

## First Peoples Child & Family Review

An Interdisciplinary Journal Honouring the Voices, Perspectives, and Knowledges of First Peoples through Research, Critical Analyses, Stories, Standpoints and Media Reviews

# After This, Nothing Happened: Indigenous Academic Writing and Chickadee Peoples' Words

Steve Koptie

Volume 4, Number 2, 2009

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1069338ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1069338ar>

[See table of contents](#)

### Publisher(s)

First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada

### ISSN

1708-489X (print)

2293-6610 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

### Cite this article

Koptie, S. (2009). After This, Nothing Happened: Indigenous Academic Writing and Chickadee Peoples' Words. *First Peoples Child & Family Review*, 4(2), 144–151. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1069338ar>

### Article abstract

Canadian Indigenous scholars valiantly search for stores of resilience and strength in contemporary Canada to demystify the tragic place of Indians in Canada. It is very much a journey of self-discovery and recovery of a positive identity and lost human dignity that allows the restoration of pride to succeed with the gifts Creation provides to Indigenous peoples. Cook- Lynn (2007) addresses this quest to locate safe places of connecting to those stories in her important work *Anti-Indianism in Modern America: Voice from Tatekeya's Earth*, where she writes about the obligation of Indigenous scholars to project strong voices to people who "believe in the stereotypical assumption that Indians are 'damned'.. vanished, or pathetic remnants of a race" and "let's get rid of Indian reservations" or "let's abrogate Indian treaties." Instead of feeling inspired to find places of good will far too much energy is sapped escaping spaces of hate, indifference and inexcusable innocence. The cultural, historical and social confusion of a one-sided portrayal of Canadian colonization creates for researchers/witnesses at all levels of education huge gaps in understanding the unresolved pain and injury of Canada's colonial past on Canada's First Nations. Indigenous peoples are invisible in most areas of academic study, normally relegated to special programs like Aboriginal Studies as if Indigenous world-views, knowledge, culture and vision for Canada's future required mere comma's in course material that feel like "oh yea, then there are aboriginal people who feel" that stand for inclusion but feel like after thoughts only if a visible "Indian" finds a seat in the class. Indigenous students' experience within the academy has is often a 'Dickensish' tale. It is a tale of two extremes; the best of times and the worst of times mostly simultaneously as each glorious lesson learned carries the lonely burden of responsibility to challenge the shame and humiliation of each racist, ignorant and arrogant colonial myth perpetuated. Like *Oliver Twist* we want more. This paper was conceived out of an invitation by Indigenous author Lee Maracle at the 2009 University of Toronto SAGE (Supporting Aboriginal Graduate Enhancement) writing retreat where Lee and the Cree Elder Pauline Shirt spun webs of stories to encourage Indigenous scholars to explore and express our survival of vicious, traumatic and intentional cultural upheavals.

Copyright © Steve Koptie, 2009

This document is protected by copyright law. Use of the services of Érudit (including reproduction) is subject to its terms and conditions, which can be viewed online.

<https://apropos.erudit.org/en/users/policy-on-use/>

This article is disseminated and preserved by Érudit.

Érudit is a non-profit inter-university consortium of the Université de Montréal, Université Laval, and the Université du Québec à Montréal. Its mission is to promote and disseminate research.

<https://www.erudit.org/en/>

## First Peoples Child & Family Review

An Interdisciplinary Journal Honoring the Voices, Perspectives and Knowledges of First Peoples through Research, Critical Analyses, Stories, Standpoints and Media Reviews

Volume 4, Number 2, 2009, pp. 144-151

# After This, Nothing Happened: Indigenous Academic Writing and Chickadee Peoples' Words

Steve Koptie<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup>M.Ed Student, University of Toronto, Toronto, Ontario, Canada.

