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Honour Song: Native Graduates Voice Success

by

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A THESIS

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Abstract

The success achieved in university by Aboriginal graduates is the subject of this qualitative study. The increasing number of graduates was the catalyst to document, improve understanding of, provide insights about and celebrate Aboriginal student success. Story telling is the strategy invoked in the study, which features the researcher's personal historical narrative about teaching and learning in the Aboriginal student community, and the narrative recollections shared by Aboriginal graduates about the university journey, their experiences and their achievement of success. The stories voiced by the graduates are shared within the conceptual model of a medicine wheel, and reveal an interactive pattern of the graduates aspirations, their challenges met and overcome, their growth achieved, and the resulting changes which took place in their lives. The process of success emerging from the graduates' stories, illuminates the way for Aboriginal students who go to university, and is an empowering vision for change.

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It is with great respect and pleasure that I acknowledge and profusely thank the individuals who participated so generously in this study concerning Aboriginal student success. I honour the graduates for what they have achieved and are achieving. The graduates' willingness to participate in the interviews, give their trust and share their stories was most appreciated. I was fortunate to learn from these individuals, while they were students, and now that they are graduates, the stories they shared about their university journeys, have contributed once more to my learning.

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In the almost twenty years in which I have been teaching in the post-secondary Aboriginal student community, I have encountered on the journey many individuals who have contributed to my learning. I would like to acknowledge a few of these people beginning with Dr. Evelyn Moore-Eyman (deceased), who initially involved me in teaching Native students. Dr. Fred Carnew offered me the chance to teach at Maskwachees Cultural College and shared his cultural and educational insights with me and my many fine colleagues. The Cree people of Hobbema and the College students taught me about Cree history and culture, and made my years teaching there a wonderful learning experience. At The Native Centre, George Calliou shared his knowledge of ceremony and cultural protocols with me. Also, I wish to acknowledge and thank Shawna Cunningham, current Director of The Native Centre, and Donna Meckling, for the many ways in which they supported the completion of my Masters.

Throughout my life to this point, I have been fortunate in having the faith and encouragement of my parents, Enid and Orville Ewart, whose profound influence I gratefully acknowledge. As parents, they have been loving and kind. As teachers, they were role models, engaged in their community, dedicated, caring and wise. I continue to value as well, the patient ear and words of encouragement from my sister, Dawn. I cherish the love and steadfast support of my husband Jim and son Greg, who have withstood the many months of abstracted attention, computer panic attacks and growing stacks of books and paper. Thank you for your care of me on this journey of learning and on the larger journey of life.

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Honour Song

For the moment, the sound of the drums is hushed. Family and friends are gathered in respectful silence. The graduates have been called up and stand, their hearts full, in the ceremonial circle. The Elder has prayed with sweetgrass, and blessed the traditional gifts, the boldly patterned blankets and the hallowed eagle feathers. The Elder speaks words of wisdom, prays for the graduates, and the gifts are presented. The signal is given. The drum begins to beat, the rhythm of the heart. The singers give voice to the soaring notes of the Honour Song. Each graduate raises his or her gift feather aloft, giving thanks, answering the sonorous salute to proud accomplishments. The graduates begin to dance, strong in the sacred circle. Friends and family come to join them with handshakes, hugs and congratulations. Soon the circle is filled to overflowing, with moving, dancing people… as the room is suffused to overflowing, with power, with celebration, with reverberations - the sound of the Honour Song.

1.0 CHAPTER ONE: SOUNDINGS

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The Honour Song vignette preceding this chapter, depicts a portion of the annual celebration, consisting of a banquet and pow wow hosted by The Native Centre and the First Nations Student Association to recognize and honour the academic achievements and success of Aboriginal students graduating from the University of Calgary. The singing of the Honour Song is a proud moment for graduates, their close friends and families. The event is an expression of Aboriginal cultural traditions and marks for graduating students the successful completion of several years of endeavour, when they were challenging a range of hardships, the unknown and the unfamiliar in a mainstream post-secondary institution. The graduation event with gift of ceremony, blankets, eagle feathers and the singing of the Honour Song is the culmination of many struggles for the graduates, and celebrates hard won success. The study presented in this thesis explores the success Aboriginal students are achieving at university. In this chapter, the social circumstances in Canada surrounding Aboriginal post-secondary education are considered, and this provides a background for a discussion about Aboriginal students attending this University and the circumstances which warranted a study highlighting the voices of Native students concerning their success. Additionally in this chapter, the oral tradition cherished in Aboriginal cultures, and which contributed to the design of the study, is explored, study limitations are addressed, and explanations of specific terms used in the thesis presentation are briefly set out.

1.2 ABORIGINAL VOICE

The voice of Aboriginal people in Canada is too often omitted from dialogue that is directly related to their lives, interests, and concerns. Aboriginal people in Canada have lived as subjugated, dispossessed and oppressed non-citizens. Only in the last few decades of the twentieth century have circumstances begun to change, with alterations made to the Indian Act, to permit greater liberty self-determination, and control over education (Reeves, 1991, p.346). Only since these changes over the last few decades have Aboriginal people been permitted to aspire to and attain a university education without sacrificing their inherent rights, identity and community membership as status Indians (Miller, 1989, p.114). Only in the last decade and a half have appreciable numbers of Aboriginal people begun to realize success in university. Only in the present day are Aboriginal university graduates in substantial numbers beginning to lead the way both in their communities and on the national scene. By asserting their voices concerning, the rights of Aboriginal people, university graduates can redress the oppression and lack of representation of Aboriginal interests, which continues to prevail in Canada.

