LET ME TELL YOU WHAT I KNOW: PERSONAL STORY AS EDUCATIONAL PRAXIS

By

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Integrated Studies Project

submitted to Dr. Kadi Purru

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Abstract

"Let me tell you what I know" is a series of personal stories written for my children and grandchildren. My stories provide some of the content, context, and familial/family connection that, as a mother and grandmother, I feel a responsibility to relate. These stories, like countless other personal stories from many different perspectives, also serve as stimulation for further inquiry and the creation of new knowledge. "Personal Story as Educational Praxis" looks at story and storytelling as intergenerational learning and articulation of personal voice. This paper argues that stories told from a wide range of perspectives and the storywork they generate calls into question the Eurocentric conception of knowledge. Through providing representation and subsequent recognition of diverse systems of knowledge and ways of knowing reality, stories have the power to both transform and decolonize Western educational systems.

Acknowledgements

Many people, both directly and indirectly, have encouraged the development of this Master of Arts Integrated Studies (MAIS) Final Project. First and foremost, I want to acknowledge my family. Without them, this project could not have existed. The perspectives and ways of seeing/knowing the world that my husband, Stephen Charleson, has unwrapped for me are beyond measure. What I have come to write here is a snapshot of my arrival at a particular place of knowing. It is a pit stop, so to speak, in an on-going journey of learning that continues to be fed by the steady, sustained teachings of my husband and family, my ancestors and relatives, the people who live and visit here in

Hesquiaht traditional territories, and this place itself - from the tiny *hyshtoop* that cling to the low tide rocks to the mountains and cedar trees that tower above us. Learning does not occur in isolation; rather it is nurtured by one's physical and metaphysical surrounding relationships. My final project has come into being through the pushing and prodding, gentle nudging, and multitude of daily reminders from people, places, and Creator.

One of the most important and vital lessons I have learned from living these past three decades in the House of Kinquashtacumlth, in the Hesquiaht community, is the value of family and relationships. I was fortunate enough to learn the value of family and home as a child from my grandmother, mother, and father. In my adult life, I have been lucky enough to experience that learning growing and expanding.

In the process of this Final Project, I have often had occasion to be grateful to my instructor/friend/fellow traveler Dr. Kadi Purru. Kadi's generous support and conversations have encouraged expression from my heart and spirit as well as from my mind. I am certain that this project would have been a much shallower work without her help.

Dedication

I dedicate this work to my family: my husband Stephen Charleson; my children Lelaina Jules, Layla Rorick, Stephen Sylvester Charleson, Estella Jean Charleson, Mariah Katrine Charleson, and Joshua Neils Charleson; my grandchildren Wayne Jules, Tiana Jules, Jamal Campbell, and Kura Lua Rorick. I invite anyone else interested to read along.

Myself and my children. From the left: Layla, Karen (me), Stephen Jr., Mariah, Joshua, Estella, and Lelaina. We are on the float at Hot Springs Cove, getting ready to meet and welcome Robin's family who are paddling into the village as the first part of Layla and Robin's wedding.[1]

My husband Stephen Charleson in his boat *Moonaquin* in Hesquiaht Harbour.

[1]All photographs and documents are from my personal family collection, and are used with the permission of family members.

Let me tell you what I know

Introduction

> I imagine standing at the head of Hesquiaht Harbour looking out into Hesquiaht Lake, in the midst of traditional Hesquiaht territories. Rain falls into the forests, into the countless small streams and drainages that run into the lake. From the lake, the river fills and pours continuously into the ocean at Boat Basin. That water evaporates from the ocean and changes back to tiny droplets of liquid that remain suspended as clouds or fog. Eventually, it falls to the earth again as precipitation. A cycle is completed only to start anew. My Final Project is like that water cycle. I begin with the questions: What do I know? How do I know it? My stories shed some light on those questions. Through my attempts at articulation, I arrive at further questions, deeper probing, the need for more stories. I continually arrive back at: What do I know? How do I know it? The cycle of striving for understanding, the circular hermeneutic journey, continues indefinitely.

My name is Karen Charleson. I was born Karen Rytter in 1957. My mother and grandmother had fled Estonia during World War II and come to Canada as displaced persons/refugees in 1948. My father had immigrated to Canada, also after the War, from Denmark. My parents met in Port Alice, on northern Vancouver Island, where my father and my grandmother's new husband - another newly arrived refugee from Lithuania - had found work in the pulp mill. By the time I was born, my father and grandfather's jobs

and our small family, had moved to Port Alberni, another larger mill town on central Vancouver Island.

At the age of eighteen, after completing high school, I met my husband on the west coast of the Island. Becoming married, becoming Mrs. Stephen Charleson, I suddenly became a legal member of the Hesquiaht First Nation – an "Indian" within the laws and definitions imposed by Canada. This legal definition seemed to matter little at the time. It was through living with my husband and having our own children within the traditional territories and family of Kinquashtacumlth and Hesquiaht, that my self-identity and perspective developed as a member of the House of Kinquashtacumlth and the Hesquiaht First Nation. It was a gradual process; it is still an on-going process. Together with my husband, today we have six children and four grandchildren.

My research within the space of this Master of Arts Integrated Studies (MAIS) program, my examination and reflection upon how knowledge is conveyed and generated through story began with my writing personal stories that I wanted to share with my children and grandchildren. It was through looking at the stories that resulted from my writing that I began to understand the effectiveness of story and storytelling as educational praxis.

My personal stories are brief segments, glimpses and representations of how I saw/felt/knew particular things at particular times in my life. They are mere points in time, places of reflection, spaces I have stopped to look at my own memories, recollections, and perspectives. My stories are my research. They serve as examples of intergenerational learning and meaningful family educational praxis, both in their descriptions of how and what I learned from my grandmother, mother, father, husband,

and family, and in their purpose of informing, stimulating, and inspiring my children and grandchildren.

Putting to paper/screen what it is I KNOW through my research and explorations still strikes me as a bold and arrogant act. I feel that to say what it is I know, I must go beyond the knowledge I have garnered from books and articles, and rely upon that with which I feel most comfortable, the knowledge derived within the context of my own life and experience. I recently read Martin Prechtel's work *The Disobedience of the Daughter of the Sun,* in which he describes knowledge as "a gradual living thing we must maintain and cultivate in the ground" (90). Prechtel contrasts this view of knowledge with a Western conception of knowledge as a possession to be mined and captured (90). I recently heard a speaker in Ahousaht state unequivocally that all knowledge comes from the Creator. What I present here as 'my knowledge,' I see as something like a sunrise: a temporary – yet recurring – gift not made possible by my own comprehension, hand, action or thought alone, but given to me like a gift, a reminder of all that surrounds and enables me.

My late mother-in-law was a strong, intelligent, wise woman. She raised thirteen children and many, many grandchildren. She lived into her eighties. So many questions she answered with "I don't know." It was not that she had never heard or read of the topic asked about, not that she had never heard it discussed or mentioned. It was not that the subject was somehow beyond her grasp. She said "I don't know" when she did not have direct knowledge for the question asked or the information requested. She would not have dreamed of describing to anyone, for example, how to go about catching a codfish, as though she knew firsthand how to do so. She had likely eaten thousands of

codfish in her lifetime, cleaned and cut up and cooked the freshly caught fish brought to her by her husband, her sons, her relatives, her neighbours and friends. She was likely along on the boat many times when codfish were caught. If a questioner knew enough to ask, how did your husband catch codfish, she might recall ways she had seen him catch codfish or methods he had talked about for catching codfish. But she would remain clear, that she had only heard this or seen parts of this, that this was all that she remembered, that she didn't really know. Most likely she would direct the questioner to someone who actually went out and caught codfish themselves. "Ask Ray or Felix or Stephen," she would say, listing her sons who cod-fished, "They know."

I present my personal knowledge in the form of stories from my space in this world, from my Estonian and Danish ancestors, from my place in my family in the House of Kinquashtacumlth and the Hesquiaht First Nation, from the space of what I feel I really know through experiences and relationships. I am conscious that this is not my isolated knowledge that I have somehow researched alone. Rather it is knowing that I have gradually accumulated, that has been shared with me through living with people, place, and Creator. It is knowledge I feel confident enough to pass on my children and grandchildren.

Story One: My Grandmother

It is easy for me to remember my grandmother – your great grandmother and great great grandmother. Memories of her flow smoothly, gently, into my mind like leisurely creek waters flowing ever towards the sea. Though my grandmother passed away more than twenty years ago, she was a continual steady presence in my childhood. I cannot imagine growing up without her. As a child, I had my mother, my father, my

brother, my grandmother, and my grandfather. This was my family, as it was supposed to be.

I can still see my grandmother playing chess with my grandfather. I see her head bent over the chessboard, arms resting on the table, studying the board. I hear her quiet cries of disgust or dismay at my grandfather's moves. I remember her alone at the kitchen table, playing solitaire with two decks of cards. I remember how she patiently showing me how to lay out the cards; the same patience with which she showed me the moves of the various chess pieces. The bishop moves only diagonally; on its first move, the pawn can move one or two spaces, but only forward; the queen can move in any direction, it can move diagonally or straight over any number of spaces. That always amazed me, the queen's ability to move anywhere. I never learned to be a good chess player; I spent too much time trying to free my queen so that she could move grandly about the board. On the rare occasions that I play chess today, I still play like that.

I can hear my grandmother singing softly. I do not recall specific songs or melodies, just the sound of her humming and singing as she prepared meals. Pieces of melody carried along by her voice subtly filling her kitchen. I remember the long walks she took me on, how we walked through the trees and down the slopes of the gully that cuts through Port Alberni on our way to the stores downtown. My grandmother never learned how to drive a car; she never worked outside her home. She sewed dresses for me on her treadle sewing machine. As a small girl I so much wanted to attempt the foot pedal on that amazing contraption, but I never dared to touch the machine that only my grandmother knew how to operate. She looked after her home, she looked after my grandfather, and she looked after us, her family. Every day my grandmother prepared a

hot, two-course dinner – soup and a main course of meat, potatoes and vegetables. It was always ready when my grandfather got home from work or before he left for work, depending upon the shift he worked. Proper meals were important. I remember how fruitlessly she tried to instill in my brother and I some understanding of the importance of table manners.

I remember how determinedly, year after year, my grandmother encouraging us to sing Christmas carols on Christmas Eve. Somehow she had gotten the idea that my brother and I could sing *O Christmas Tree* in German; she never believed that we could not. I think we refused to learn. I remember the Christmas Eve meals she prepared: bowls filled with headcheese, pickled herrings, marinated herrings, pickled mushrooms and beets, always the black bread – the heavy, dark, sourdough rye bread – that she and my mother commented upon endlessly. The exact texture and taste of every batch of bread was a subject for new analysis and discussion. I remember my favourite - *rosolje* – an Estonian beet salad magnificently full of finely chopped eggs, potatoes, vegetables, all made pink by the beets.