*Plenty Coups refused to speak of his life after the passing of the buffalo, so that his story seems to have been broken off, leaving many years unaccounted for. "I have not told you half of what happened when I was young," he said when urged to go on. "I can think back and tell you much more of war and horse-stealing. But when the buffalo went away the hearts of my people fell to the ground, and they could not lift them up again. After this nothing happened. There was little singing anywhere," Besides he added sorrowfully, you know that part of my life as well as I do. You saw what happened to us when the buffalo went away." (Lear 2006: 2)*

The title of this paper is derived from a chapter in *Radical Hope: Ethics in the Face of Cultural Devastation* by Jonathan Lear (2006) which is a remarkable re-telling, re-visioning and re-reading of specific historical circumstances that created the human vulnerabilities that lead to the pathos/pathology, marginalization and despair in Indigenous communities across Turtle Island (North America). Plenty Coups, the last great warrior of the pre-colonized Crow Nation, had to make an agonizing and fatalistic decision, one that tied his people to "reservationization" and a subsequent loss of liberty. After this, "the Crow people became depressed; things ceased to matter to them. It did not take much time for despair to settle within his community or it was for them "as though nothing happened" (Lear 2006: 3). Lear has articulated an alternative perspective on the tragic impacts of "reservationization" of the Indigenous people

Questions or correspondence concerning this article may be addressed to:

[koptie.steven@gmail.com](mailto:koptie.steven@gmail.com)

### Abstract

Canadian Indigenous scholars valiantly search for stories of resilience and strength in contemporary Canada to demystify the tragic place of Indians in Canada. It is very much a journey of self-discovery and recovery of a positive identity and lost human dignity that allows the restoration of pride to succeed with the gifts Creation provides to Indigenous peoples. Cook-Lynn (2007) addresses this quest to locate safe places of connecting to those stories in her important work *Anti-Indianism in Modern America: Voice from Tatekeya's Earth*, where she writes about the obligation of Indigenous scholars to project strong voices to people who "believe in the stereotypical assumption that Indians are 'damned,' vanished, or pathetic remnants of a race" and "lets get rid of Indian reservations" or "lets abrogate Indian treaties." Instead of feeling inspired to find places of good will far too much energy is sapped escaping spaces of hate, indifference and inexcusable innocence. The cultural, historical and social confusion of a one-sided portrayal of Canadian colonization creates for researchers/witnesses at all levels of education huge gaps in understanding the unresolved pain and injury of Canada's colonial past on Canada's First Nations. Indigenous peoples are invisible in most areas of academic study, normally relegated to special programs like Aboriginal Studies as if Indigenous world-views, knowledge, culture and vision for Canada's future required mere comma's in course material that feel like "oh yea, then there are aboriginal people who feel" that stand for inclusion but feel like after thoughts only if a visible "Indian" finds a seat in the class. Indigenous students' experience within the academy has is often a 'Dickensish' tale. It is a tale of two extremes; the best of times and the worst of times mostly simultaneously as each glorious lesson learned carries the lonely burden of responsibility to challenge the shame and humiliation of each racist, ignorant and arrogant colonial myth perpetuated. Like *Oliver Twist* we want more. This paper was conceived out of an invitation by Indigenous author Lee Maracle at the 2009 University of Toronto SAGE (Supporting Aboriginal Graduate Enhancement) writing retreat where Lee and the Cree Elder Pauline Shirt spun webs of stories to encourage Indigenous scholars to explore and express our survival of vicious, traumatic and intentional cultural upheavals.

*Thank you, Dr. Jean-Paul Restoule for your efforts to bring Cultural Safety to the University of Toronto.*

in America. His book is a must read for Indigenous scholars seeking contextual frameworks for creating discourse on decolonization and the restoration of natural adaptability in ancestral homelands. The many diverse places on Turtle Island which have common experiences with colonization, upheavals of social, political, economic and spiritual devastation understand what the term, "our hearts fell to the ground" means. The unresolved intergenerational trauma (Wesley-Esquimaux 2009) that many experienced has led to soul crushing shame and debilitating confusion in far too many instances. Human violence and apathy stand as clear indicators that the sphere of healthy human emotion and social efficacy has been difficult to recover since Plenty Coups 19<sup>th</sup> century account of cultural, economic, political and physical dispossession and destruction by settlers escaping poverty and injustice in the Old World. Indigenous scholars today face a daunting challenge in the creation of academic literature that accurately presents the truth of de-civilization struggles currently happening throughout Turtle Island.