The voice of Aboriginal university graduates is needed in the wide scope of Canadian affairs, but especially concerning topics pertinent to Native peoples nationally, and politically. Education, including post-secondary education is a topic integral to self-determination and Aboriginal peoples. Within the microcosm of the university setting, the voice of Aboriginal graduates can be of profound benefit to those who follow the same difficult path they, themselves chose, when they ventured into post-secondary education. By sharing their experience, and by giving voice to their learning success, University of Calgary graduates can be instrumental in encouraging, assisting and empowering other

Aboriginal students. By sharing their stories, Aboriginal graduates can edify the university with an understanding of their experience. By sharing what they know, Aboriginal university graduates have honoured, preserved and revitalized the ancient voice of the oral tradition. By voicing their insights, Aboriginal university graduates now occupy the central role in the dialogue presented in this thesis, concerning how post-secondary educational success can be achieved.

1.3 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

At the University of Calgary the increasing numbers of Aboriginal students enrolling in a variety of university programs reflects a national trend. In 1971 a single Aboriginal student graduated from the University of Calgary. In 1972, Indian Student Services was formed to address the needs of a group of twenty-five Aboriginal students, who were recruited to the University by Indian and Northern Affairs Canada. The students were recruited to enter University of Calgary in a program funded by Indian and Northern Affairs, but run co-operatively with faculty at University of Calgary. Over the next decade (1972-1982), students who were in this initial group, a few in Outreach Programs and others each year coming to campus, took on the challenges of University. But, annual enrolment of Native students was not high, many who started university abandoned the dream, and graduation rates remained low. Graduation records kept by Indian Student Services in the decade of the 1970's, indicate that frequently, only three or four students might graduate in a year, and in some years there were no graduates at all. By the end of that decade, Indian Student Services had become The Native Centre, providing services for students, but also involved in conducting research and curriculum development in co-operation with Native communities in Alberta. However, student enrolment had not

increased greatly on campus and the number of graduates continued to average at less than ten per year.

In the 1984-85 academic year, a new program was initiated at The Native Centre for newly recruited Aboriginal students. The Transition Year Program was instituted to provide more comprehensive support, skills instruction and tutorial guidance to another group of twenty-five students from across western Canada. Even with this program, and an affiliated program for another fifteen students at Maskwachees Cultural College at Hobbema, success at university appeared elusive for the majority of students who entered the program that year and in subsequent years. This writer was an instructor who worked in both the Transition Year Program during the first year of operation at The Native Centre and later at Maskwachees Cultural College for a further five years.

Transition Year Programming was run at The Native Centre for several years, but operations ceased in 1990, when Federal funding for the program ended. Transition or University Preparation continued in an independent and revised program at Maskwachees Cultural College until it also lost funding in the mid 1990's. First Nation's Funding for the program was resumed in the year 2000. Other post-secondary Colleges and Universities in various parts of Canada have also adopted similar support programs, which attract numbers of Aboriginal students. Despite the lack of Transition Year programming at University of Calgary, Aboriginal student enrolment at the University since 1992 has increased and annually surpasses the numbers of new students who attended during the two preceding decades. Typically, forty to fifty Aboriginal students were being admitted each year (1996-2002) to main campus programs of study. Correspondingly, in the latter part of the 1990's

and from 2000-2002, the average number of graduates is also forty or more. These numbers indicate a substantial change in the post-secondary successes of Aboriginal students who attend and complete degrees at the University of Calgary.

While the numbers indicating increasing enrolment and increasing graduation are evident, it is less clear why Aboriginal students are succeeding. Many of the barriers, which typically interfere in the achievement of post-secondary education for Aboriginal students, remain. Aboriginal students can still encounter culture shock and academic challenges at University of Calgary, experience family or personal trauma, financial hardship, illness, discrimination and systemic racism. There are tremendous potential and actual difficulties which Aboriginal students can and do meet. Yet, more Aboriginal students are attending and succeeding at University of Calgary. From 1972 until 1992, there were three hundred Aboriginal graduates who identified themselves to The Native Centre. But, in the single decade of 1992-2002, over three hundred more Aboriginal graduates have identified themselves to The Native Centre. This total is indicative of more than twice the number of graduates in half the time. Until the mid-1990's University of Calgary did not ask Aboriginal students to self-identify on their university applications. Only those students applying through The Native Centre consistently indicated their Aboriginal status. As well, data put into the Student Information System did not always reflect Aboriginal status so that the records of application numbers were fallible and approximate and the tracking of Aboriginal student progress was not attempted by the institution. A recent review of in-house records by the staff of The Native Centre regarding applications and admissions of Native students who registered with the Centre, reflect that between 1972 and 2000, over 60% of admitted students were completing their degrees

successfully.

