Anjeanett Dawson) and Norman Gurrero. Also included were Métis Elder Kiskino (Heather Myhr), *Anishinaabe*/Métis Elder-scholar Dr. Vicki Kelly, non-Indigenous scholar-teacher Dr. Paula Rosehart, as well as all those beings of the land, water and sky of these traditional territories. In this program, Dr. Kelly centred making and creating practices, as well as land practices, as key to our connection to the teachings of the land, waters and peoples who have been caretakers of both from time immemorial. It was here I encountered the power of mystery through practices of making and creating. It was also here that I encountered many of the scholars who have become key to my work. Scholars such as Dr. JoAnn Archibald (Sto:lo), Dr. Gregory Cajete (Tewa), Dr. Kerrie Charnley (Katzie) Dr. Dwayne Donald (Cree), Dr. Karlee Fellner (*Nehiyaw*/Métis) Dr. Margaret Kovach (Saulteaux), Dr. Vicki Kelly (*Anishinaabe*/Métis), Dr. Leroy Little Bear (Blackfoot), Dr. Manulani Aluli Meyer (Hawaiian), Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (*Anishinaabe*), James Vukelich Kaagegaabaw (*Anishinaabe*) and Richard Wagamese (*Anishinaabe*) have taught me a great deal through their work, even if I have never been in a classroom with them in person.

Terms and Teachings

From those teachers, I learned that *medicine* is more than what we put into our bodies to heal us. Medicine is anything that heals us in our spirits, bodies, minds and/or hearts. They also taught me

⁸ Here, the term *more-than-human* is used to refer to spirit beings as well as the beings who wander among us and who are not human: plants, rocks, animals, air, water and so on. See Cajete (1994, p. 26) for a more thorough discussion of this idea in relation to the concept of All My Relations.

⁹ For an excellent account of the work in the first iteration of the program, see Kelly & Rosehart (2021) and Kelly (2021b). The following link connects to a beautiful film, created by Calder Cheverie, offering a snapshot of some of the experiences with the nations: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oXr67i6Vygs>

that the medicine teachings (the lessons or learnings or practices we gather along the journey of our lives) become part of our *medicine bundles*. In many Indigenous spiritual practices, our medicine bundles are also, literally, where we keep our plant medicines (cedar, sage, sweetgrass and tobacco), our feathers and abalone shells for smudging (the practice of lighting the plant medicines and waving the smoke over our bodies in a ceremony of cleansing), and our treasures of all kinds (small stones, pinecones, beaded gifts and so on). The bundles hold everything we need to hold ceremony, wherever we are.

Later in this sharing, I offer up the idea that what we encounter in our experiences of making, drumming, singing, dancing and story-sharing (along other creative life practices) may also become part of our medicine bundle. These experiences offer us invitations to step into liminal spaces, spaces between the physical and spiritual realms, where mystery abounds. At the same time, they are invitations to trust the great mystery—*Gizhe-Manidoo*¹⁰ (Great Spirit/Great Love/That Being Who Cannot Be Known), allowing us to feel closer to our Ancestors and All Our Relations.

In addition to making and creating practices (which I will speak of in more detail later), I refer to *ceremony* many times. For me, as I understand this concept now, *ceremony* is any mindful act through which we open ourselves to become available to the cultural and spiritual teachings all around us (Cajete, 1994; Kelly, 2019). Some *ceremony* is highly ritualized and codified in protocols of action, language, dress and song (the ceremony of smudging, for example). Some ceremony is found in the simple moments of life when we feel filled with gratitude and express this through dance, laughter, song, or whispers of “thank you” to the world. There is ceremony in making or creating, when we are in communion (as one spirit) with the materials, processes and creative energies. As Tewa scholar Gregory Cajete teaches, “the transformation of the act of ‘seeing’ into art by the artist is a primordial mystery through ritual” where “process, product, and self might become one” (Cajete, 1994, pp. 155-156). We are transformed by the mystery.