Modern Indigenous writers and scholars require safe spaces to create alternative descriptive paths towards transformation of outdated colonial mythologies and recover a world-view that maintained life-ways that by most historical, anthropological and spiritual accounts flourished for centuries with parallel success with all mankind. Misrepresenting a whole race of humanity allowed for immoral and illegal predatory settlement across Turtle Island that still carries a great level of conflict, controversy and injustice that has global implications for how nation states conduct geographical and political relationships in the present. The coming struggle for sovereignty in Canada's Arctic region is the new frontier that challenges the rights of all Canadians. Diplomacy at home is just as difficult as good will abroad as Canada seeks truth and reconciliation to confirm its claim to legitimate nationhood. The need for alternative perspectives is so great and Canada is fortunate to have a growing number of Indigenous scholars and writers to reframe a mature Canadian identity beyond existing as a colonial outpost of Britain or America. Aboriginal cultural, economic, political and spiritual contributions to Canadian identity are significant misunderstood defining attributes (Saul, 2008).

Indigenous writers must locate narratives, words and ideas to resist and rebel against half-truths and misrepresentations of existing scholarly interpretations that maintain oppression and myths of cultural and racial supremacy that isolate Indigenous peoples as refugees in their own territories. As re-writers of colonial lies, we carry an ongoing responsibility to advocate for the recovery of self-determination, self-governance and territorial integrity. The quest for natural sovereignty is

recognized in the September 13, 2007 United Nations General Assembly Resolution to adopt the United Nations Declaration of the rights of Indigenous Peoples Article 33:

*Indigenous peoples have the right to determine their own identity or membership in accordance with their customs and traditions. This does not impair the right of Indigenous individuals to obtain citizenship of the states in which they live.*

Indigenous peoples have the right to determine the structures and to select the membership of their institutions in accordance with their own procedures.

This re-visioning is working towards the reclamation of our self respect and honors the suffering our ancestors endured. Today we are including the concept of cultural genocide in our discussions to reclaim the spaces the Creator offered our past generations. Natural cultural resilience and adaptability to colonization requires cultural re-quickening or a massive unified grieving process patterned after Rotinohshonni (Six Nations) transformative condolence ceremonies to restore *peace, power and righteousness*, the foundations of good will towards all Creation (Alfred, 1999). The assertion of basic human rights create pathways of restoration for Indigenous life-ways and provides economic, political, social, political and spiritual efficacy to successfully re-inhabit the diverse territories of Turtle Island. Lear (2006) creates an alternative narrative that invites the intellectual scrutiny necessary to navigate glaring gaps in modern knowledge and prevents against the most destructive aspects of man that now threaten all of Mother Earth. Exclusionary world views maintain the ignorance and arrogance that shield most current Canadian citizens from the responsibility to do no harm to future generations. This is another component of natural sovereignty in Indigenous world-views that provides important insight to the unsettled human condition that demands a transformation from "dis-ease" to traditional resilience that respects and honors future generations.

How do individuals and communities prepare or equip themselves for social, political, economic and spiritual vulnerability that ends with cultural upheaval and collapse? In the 21<sup>st</sup> century we have stark iconic visual media images of warfare and destruction in places like Europe, Korea, Vietnam, Yugoslavia, Rwanda, Ipperwash, and Gaza to frame our reference points for locating paths of compassion and kindness. These images should shock citizens of all races out of complacency and indifference and have them demanding their leaders work for peaceful resolution to tragic human conflict. Every unfortunate conflict offers opportunities to explore human struggles against injustice and efforts to avert spirals into catastrophe. Vietnam lost over 2 million citizens in a war of attrition to end French, British and American

imperialism. Indian and Pakistan cling to nuclear war threats in unresolved de-colonization and just mentioning the concept of a Palestinian state can cause violent backlash against such a bold suggestion. The experience of Indigenous peoples on Turtle Island, especially in Canada, needs to be listened to at a higher level, because the confusion flowing from the devastating epidemics, assimilative disasters of residential schools, massive child apprehensions, over reliance on incarceration as social regulation, and the ultimate human indignation of having your very existence defined by the Victorian Age rationalizations for domination, the Canadian Indian Act must be reconciled. These unrelenting sieges against Indigenous humanity block any meaningful adaptation. Many of the world's conflicts are struggles against having to abandon human rights to exist as distinct peoples in traditional territories. Telling a story is not enough, there must be collective action taking place, both from within First Nation communities and with the larger public to move what have become virtual mountains of grief. There needs to be a compassionate receiving and acknowledgement that takes place. Indigenous writers must uncover roots of indifference towards one race to truly represent the inhumanity because it is identity confusion of Canadian citizenship and nationhood that threatens our collective future.