The number of successful students who graduate continues to climb. (Appendix A) This increase represents a significant change in the University achievement of Aboriginal students. The increasing success of Aboriginal students deserves to be celebrated. Just as the students and staff of The Native Centre, celebrate the accomplishment when a student completes a degree, the current growth in numbers of graduates warrants honouring. The majority of the Aboriginal graduates in the past decade have participated in the annual Graduation Banquet and Pow Wow hosted each year since 1992 by The Native Centre and the First Nations Student Association. Graduates welcome the opportunity to celebrate their success with family, friends and faculty in a setting that recognizes and promotes their cultural traditions and ceremonies. Many Aboriginal graduates describe their participation in this occasion as the pinnacle event to which they aspire throughout University.

It is important to understand the dynamics of success among Aboriginal graduates of the University of Calgary. Their success is relevant to the role of The Native Centre and to the University where they achieved their success as students. Aboriginal university graduates have stories to tell, about the challenges and hardships they encountered, but especially stories about what occurrences, values, attitudes, beliefs, family, individuals, or circumstances inspired them to strive for and achieve university success. The stories of Aboriginal university graduates can provide a greater understanding of their experience and contribute to the provision of services by staff, trying to assist others who come to The University of Calgary. As well, the success of Aboriginal university graduates is relevant to their individual lives, their families and their communities. The stories of Native

graduates of University of Calgary, can be sounded for a better understanding of the contributing conditions, the nature and impact of their success.

1.4 NARRATIVE IN THE STUDY

It is timely in light of the achievements Aboriginal students at University of Calgary are demonstrating, to explore the phenomenon of Aboriginal student success. Since this researcher has worked in the field of Aboriginal post secondary education from 1984 and continues to do so during the present time of writing, much of the information, observations and ultimate analysis which were made in this study were based upon and influenced by that experience. For this reason, a portion of this project focused on what I have learned while I have been teaching adult Aboriginal students embarking on university studies. By developing a narrative of my own story as a Non-Native person, but one who as a Canadian has in some way, been involved at times minimally, then more closely associated with Native people in an educational setting, I became more aware of what I had learned over the course of my teaching career. While nowadays there are many people involved in Aboriginal education, both Native and Non-Native in a variety of post-secondary settings, it was intended that introspective reflection upon my own experience will present a personal backdrop to the research exploring the stories of Aboriginal graduates. Additionally, since the twelve years I have so far worked at The Native Centre represent about one third of the time of its operation, it is possible for me to review from a personal perspective, some of the history, the role, and the interactions of The Native Centre with Aboriginal students attending University of Calgary.

1.5 THE ORAL TRADITION

Storytelling is fundamental to the oral tradition, which belongs to Aboriginal culture. In Aboriginal culture, storytelling has played, and still plays an integral and fundamental role. Story telling is essential to the oral tradition which belongs to Aboriginal traditions and is a vehicle for the voice of Aboriginal graduates. The process of colonization in many ways effectually deprived Aboriginal people of the opportunity to tell their stories, and to be heard by the larger society. As First Nations writer Dr. Emma Larocque observes,

> In contrast to the inane stereotype of the Indian as soundless, we know from the vast storehouse of our oral traditions that Aboriginal peoples were peoples of words. Many words. Amazing words. Cultivated words. They were neither wordless nor illiterate in the context of their linguistic and cultural roots. The issue is not that Native peoples were ever wordless but that, in Canada, their words were literally and politically negated. (Perrault and Vance p.xv)

While historically efforts were made to submerge or drown out the voice of Aboriginal peoples in North America, in the later part of the 20th century, a few First Nations individuals have begun to challenge the status quo. N. Scott Momaday, a member of the Kiowa Nation, is a leading proponent of the strength and power of the oral tradition and speaks of it as the "ancient voice." Reference to the oral tradition, and the stories of his people have informed Momaday's own work. His heralding of the knowledge, essence and spirit found within the oral tradition has helped to inspire other Aboriginal storytellers. Momaday was raised bi-culturally and multi-culturally, living among, and experiencing a variety of tribal and non-tribal cultures. He was greatly influenced by Kiowa stories.

> One is the story of the arrowmaker, the man who saves himself through language. The arrowmaker is a man who dares to speak in a moment of crisis a man who risks himself in words in order

> to overcome an enemy . . . [he] learned from that story the importance of applying words to the world. He would come to believe that human beings are made of words and that he could realize himself, and communicate himself, through language. (Woodward, p.2)

Momaday's recognition of the power of words and stories is a profound assertion of the need for Aboriginal people to both keep sacred the ancient stories, and to "apply words to the world," through the telling of their current stories of success. By telling their stories, Aboriginal university graduates also may as Momaday describes it, "realize," and come to know themselves, and the study is designed so that they can apply their words to the present day world in which they live. It is increasingly common that First Nations students attending University of Calgary speak of and where possible, employ the oral tradition as a method of study and source of information in assignments and essays. For example, in her Master's thesis Laura Auger a member of the Cree Nation, asserts, "A live world view is founded upon the ancient tradition of transmitting the philosophical framework through story" (Auger, p.16). As well, she maintains, "Stories are the basic foundation of the oral tradition. In the stories are the values and beliefs of the Cree peoples" (Auger, p.22).

The oral tradition of Native people is not unique to an individual tribal culture in North America. It is a universal tradition shared, as are some stories, across many cultural communities. In his "Oral Cultural" presentation at the World Indigenous Peoples Conference on Education 2002, Peter Wesley, University of Calgary graduate and member of the Nakoda community indicated,

> We are a storytelling people who believe storytelling is a sacred event. It is a Special time of sharing, teaching and learning. Storytelling is a means by which to relate experiences, events and particular happenings. Morals, values and beliefs may be

> incorporated. Stories are generally told in a long, roundabout way. Often there are no endings (Wesley, Conference Presentation. August 8, 2002).