My grandmother was born Ariadne Semenov in 1904 probably in Vaimastvere village in Tartumaa county in Estonia[2]. Her father Michael Semenov was an accountant who moved from village to village doing their books. Our relative Hillar Semenov, my grandmother's nephew - his father was my grandmother's brother - has come to Canada twice in recent years to visit my brother and I. He tells me that Michael's wife always came home to the farm to give birth to her children, so my grandmother must have been born in Vaimastvere. My grandmother had two sisters and one brother. She and her

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[2] My relative Hillar Semenov provided me with dates, names and information about my grandmother in our email correspondence in 2007.

siblings all had one child each. I grew up hearing their names, hearing my mother's stories of childhood times with her cousins Kurt and Harry and Hillar. They all immigrated to Australia after World War II. Only my grandmother and mother came to Canada.

My grandmother's family moved to Tallinn, the capital city of Estonia, during World War I. Her father worked there for the newspaper *Päevaleht*. My grandmother married an Estonian military officer named Oscar Pollisinski. I grew up seeing his framed photograph on the dresser beside my mother's bed. In his military uniform, he was tall, dark, and handsome – like the cliché. He looked a lot like my mother. My mother told me over and over again as a child how he was taken by the invading Russians, the communists, and sent to Siberia. In those times, the Soviets sent their political and other prisoners to Siberia, where they left them to survive or not survive in the frozen *gulag* or network of prison and labour camps. My mother never stopped mourning him, this father she had lost when only a child. My grandmother talked little about him. I think looking back now, that this was out of respect for her new husband, the man we grew up knowing as our grandfather, Alfonsis Gudaitis.

Recently, I wrote to Hillar about my grandfather's death. I wanted to know the year it happened, the year my mother's father, my grandfather, your great and great great grandfather, was taken away. Hillar shocked me - if I knew anything as a child, it was that my grandfather had been taken to Siberia - by telling me that not only did my grandfather die in 1940, but that it was strongly believed that he and his fellow officers were shot and their bodies disposed of. I can no longer ask my mother or my grandmother about this. Was the getting sent to Siberia story perhaps a slightly easier

one to tell my mother as a child? I do not think my mother intentionally deceived me – she was vehement in her descriptions of how her father was taken from her and she repeated them often. My grandmother never spoke of it.

As Hitler and his German armies moved to take over much of Europe, they occupied Estonia in 1941, pushing out the Russians who had recently occupied the small nation. In 1944 when the Russians re-invaded Estonia, my grandmother and mother, like many other Estonians, fled. My mother told me stories of how she and her mother escaped Estonia in a vehicle with German soldiers. As a child, what she remembered most vividly was the pain of needing the bathroom but being unable to stop for hours and hours. My mother and grandmother eventually arrived at a refugee camp for displaced Estonians in Augsburg, Bavaria, Germany. There they spent the remainder of the war and the years following it when the international community simply did not know what to do with them. According to my mother, they lived on potatoes. Any wealth Germany still had was poured into the war effort. For my mother and grandmother, for the thousands of other Estonians living as refugees in Germany, their homes, their former country, no longer existed. Estonia had become a part of the Soviet Union. It was impossible to go back.

My mother finished high school in the Estonian refugee camp. I look at one of the old report cards, full of top grades that she saved. She enrolled in the University of Munich.

Müncheni Eesti
Üliôpílaskond

Liikmekaart No. 62

Polisinski, Stella

on maksnud lükmemaksu kümme RM. II sem. 1946

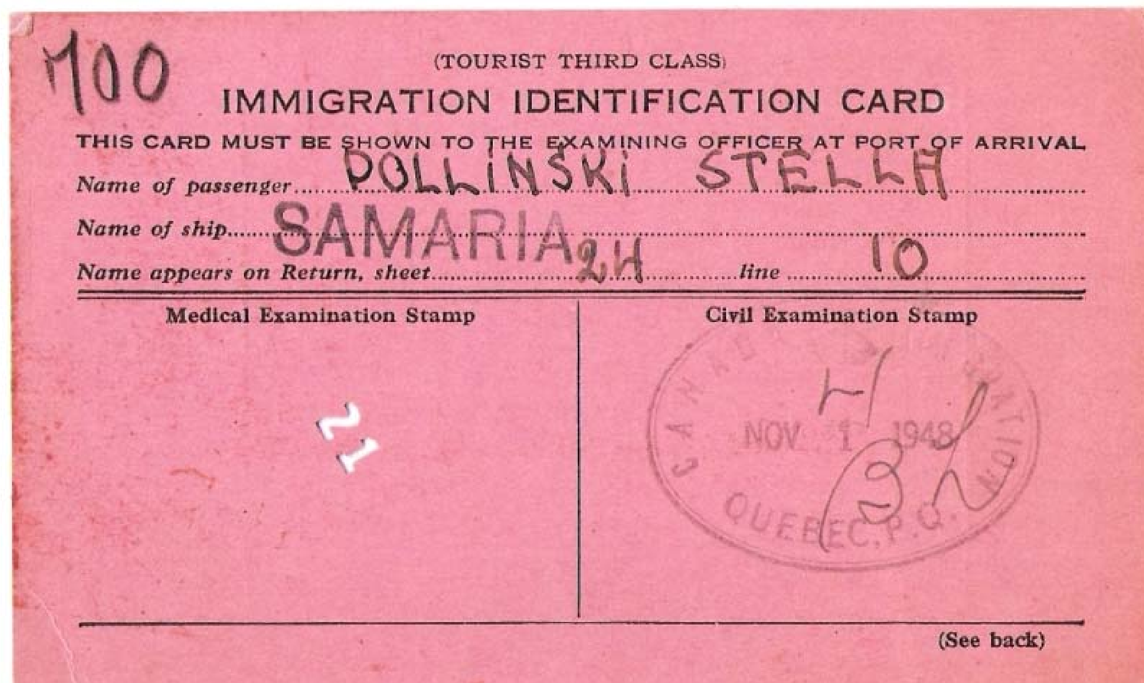
Münchenis, 15. aug. 1946

Esimees

Laekur

Estonian Students' Association Munich

In 1948, my mother and grandmother were accepted as displaced persons into Canada. I have a copy of my mother's Immigration Identification card, one she carried with her on the ship *Samaria* that brought them across the Atlantic Ocean to eastern Canada.


700

(TOURIST THIRD CLASS)

IMMIGRATION IDENTIFICATION CARD

THIS CARD MUST BE SHOWN TO THE EXAMINING OFFICER AT PORT OF ARRIVAL

Name of passenger POLLINSKI STELLA

Name of ship SAMARIA

Name appears on Return, sheet 24 *line* 10

Medical Examination Stamp

Civil Examination Stamp

NOV 1 1948

QUEBEC, P.Q.

(See back)

My mother had to work for a year as a live-in maid to repay their passage. My grandmother was too ill then to work, so my mother had to pay off both of their fares. It was during that time in Hamilton, Ontario, that my grandmother met Alfonsis. He had come to Canada, also after the war, I expect in similar circumstances, though I do not recall anyone mentioning, from Lithuania, another post-war Soviet occupied country. It was Alf who brought my grandmother and mother to British Columbia. He found work at the mill at Port Alice on Vancouver Island.

There my mother met my father. Unlike my mother and grandmother, he had immigrated to Canada on his own. As a young man, he was looking for work, looking for a way to make a life outside the chaos and poverty that was post-war Europe. He came, not from Estonia or Lithuania, both small eastern European Baltic countries, but from the more well-known (in Canada) Scandinavian country of Denmark.

Beside my mother's dresser photograph of her father, was a smaller framed photograph of my grandmother holding my mother as a small child. My grandmother is well-dressed and perfectly-groomed. She is a beautiful woman sitting in Tallinn on a park bench with her young child. Hillar writes me that "Ada was always known to be a lady. We know someone in Adelaide {Australia} who turns 100 years old on November 11th {2007} who knew her well in camp. This lady always speaks well about Ada."

My grandmother and mother spoke Estonian to one another seemingly endlessly. They talked for hours and hours, long into the evenings and nights. I understood not a word. When my grandmother went home, my mother and father spoke English. She did not understand Danish; he did not speak Estonian.

Most of what I knew about Estonia for many years came solely from my mother and grandmother. From them, I learned that Estonia before World War II was an idyllic, wonderful place. Estonia, with its long history of fighting for independence against greater and larger European powers – sometimes successfully, many times unsuccessfully – became an independent state between the World Wars. My mother had been born into that period of thriving, optimistic independence. It was a word I heard often growing up: independence. It seemed to sum up hope, idealism, identity, desire; being Estonian was about continuing to aspire towards independence.

Researching Estonian history, even recent Estonian history, is not easy for me. In Canada, in English, Estonia scarcely exists. Relatively obscure history books like Hiden and Salmon's *The Baltic Nations and Europe* discuss an independent Estonia that existed between the world wars that was heavily dominated by its military. I realize that I already know this from stories of my grandmother and mother. My grandfather was a highly ranked officer; he was an important part of that military. Though neither my mother nor my grandmother ever presented things in such terms, I can see that my grandfather and his family – my grandmother and mother - would have been a part of the Estonian elite; what is called from another perspective, the ruling class. I can recall many a Christmas when my grandmother drunkenly lamented the good times. She talked of having danced with the Estonian president. In *The Baltic Nations and Europe,* I find the name Konstantin Päts, the man who was Estonian president (some say benevolent dictator) in the 1930's.

There were times my grandmother cried at not going to Australia after the war, like her relatives. Even as a child, I knew that she was lonely. From my mother and my

grandmother, I got the sense that their best times, their happiest days, were past. They had been cruelly and violently ripped away from their home by armies of Russian communists. They remained quietly bitter and angry, but mostly they carried with them a sadness that could be forgotten only for short lengths of time. It was a sadness that shaped their lives, that sometimes, they found almost impossible to cope with.

K. Linda Kivi in *The Inner Green* writes from her position as a child of Estonian parents who also fled their homeland during World War II. Though she was born – like me - after the fleeing, Kivi writes that she "emerged into a culture smarting from the expulsion from its ancestral, indigenous home" (14). Home for her family, Kivi explains "was synonymous with loss and unfulfilled longing" (16). She talks of war and displacement reaching down through the generations. She talks of her parents' conscious lessons to their children on what to fear and how to protect themselves. She writes: "The only bond possible with land was one of mythic proportions with a country my brother and I had never been to" (16).

My grandmother received her Canadian citizenship in 1977, almost thirty years after she arrived in Canada. Her birth date on her citizenship card made her 63 years old; she was really 73. She had missed years of Canadian pension benefits rather than reveal her true age. As a child it was impossible for me to get her to tell me how old she was. My mother, similarly, told me repeatedly that women did not reveal their true ages. It was years later that I learned that my grandmother had made herself ten years younger, that her age-change had necessitated a similar, though less drastic, change in my mother's age. Hillar writes me that my grandmother likely made her age closer to that of Alf's. I remember my mother and grandfather basically nagging my grandmother into the

citizenship process – it took them years. She was terrified. I think that she always feared that she was somehow too foreign. Her name was Ariadne; her family and friends called her Ada; in Canada, she went by the name Irene, thinking her real name too difficult for Canadians to pronounce.