In March 2009 one of Canada's most distinguished Indigenous authors Lee Maracle provided such a space at the first Supporting Aboriginal Graduate Education (SAGE) writing retreat north of Toronto at the Fern Resort. The commitment of University of Toronto to assist the progress of Indigenous scholars must be acknowledged. The strains of being strangers in our own lands is everywhere especially in spaces where we must challenge racism, oppression, sexism, classism, indifferent and dismissive attitudes that define colonial experience for our ancestors. Canadian universities must find ways to contribute truth and reconciliation frameworks for 21<sup>st</sup> century scholarly engagement if they are to seed transformation and decolonization. Indigenous writers and scholars have crucial perspectives and lived experience for addressing the cultural devastation and the harsh inequities from Canada's other history. Saul (2008), in his book *A Fair Country: Telling Truths about Canada*, challenges Canadians to explore colonial legacies that impair a mature identity formation beyond "a marriage of self-loathing, humiliation and adoration" (243).

Canadian Indigenous scholars have many ancestral narratives of resilience and remarkable adaptation to change to assist in locating a global definitive framework for "Indigeneity." Durie (2009) presented a paper in Vancouver, British Columbia on his efforts in New Zealand to develop a Maori health workforce to restore Indigenous well-being in that colonial state. Durie (2009)

claims indigeneity flows from "longstanding relationships with the natural environment;

*An ecological approach based on a synergistic relationship, has not only led to careful stewardship of the environment and natural resources, but also to a way of thinking within which health and illness are conceptualized as products of relationships-between individuals and wider social networks, and between people and the natural world. Adaptation to the natural environment was not only necessary for food and shelter but also gave definition to social groupings, tribal identity and a philosophy of environmental sustainability within which human survival unfolded. Language, culture, and a distinctive system of knowledge was a by-product of the environmental experience and the bond with the land was reflected in song, custom, approaches to healing, birthing, and the rituals associated with death. (Durie 2009:3)*

The exploration and re-expressing of the pathos of colonization by Indigenous scholars of how loss of cultural resilience and natural sovereignty to adapt to changing social, political, economic and spiritual landscapes created collective pathology, being others in our own places and ashamed of our predicament. Re-quickening this sad history will guide all humanity away from reckless exploitation that could destroy all Creation. Maracle (2009) calls this recovery of confidence by confiding in each other as a going home journey that brings us back to the familiar. She demands Indigenous writers "feed the courage", that enlivens all voices, even those not in agreement. "We never did anything alone" is Lee Maracle's modern warrior rally call to reclaim the clarity that once resided in our ancestral remembering. The good life in our families was always a collective responsibility that required family choices on what must be shared to create places we would "want to stand under" supporting clean minds, hearts and bodies, (Maracle, 2009).

### Reflective Topical Autobiographies

This author, as a returning mature graduate Indigenous scholar has found many enlightening moments from blending accumulated personal, family, work, and educational knowledge to re-energize a desire to reframe the Canadian identity to include the richness of Indigenous culture. A growing number of mature Indigenous social service workers are returning to Canada's learning centers where they are articulating observations and insights to Indigenous experience in colonial Canada. It is imperative that post-colonial academic literature include these contributions. True reconciliation between Canada and First Peoples is only possible if those stories of resilience are reflected back



from the experience of historic trauma and unresolved intergenerational suffering (Koptie, 2009). One of the gifts of researching for a graduate degree in community development was gaining access to the work of Irihapeti Marenia Ramsden. Her work as a mature Indigenous scholar is a superb role-model as is her struggle to have social, health and political institutions in New Zealand incorporate Cultural Safety in all aspects of social, political, ecological and spiritual engagement between Maori people of New Zealand and those who hold power and privilege in colonial New Zealand. Her doctoral thesis has given all Indigenous scholars a model for writing about Indigenous knowledge and community healing.

Irihapeti Ramsden completed her doctorate thesis just prior to her tragic death, after a 5 year battle with breast cancer. This is surely a testament to her enduring women-spirit. This became the essence of my paper on Cultural Safety. Ramsden (2003) created a living legacy by framing her research around reflective topical autobiography where she made her life experience available to outsiders. Johnstone (1999) who Ramsden credits for guidance as a self-researcher defined reflective topical autobiography as a framework that allows the writer or researcher a context to:

*...return at will to his or her life story again and again to re-read, re-vision and re-tell the story in the light of new insights, understandings and interpretations of meanings acquired through ongoing lived experience. (Johnstone, 1999:25)*