Wesley tells how central storytelling is to his cultural community, but also speaks about the importance of storytelling as an educational endeavour, instructive in learning, and deriving meaning which contributes to the understanding of one's environment, both physical and social. The narration of their experience by university graduates made it possible to uncover learning and meaning in a compelling cultural context. Thus, storytelling was the appropriate cultural approach to developing an understanding of the success of Aboriginal students at University. It was fundamental to this study that Aboriginal university graduates voices be heard, and that their experience of success be revealed as potentially empowering to future First Nations post-secondary students.

1.6 NATURE OF THE STUDY

In order to derive an improved understanding of the success of Aboriginal graduates, a qualitative study was conducted in order that an understanding of the precursors, elements, conditions and impact of success would be achieved. It was critical that such an exploration should keep central and treat with respect both the cultural traditions and the voice of Aboriginal students. A primary purpose of the study was to encourage and to listen to the voice of Aboriginal university graduates. The study provided the opportunity for university graduates to share their stories, their cultural perspectives, and understandings of their experience. The stories of Aboriginal university graduates were then reflected upon, explored and sounded for themes which emerged, and which contributed to a fuller understanding of the phenomenon of Aboriginal student success at

the University of Calgary.

1.7 DESIGN OF THE STUDY

In the conceptualization of this study, it was crucial that a method, which was consistent with and respectful of Aboriginal culture, be established. Storytelling or narrative communication is authentic in Aboriginal cultural expression. By presenting a narrative of my own experience, I share in and respect this tradition in order to honour the spirit of reciprocity. Since graduates were asked to tell their stories, it is only right that I too made my story a part of the study. A review of my work is consistent with participatory action research and as such, may be considered a primary source document. Furthermore, my story also presents the context and identifies the perspective implemented in the analysis of the stories of Aboriginal graduates by the researcher, in the process of identifying emergent themes. (See Chapters Four and Five).

1.8 DEFINITION OF TERMS

Aboriginal: In this study the term Aboriginal, which is the word used legally and legislatively in Canada, is used to refer to Native peoples in Canada. Aboriginal is understood to imply the inclusion of Indians, Metis and Inuit peoples. A person who is of Native and European (originally French or Scottish), heritage may refer to themselves as Metis. Inuit peoples originate in the Eastern Arctic. The term "Indian" is a historical misnomer not preferred by Aboriginal people. However, it exists legislatively in documents such as the 1874 Indian Act. It appears in this study in historical or legal usage (for example, Status Indian, according to the Indian Act), or in circumstances where it may have been used in the literature or by participants. Other terms more commonly used by

Aboriginal people to refer to themselves include Native, First Nations or Indigenous, and these references appear interchangeably throughout the study.

Sounding: The term sound/sounding is rich in meaning. The Funk and Wagnalls Canadian College Dictionary provides over twenty possible applications and definitions related to sound(ing). Those which apply to this study include, "to articulate… to give forth a sound… measuring depths… to make an investigation, to explore… to ascertain, determine… discover… to make known or celebrated: for example sounding a hero's name" (p.1280-81). The word 'sounding' or 'soundings' appears in the title of each chapter, and the primary meaning implied in the use of the term is appropriate to the purpose of and material presented in the chapter. However, readers are given license and encouraged to recognize more than a single meaning embodied in each use of 'soundings.'

Success: For the purposes of the study the term success is fundamentally used to signify the successful completion of a university program and the formality of receiving a degree. Success as defined by Funk and Wagnalls Canadian College Dictionary is "A favourable or desired outcome… or result" (p. 1336). It must be noted that the notion of success has its origins as a concept in European languages and cultures and is not directly translatable as an equivalent into First Nations languages such as Cree or Blackfoot. An obstacle in the translation between languages is that First Nations languages are verb and action oriented and English is noun based. Conceptualization in First Nations cultures has a process orientation. Accordingly, the term success may not be perceived as a particular result or outcome. In order to be respectful of the potential differences in conceptualization, participants in the study were invited to specify their personal notions of success. An

explication of the perceived nature of success as revealed by the graduates' stories, as well as its relationship to process, is presented in greater detail in Chapters Six and Seven.

1.9 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The selected number of participants is conservative in quantity. However, it was anticipated that participants would be able to provide both quality and depth in their recollections. Since all participants were graduates of the University of Calgary, their stories and the themes which emerged, have particular application to students who attended this University. The stories of participants arose from their recollections of events, their perceptions, so that the meaning and understanding derived was rooted in their memories and influenced by the passage of time. Thus, it was a key part of the research process to encourage participants to reflect on and detail their experience as thoughtfully as possible. Additionally, the researcher was responsible to listen and later read the text carefully, in order to select, analyse and identify expressive meaningful text.