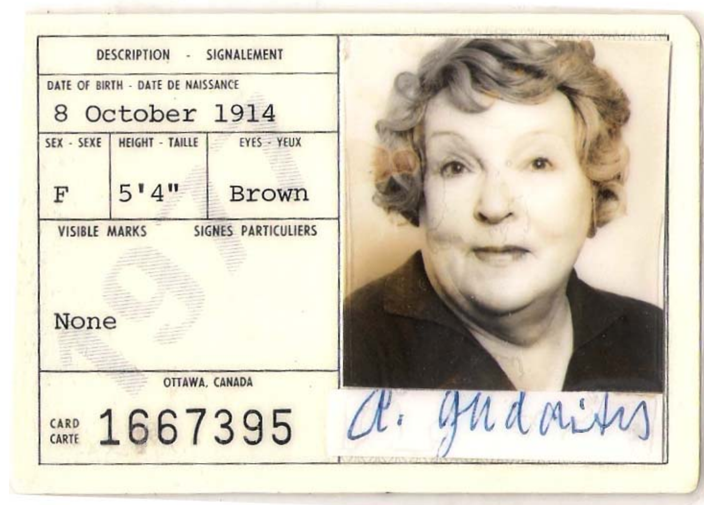
Certificate of Canadian Citizenship — Certificat de Citoyenneté Canadienne

This is to certify that — Ce certificat atteste que

ARIADNE GUDAITIS

is a Canadian Citizen under the provisions of the Citizenship Act. — est citoyen canadien aux termes de la Loi sur la citoyenneté.

MINISTER MINISTRE



DESCRIPTION - SIGNALEMENT

DATE OF BIRTH - DATE DE NAISSANCE: 8 October 1914

SEX - SEXE	HEIGHT - TAILLE	EYES - YEUX
F	5'4"	Brown

VISIBLE MARKS SIGNES PARTICULIERS: None

OTTAWA, CANADA

CARD CARTE 1667395

A. Gudaitis

Story Two: Estonia

As a child I asked countless questions about Estonia. Estonia was a mythical place, a reality that surrounded and encompassed my mother and grandmother. Life in Port Alberni where we lived, where my father worked in the mill and I went to school, where my mother cleaned the house and cooked our meals, where I played with other children and went fishing with my father; it was all ordinary. Estonia was special. It existed on another elevated plain. As a child, I desperately wanted to be on that plain with my grandmother and mother. Their love for Estonia was intoxicating. I drank it in. Estonia - a place that I had never seen - I knew through my grandmother and mother's recollections.

It seems that as I grow older, I come closer to my past. I circle back. Recollections become more vivid and more frequent. It is a condition - this fond remembrance of the past - that I recognize frequently in friends and family who are of similar age. After years of allowing Estonia to slip into the back recesses of my mind, it has again come to the forefront. I seek out Estonian acquaintances, learn about the roots of Estonian words from my friend/instructor Kadi, correspond with my grandmother's nephew, read what I can about Estonia. I seek to understand once again the strands of my grandmother and mother's lives that continue to run through my own.

I feel like I know far too little. I wish that I had more to tell you. Questions that I did not know to ask of my grandmother and mother, I can no longer ask. I grasp onto Estonian histories and stories; find in them bits of information, events, or people that I

recognize from my childhood. That which I do not recognize, do not find some anchor of proof from my memories, I tend to cast aside. I thus create my own version of Estonia.

I do not know that the Estonia of my mind matches too precisely or accurately the Estonia that exists today, the once again independent state calling home its once-fled people to help rebuild a European nation. My Estonia is inextricably linked with loss, with a tearing away of home. It is an Estonia that was made an ideal, a paradise. It is also an Estonia that reflects my own evolving perspectives and the reality I have come to live within here in Canada. My knowledge of Estonia is a patchwork, a conglomeration of bits of information and ideas accumulated over the past five decades. It is a quilt. The colourful bits of fabric I have had for a long time now; only the thread with which I sew the pieces together is new. I no longer seek accuracy, only a stitching together to create something that I can share with you.

Estonia is a small country, not too much larger than Vancouver Island. It is nestled on the eastern end of the Baltic Sea, seemingly on the inner sea edge of northern Europe. It has a long history of occupation by larger, more powerful countries and peoples. At various times over the past two thousand years, Estonia has been occupied by Denmark, Poland, Russia, Germany, and Sweden. Estonian people, largely peasant farmers, spent much of the past two thousand years as serfs, servile farmers bound to their homelands that were controlled by foreign overlords.

Estonia, any Estonian will tell you, also has a long history of resistance against foreign occupation and control. It was the last part of Europe Christianized; the Estonian tribes resisted the forces of Christianization longer than other European peoples. Pope Innocent III declared a crusade - similar to the Crusades mounted in the middle East - to

Christianize Estonia in the early 1200's. Despite Estonian resistance, German knights on horseback and Danish and other forces eventually overtook Estonia and established Christianity there.

I grew up hearing about Estonian independence, the independent state of Estonia established after World War I and lasting until the Russians once again imposed their control over Estonia in 1940. The period was a mere twenty years, but it was a twenty years that had been struggled for and anticipated for millennia. My adult mind tells me that centuries upon centuries of occupation, of oppression, take their toll; that the effects of all those occupations and oppressions are passed down through the generations. So also, I was reminded so often as a child, does the legacy of resistance, the stubbornness of refusing to be subsumed by larger forces, of retaining Estonia, of refusing to become a part of something and someone else. My heart cannot help but rejoice at the prospects, the potential, of an Estonia once again 'free.'

The Estonian language is a part of the Finno-Ugric language family. The most well known languages in this family are Finnish and Hungarian. The Finno-Ugric language family is unrelated to the Indo-European languages that have come to be spoken by most of Europe. My mother and grandmother spoke of this often, with a considerable amount of pride. I remember hearing my mother speak to a Finnish fisherman one day when we were all out in my father's boat. They could understand one another – the Finn and the Estonian. Their languages were not that far apart.

As a child I desperately wanted to learn to speak and understand Estonian. Friends of my parents had a daughter a few years older than I who spoke Estonian fluently; she read children's books written in Estonian. I was very jealous; I remember

pouring over her books when we visited. I vowed to my mother many times that I was going to learn Estonian. I never got far.

Today I research on the internet – this handy information-gathering tool that I have recently acquired – and read about the Finno-Ugric language family. Contained within that family are the Finnic languages: Finnish, Estonian, Karelian, Ludian, Vepsian, Ingrian, Votian and Livonian. These are all located around the Baltic Sea in what is now Eastern Europe. Then there is the Sámi language located in northern Scandinavia. To the south is the Hungarian language, then the languages of western Siberia that Hungarian is most closely related to: the Khanty and Mansi languages. I find the many small enclaves of Finno-Ugric languages scattered across northeastern Europe and western Asia. They have strange names for me, names that are little known here in Canada, these peoples called: Mordvin, Mari, Komi, Permyak, Udmurt, Nenets, Enets, Nganasan. I read of languages dying, of the Russian language being forcibly imposed and Finno-Ugric languages such as Selkup and Kamass being gradually eradicated.

I read of linguistic research into common structural features and basic vocabulary found in all Finno-Ugric languages. I see Lyle Campbell's work in *Historical Linguistics: An Introduction* with his vocabulary of 200 basic Finno-Ugric words, of which he finds 55 words related to fishing, 33 related to hunting and eating animals, 12 related to reindeer, 17 related to plant foods, 31 related to technology, 26 related to building, 11 related to clothing, 18 related to climate, 4 related to society, 11 related to religion, and 3 related to commerce (148). Through my research, I imagine my own past.

I read theories of the origins of the Finno-Ugric family, its supposed beginnings in eastern Russia and western Siberia. I also read of Finno-Ugric peoples like the Finns

always existing as Finns only in Finland. This makes sense to me. Finns exist in Finland, as Estonians exist as Estonians in Estonia. It is the physical place – Finland and Estonia – in conjunction with the language that defines and identifies a people. I read of ancient Finno-Ugric peoples being fishermen and hunters, of their skills at navigating and boating the inland waterways of northern Eurasia. There are long roots that trail into the tree that is home.

I feel safe again to (re)learn and (re)investigate Estonian connection to place. It is a connection different from the immediate connection to place I know today here in Hesquiaht traditional territories, but it is a connection similar enough that I find it easily recognizable. This state of being in a place since time immemorial, of being a part of the world here, I know that I have learned from my husband, my family, and Hesquiaht place itself. The unity of all creation and Creator, this unity of the physical and spiritual, I know here on this Hesquiaht land, on this Hesquiaht ocean. Yet, in that knowledge, I recognize what Erki Evestus tells me in *Estonian Gods:*

> Estonian Gods do not have towering and majestic shrines, neither do they relate to the long and bloody history of Crusades. Estonian Gods are in all creation – in a blossom, in a beast, in a grain of sand. They bustle in the leaves and sing in the summer breeze. Gods are in every beetle and in every sea wave, all through the miraculous nature around us. They do not need worship or words of celebration, they are well-wishing, modest and supportive as a true Estonian himself. They are simply there for us (3).

From my grandmother and mother I learned about the eternal connection of people and place, before I ever knew words to express such connection. Today, I read

about Estonian folk songs composed through direct communication between the heart and the living land and I remember my mother's doll dressed in Estonian national costume – the costume worn by Estonian folk singers still today. I read about Estonian word meanings, how *maa* means Earth, soil, land, and country; how the Estonian people refer to themselves as *maarahvas* meaning the Earth people; how *maakeel* means the language of the Earth or the language of the people who live in their own Earth and care for it (Sarv 2005). Kadi Purru speculates in her doctoral thesis: "Acknowledging Home(s) and Belonging(s): Border Writing":

> I recall that in Estonian the word "I" is *ma* which is homonymically very close to the word *maa* meaning "earth," "land". . . and I would like to speculate that *ma* was once and becomes again part of *maa.* At least that is what I want to feel when using the word "I"– *ma* (51).

My Estonian learnings connect me to my Hesquiaht learnings. Kivi writes that "my ancestors bestowed upon me my inheritance of a home-dweller: the ability to love the land"(18). Kivi, who now lives and loves her home in the Columbia Mountains of British Columbia, has - like me - extrapolated a love of home, a connection to place and earth from Estonia to North America.

There are times when I feel homesick for a place that I have never been. There are times when I miss a language that I have never spoken. Yet I have a home here, and through that home I can appreciate my past home, the home of my grandmother and mother. I have a language here - this mixture of local English, academic English, and Hesquiaht - with which to shape my experiences into expression. I am wealthy with all that I have learned and know, all that I continue to learn and know. I am happy to come

back to a place where I am once again learning more, (re)establishing connections to Estonia.