Ramsden is generous in her praise of an important role-model in her life, Thich Nhat Hanh, a Zen Buddhist monk, peace activist, scholar and poet who was nominated in 1967 for a Nobel Peace Prize by Martin Luther King Jr. who valued Thich Nhat Hanh's efforts to bring peace to Vietnam. Reconciliation requires the capacity for "deep listening" a crucial part to be receptive to reflective topical autobiographies. A paper by Thich Nhat Hanh (1993), titled "The Fourth Precept: Deep Listening and Loving Speech" presents ideas for bringing "joy, peace, and happiness to many people and alleviate their suffering":

*Aware of the suffering caused by unmindful speech and the inability to listen to others, I vow to cultivate loving speech and deep listening in order to bring joy and happiness to others and relieve them of their suffering. Knowing that words can create happiness or suffering, I vow to learn to speak truthfully, with words that inspire self-confidence, joy and hope. I am determined not to spread news that I am not sure. I will refrain from uttering words that cause division or discord, or that can cause the family or community to break. I will make all efforts to reconcile and resolve all conflicts, however small (Thich Nhat Hanh, 1993:1).*

### **On-the-Ground Healing Words: Reflective Topical Autobiography**

As an organizer of residential school survivor healing circles along with being a participant and facilitator of many Indigenous sharing circles this writer has witnessed the movement to recover and restore cultural connection to family, community and First Nations. Participants sharing collective experiences learn that shame is a common experience of loss of language and cultural identity that has been reduced to a pathological and predatory side show in the colonial circus (Koptie, 2009:66). One of the greatest personal experiences of collective emancipation and psychologically liberating moments of clarity came from work in northwestern Ontario, remote fly-in reserves, where I was able to support some of the first residential school community healing circles. In one Cree community, the intergenerational suffering in silence by adults prevented emotional closeness to children and grandchildren and became a blockage to locating healing voices. The loss of family connections when children are stolen from their communities interrupts and impedes the transfer of loving, caring and sharing resilience from parent to child across whole communities and territories. These life-path guides were replaced by values emulating from abuse and violence within residential schools that created wounded souls filled with hatred, jealousy and greed.

How do people recover their humanity, as well as basic human rights to safety, and lives not driven by fear of neglect, hunger, pain, sexual abuse and ridicule? The transfer of suffering was never explained or understood. The incomprehensible becomes debilitating silence. An exercise to explore the pain and suffering within the group, from not knowing how to express the hurt to their families and communities, started with the group while standing and placing their hands on their heads to acknowledge "I did not know." This is an expression of compassionate, honest, humble and kind misunderstanding of the impacts of intergenerational historic trauma. Most survivors suffer in silence out of shame and to protect their social, emotional, psychological and spiritual integrity. To publicly acknowledge the confusion from un-expressed suffering is often the first experience of incomprehensible and unrecognized unresolved grief. They were then invited to place their hands on their hearts and quietly exclaim, "I am so sorry." There was in unison sighs of release from oppressive painful memories not yet ready for words and weeping, for releasing appropriate emotions is safer when shared with empathetic co-survivors.

This is an on-the-ground example of the spirit of personal truth and reconciliation. This process took many sessions and a great deal of courage, honesty

humility, respect truth, love and wisdom, the seven qualities or values promoted by traditional Aboriginal people often referred to as “The Seven Grandfather Teachings,” (Wesley-Esquimaux and Snowball, 2009). For Indigenous writers and scholars, these values provide a working outline to frame personal narratives that are both topical and reflective of common experiences. Hawai’i Indigenous scholar Poka Laenui (2000) writes about colonization and de-colonization and has put in words a model for re-vision, renewal and recovery. The five processes of colonization according to his work are: **Denial and Withdrawal, Destruction/ Eradication, Denigration/Belittlement/Insult, Surface Accommodation/Tokenism and Transformation/ Exploitation.** The five processes of de-colonization are: **Rediscovery and Recovery, Mourning, Dreaming, and Action.** This framework is another major contribution to modern Indigenous writers and scholars to weave stories of survival and resilience for community healing.