1.10 CONCLUSION

The need existed to develop a better understanding of the success which Aboriginal students have been achieving at University. At present the numbers of Aboriginal students who are seeking out post-secondary education are increasing. Information and insight that previous graduates of university provided may be of assistance to future students and to agencies such as The Native Centre in responding to the needs of Aboriginal students in University. The stories of Aboriginal graduates about their experience may make it possible to further extend the opportunities for success in University to entering students. By encouraging the voice and listening to the stories of

Aboriginal graduates, the study incorporated a methodology that is respectful of the oral traditions of Aboriginal culture. The sounding of story is consistent with qualitative ways of knowing and inspired a personal narrative of my participatory research experience in the Aboriginal student community and the sounding of graduates' stories for thematic insights. By connecting with the lived experience of Aboriginal university graduates and reflecting on emergent themes, new meaning and better understanding of the phenomenon and impact of Aboriginal student success was created.

This thesis relates the qualitative research I conducted in order to explore my teaching and learning experience in the Aboriginal student community, in company with the stories of graduates who shared their experiences as a way of helping to build greater understanding of the origins and impact of success. The thesis is arranged in seven chapters and presented in the following manner. Chapter Two provides a background for the study based on the literature concerning Aboriginal education, more details of which are described at the end of this explanatory paragraph. In Chapter Three, Aboriginal ways of knowing and methodology are presented and the particular methodology used in the study is detailed. My personal narrative and the history I share with Aboriginal post-secondary students are developed and are documented in Chapters Four and Five. In addition, Chapter Five relays observations on the experience of Aboriginal students who have been part of the community at The Native Centre during the last decade. The stories the graduates shared about their aspirations, hardships, learning, success and new found power are featured within the context of an Aboriginal model described in Chapter Six. In Chapter Seven, the graduates' stories are sounded and interpreted regarding themes, in sights, recommendations and conclusions which emerged from their experience and their

success in University. The reader who now proceeds in sequence from Chapter One to Chapter Two: "Sounding the Literature," will find related a history of First Nations educational traditions, a report of the harmful impact resulting from residential schools, and a review of contemporary issues in post-secondary education as they pertain to a discussion which focuses on the research relevant to Aboriginal student success.

2.0 CHAPTER TWO: SOUNDING FOR SUCCESS: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Aboriginal education is a construct and a process which took place for thousands of years before the arrival of Europeans on the North American continent. It is only through the dynamic interactions between the two larger cultures, as Europeans sought to enforce their world view, policy and practices upon First Nations, that education for Aboriginal people became regarded as a problem, elements of which persist into the present day. For Aboriginal communities the problem of education is re-establishing a workable First Nations model that allows students to succeed. For mainstream society the difficulty is to curb ethno-centric policies and attitudes, and accept that there may be alternative ways to approach Aboriginal education. Currently, Aboriginal education is a topic which engenders a breadth of concerns including early school leaving, learning styles, remedial and special education, racism, control over schools, colonization, curriculum content and methodologies, and post-secondary education access and achievement. Post-secondary education is a concern related to all the other educational concerns, since it is in the lower school levels that First Nations people currently experience the Euro-Canadian education system, learn to become students and learn about themselves, about success and failure in a school environment.

As a result of their early schooling experiences, many First Nations students approach university as adult students with feelings of conflict, having rejected and left the education system in their youth, without completing grade twelve. Many adult Aboriginal

students contemplate a return to formal schooling, recognizing that an academic education may be useful in finding employment in their communities and that education is in demand in the mainstream economy, but find that they are filled with trepidation at the idea of being in a classroom once again and facing some of the frustrations which drove them out of school as adolescents. Finding success in a post-secondary, Euro-centric university environment with its many associated hurdles, is a remarkable achievement, and as yet there is limited research focusing on this topic (Hampton and Roy, 2002; Archibald et al., 1995). In order to provide a background for the current research into Aboriginal student post-secondary success, a review of the applicable literature was undertaken. The discussion of the literature presented here is intended to address issues related to Aboriginal education such as cultural influences and factors, historical happenings, and contemporary post-secondary educational initiatives related to success.

2.2 ABORIGINAL EDUCATION

Traditionally, the members of Aboriginal Nations were reared in a process which was effectively life-long learning. While individual and community process may vary, it was the object of Aboriginal education that the individual have the freedom to discover their particular strengths or qualities as well as mastering survival skills, and developing proficiency in using their skills and capacities to contribute to the benefit of the group. As Janice Hill notes, Indigenous education, "… is life-long and all encompassing. It is the ideal of intergenerational learning and learning in relationship" (p. 283). Traditional education involved the whole community as siblings, relatives, parents and elders participated in the teaching of the young. Hampton (1995) indicates that education took the form of, "oral histories, teaching stories, ceremonies, apprenticeships, learning games,

formal instruction, tutoring, and tag-along teaching" (p. 8). Learning took place within the context of the family, community and relationships, and skills were applied in the setting where they were appropriate. Students had ample "role models who exemplified the knowledge, skills and values being taught" (Ibid).

Native children were encouraged to be self-motivating and self-actualizing approaching those who could and would help them to learn a skill. Learning required repeated observation, listening and practice. Stairs describes the passing on of knowledge, "through the observation and imitation embedded in daily family and community activities, integration into the immediate shared social structure being the principle goal" (p. 141). Education took place in the real world setting, and children might first take on learning a task such as moccasin making by performing the last element, adding the trim, first and then another time learn the preceding steps in a process Stairs calls "backwards chaining." Traditionally, repeating a task helped to build concepts and skills, rather than ideas being framed in explicit verbal instructions or steps to be obeyed to achieve success. Recounting events, experience and stories effectively passed on "concepts and principles implicitly" (Ibid p.142). It was up to the individual to identify concepts and learn from the story the message being imparted. And, no outside authority decided whether an adequate level of learning had taken place.