Mystery, to me, is the terrifying beauty of the unknown and unknowable. Yet, it is the centre of all existence, where we are everything and nothing and live in all dimensions at once. Mystery, ironically, defies description, like the Spirit Beings so old their names are now symbols or pictographs. Even though mystery is too fluid a concept to be forced into one description, (not) knowing needs to be offered space in our curricula of all kinds. There is much to be learned by knowing we don’t know, by trusting the process (whatever that process may be), and by entering into a conversation with mystery—the centre of all being. *Anishinaabe* cultural writer Richard Wagamese (2021) communicates this teaching beautifully:

What comes from Spirit is beyond time, beyond place. It exists in another realm and when I get in touch with it, when I get in touch with my essential self I am transported, altered, changed, empowered and I become less human being working than a perfect spirit moving. This is powerful. This is truth. This is spiritual. (p. 68)

¹⁰ The Great Spirit is a spiritual being but also a place and a power. The Great Spirit is everything and nothing. Nowhere and everywhere. Leanne Simpson has a wonderful discussion of this in her 2011 book (noted in the reference list).

For me, nearly every morning waking, this conversation with mystery begins in ceremony: with writing, visioning and smudging. I write three pages of stream-of-consciousness life writing, laying down the wonder, worry and wounds from the day before—dreaming into the day that is dawning. Here, I sit in the great presence of mystery, grateful for the silence and honour to participate in a conversation I have been having my whole life with the humming, loving, vibrating world at the centre of all centres, knowing that I am not separate from any of it. I conclude my morning ceremony with a smudge to cleanse me for the new day. The poem and photo that follow offer a glimpse into the “dark meetings” I have with mystery at the start of each day.

the dark meetings

how do I come to know any of it?

how do these mornings,

(mostly dark and cold)

at this paper,

(mostly dark and blank)

teach me anything

about being human enough

to wander through this forest of Spirits,

quiet enough to jump out and scare me

from behind my widest assumptions?

I have tried

so many other ways

to learn how to be who I was born to be

but the only way I know how to learn to be whole

is here . . .

stringing together words

whispered from the centre of creation,

until my hands do the same,

in this world of getting and having,

until something makes sense enough

to bead me into wholeness,

in the wake of my Ancestors,

who sat in this same place,

mostly dark and cold and blank,

stitching the world together,

one little Spirit at a time.



Figure 1. *Morning Table*. Photo taken by author.

Making as Sites of Mystery: A Key Indigenous Pedagogy

Indigenous knowledge practices are ecological encounters of profound ethical relationality that acknowledge the act of co-creating through living embodiments of Indigenous Poiesis. What is provoked are potential encounters that ask us to fully engage in elegant enactments of making such that the ceremony of these sacred practices makes and unmakes us. (Kelly, 2019, p. 20)

Every school year, the youth who enter our shared classroom are taught beading and Coast Salish weaving as foundational pedagogical practices in the exploration of Indigenous ways of being, knowing and doing. One of the many important Indigenous pedagogical traditions is having busy hands while listening to teachings. Indigenous scholars such as Archibald (2009), Charnley (2019) and Kovach (2020) have shared the importance of having our whole selves engaged in our learning. Hands busy in the work of weaving, beading, colouring or drawing bring the body into the listening. Katie scholar Kerry Charnley (2019) shares in her work that when the body, mind, heart and spirit are engaged in the listening/learning process, the listeners are better able to remember what they have learned, so that when they are called to share that knowledge in the future, they have multiple ways to remember (pp. 257-261).

The making also invites the youth into the mystery of creation by an act of surrender. They are invited into the tension of engaging in new practices with what Zen philosopher Shunryu Suzuki (1989) calls “beginner’s mind”—a state of mind which calls the learners to surrender to the unknown and go where the learning takes them (pp. 21-22). I have observed that this state of mind increases the youths’ resilience to the stress of the unknown. We (myself and the educational assistants who work with me) coach them to trust their muscle memory—to trust their fingers to know what to do next, even if their brain does not always remember. For youth who struggle with anxiety, this

teaching is medicine. Time and again, the young ones have shared with us how the weaving and beading soothes them and are distractions from their electronic devices.¹¹ They tell us they love having busy hands while they listen, that these practices help them listen with their whole bodies.

In my own life journey, I have come to know there are certain occasions which seem to be more fertile, to be softer to the conversation with mystery—with *Gizhe-Manidoo*. These sites are usually ones in which I am participating in rituals of life (washing dishes, folding laundry), morning ceremonies (life writing, writing poetry, laying down tobacco,¹² smudging), or making practices (drumming, beading, painting, weaving). My busy hands calm my trembling Spirit, inviting me to fall into the spaces between breaths where Creation and Creator live in me.