Story Three: A Danish Farmhouse

My father had a painting done once. A picture painted on a small oblong cut of wood called a burl. They are ugly gnarled abscesses – burls - hard twisted goiters really - that grow from the sides of tree trunks. Some are scarcely larger than a person's fist; others are massive, weighing perhaps a hundred kilograms. When they are sliced off the tree, when those slices are sanded and polished however, they yield surprising beauty. To look into a well-varnished burl is to look into a deep swirling sea of tossed amber-yellow-brown-golden-orange. It is like seeing the depths of autumn. In living rooms and basements across the logging towns of Vancouver Island, people used to proudly display homemade burl coffee tables. My grandfather had one in his basement. They were once quite the fashion. For my father's painting, the burl slab was not varnished. The raw cross section of outgrowth would only have been sanded before the artist painted upon it with greens, whites, and blues.

My father was not especially interested in art or paintings; I'm fairly certain of that. When he was in the initial stages of having a cancer in his throat diagnosed, I went to meet him and my mother. He did not know yet, or at least have to admit, that he had cancer. He could still try to believe – his specialist appointment was the next morning - that his chronic hoarse throat was due only to decades of smoking unfiltered cigarettes and not to a fatal mutilation of his throat. I was in Victoria with Estella, then eighteen months old, who was having surgery to repair her cleft palate. I met my parents in the evening in the dining room of a downtown hotel. I was coming from a day spent at the

hospital; my parents from a long morning spent driving to the city, and an afternoon of shopping for my mother and wandering for my father. Once we had ordered our meals, I asked my father how his afternoon had been, what had he thought of the area he had just experienced. He pondered his response, seemingly carefully, before he answered me. "Very nice street," he said. There was not a trace of sarcasm in his voice or in his eyes. He had walked by galleries and cathedrals, historic churches and heritage buildings with their manicured lawns and gardens. He had walked by coffee shops and movie theatres and corner stores and parking lots. None had made a grander impression than another; none had especially aroused his interest. He had viewed it all in its totality, and yes, it had all made for a very nice street.

It was a surprise to me, that one day when he said that he was going to have a painting made. I was perhaps nine or ten years old. I had never heard him express an interest in paintings before. I was sitting at the table eating lunch, thick cuts of European sausage fried along with the leftover potatoes from the day before. Or perhaps I have imagined that part. Maybe it was another day that I was eating the sausage. Perhaps that day, I was eating the leftover remains of a meatloaf, or a grilled cheese sandwich. I was sitting – eating - at the table looking out at the yard, I know that much. I was still in elementary school and I walked or rode my bike home for lunch every day. While I was eating, I heard my father telling my mother. She was by the sink. Every time I ate a meal, my mother did the dishes. Only on very special occasions like Christmas or a birthday, when my grandmother – my mother's mother – was there, did my mother sit and eat with her family. Times like those, I did the dishes. It was a constant bone of contention between my mother and father. On the rare times that he made a big enough

fuss about my mother not eating with us, she conceded for a day or two and sat perched on the edge of her chair picking at a few morsels of food while we ate our meal. Most of the time, however, like this day, she was at the sink doing dishes, looking out at the yard herself. On this day, like on any other, my father stood behind her, somewhere between her bent figure and the fridge door, and spoke to her back. He told her that he was getting a painting done on a piece of burl.

Thinking about it now, I figure that he must have heard about the person who did the paintings from someone at work. My father worked at the pulp mill in Port Alberni. He began work there before I was born, and he worked there until he went into the hospital for his throat cancer operation. I was twenty-eight years old by that time. I was inside the mill exactly once – on an "official" mill tour. After the years I spent wondering about the mysterious interior of the place where my father spent seemingly endless hours of work, it is a little shocking to me that I remember so little of what I actually saw that day. I remember the mill far better by how it looked as we drove by in the car. I remember how it looked from the parking lot in front, and from the parking lot alongside, all those times I sat in the back seat of the *Valiant* when my mother picked up or dropped off my father for his shift. I remember how impressed I once was by the drive-through car wash – an upside down "U" shaped sprinkler really - at one end of the lot. I remember how the mill looked from the ocean when we went by in one of the series of boats my father always managed to have. From the water, it loomed massive dark and overwhelmingly dirty. It was a monolith that arose from the inlet itself like some frozen phantom that had long ago failed to vanish with the retreating fog.

I digress. That's the thing about memories. They run in all sorts of strange directions and take all sorts of strange leaps and bounds. Before you know it, you are far away from where you started and have to force yourself to backtrack. My father told my mother one day, that he was getting a painting done. He had to have heard about the possibility of getting paintings painted at work. That was where he learned about such things, the goings on of the town, how people lived and thought, countless tidbits that he brought home to my mother that I heard mostly discussed at the kitchen table. My mother certainly would not have learned about someone who made paintings on pieces of cut wood. She stayed home and cleaned and read her newspapers, went out shopping when she needed to, and generally regarded "Canadians" as frighteningly uncouth and impolite. My mother had a single handful of friends who she talked with and visited perhaps once a month. That was the extent of her social circle. My father was the outgoing one, the friendly one, the parent who was willing to stop and chat with anyone, to enjoy a story or a conversation. As a young child, I marveled at all of the people he knew at work. I waited for his stories about what long familiar characters said or did that shift. In retrospect, I realize that my mother did too. Occasionally I actually got to meet one or another of the men my father told stories about. With me alongside, he would stop by someone's house on an errand or excuse. They were Danes, like my father, or Norwegians; a few were Italians or Yugoslavs; some were even Canadian enough that they were no longer identified by the European country of their ancestors. They all worked at the pulp mill. They all had families and houses to take care of, yards to plant full of vegetable gardens. Someone at work – I never knew who - would have told my

father about the person who did paintings on burls, and somehow, my father had decided he wanted one.

I still travel by the building where the artist lived; it's a good hour's drive out of Port Alberni. The highway, as it approaches Nanaimo, has been widened to six lanes now, and it looks as though I would need to take an exit to a side street to be able to stop there. When it was a two lane highway, of course, you could just pull up in front of the building. I don't know if I was with my father when he went there, waiting perhaps in the car while he brought in his burl or picked up the finished painting. Maybe, my father merely pointed out the shop on other times when we drove by. What I do remember is that my father was happy. He was happy anticipating the painting, and he was happy when he finally got it. A picture of a small white house in a field of green. A Danish farmhouse. Exactly what he had told my mother he wanted that day in the kitchen by the sink, a picture of a Danish farmhouse.

It still hangs in the living room. My father and mother have died, but my brother – your uncle - lives there yet. He has not moved the painting from the place where it was hung forty years ago. It is not that the painting has some place of honour or special recognition; at least I don't think so as far as my brother is concerned. There are lots of things in that house that my brother has not moved. My brother is not the sort of person who goes about moving things that are perfectly fine where they are.

My father was a farm-boy. That is how he always described himself, as a Danish farm-boy. Being a farm-boy, for him, served as an explanation for many things. He was still a young kid during the Second World War. He did not go far in school. He was just old enough to want to get out of ravaged Europe and dream of earning his fortune far

from home, once the fighting ended and exodus was possible. He did not talk about those times often. He was just a farm-boy. That summed it all up. He disliked Germans.

My mother, in contrast, talked about the war daily. She could not stop talking about the war. My earliest memories of my mother are of her telling me stories of how it was to live in the refugee camp, how it was to flee an Estonia twice invaded, how it was to have a father that was sent to Siberia, and how wonderful life had once been before it had all happened. She disliked Russians.

They never went back, either one of my parents. Some of my father's friends at the mill went back to the old country. They took their families. I don't think my parents ever seriously considered it. I think they were both far too scared of what they would find and what they would feel. They preferred to act as though Europe had irrevocably tossed them out, thrown them into North America on one-way tickets. They sent parcels, packed with foods that my mother imagined to be in short supply and overly expensive in Europe, in place of themselves.

I was still in elementary school when my father's brother – my uncle – came to visit. He worked on a freight ship that had docked in Vancouver. I remember the unexpected phone call that my father got one day, the excitement that was tangible in the house. I remember being overwhelmed by the sheer joy I had in getting to meet my actual uncle. My mother was an only child; my father had four sisters and only one brother. Until then, I'd met none of them. When I was younger, it had been something of a game for me to get my father to name his sisters, counting them off on his fingers. But this, this was my one and only uncle. My father's younger brother. Imagine that. It was all so unexpected and so wonderful. Right from the first moment he came to our house,

from his first words in difficult and heavily accented English, I determined that he was the most perfect uncle ever. A year or so after that visit, he came again, once more when his ship docked in the Lower Mainland. He stayed for a few days, and then was gone. Perhaps he stopped working for the merchant marine. I remember my father saying at some point that he had moved to Norway.

It was sometime in that mix of years when my uncle visited and my mother mailed parcels, that my father commissioned the Danish farmhouse painting. Perhaps the artist was also a displaced Dane, a farm-boy working too far from the fields of his youth. Perhaps, I am making this all out to be far too romantic. My father has been dead now for over two decades. Stephen barely remembers his grandfather but he has been to Denmark recently. I will have to take him to my brother's - his uncle's - house when he returns from Europe. He might recognize the picture of the farmhouse on the living room wall.

Story Four: Sashmaray

In the corner of the bay at Hot Springs Cove, tucked up almost to the trees, hidden in behind a small bend in the shoreline, you'll find *Sashmaray*. Gutted now, its motor and fuel tanks taken out, the roof torn off its cabin, pen boards gone from its hatch, gurdies and davits missing, poles and mast removed, *Sashmaray* rests on its side on the beach. High tides flow around and through it.

Sashmaray. Living on the coast, fishing, you understand how much a boat means. In mere physical terms, *Sashmaray* was a little over 39 feet or nearly 12 meters in length; it was about 12 feet or nearly 4 meters in width. Built in 1964 in New Westminster, it was a west coast troller/gillnetter. Your father/grandfather bought *Sashmaray* in 1976; he

removed the gillnet drum shortly afterwards and replaced it with a fish box. He was not much interested in gillnetting; he'd been a troller for most of his life.

Sashmaray caught a lot of fish over its lifetime. Spring salmon, cohos, sockeye – it was a good sockeye boat – tons and tons of codfish. It used to be something you could depend upon, fishing for salmon in the early springtime, cohos and sockeye in the summertime, springs again in the fall, cod-fishing in the wintertime.

I could write of *Sashmaray's* slow demise, its gradual rotting away at the float in Hot Springs. Its demise parallels the slow demise of the whole west coast fishing industry, the dwindling, drastically shortened commercial openings, the depleted fish stocks, the increasingly frustrating Department of Fisheries and Oceans regulations, and the growing impossibilities of making enough money to keep a small commercial troller running and well maintained. I do not intend, however, for this to be a sad story of loss. View it instead as a sort of celebration, a tribute if you will, to *Sashmaray* as part of our lives, as part of our family, for over thirty years.