While education was learner initiated, "knowledge is a shared resource acquired cooperatively," and the intent was that the learning achieved would benefit the group. Stairs describes the manner in which the Aboriginal community relied on individualism:

> The community respects individual differences within the bounds

> of cultural norms and takes advantage of the various talents among its members: a leader's political skill, a hunter's knowledge of animals, a storyteller's way with words, a business person's financial ability. Young learners, too, are accepted as individuals and are not expected to progress all in the same direction at the same time or to meet set standards of achievement. They are expected to attend to adult activities around them according to their own motivation, or to approach teachers and elders themselves, before direct instruction is given (Stairs, p. 142).

Teachers were all around the young Native learner, and integral to the education system were the Elders who had long experience and wisdom to pass on to learners. Elders shared their knowledge with apprentices who learned the medicinal plants, the stories, or the Rituals and ceremonies which were the spiritual source of the culture of the people, and the community.

Elders are acknowledged throughout the Native community as well as in scholarly writing as vital in Aboriginal education (Kirkness, 1995; Ermine, 1995; Couture, 1991; Friesen, 1995; Hampton, 1995). Spirituality as taught by Elders is understood as the central core of Aboriginal thought, world view and epistemology. "The first standard of Indian education is spirituality" (Hampton, p.19). Couture regards true Elders as "oral historians, guardians of the secrets, interpreters of the Life of the people, as unusual teachers, and way showers to the People" (p. 202). Elders are embodiments of traditional insight and provide a strong, moral and spiritual vision of the universe as a whole, all things being in relation, and principled by balance and harmony. Ermine describes Elders as the 'Old Ones,' who are guides in Aboriginal spirituality and epistemology, leading the Aboriginal voyage, learning about the place of the people in the world and acceptance of how things are in the world. The Aboriginal journey, a spiritual expedition, travels into "subjective inner space,"

in order "to arrive at insights into existence" (p.102). In the world view shared by Aboriginal Elders and community, "all existence was connected and ... the whole enmeshed the being in its inclusiveness" (Ibid p.103). Based on this understanding and respect filled ideology, Aboriginal culture and learning accepts that individuals are subject to the "metaphysics of the inner space," and that all beings and entities are connected. People are part of, spiritually connected to their own environment and to everything in it. Aboriginal teachings facilitated the development of a subjective, accepting perspective with an ability to synthesize a diversity of information and experience (Macias, 1989, p. 48). The individual learns to understand and accept connectedness and inter-relationships through looking inwards and through the cooperative activities of emotions and the intellect (Ermine, p.110).

Aboriginal education presents a holistic thought process and world view in which the notion of the cycle of life and the circularity and relationship of all things predominated. Within the circle, sometimes depicted concretely or tangibly as a design known as a medicine wheel or web, lessons could be taught about the relationship of the individual to the group and to the life all around. As well, the wheel could describe the dynamic relationship of four aspects of the whole person with physical, mental, emotional and spiritual capacities. Aboriginal education taught the learner to seek harmony and balance, to trust the emotional realm and that, "The continuum of the wheel illustrates that the processes of the emotional, physical, intellectual, and spiritual are connected and that we should not be easily seduced into believing that living occurs from the neck up" (Calliou, p. 63). Aboriginal education was a system that nurtured within the learner an understanding of the world around them, by means of a complimentary inward looking

subjectivity prompted by the search for acceptance, balance and harmony. The individual achieved self-actualization by contributing skills and abilities towards the well being of the community.

2.3 EUROPEAN CHALLENGES TO ABORIGINAL EDUCATION

Europeans coming to North America encountered a culture dramatically different from their own. The differences were many. The Europeans brought with them intriguing technology such as metal pots, tools and weaponry, and demonstrated sophistication in reading and writing skills. They lived in a complex authority centred and hierarchical social order. Their clothing was manufactured from wool and woven plant fibres. They travelled in immense ships with sails, which carried quantities of goods for trade. But, Europeans also carried with them diseases that would devastate Aboriginal peoples. Additionally, Europeans carried with them a world view, which lead them to conclude that they were vastly superior to the peoples of the new world. By virtue of their belief in their self-defined superiority, Europeans set about claiming the continent and establishing authority over the vast territories they claimed as their own.

Europeans also set about converting the Aboriginal peoples of the eastern regions of North America to their religion, and to their way of life by means of education. As early as 1615, missionary schools were started by the Recollets order among the Hurons. Jesuits also began schools and sent Aboriginal boys and girls to France to be educated. Once the British Empire absorbed New France (1763), English language day schools were initiated in attempts at assimilation. Subsequent educational efforts included industrial schools where young Aboriginal peoples were to be taught basic literacy and a trade. Girls would

be taught house-keeping skills. From 1830, a few residential schools began to operate, but following Confederation (1867), until the mid 1960's, the residential schools were the general format for Aboriginal education and forced assimilation. The last residential school closed in 1988 in Saskatchewan (Friesen, 2001).