In another remote, isolated reserve participants where the Cree language is the main form of interpersonal communication the initial sharing was around developing a definition of the residential school experience from the consciousness embedded in the communities’ worldview through their shared language. I gave a teaching on the evils of harm to woman and children. I requested the group to speak amongst their group in their Cree language until they found a word or expression for what kind of people intentionally harm children and women one of humanities worst crimes. I stated that if the police were to come into our meeting place and arrest me for rape or violence against children or women, what would happen when I went to jail and everyone was aware of my crimes. Most men know jailhouse hierarchies and even within that fraternity the worst contempt and calls for retribution is towards pedophiles and rapists. This strategy had other preventative intentions as healing often comes with education. The group soon came up with a cultural concept they could utilize to comprehend the life within most residential schools. They spent the next three hours both crying and laughing about the paradox of education mixed with trauma that filled their stories.

One inspiring experience from those community narrative sharing circles comes from an Elder at one meeting who requested a private counseling session. She was considered a community leader but reluctant to demonstrate vulnerability in her fragile community and struggled to lived a life as if nothing happened. She was unsure talking about suffering could restore hope, happiness and joy in the lives of people where the struggle for survival is extreme and filled with despair, helplessness and hopelessness. She spoke at length about her childhood, ruined by being taken away from her loving family at the age of 4. In workshops, I often ask

young parents what would happen if the police came to their suburban home, knocked on the door and said give us your children or go to jail. A collective gasp routinely follows with disbelief that this is recent history for many First Nations. The Elder struggled to comprehend the abuse she experienced from religious people who her family had taught were good. She wanted to know why she would be continually punished at the residential school when she was being good like her grandmother in loving kindness had instructed her. I stopped the conversation to ask her to think again about what her grandmother would have said when she was guiding this woman to be a good human being in the traditional language from the traditional Cree World-view. She became still and began to weep. “You are right, the teachings about goodness my grandmother passed down were far superior to those of uncaring, unloving and racist residential school nuns who would harm innocent children,” she cried in a release of pent up suffering.

### Exiles in Waiting with Words of Hope

Dubravka Ugresic is a remarkable Croatian exile of the former Yugoslavia whose woman-spirit should inspire Indigenous women globally to unite, recover and reclaim natural sovereignty in their homelands. Her bold reflective autobiographic narratives challenge complacency that allows trauma in places removed from privilege. Indifference to evil clearly leads to human catastrophe. History is useless if lessons from mans worst crimes, conflicts and conduct fail to establish “Never Again” protection of the most vulnerable. Ugresic (2005) offers a healing tool for moments when angst suffocates hope and disillusion, despair and helplessness bring back the pain of suffering that silence the restoration of voice. She goes to a beach, faces into the wind to an imaginary wall and wails for the release of hatred and the desire for revenge. To those sick and evil perpetrators of trauma she returns their poisonous acts:

*May you be cursed in this world and the next.*

*May you not live to see the sun rise.*

*May the vultures get you.*

*May you vanish from the earth.*

*May you walk a thorn field barefoot.*

*May God make you thinner than a thread and  
blacker than a pot.*

*May you reap wormwood where you sow basil.*

*May the Devil torment you.*

*May the Devil lap your soup.*

*May ravens caw at you.*

*May thunder and lightning strike you.*

*May lightning strike you and split you down the middle.*  
*May you wander blind over the earth.*  
*May a serpent bite you in the heart.*  
*May you suffer like a worm under bark.*  
*May your heart quarter and burst.*  
*May you never more see the light of day.*  
*May all abandon you.*  
*May you lose all but your name.*  
*May your seed be obliterated.*  
*May your life be bleak and barren.*  
*May a serpent swallow you whole.*  
*May the sun burn you alive.*  
*May your sugar be bitter.*  
*May you choke on bread and salt.*  
*May the sea cast up your bones.*  
*May grass sprout through your bones.*  
*May you turn to dust and ashes.*  
*May your mouth utter never a word.*  
*May you be damned.*  
*May a live wound devour you.*  
*May the waters close up over you.*  
*May your name be forgotten.*  
*May you never see the sun.*  
*May you rust over.*  
*May you be murdered every day of the year.*  
*May your roots dry up.*  
*May you lick ashes.*  
*May your heart turn to stone.*  
*May you die in darkness.*  
*May your soul fall out.*  
*May you never eat your fill.*  
*May your joys lament.*  
*May you drift without end.*  
*May you go deaf.*  
*May you go dumb.*  
*May the earth push up your bones.*  
*May you be devoured by worms.*  
*May you lose your soul and nails.*  
*May you never again see your house.*