Many of us travel this west coast of Vancouver Island stretch of coastline, where no roads link communities and sites, by water taxi these days. Aluminum and fiberglass boats designed to go quickly, to carry people and goods from place to place, are plentiful. They make for good sight-seeing, these water taxis. You can go whale watching, see black bears along the beaches, see eagles and sea lions and ducks; you can witness some of the most beautiful shorelines – beaches and forests - to be found anywhere in the world. You can travel from Hot Springs Cove to Tofino and back easily in the same day, in the same afternoon even. You can experience the magnificence of the coast, the sheer pleasure of traveling on the ocean, and you can do it fast.

I suppose that I could emphasize the similarities of traveling by water taxi and traveling on *Sashmaray.* The same ocean, the same coast, the same whales and eagles and sea life. Yet the comparison would be a poor one, somewhat like comparing a full diverse forest with a single stand of cedar trees. *Sashmaray* was a means of transportation, yes. It was a means to carry goods and freight, sure. But it was also a place for us to stay, to live. It was a way to make a living, to fish not only for fish that we could sell, but also for fish that we could eat. More than an occupation or a tool, *Sashmaray* was a lifestyle, a way of living. Out on the ocean and tied up to the dock, it was always there, always needing to be maintained, fixed, painted in the spring months, repaired, bailed out, watched over; always providing the opportunity to go fishing one more time.

Sashmaray tied up at the float at Hot Springs Cove in the mid-1980s.

We used to all sleep on *Sashmaray*. Sometimes there were six or seven of us; one or two on the bunk downstairs, another one or two on the bunk upstairs, the rest of us lined up on the cabin floor that was just a little bit too short. When I slept on the floor, I

spent the night fighting for any extra inch of floor space that would allow me to stretch out my legs and relieve my tightening knees.

Days when we left Hot Springs to travel to Tofino in *Sashmary* to sell fish, to get our groceries and propane, to go to a doctor's or dentist's appointment, to travel somewhere beyond Tofino, it took us three and a half hours if we traveled the inside way, or three hours if we traveled the outside way. We measured distance like that, we still do, by the time it took to get somewhere. The time always varied. It depended on the weather, the size of the seas, the swells, how hard the wind was blowing, how hard the wind was supposed to blow later in the day.

To get from Hot Springs Cove to Tofino inside way, you round the point at Hot Springs (they call it Sharp Point on maps), travel down Sidney Inlet, round the point near Riley's Cove (they call it Starling Point on maps), go past Riley's Cove, past Steamer Cove, past Jenny's Beach, and into Rocky Pass (they call it Hayden Pass on newer maps). You stay to one side of Rocky Pass; there are reefs on the other side. Out of Rocky Pass, you travel past Atleo's towards Ahousaht, and then towards Cone Island. You travel past the rest of Flores Island and then out round the rocks at Catface. You tuck inside the reefs there and make your way across to Vargas Island. Along the inside of Vargas, you stick close to shore, you tuck inside the sand bar at MacIntosh, round the point and travel across towards Meares Island. You travel along Meares for a short while, pass Opitsaht, and cut across between the buoys ever mindful of the sand bar just outside them. You pass Dead Man's Island and then you go to the Tofino floats: Pinky's (North Sea Products) if there is fish to deliver, the Whiskey Dock sometimes, Fourth Street fishermen's floats sometimes, or Jensen's floats. Mostly we liked to tie up at Jensen's

float. Atleo Air ties up there now. I never knew the official name for the float. Everyone called it Jensen's because a fisherman named Alf Jensen lived (and still lives) in a house just above there.

To get from Hot Springs Cove to Tofino outside way was a lot simpler. You ran out of Hot Springs, headed toward Rafael Point on the open side of Flores Island, traveled well outside the kelp that grows there and along the outside of the Island. You could then cut in at Fitzpatrick, through the islands on the far side of Flores and make your way across to meet up with the inside route along Vargas Island. Or if the weather was fine, you could just keep going, past Bare Island, along the outside of Vargas. Then you could cut in near Wilf Rock, between Vargas and Wickaninnish Islands, then around between Wickaninnish and Stubbs Island, and on into the Tofino harbour. What made the outside way a lot less simple, of course, was the sea and weather. Tide slop running against wind waves, swell from offshore storms, always something new and different to consider, the ocean pushing *Sashmaray* from wave trough up and over each new swell. Inside way, except for the point at Hot Springs and the area around Catface, was relatively flat. On calm days, traveling felt like just floating along on a lake.

These are routes from my memory, and routes we still travel today by water taxi and mostly in our own aluminum boat *Moonaquin*. I've altered them a little here in the telling, mostly by adding names – especially names of islands – that I normally do not use much. I can picture the routes in my mind, but I never see Flores Island, for example, and think, oh, this is Flores Island. I notice the smaller places on the island instead, recognize Hootla Kootla, Baseball Bay, the place you can get oysters, that sort of thing. The names I attach to places are sometimes the names found on maps, sometimes they

are Ahousaht or Hesquiaht names, sometimes they are fishermen's or local "slang" names. They all mix together.

The farthest I ever traveled in *Sashmaray* was to Bella Bella. I think it was 1979. We went there for herrings. The commercial gillnet herring fishery was still big then. There was lots of money to be made; lots of fishermen and boats. Many fishermen with trollers like *Sashmaray* had aluminum herring punts, gillnets, and licenses for catching herring. Like other fisheries on the west coast, the herring fishery declined rapidly between the early 1970's and the 1990's. By 1979, the year I went along to fish the Central Coast, while punts and licenses were still plentiful, herring stocks had already fallen enough that fishermen had to scramble to make various "openings" when fishing was allowed up and down the coast.

We fished first that year near Tofino. We anchored, just around the corner really from Tofino, at Elbow Bank. There were big prices. Cash buyers – large boats that packed herring and later delivered it to the various fish company plants – anchored just outside the fishing grounds, buying loads of herrings from the fishermen. They were paying $5000 a ton that year. They measured herring like that then, there was so much of it, by the ton. The companies were after the roe – the eggs - inside the female herrings. In the seasonal herring plants set up along the coast, workers removed that roe from the fish in long assembly-type lines. The bulk of the roe was shipped to Japan where it was considered a delicacy. The rest of the herrings – the fish itself and the males – was pretty much waste. Anyways, that year the cash buyers were paying around $5000 a ton. Prices went up and down as different buyers competed and tried to entice fishermen. Some gave away, as unofficial bonuses, bottles of liquor and, we heard, cocaine. Mostly

I remember that "opening" as being short, a mad scramble for less than 24 hours. A lot of the herring were schooled in areas that the Department of Fisheries kept closed. Already there was far less herring than even five years before when fishing had been "open" for weeks rather than hours at a time.

After that first short spurt of herring fishing, *Sashmaray,* towing Stephen's herring punt, ran around the south end of Vancouver Island. We ended up arriving in the darkness off Denman Island, somewhere near the middle of Vancouver Island's east coast, to catch the tail end of an opening there. A sea of lights that was the fleet fishing led us to the exact location. I don't remember how much fish we caught. What I remember is that *Sashmaray's* clutch gave out somewhere near Campbell River as we were running up to the central coast for expected openings there. Once the clutch was fixed, we ran from Campbell River to Bella Bella.

Running, that is what they called traveling by troller. When you fished in one spot, you trolled at slow speed; when fishing was done, you ran, at higher speed – maybe 8 or 9 knots, not fast at all compared to a speed boat or even compared to something like the BC Ferries – to another location to fish or anchor out or tie up and go ashore. Running entailed big chunks of time; while you were fishing you just got used to long times like that. Three hours, for example, to run in for the night was not an especially long time. So running around Vancouver Island, up the length of the Island and across to the inside route to Bella Bella seemed long for sure – in total it was days and days of running – but it did not seem surprisingly or unusually long to us then. How else after all would one get to Bella Bella from here, but to run for days?

Herring fishing in Barklay Sound – Stephen running the punt

As it turned out, we arrived in the Bella Bella area and waited. We waited for something like two weeks. That year not enough herrings showed up near Bella Bella to warrant an opening – or so the federal Department of Fisheries decided. We stayed tied up across the harbour from Bella Bella in a place called Shearwater. We went across to Bella Bella a few times, to go to the store, to break the boredom I guess. Mostly we stayed at the floats along with a lot of other fishermen from the Vancouver Island west coast. Everyone eventually gave up waiting and came home. We ran back to Port Hardy. Then we ran around the north end of Vancouver Island. The boat we were traveling with, someone on there took pictures as we crossed Nahwitti Bar where the ocean floor rises sharply and the waves become huge, monstrous. Its like the point off Hot Springs, where you ride the mountains of swell capped by wind waves, driven by rising or lowering tides rushing out of or into the cove and Sidney Inlet. We ran down the west coast of the Island, back to Hot Springs Cove. They used to say that *Sashmaray* was a good sea boat. There is not much higher praise really than saying that a boat is good on the ocean; there's really not much more you could ask for.

When I first went fishing with your father/grandfather, it was May. We fished for spring salmon then, and Stephen showed me around his home - Hot Springs Cove, Hesquiat, Homiss. At Hesquiat, he'd anchor outside the kelp, and we'd row ashore and

walk the beach. You could take a day, a week, off to go camping, to do whatever it was you needed/wanted to do, in those days. You might not get too much money taking too many days off, but that never seemed to be too important. Most of the time you had enough to get by. More importantly, you had the means – the boat, the gear, the knowledge and the ability – to go fishing when you needed to make money or get fish. You could run out in the morning darkness to the grounds and fish until late in the evening. In the late 1970's, you could still fish commercially from April 15th until October 15th for the salmon species. Then you could cod fish in the winter times.

We used to catch:

Spring salmon *suuha*[3]

Coho salmon *cuw'it*

Sockeye salmon *mi?aat*

Pink salmon (humpies) *č'aapi*

Chum salmon (dog salmon) *?aak*

Codfish *tuškuuh*

Red snapper

Rock fish

Halibut *p'oo?i*

Dogfish (we threw them back) *yačaa*

Occasionally Steelhead

I am not a fisherman, not really. I have never been entirely competent on the boat. I am more of a spectator. I am the one sitting on the hatch cover watching Stephen haul in fish, watching you as children catch fish, watching the dressing, washing, icing of

[3] Words in italics are in the Hesquiaht language.

fish as *Sashmaray* moves in the constant rhythm of the ocean. Stephen is the fisherman. He is the one more at home on the ocean than on the land. He is able to steer and fix and manipulate *Sashmaray* through the toughest of storms. He is the one who knows this grey, green water world, can recognize the landmarks, the locations of the reefs and banks, how to find – without GPS or radar – the fishing places like the long reef, Hisnit reef, Humpilth. I saw that same ability in Lelaina and Stephen Jr, the same comfort, quickness and expertise on the ocean.