The following poem and photographs of samples of my beading projects share how the practice of beading pulls me together, even when I feel untethered or lost, like spilled and scattered beads.

be[ad]jing in the (not) knowing

the tension at these crossroads
heightens longing
to an intensity so tight
my cells vibrate with it:
drumming in all dimensions
so I feel everything so deeply
I cannot shake free from the hold of it.

all the “what ifs” roll in all directions,
like scattered beads
silently collected in my lap,
the sound of them tapping the hardwood floor,
reminding me of songs in praise of freedom.

my brain doesn’t understand the specifics of this anxiety—
bubbling chemicals surface from other “near misses”
or moments out of my control,
ruled over by the petition of my reaching heart
into the most silent of spaces
where one false thought
could tip the scale in the “wrong” direction
until I’ve gotten years clear of the moment to see

¹¹ As part of our “assessment” practices, we hold “formal” conversations with youth. During these conversations, we gain deeper knowledge into the experience of the youth and what is working for them.

¹² Putting down tobacco is a ceremony of “prayer” in which a generous pinch of tobacco is placed on the land or water, in a smudge shell, in order to make an offering to a Spirit or Spirits to intercede for humans. The plant teaches us how to pray and be in these sacred spaces (Debassige, 2010).

I had no idea I was holding my map upside down.

I learn to put down tobacco,
 while I bite my lip,
 asking not for one outcome or another,
 but to be released from the torture of wanting to control the outcome
 one way or another—
 to be ok to leave the beads to their freedom
 on the floor
 and beg for the help of new ones. . .
 if that is what the work asks of me.



Figures 2 and 3. Beaded earring and medallion. Art and photograph by author.

Teachings of (Not) Knowing: Wandering in Wondering

Original Man was the last to be created. Gzhwe Mnidoo wanted one who would reflect her/his thoughts, and so from the first woman s/he took four parts of her body—soil, air, water, and fire and molded a being, a vessel. Gzhwe Mnidoo blew his/her own spirit breath into the being and gave him her/his own thoughts, and these thoughts were so vast that they spilled out of his head into his entire body. Gzhwe Mnidoo touched Original Man’s breast causing his heart to beat in harmony with the rhythm of the universe and with Gzhwe Mnidoo. (Simpson, 2011, p. 39)

In many traditional *Anishinaabeg* stories, existence begins and ends in the teachings of mystery. As well described by *Michi Saagig* Nishnabeg poet, storyteller and scholar Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (2011), creation begins in the void, is born of the sound of the drum and rattle, culminating in the formation of the first human. From an *Anishinaabe* perspective, humans are born of the Great Mystery into great mystery, carrying the spirit breath and heartbeat of creation—knowledge spilling into our bodies from the hand of “that which we do not understand” (Simpson,

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2011, p. 55). We are born into the (not) knowing, into the mystery. We are born into mystery but, throughout our lives, we forget how to be comfortable with not always knowing what comes next in life, in work, in thought or deed and this uncertainty causes anxiety. Medicine for the anxiety of not knowing, the uncertainty of mystery, can be found in the *Anishinaabe* teaching of *debwewin*—truth. In this ancient understanding of truth, we are invited to wander together in wonder and find comfort together in the discomfort of not always having the *right* answers to life's mysteries.

Anishinaabe Truth, debwewin: We Cannot Know Alone

debwewin

In Simpson's 2011 book, *Dancing on Our Turtle's Back: Stories of Nishnaabeg Re-Creation, Resurgence, and a New Emergence*, *Anishinaabe* Elder Gidigaa Migizi (Doug Williams), shares the story teaching of the word *debwewin* (p. 94). This Elder teaches here that truth is not a definitive answer held by one member of the community but, rather, is a creation of understanding made of pieces of each member's experience and relationship to the question, issue or wondering. We cannot come to a full experience of truth without the echoes of visions of the whole community. This is why *Anishinaabeg* understandings (i.e., *debwewin*—truth) of a question take so long to bring into communal imagination and knowing.

debwewin as Medicine

I have lived a life in classrooms and learning spaces for over two decades as a teacher and a learner. Much of those years have been spent feeling isolated from the Western educational landscape, living in what has been described as the "trauma of erasure and separation" (Bickel & Snowber, 2015, p. 67). But more recently, from the mentorship of Elders, I feel called, in my learning communities, to offer their teachings in the hopes that sharing medicine ways (*mino bimaadiziwin*) will bring healing. One of those medicine teachings is the teaching of *debwewin*. The story living in the word *debwewin* has created communities of understanding where young ones are invited to bring their life experiences into their learning spaces and conversations. In this way, we hope to honour their learning Spirits and the lives they have lived.