Initially, education of Aboriginal youth had begun based on the choice of Aboriginal peoples. However, being educated in the European way did not prove generally successful. The authoritarian structure of schools was foreign to the expectation of young Aboriginal learners, and was vastly different than traditional Native education. Few Native people pursued an education beyond basic instruction, and those who did found they no longer fit into the life of their own community. Children taught trades had no place to start a business, and often trades were not typically viewed as needed in the Aboriginal community. However, Aboriginal Elders and leaders recognized the value of new knowledge and skills that were part of European education, and as the British colonies expanded west and treaties were established with the western First Nations, the provision for schooling was a term of the agreements enshrined in the treaties. With the establishment of a Federal government for Canada which was intent on western expansion and settlement, it became policy to re-locate Native peoples to reserves, to usurp their inherent rights, and to accomplish the assimilation of the people by educating Aboriginal youth in residential schools.

The running of the residential schools was delegated by the Federal government to the churches, several of which had been involved in Aboriginal education previously. It was the aim in the residential schools that children should be taught to be European. They

were taught to despise and condemn their community culture, its customs and traditions, their parents and Elders. Children could be tortured and beaten for speaking their Native language, and discipline for any infraction could be harsh (Ing, 2004). Currently, stories about the survivors of residential school have emerged, an example of which follows:

> It was an enormous setback for me and the beginning of a lifetime of cultural, personal, and educational dissonance. The formal education that I gained in those first few years in residential school was overshadowed by an increasing accumulation of stress, anger, fear, and hostility, created partly by the change from a non-directive way of living to a directive one. I went from making my own choices, having decision-making power and responsibilities at home to being told what to do, how to do it, and when to do it… I remember so well the first day of school… A nun took me to a room, roughly pushed me inside with my bag, and closed the door. This was the very first time I experienced violence in my early years. There was a lot more physical violence later at school, but this was the first instance I was never able to forget because it was so unexpected and incomprehensible… was almost paralyzed by fright, and no one seemed to notice… This was the beginning of a totally foreign life in a totally new culture, an education typified by extinction of a former way of learning, confusion about who I was, and the end to family life as I had known it. I did not realize at the time that the first part of the oppression was to leave me alone on the other side of the door; the second part was to leave my culture on the other side of the door. No matter how parents felt or objected, native children were taken from them at age six or seven to eighteen. I did not realize at that time that this was the last time I would go home to my family and not to strangers… I would reject them as I had been taught, and that I was never to return home until I was an adult with my own children (English, 1996, p. 46-47).

Aboriginal people were deprived of choice in their education, and provided with an education which crushed the sense of self, and contributed to the loss of Native languages, healthy family bonds, and cultural practices. Federal and provincial laws forbade participation in traditional events such as the Sundance or the potlatch. Native people were prevented from gathering or travelling between reserves by laws enforced by Indian agents governing the reserves. Children taken distances away to residential school may not have

returned home for over ten years (Johnston, 1999; English, 1996). Aboriginal communities became fractured and fragmented, and residential schools left festering wounds in the hearts of the people, many of whom found they were lost between cultures, not reared in their own culture and not assimilated or welcomed into the larger culture (Friesen, 2002; Henderson, 1995).

In the 1960's, as residential schools were closed efforts were made to integrate Native children into mainstream Provincially run schools. However, this experiment did not receive support from Native communities and students dropped out at a high rate. In integrated schools Native children had to contend with the prejudice and stereo-typing of fellow students and instructors, many found themselves relegated to remedial and non-academic programs (Hampton, 1995). The Federal government planned continuing its policy of assimilation of Native peoples through education, and published the White Paper in 1969 outlining policies intended to terminate Indian status and reserves. Native leaders and groups vocally opposed the intentions of the government, and the Alberta Indian Chiefs published the Red Paper in 1970, calling for the re-assertion of control of Native Education by Native peoples. Also, in 1970 a lengthy sit-in acted as a catalyst to force the agreement for the first locally-controlled Native school, in St. Paul, Alberta (Friesen, 2002; Henderson, 1995).

The National Indian Brotherhood published their Policy on Education in 1972 calling for local control of schools, better facilities, culturally sensitive teachers, and culturally relevant curriculum. Over the past three decades, First Nations local control of schools has been achieved on reserves, and new school facilities are evident in the

communities. Gradually, more Native teachers are graduating to teach in the schools, and some adjustments to curriculum have been initiated. However, the process of education provided in a school setting still evinces a predominant influence from the Euro-Canadian model (Kirkness, 1995). The 1996 Royal Commission on Aboriginal Affairs reflects that education issues persist in the Aboriginal community. The impact of coercive government policy and the brutality meted out to generations of Aboriginal children continues to have an impact in the Native community.

> When the residential school system was finally shut down, it did not signal an end to the ongoing struggle for cultural recognition and meaningful education for Native people… The residential school phenomenon will not go away. While only about 20 percent of First Nations children ever attended residential schools, many of them and/or their descendants are claiming sexual and/or physical abuse or cultural loss as a result of the experience. There are more than 6 000 cases before the courts, naming church denominations as well as government in their litigations...The number of cases before the courts could go as high as 15 000 or more since as many as 90 000 children attended residential schools throughout the years that the system operated (Friesen, 2002, p.114-116).