*May you lack bread when you have salt.*  
*May you turn to wood and stone.*  
*May your star go out.*  
*May you take to the road.*  
*May your days be black.*  
*May your tongue go mute.*  
*May you leave your bones behind...*

From the book, *Ministry of Pain*

(Ugresic 2005: p.255-257)

The two stories or reflective topical biographic narratives and the Ugresic (2005) exercise of purging hatred are offered as evidence on the need for Indigenous scholars to locate paths for healing in spaces and in places where, with very little ground work, a great deal of healing work is possible to alleviate undefined suffering. We are a fortunate generation for many of us have had families who wanted something better in life than the pain of their ancestors. Stonechild (2007) addresses the trade of land (Treaties) for education leaders like Plenty Coups envisioned. They got instead organized cultural genocide in the guise of assimilation policies to “kill the Indian” in the children. Education became another trauma to escape. Neither one of my parents went to high school. I believe my grandfather escaped a residential school called the “Mush Hole” because the main food was oatmeal and ran off with a travelling carnival in the 1930’s. He was determined that none of his eleven children would have anything to do with residential school or “carnies” but my Mohawk mother ran off with a man whose family owned a travelling carnival, but that is another lengthy autobiographic narrative that I want to write. Embedded in that story are parallels of colonization (Koptie, 2009). It is also a remarkable story of finding an identity while struggling to maintain a path of hope for future generations. My son Joshua Eric graduates from the Aylmer Police College on April 2, 2009 and becomes a York Region, Ontario police officer April 30, 2009. His name comes from a great uncle who was a decorated warrior who’s life ended at Dieppe during the Second World War in France.

### **Words from Chickadee People**

The “stop it now” generation is surfacing throughout “Indian Country” with a new evolutionary Warrior spirit to tackle the despair they see in their territories. They will become activists to interrupt indifferent and dismissive notions of Canadian colonial identity that allow oil sands chaos, water pollution and climate disasters to go unchallenged on their shared lands. Indigenous writers must help all young people locate words for healing and activism in languages and in the spirit of intentional living

that our ancestors preserved for us. Indigenous writers and scholars can look at Plenty Coups' life story, Ramsden's (2003) framework for re-telling personal stories and countless other remarkable resilience narratives to be, re-read, retold with re-vision to garner new insights, understandings, and interpretations of common colonial experiences. These re-histories are tools to re-educate the dominant culture on the intent our ancestors had when making Treaties and other accommodations for survival and to buy time to adapt to the colonial circus. They did what they had to do when relinquishing their natural sovereignty to make war in times of destructive turmoil that they witnessed around their territories. If the alternative was genocide then we must honor their legacy to future generations. The confusion, shame and anger we carry is surely a lot less than watching the buffalo go away, the Creators most precious offering for survival. After the buffalo went we can only speculate the tremendous fear and terror that swept across "Indian Country." Looking to understand the motivations of Plenty Coups is to re-vise colonial myths of civilization transplanting primitive peoples in a destiny manifested by cultural, scientific, political, economic supremacy ordained by religious zealots and extremists. The trajectory of prerogative power across Turtle Island is now a global path to catastrophe as fundamentalist political, economic and religious groups, failing to study painful historical lessons, engage in warfare seeking dominance of Mother Earth. Canada's imperial ambitions in Afghanistan will not survive the imposition of a Taliban Act of tribal control and attack on that country's natural sovereignty and responsibility for peace, power and righteousness. It is imperative to listen deeply to Plenty Coups life story or reflective topical biographies of that time to extract profound lessons of hope for Indigenous peoples struggling with de-colonizing their homelands on Turtle Island.

Lear (2006) contends a review of a vision quest and dream from that experience altered Plenty Coups later perceptions of events tragically unfolding in his territory. A cultural imperative that young men undergo rites of passage ceremonies in preparation for adulthood is long established by anthropologists. This is confirmed by the anthropological recordings of Plenty Coups narrative on that 1855 or 1856 experience. In his vision came the image of disappearing buffalo. After that in his dream a mighty storm in which the Four Winds start a war in the forest leaving but one tree where a desperate old man sits to warn young Plenty Coups:

*"Listen Plenty Coups," said a voice. "In that tree is the lodge of the Chickadee. He is least in strength but strongest of mind among his kind. He is willing to work for wisdom. The Chickadee-person is a good listener. Nothing escapes his ears,*