Stephen Sylvester Charleson icing fish in the hatch of *Sashmaray*.

excitement/thrill of catching fish

smiley on the heavy line

troll slow for sockeye

a little faster for *cuw'it* and *suuha* .

one codfish follows another up

gaff the follower first or you'll lose it

sling humpies into the fish-box

they splatter blood all over

I used to wonder about old fishermen and women, who hadn't been out fishing in decades, but still talked about fishing as though they'd been out only last week. It stays with you, the feeling of how it is to be fishing. It stays immediate, in the forefront of your mind. Its that powerful. I think it has something to do with that connection to the Creator, to life, that you make out on the ocean. It is not a conscious connection derived at through logic or reason; rather it is a sublime humbling sense of connected-ness that you cannot escape. There is a safety and a comfort, a humility and gratitude at creation, that you experience out on the vast space of open ocean.

endless expanse of unconfined space

infinite vastness

pulsing rhythm of waves and sky

eternal movement

continuous life

cycles of tides and winds and swells

suns sinking into the horizon

Mostly I love to cut, to "do" fish. I can do fish all day and be happy. To be outside with fish, all is right with the world. Put it in the smokehouse, in a jar, in the freezer. There is a feel to fish, the smooth, firm texture, that is somehow clean. I've cut

up lots of meat, but its not the same. Even *moo-uch* (deer) meat – meat not from the store - its different. You could never have meat again, and it wouldn't really matter – because you've got fish. Fish fish fish fish fish fish fish fish fish fish fish fish fish fish fish fish fish fish fish fish fish fish fish fish fish fish fish fish fish fish fish fish fish fish fish fish. When you come home these days, I always try to cook some kind of fish. It's a reminder of sorts, feeding you the fish that has sustained your family, your ancestors forever. It is a way of welcoming you back.

As I (re)write this story, herrings are spawning in the bay at Hot Springs Cove. Your father/grandfather and I have cut down hemlock trees, tied them to anchors of rock, attached lines and floating buoys, and set them into the waters where the herring are spawning. We were out in the boat checking our "trees," watching the spawn, only hours ago. We ate *cwukmis* (herring eggs) for lunch. We will have lunch again soon – more *cwukmis.* When it is spawning like this, we will have three or four lunches a day. Sea lions are in the bay, eagles perch in the trees above, ducks dive and glide over the waters, gulls are excitedly swirling and eating on the beaches. The harbour is alive. We are alive. This is sheer happiness, absolute joy.

Our connection to the world is right here, right now, in every step we take and every breath we breathe. The story of *Sashmaray* continues in living processes. I phoned Lelaina and Layla this morning. "Its spawning," is all I had to say – and they knew immediately, could conjure up the entire scene, the excitement and energy and glee at this annual event that they know so well. Kadi writes me later that herrings seem to connect Estonia and Denmark with my current home. And it is true: herrings and fish in general –

my relationship to that life-giving sustenance from the oceans - has its roots in Estonia and Denmark just as it has its roots and present in Hesquiaht today.

I do not know that I can ever present adequately such powerful connection to the world around me in a story. I have attempted to do so in "Sashmaray." If you get some sense from this story of connection to the world around you, of the intertwining of the wealth of physical place, the spiritual, and our families, the story will have been successful in my measuring.

Story Five: Sashmaray – Another Story

We used to stay in *Sashmaray* for days, sometimes for weeks. Sometimes we were fishing, anchoring out near the grounds, some nights running in to anchorages all up and down this section of Vancouver Island coast. At other times, we were tied up to the float in Tofino, waiting for better weather, waiting for one of our children to be born, waiting for a part or a mechanic or some way to get fixed and back out fishing or back home to Hot Springs. I can look back on those times of waiting now with nostalgia. I can overlook the days of frustration and impatience, the feeling of being "stuck," but the hard parts, they too are part of the story of *Sashmaray.* The breakdowns, the not being able to go out fishing to make enough money for food or fuel or repairs, the not-being-able to go home to the house where there was enough space to sleep in a bed and walk more than a few steps from wall to wall and use a stove large and hot enough to heat large pots of water, enough to bathe not in a small sink, but in a whole bathtub, those too are part of the story of *Sashmaray.* It was a luxury for me to arrive in the house and escape the relentless scent of diesel fuel. It was a luxury for me, upon getting back to the house after days spent in *Sashmaray,* to take my shoes or boots off, to walk around all

day shoeless/bootless, to finally have free feet. It was a luxury to not have to be on continual guard against one of you falling from the side of the boat or the float into the water. I could write a story so embedded with sadness and despair that you would cry, but it would not be true. In those days, those weeks, of fishing and of waiting, we were together. I was surprised recently to realize that I like the smell of diesel fuel. It always reminds me of times spent on *Sashmaray*.

We were in *Sashmaray,* tied up in Tofino at Pinky's – what they used to call North Sea Products, after the man who once ran the fish camp there – when I went into labour with our youngest son Joshua. I awoke early in the morning, and sat up on the skipper's seat facing the once varnished wooden steering wheel and front cabin windows. I would have had to be careful stepping over sleeping bodies to get there. It was not too dark tied up at Pinky's; there were lights on the dock that shone into our windows. I sat up in that false yellow light and ate potato chips. I've never been a big fan of potato chips, but I was hungry and that was all that was handy. When we all slept scrunched up in *Sashmaray's* cabin there was no way to get at things without stepping on/disturbing someone or something. There were eight of us that night: Stephen, myself, Lelaina, Layla, Stephen Sylvester who we call Mister, Estella who we call Missy, Mariah or Mia for short, and Stephen's friend and deckhand at the time Sam. We'd gone to Tofino to deliver fish. More accurately, your father/grandfather and Sam had been fishing and were set to deliver the hatch full of iced fish. I could have stayed in Hot Springs, but I'd decided to come along, not wanting to stay home 'alone.' We arrived in Tofino after the fish camp had closed for the day; the plan was to deliver the fish when the camp re-opened in the morning at 8:00 a.m.

So we were sleeping overnight at Pinky's float waiting to deliver fish. It was three or four o'clock in the morning and I was sitting by the steering wheel eating chips. I know I woke up Stephen's deckhand, but he was polite enough to pretend to stay asleep. You needed to be polite like that when you were in such close quarters. You needed to be aware and respectful of other people. I ate some chips, and felt regular contractions. I waited; they were not too hard yet. I wanted to let Stephen sleep for a while longer; I knew he was exhausted from fishing. I don't remember how long he had been fishing that trip – but the very fact that it was the end of a trip with enough fish iced to want to deliver – meant that he had been fishing for at least five or six days. He had been day fishing out of Hot Springs Cove; he'd gotten up every morning at sometime around five, had something to eat, and headed down to *Sashmaray.* He'd run out a few hours – maybe more – to the grounds and fished until there were no longer enough fish there to catch; he'd then either run somewhere else to fish or, if it was late enough in the day, he'd run back into Hot Springs. By the time the fish were all dressed and iced – *Sashmaray* was an ice boat packing four-five tons of dry ice; not many fishermen had freezer boats then – he'd come up to the house for supper. Some nights he did not make it back up to the house until nearly midnight.

We were staying in the teacherage – in one side of a duplex in the village at Hot Springs Cove. We'd moved into it that summer while there was no teacher, so that our house could get gyp-roc put up on all the walls. Before the gyp-roc, our house had only paneling on the walls, the type of paneling that roars up in fast flames in a house fire.

So I waited for Stephen to get a little more sleep. When I woke him up to tell him that I wanted to go to the hospital, I did so quietly. I didn't want to wake everybody. He

got up right away. We thought of what to do and decided to wake Lelaina. She would have been twelve or thirteen. We told her that we were going to the hospital, that I was going to have the baby, and that she should not wake up her brother and sisters. We didn't want her to have too much chaos on her hands with four younger siblings all up too early in the morning. At the same time, we had to let her know so that someone would know where we were, so that she would know to watch everyone when we were not there. Stephen and I found out afterwards that as soon as we left the boat to walk up to the hospital – it was only a short walk up the hill – Lelaina woke everyone up immediately with the excited news that mom had gone to have the baby.

Our youngest son Joshua was born around seven o'clock in the morning. Stephen left the hospital around eight, to go back to *Sashmaray* and check up on everyone and deliver his fish. After he delivered the fish, he brought you all up to see me and your new brother. Things flowed perfectly. We always thought that our youngest child was born a considerate person. He waited for the right time, did not cause anyone inconvenience or upset. He fit in to the pace of everyone's life.

An early high school photo of Joshua

I think that you all had a great day, that day when Joshua was born. Delivering fish is always exciting: watching the totes being filled in the hatch, all the fish coming out

of the ice, totes being hoisted/winched up out of the hatch and onto the loading dock above. You would have waited for your father to come down from the fish camp office with the news that he had so many pounds of coho, so many pounds of large springs, medium springs, small springs, what the going price was. You would have been excited and anxious to see your new brother. I'm sure it was a very good day.

Personal Story as Educational Praxis

Introduction

The use of story for education is not new; rather, it is a well-used method that has proven to be effective in transmitting and generating knowledge over millenia (Atleo 1-5; Smith 144-45; Cajete *Igniting the Sparkle* 56; Minh-ha 148). Stories in a myriad of styles and forms, interpretations and analyses of stories, stories as articulations of experience, and stories conveying the lessons learned from experience, revelation, and the physical and spiritual worlds have been and continue to be utilized as sources of knowledge by many peoples.

The personal stories I present in "Let me tell you what I know" are stories I wrote for my children and grandchildren with the intention of sharing some of my life experiences and knowledge with them. Through passing on these stories, I hope to further strengthen my children and grandchildren's understandings of their ancestral pasts, and to empower and inspire them to continue to learn from a strong foundation rooted in particular ways of knowing and seeing the world. The stories in "Let me tell you what I know" reveal content, context, connection to my family and community, and values. They are my reflections on how I see the world, and also how I arrived at that

worldview. My stories attempt to stimulate and inspire my children and grandchildren to inquire further, to ask and investigate questions, to think and reflect, and to weave their own stories from the strands of mine.

Providing the example of my own stories leads me to a renewed appreciation of the power and worth of personal stories in general. As the stories in "Let me tell you what I know" can provide a foundation of understanding for my children and grandchildren, countless other personal stories told from a diversity of perspectives can provide the basis from which many other children find meaning and belonging. Yet, the utilization of story and storytelling is an opportunity for educational praxis that goes largely unrealized in dominant Western educational systems (Cajete *Igniting the Sparkle* 128; Holmes 4.1).