In our classroom, when we work together with story (novels, short stories, traditional stories), we (the educational assistant and I) are sure to share the teachings of *debwewin* prior to the beginning of any readings. So many young ones have been scarred by Western educational demands to know, definitively, what the *right* answer is. When we share the teachings of *debwewin*, especially in the abstract concepts of art, poetry or story work, we witness relief in students' faces and body language, showing us that they are free from the tyranny of the *teacher's* answer. I always share with them that I do not have the answers either—that the questions I ask them are the questions I have about the piece, too. In daily conversations with the youth, they tell us how much they appreciate this openness in learning and in how we leave space for their knowing—and their (not) knowing—and their ways of coming to know. They come to trust that they may invite wonder in their wandering, just as we have. We wander in wonder together.

When I share weaving techniques, or the story of drums, or a drumming ceremony, in our classroom communities, I offer the medicines gifted to me by my teachers, hopefully becoming useful to the wounds of others. I humbly try to offer a way to live in *mino bimaadiziwin*—a way that honours life, so that I am not just doing no harm but doing good for All My Relations and the generations coming after me—for my grandchildren’s grandchildren (see Vukelich Kaagegaabaw, 2023).

The youth with whom I walk, in my classroom and school communities, have shared how they find solace in weaving, beading, drumming and singing. They have shared how these acts of creation offer them solace in a world that sometimes seems blind to the needs of their learning Spirits, wounding them deeper than they may already be wounded. In our classroom community, we come to understand, as we create side by side, that we learn how to put back together what has been torn apart, learning how to weave, string, write ourselves together in the healing resonance of deep medicine. Physician Rupa Marya and political economist Raj Patel (2021) describe deep medicine as that which counters “dia-gnosis”, the analytic taking apart in order to understand. Rather, drawing from Indigenous and decolonialist theories, they put forth their learning that deep medicine “never separates a person or a community away from the web of relationships that confer sickness or health” (p. 331). Instead, this medicine “brings together several kinds of stories” and “puts the pieces back together to understand and to heal what’s been divided” (pp. 330-331). Likewise, when we create understanding together, through the teachings of *debwewin*, we create opportunities to heal together. For this, I am ever grateful.

Final Gratitudes and Prayers

Chi miigwech (thank you), Creation, mystery and Spirit! Thank you for inviting me to know you, even when I didn’t know I knew. *Chi miigwech*, dear Reader, for joining me on this wander into wonder. This Indigenous métissage has, hopefully, offered pathways to encounter mystery in sites of making or creating, offered invitations to healing through making and creating within those encounters, and offered healing ways through making and creating within the encounters of mystery and offered pathways to healing community through the *Anishinaabe* teachings of *debwewin*, or truth. Through the sharing of my poems, my observations and images of my own creations, I hope to have offered pathways to encounters with mystery that are hopeful, helpful and healing. These offerings are prayers that all of us find healing in the great mysteries of our lives. All My Relations.

the call to surrender

what does the call to surrender feel like in my bones,
 where I remember all those other times—
 and there have been so many—
 when to bend meant survival in a world of more weight,
 and resistance meant snapping in all directions,
 because there were too many fissures
 in too many hidden places

to know which inches would blow out first.

sometimes it's like an exhale after a long held
stinging breath
and the subsequent release of muscles—
so deep it exhausts me to collapsing,
in the absence of tiny oxygen molecules holding me up.

sometimes it's an explosion,
forcing me open to the world on the other side of resistance—
loud and sharp and exquisitely painful
in the reflective surfaces of the facets of the teachings
I was meant to accept,
through more peaceful means,
before the Creator
and the Ancestors
and All My Relations
had to bring in the heavy artillery
to open the door to my heart—
to open my eyes—
to see what I was refusing to see.

sometimes it feels like aabawaawendam—
"forgiveness"—
a melting or thawing
of all those rigid places holding anger
or hatred
or fear. . .
a falling away
or a releasing to the inevitable,
in order to keep standing
before the weight of all this death and destruction
buckles my knees with its apathy
and I fall to dust in the shadows of it all.

I remember these moments most—
the falling away of things:
resistance
fear
anger
the shedding of skin or heavy clothes
so that I feel lighter,
filled with promise enough

to step into the light. . .
washed clean in the letting go.

an opening of my hands
to release whatever it is I am/was holding
and lift my open hands in gratitude
to the teachings that surrender just gifted me:
the strength really does come in the release.



Figure 4. She said anguish comes for your bones.
Water colour, Prisma colour pencils and ink.
Artwork and photograph by author.

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