*which he has sharpened by constant use. Whenever others are talking together of their successes and failures, there you will find the Chickadee-person listening to their words. But in all his listening he tends to his own business. He never intrudes, never speaks in strange company, and yet never misses a chance to learn from others. He gains successes and avoids failure by learning how others succeeded or failed, and without great trouble to himself...The lodges of countless Bird-people were in the forest when the Four Winds charged it. Only one person is left un-harmed, the lodge of the Chickadee-person. Develop your body, but do not neglect your mind, Plenty Coups. It is the mind that leads a man to power, not strength of body." (Lear 2006:70-71)*

### Invitation to Explore and Express

I am struck by the prophetic power of this dream/vision, ancient yet modern, which is also a profound road map through colonial learning spaces for reclaiming Indigenous knowledge and worldviews. Future generations of Indigenous scholars and writers can find unlimited alternative vantage points to explore and express in Lee Maracle's invitation to re-vision our journey on our lands. There are also untold reflective topical autobiographic narratives that can be re-told as Irihapeti Ramsden challenges survivors of colonization to create the Cultural Safety that restores wellness and brings global reconciliation of past injustices. This paper was a journey of reflection on a form of Indigenous writing for future generations that finds positive stories of adaptation and intentional choices to protect traditional resilience in crisis. Blair Stone Child (2007) asserts that education is the new buffalo. A new wave of Indigenous academic writing is filling in the gaps of failed attempts to adequately reframe a world "after this, nothing happened" and "when people's hearts fell to the ground." The survivors have a new, strong and vibrant voice. Plenty Coups would be proud. For me, Graduate School research and writing is very much about struggling for words to express lessons on over 25 years of community healing work that can be used to alter the often hurtful notions Canadians have about their real history and identity. The rewards are gaining access to collaborative wisdom and compassionate appreciation of shared experiences from around Mother Earth. One learns that all humanity can be reflected back through an Indigenous lens. Good will from strong good minds is a good plan for the well-being of strong future generations. Or so a Chickadee-person told Plenty Coups.

### References:

Alfred, T. (1999). *Peace, Power, Righteousness*, Don Mills, ON: Oxford University Press.



- Battiste, M. (ed.) (2000). *Reclaiming Indigenous Voice and Vision*, "Processes of Decolonization," by Poka Laenui, Vancouver, BC: University of British Columbia Press.
- Durie, M. (2009). "Indigenous Health Workforce Development: Maori Experience," paper delivered at the First Nations Health Managers Second National Conference, Vancouver, BC.
- Gerstenberger, R. (2006). "Indigenous-labour solidarity and the Six Nations land dispute." in *New Socialist: Ideas for Radical Change*, Issue no. 58, p. 28.
- Johnstone, M. (1999). "Reflective topical autobiography: an underutilized interpretive research method in nursing", *Collegian*, Vol. 6 No. 1.
- Lear, J. (2006). *Radical Hope: Ethics in the Face of Cultural Devastation*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Koptie, S. (2009). "Metaphorical Reflections on the Colonial Circus of the Drunken Indian and the Kidney Machine," *First Peoples Child and Family*, Volume 4, Number 1.
- Maracle, Lee (2009). *Lectures: Indigenous Writing*. SAGE, University of Toronto, Ontario.
- Ramsden, I. (2003). *Cultural Safety and Nursing Education in Aotearoa and Te Waipounamu*, Doctoral Thesis, located: <http://culturalsafety.massey.ac.nz/>.
- Shirt, Pauline (2009). *Lectures: Indigenous Writing*. SAGE, University of Toronto, Ontario.
- Stonechild, B. (2007). *The New Buffalo*, Winnipeg, MB: University of Manitoba Press.
- Thich Nhat Hanh (1993). *For A Future To Be Possible: Commentaries on the Five Wonderful Precepts*, Berkely, CA: Parallax Press.
- Ugresic, D. (2005). *Ministry of Pain*, New York, NY: Harper Collins Books.
- Wesley-Esquimaux, C. & Snowball, A. (2009). "Viewing Violence, Mental Health and Addictions through a Wise Practices Lens," paper for joint publication.
- Wesley-Esquimaux, C. (2009). "Trauma to Resilience: Notes on Decolonization", in *Restoring the Balance: First Nations Women, Community, and Culture*, Valaskakis, G. and Stout, M., and Guimond, editors, Winnipeg, MB: University of Manitoba Press.