Carl Leggo in "Curriculum as Narrative/Narrative as Curriculum: Lingering in the Spaces" argues that "schooling is frequently constructed around a restricted set of narratives that sustain authorized political-cultural-social 'realities' while excluding many other views and perspectives and traditions and possibilities" (V.4 N.1). Incorporating a broad range of personal stories into the educational system is a means by which that system can acknowledge and recognize diverse ways of knowing and understanding the world. Such acknowledgement and recognition has the potential to transform the educational system from a Eurocentric domain into a liberating force of decolonization. Marie Battiste writes: "By animating the voices and experiences of the cognitive 'other' and integrating them into the educational process, it creates a new, balanced centre and a fresh vantage point from which to analyze Eurocentric education and its pedagogies" ("Indigenous Knowledge and Pedagogy In First Nations Education" 5).

Using Story in the Current Educational System

Using the stories of various cultures as a basis for greater understanding between peoples is a rationale often presented (British Columbia Ministry of Education 4; Chamberlin 239). Sharing stories raises the possibilities of conversations across cultural borders and the awareness of others about our views, beliefs, values, and ways of living and thinking. Indeed, the promotion of such sharing and understanding is a stated goal of the British Columbia Ministry of Education in its efforts to integrate Aboriginal content into the provincial public school curriculum (British Columbia Ministry of Education 4).

In *If this is your land, where are your stories?* J. Edward Chamberlin argues that if people can come together "in a new understanding of the power and the paradox of stories," we will be better able to understand one another and resolve conflicts between us (239). Similarly, Dan Yashinsky, a storyteller for UNICEF, presents personal and family narratives as an opportunity of seeing the world through the eyes of another, a means by which through our stories we can "beat our swords into ploughshares" (2007).

Greater cross cultural understanding, however, is but one benefit of integrating stories and storytelling into the curriculum. Story and storied curriculum figure prominently in new approaches to Aboriginal education in both British Columbia and Alaska. The Alaska Native Knowledge Network website "designed to serve as a resource for compiling and exchanging information related to Alaska Native knowledge systems and ways of knowing"(http://www.ankn.uaf.edu/about.html) links to many resources such as *The Handbook for Culturally Responsive Science Curriculum* by Sidney Stephens (http://www.ankn.uaf.edu/publications/handbook/) which opens with a story from an Iñupiaq elder that serves to introduce and validate the ensuing science curriculum.

Shared Learnings, the principal resource guide the British Columbia Ministry of Education provides for Aboriginal education across the province, provides teacher instructions on ways to incorporate Aboriginal content through story into specific courses/classes. A number of sample lesson plans incorporating the use of Aboriginal stories are provided for Kindergarten through Grade 10.

The draft Prescribed Learning Outcomes for the newly developed English First Peoples 12 course in British Columbia emphasize students learning the importance of listening, thinking about, analyzing and applying the lessons of oral, written and visual texts (www.bced.gov.bc.ca/irp/irp.htm). They call upon students to critique logic and quality of evidence; identify and describe diverse voices and perspectives; identify and challenge biases, distortions and nonrepresented perspectives; and to explain the importance and impact of social, political, and historical factors (*Ibid.* 56). They also recognize the importance of including various genres of expression such as oratory, creation stories, current/contemporary oral stories, trickster/transformer stories, and masks (11).

In "Yetko and Sophie: Nlakapamux cultural professors," Shirley Sterling writes of a genre of story called *spilaxam* which she translates from Nlakapamux into English to mean personal narrative (26.1). She tells her own personal story of learning to build a fish trap with her mother Sophie, saying that her mother "imparted knowledge in the same way she had learned it, by actually building the trap and by telling a story at the same time" (*Ibid.*). Sterling explains that the story has many layers of meaning from the economic to the societal to the legal to the political to the psychological to the educational and historical(*Ibid.*). Her telling of the *spilaxam* about building a fish trap is

an example of a personal story providing both the content and context for Nlakapamux education (*Ibid.*).

For story and storytelling to be fully effective in the curriculum however, teachers need to not only bring story and storytelling into the classroom, they also need to learn how to effectively utilize pedagogies based upon story and storytelling. Battiste argues that a major problem is that "{a}ll teachers have been educated in Eurocentric systems that have dismissed Indigenous knowledge and pedagogy" (25). Atleo and James explain that "{t}he strategies of oral tradition are more than storytelling, central is listening, without verbal or mental interruption," what the authors call a "deeply profound" skill (2000). Effective strategies involve strategic positioning and an adherence to "{t}he principles of storywork, respect, responsibility, reciprocity, reverence, wholism, interrelatedness, and synergy" (*Ibid.*).

Cajete writes that enabling effective and meaningful storytelling within the classroom requires creative conditioning that involves creating opportunities to be in Nature and gain directly from the natural sources of life; gaining a perspective of the past, present, and future from the stories of one's own tribe and place; and recognizing and honouring the teachers in ourselves, in our relationships to others and the natural world (*Look to the Mountain* 141). Further, he argues that through freeing our minds of preconceived notions and attitudes that block the creative process of storying, the imagination can be freed to see a story from many different angles to gain a grasp of all of its dimensions (*Ibid.* 141). Storytelling involves learning to apply lessons from storying to other life experiences; learning techniques of story making, story giving and story getting; learning the communicative art of performing story in a variety of ways;

and learning the foundation of the participatory and celebratory experience of story (*Ibid.* 141).

Nuu-chah-nulth scholar Dr. E. Richard Atleo in *Tsawalk: A Nuu-chah-nulth Worldview* describes how lessons in story are taught indirectly “thus eliminating the resistance of listeners who are not the apparent subjects of the story and lesson” (4). Peter Cole, in *Coyote and Raven Go Canoeing,* comments that “storytelling is a way of experiencing the world rather than imposing a decontextualized denotative ‘truth’” (xiv). Storytelling is a non-intrusive style of teaching. It shows respect for students’ own abilities to learn and to know for themselves. In place of directly telling students how to think about a particular area, what information to unquestioningly believe and accept, storytelling provides an avenue by which students can listen, digest, interpret and analyze information, and draw their own conclusions from within the context of their own worldviews. To utilize such an approach in the current educational system clearly requires a new approach from educators.

In modern Western academic disciplines, information and knowledge have largely been separated from the stories, the contexts, from which they grew. Knowledge is presented as fact, data, theory, explanation or description. The stories behind the knowledge remain invisible. Students, to make sense of the information, must re-contextualize the information presented within their own stories. Cajete writes that the problem with this method is that students have not learned to re-contextualize (*Look to the Mountain* 139). “Their natural sense of story has been schooled out of them. They do not know how to mobilize their imagination to interact with the content that they are presented – they have lost their innate awareness of story” (*Ibid.* 140).

The storied roots and subsequent methodologies of modern academic disciplines with their particular ways of seeing and knowing the world go largely unidentified and unexplained in the Western educational system. Because they remain unseen, opportunities to critically evaluate and question them are lost. Ethnography, for example, is the science devoted to describing ways of life of humankind (Palys 215). Palys cites Vidich and Lyman suggesting that ethnography "grew out of Europeans' interest in understanding the 'primitive' cultures they encountered when Columbus stumbled across the 'New World'" (215). In the early twentieth century, ethnography was professionalized as the discipline of social anthropology (Seale 100). Malinowski, who pioneered what he called "scientific ethnographic fieldwork" by spending two years in the Trobiand Islands and presenting his experience as a "scientific" account through "statistical documentation," is seen as a founding figure of social anthropology (*Ibid.* 101). History, for another example, is described by Conrad and Finkel as the study of the past that became an academic discipline in Europe and North America in the nineteenth century (xiii). Those initially involved in the discipline of history "focused on political and military events that chronicled the evolution of empires and nation-states"(*Ibid.*). Research was done chiefly through collecting primary historical documents and comparing already written texts (*Ibid.).* Only over time did the scope of history broaden to include economic, social and cultural developments (*Ibid.*). Neither social anthropology nor history is uncontested, unbiased, or universal 'fact,' but students, without access to the stories of these disciplines, have few resources or skills with which to question them and thus make their content meaningful.

The greatest hurdle to fully utilizing story in the current educational system is the modern Western assumption that stories belong in the realm of 'fiction,' that they are somehow unscientific, unproven by scientific method and therefore, disqualified as truth or legitimate knowledge. As Atleo argues, story is seen as belonging to a "primitive" stage of human evolution (xix), a stage that has been bettered by scientific progress and Enlightenment faith in reason. Atleo links this assumption with the Western assumption that the nature of the universe can only be illuminated by the human mind (xix). Fiction and fact are seen as mutually exclusive. Imagination and creativity sit opposed to the 'truth' of fact. Within the parameters of Western knowing "{t}hinking true means thinking in conformity with a certain scientific discourse produced by certain institutions" (Minh-ha 124). Western knowledge, in the modern educational system and elsewhere, is presented as universal, without alternative. That which is outside the understanding of Western knowledge is categorized as untrue or at least somewhat untrue in labels like anecdotal, folk, myth, legend and superstitious.

Story lies largely outside the realm of Western scientific reason and Western definitions and criteria of knowledge. Story is authenticated not by Western scientific method, not by exact replication, but by its own varied criteria of authenticity. Atleo writes of origin stories being authenticated by the commonality of themes conveyed by the same stories told differently by different families in different settings at different times (4). "Literature and history once were/still are stories" says Minh-ha (121). They "articulate on a different set of principles, one which may be said to stand outside the hierarchical realm of facts" (121). Darnell argues that story is authenticated by the storyteller's making clear his or her right to speak from experience, making plain his or

her history of having come to know a particular story (5). Ellis comments that the value of stories is in their usefulness, rather than in their accuracy – since accuracy is subjective, always in the interpretation of the teller (126).

To fully incorporate story into modern education systems, one needs to examine the foundations of Western knowledge. One needs to honestly open oneself up to examining alternatives to that knowledge and to recognizing the legitimacy of non-Western ways of knowing. Viewing story as an articulation of knowledge rather than as a work of fiction opens up the possibilities of story finding relevance and application as educational praxis. Without such a transformation of the Eurocentric criteria used to determine authentic and acceptable knowledge, story in the classroom will remain just what Western knowledge has made it – an item of interesting and/or entertaining fiction that promotes a limited amount of cross-cultural understanding removed from the reality of truth and scientific proof.

Intergenerational Learning

My husband and I have six children and four grandchildren. As I watch my children live their adult lives, as I watch my grandchildren grow and learn in a world so markedly different from the world of my own youth and young adulthood, my desire to share with them more of what I have come to know, and the path by which I have come to know it, intensifies. We no longer all live under the same roof for most of the year. Stories I could once tell and retell, I now must horde and remember to tell them at specific times while we visit one another. In writing my stories, I am attempting in modern circumstances to pass on what I want to teach my children and grandchildren. I am attempting to meet my family responsibilities as a mother and grandmother.

Intergenerational communication, the transmission of knowledge from one generation to the next, ensures not only a continuity of knowledge and ways of living, it also enables the creative explorations that expand and transform knowledge and living (Cajete *Igniting the Sparkle* 131-34; Sterling 26.1). In telling my stories to my children and grandchildren, I participate in the creation of the contexts, the ways of seeing and knowing the world, from which they form their own knowledge and lives and come to tell their own stories. Trinh Min-ha writes of herself as storyteller being but one link in a chain. "No repetition can ever be identical, but my story carries with it their {her ancestors} stories, their history, and our story repeats itself endlessly" (122). She goes on to argue that each gesture and word of storytelling involves the past, present and future, that a story has no beginning, end or middle, but is rather an ever changing, shifting and growing process (122-23).

In "Elders' Narratives in Hawai'i: An Ancestry of Experience," Leilani Holmes explains:

> When the *kupuna* tell the stories of their *kupuna* to the younger generations, they connect generations of Hawaiians, forming an ancestry of experience. A phrase I heard often was "My *kupuna* told me, and now I'm telling you." Knowledge flows through these narratives and becomes embodied in the identities of the listeners. In the assertions, patterns, sequences and shifts of the narratives we find a powerful cosmology and compelling philosophies/practices of knowledge (4.1).

In writing about the "cultural professors" Yetko and Sophie, Sterling describes them remaining alive in the present tense of the stories, and of how the stories allow them

to “continue to nurture, inform, teach and guide us” (26.1). She sees the story as a living tradition because her ancestors in the fishtrap story are still teaching, still alive in the memories and words of the storyteller (26.1). Commenting on Sterling’s article, Jo-ann Archibald says that “the grandmother professors show that by teaching the younger generation the traditional cultural teachings in ways that honor Nlakapamux knowledge and the learner, they continue the powerful intergenerational cycle of learning, caring, and sharing” (26.1)

Linda Tuhiwai Smith, in *Decolonizing Methodologies,* describes story telling as one of twenty-five projects in a programme of indigenous research:

> Story telling, oral histories, the perspectives of elders and of women have become an integral part of all indigenous research. Each individual story is powerful. But the point of 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…For many indigenous writers stories are ways of passing down the beliefs and values of a culture in the hope that the new generations will treasure them and pass the story down further. The story and the story teller both serve to connect the past with the future, one generation with the other, the land with the people and the people with the story (144-145).

The Right and Responsibility to Narrate: My Voice

“Let me tell you what I know” is my voice. My voice is the means with which I articulate my knowledge. In speaking aloud, in writing what will be read, my voice claims its place in the myriad of voices that make up this world. It stands alongside the

well recognized voices of Western scholarship and says yes, I too have a story to tell, a way of knowing the world that I will share that is also deserving of being heard. Homi K. Bhabha, in *The Location of Culture* writes of entering "the territory of the right to narrate" (xxv). He calls himself an "unsatisfied voice" with a "collective, ethical, right to difference in equality" (xxv). Bhabha describes surviving, producing, labouring and creating "within a world-system whose major economic impulses and cultural investments are pointed in a direction away from you, your country or your people" (xi). "Such neglect" he says "can be a deeply negating experience, oppressive and exclusionary, and it spurs you to resist the polarities of power and prejudice, to reach beyond and behind the invidious narratives of centre and periphery" (xi).

There are multiple ways of being and knowing, many of which have historically been denied and marginalized in the development of the metanarrative of western history and domination (Atleo M. and James 2000). Doxtater contends that Western knowledge experts remain "unconcerned with other knowledge except to validate their own master narrative" (619). Because of histories of colonization and on-going Western domination, many of our voices and our stories are missing from the accepted, historical record. Our voices and stories have been ignored, treated as though they did not exist. "Let me tell you what I know" attempts to bring my voice and stories into the light, to make them (and by extension myself) visible. In "Let me tell you what I know," First Nations knowledge, specifically Hesquiaht and Kinquashtacumlth knowledge, and Estonian and Danish knowledge, are represented. Family responsibilities as a mother and grandmother to teach and encourage and inform in ways that honour and support family roots are central.

Kim Etherington, in *Becoming a Reflexive Researcher: Using Our Selves in Research,* quotes Frank:

> The very act of forming stories requires us to create coherence through ordering our experiences, and provides us with an opportunity for reclaiming our selves and our histories. New selves form within us as we tell and re-tell our stories and when we write them down. When we use our own stories, or those of others, for research, we give testimony to what we have witnessed, and that testimony creates a voice (9).

Minh-ha argues that telling a story as the teller thinks it should be told, maintaining the words and the form, allows the teller's truth to live on (150). Such storytelling, Doxtater argues, is both emancipatory and decolonizing (620). Another of the indigenous research projects that Linda Tuhiwai Smith describes she entitles "Representing":

> Indigenous communities have struggled since colonization to be able to exercise what is viewed as a fundamental right, that is to represent ourselves. The representing project spans both the notion of representation as a political concept and representation as a form of voice and expression…Representation is also a project of indigenous artists, writers, poets, film makers and others who attempt to express an indigenous spirit, experience or world view. Representation of indigenous peoples by indigenous peoples is about countering the dominant society's image of indigenous peoples, their lifestyles and belief systems (150-151).

Marie Battiste, in her paper "Indigenous Knowledge and Pedagogy in First Nations Education: A Literature Review with Recommendations," asserts that the "exclusive use of Eurocentric knowledge in education has failed First Nations children" (9). She writes of Aboriginal epistemology being found in stories as ways of knowing and Aboriginal pedagogy being found in storytelling as ways of knowing and learning (18). When our stories – expressions of our histories and cultures and ways of being and knowing – are trivialized or omitted from the school curriculum, when a Western standard of knowledge is presented as being universal, we are made present only as Western stereotypes define us. "Let me tell you what I know" is intended as an act of resistance, a notification of sorts that I am here and able to define myself. It is my contribution to changing/transforming the dominant Western narrative of history for my children and grandchildren. Bhabha describes interrupting the "Western discourses of modernity" through "displacing, interrogative subaltern or postslavery narratives and the critical-theoretical perspectives they engender" (345-46). "Let me tell you what I know" is my version of such a narrative.

Conclusion

The personal stories in "Let me tell you what I know" illustrate the effectiveness of such stories as intergenerational knowledge transmission within the context of family. I find in telling my stories, an example of an ancient educational approach that still has meaning and application today. Such an educational model and pedagogy, utilizing stories from a broad range of worldviews, could both transform and decolonize current Eurocentric education.

The limited set of narratives that the current Western educational system utilizes is both exclusionary and non-representative of many non-Western worldviews and ways of knowing and learning. Battiste argues that the most important educational reform in Canada would be an acknowledgement of the silent and silencing curriculum of Eurocentric knowledge taught by the way in which teachers behave and how they transmit information ("Indigenous Knowledge and Pedagogy In First Nations Education: A Literature Review with Recommendations" 30). Personal stories such as those presented in "Let me tell you what I know," and storytelling pedagogies such as those articulated by Cajete, question the current Eurocentric knowledge base utilized in the educational system and open up realizations and understandings of realities and ways of knowing the world outside the Western tradition.

"Let me tell you what I know" is in some ways a resistance to what Marie Battiste in "Maintaining Aboriginal Identity, Language and Culture" calls cognitive imperialism, a form of "cognitive manipulation used to disclaim other knowledge bases and values" (198). Through my personal stories I assert my voice, one that typically is silenced and/or marginalized in the dominant Western system. Through theories of indigenous education we can begin to see new pedagogical schemes based upon traditional non-Western methods emerging. Such new approaches decolonize and transform education by raising the voices and acknowledging the authority of all people and knowledge systems.

A curriculum rich in story encourages students to find meanings in stories that rely and build upon their prior knowledge and experience. Education moves from the abstract into the realm of daily social and family contexts. Meanings, critical thinking,

and practical skills can be applied to stimulating, rather than denying, identities and ways of living, knowing, and thinking. In using and honouring all of our stories, the curriculum becomes a place in which Western and non-Western voices, content, knowledge, and learning are integral elements. Students are enabled to pursue learning through acknowledgment and recognition of different life experiences and bases of knowledge.

Models of successful Aboriginal education incorporating story and storytelling can be applied to current educational approaches for students from different cultures. Incorporating personal stories and storytelling from a diverse range of non-Western and/or previously marginalized voices creates an inclusive and responsive learning environment. Stories such as those I relate in "Let me tell you what I know" can be accepted and respected and contribute to learning that empowers all of our ways of seeing and knowing our worlds.

A Closing Story

My husband and I own and operate Hooksum Outdoor School in Hesquiaht Harbour. Through the school, through exposing people to the world of Hesquiaht traditional territories, we seek to provide and facilitate "quality outdoor and environmental education through traditional indigenous knowledge, modern skills, and intimate connection to the natural world" (www.hooksumschool.com). Through Hooksum Outdoor School and through my writings, I attempt to articulate, explain and encourage others to understand my perspective, my way of seeing/knowing the world.

I sit on the beach at Hooksum, at Iusuk, in the midst of Hesquiaht reality. It is in the land, in the sea, in the names of places and creatures and winds and tides. It is in the

trees and forests and stones and sand and earth. It is in the people who live here today and who have lived here in the past and who will live here in the future. Yet the Western mindset still encroaches. Visitors, students of our school, easily see the beauty of the beach, the pounding surf, the forest, the sky and sunset. Yet it is somehow difficult for them to go beyond seeing merely a beautiful viewscape. It is difficult for them to consider that what they have been accustomed to seeing as wilderness is really home. Most non-native visitors and students relate easily to the romanticized story of the old homestead and white woman creating a garden/farm in "wilderness" across the bay from Hooksum. Margaret Horsfield in *Cougar Annie's Garden* begins the tale of that homestead: "In the middle of nowhere, hidden on the west coast of Vancouver Island, Cougar Annie's garden has endured for over eighty years. Surrounded by rainforest and mountains, this is a place remote and charmed. Strange with beauty, powerful with story, the garden casts a strong spell" (3). It is Horsfield's Western story to which these guests can most easily relate. Our story that Hesquiaht is the middle of everywhere, that Hesquiaht has endured and thrived since creation with its own stories that cast their own spells and create their own realities, sits in competition with this imported Western reality. The Western story of conquest of nature through struggle and hardship and determination that is so unpalatable to us, is easily digested by a Western audience.

I feel sometimes as though I am intruding, being listened to politely as people listen to children's 'fantasy' stories. I want to be recognized with the same respect, affirmation, and acceptance afforded those Western tales, perspectives, and views of reality exemplified by Horsfield. At times I feel as though I have succeeded; many times I feel as though I have talked, explained and showed into a void.

I cannot divide this Final Project from my life, from how I learn and know and pass on what I have learned and known. Trinh Minh-ha describes writing, thinking and feeling with our entire bodies, not merely our minds or hearts (36). Stories grow in us as children grow inside of us, nurturing and feeding until they are mature enough to enter the outside world. This Final Project is one more attempt on my part to tell my story, to explain well enough, to illuminate through my stories and analyses, what I have come to know from where I am, where I continue to be. The "hearing" of my voice – together with the voices of thousands of others coming from the "margins" outside the Western knowledge base - would revolutionize the educational system as we know it today in British Columbia.

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