Decades of punishment and disrespect directed at themselves and their culture, through an Euro-Canadian assimilative education system imposed in residential schools or in provincial public schools, has caused the Aboriginal community to regard education within the mainstream with mistrust. "Personal and social problems such as alcohol and drug addictions, physical and sexual abuse, high rates of violence, incarceration, suicide, and low rates of academic success and employment have all been attributed to the residential school experiences of thousands of Indigenous persons" (Weber-Pillwax 2001, p.162). Leaders in Aboriginal education such as Kirkness (1995), Hampton (1995), and Hookiman-Witt (1998), advocate a return to Aboriginal approaches to education, and the creation of

Aboriginal curriculum teaching traditional concepts, values and world view. Hookimaw-Witt observes that education in modern society advances a core set of values and cultural norms that are for the most part Western or Euro-Canadian. Thus, the education system is still assimilating Aboriginal people and undermining their culture. Hookimaw-Witt advances the premise that education within a Native model or paradigm would fulfill the needs of First Nations learners in the modern cultural environment.

While local control over education at the elementary and secondary levels has occurred in the First Nations communities across Canada, Kirkness (1995), is critical of insufficient change in the system, where curriculum follows the mainstream, Native teachers learn to teach like the Euro-Canadian teachers before them, Native languages and Elders themselves are not accorded a fundamental role in the education process. As Cohen states, "The recognition of Indian education as distinctive indicates a legitimate desire of Indian people to be self-defining, to have their ways of life respected, and to teach their children in a manner that enhances consciousness of being Indian," the end result being the removal of oppression and disempowerment, since, "healthy self-identity and self-esteem of individuals are necessary for community to heal itself" (p.141-143).

2.4 ABORIGINAL POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

The history of Aboriginal education is the background fraught with abuse from which Aboriginal Post-secondary Education issues arise. Industrial and residential schools of bygone years did not prepare Aboriginal students to go on to higher education. In order to go beyond grade eight, students had to leave the reserve community and go to urban centres. As well, Federal regulations prior to the 1950's required a Native person who

wanted a post-secondary education to lose their Indian status. Attempts at integrating Native children into mainstream schools beginning in the 1960's, were generally unsuccessful, and there were high drop-out rates when students were confronted by curriculum which ignored them and their culture, described them as 'savages,' or they met with discrimination and low expectations from peers and teachers. In contemporary times, many Native families have moved to urban centres, and Native students are attending urban schools where little is known about their culture and where, "the unexamined practice of schooling contributes to the marginalization of these students" (Tompkins, 2002, p.410). As Tompkins further indicates, in spite of the diversity which now exists throughout the country, most Canadians of the dominant group do not know this diversity, "never intersecting with people who are different from them" (Ibid p.409).

Despite centuries of efforts to assimilate their people, First Nations have retained their resistance and many aspects of their cultural diversity, even though it is not yet understood by the mainstream. First Nations students struggle within the mainstream education system, and until the latter half of the 1980's and the decade of the 1990's, few pursued post-secondary programs. High school completion remains a problem with fewer than 23% of Status Indian people achieving grade twelve (Census 2001). In 1967 approximately 200 First Nations people were attending post-secondary institutions in Canada. This number multiplied by 1990 to 60 000 Native people attending a variety of post-secondary institutions including technical and college programs. However, the completion rate for individuals in university degree programs is reportedly only 36%, and just 3% of Status Indian peoples hold degrees. Currently 50% of the Status Indian population is under the age of twenty-five and this is representative of a growing

population, which based on treaties, has the right to, and is likely to need access into post-secondary institutions to acquire skills and knowledge in order to function in today's world (Cunningham, 2003).

A number of circumstances continue to impact Aboriginal students who seek a university degree. According to Malatest and Associates (2002), "significant barriers exist with respect to Aboriginal participation in post-secondary education," which include a "legacy of distrust in the Aboriginal community of the education system, lack of preparation for university or college at the secondary level, feelings of social discrimination, isolation and loneliness at post-secondary institutions," being hampered by poverty and an inability to meet financial requirements, the lack of cross-cultural respect and understanding, and family obligations and expectations (p.1). This brief summary provides an encapsulated idea of several of the major issues encumbering Aboriginal students wanting to pursue a university education.

Although it is not the purpose of this chapter to focus in depth on the many issues Native students may meet, it is important to acknowledge that racism is also a factor influencing educational success for Aboriginal peoples. "Systemic racism, racist remarks and racist attitudes have a profound affect on academic success" (Minister's National Working Group on Education, 2002, p. 30). In addition, Duran and Duran (1995), point out the long term psychological ramifications of internalized oppression, where despair manifests itself as self-hatred, which expresses itself in Native communities in family dysfunction, high rates of suicide, alcoholism, and domestic violence. These traumas which Duran and Duran liken to intergenerational post-traumatic stress disorders, are active

throughout the Native community and frequently play a role in the lives of many Aboriginal people at all levels of the education system (p.29-31). When the extent of the barriers and socio-economic factors are taken into consideration, the success that Aboriginal students are achieving in post-secondary institutions is commendable and deserves both acknowledgement and celebration.

2.5 ABORIGINAL POST-SECONDARY SUCCESS

A key element in Aboriginal post-secondary success identified in the literature is access. Aboriginal enrolment is increasing in post-secondary programs, however, early school leaving, low grades and lack of completion of grade twelve can prevent students from gaining access to their program of choice.

> Despite increases in the number of Aboriginal students attending post-secondary programs, the issue of access continues to be significant... That many Aboriginal students drop out before grade 12 or go through the system without acquiring skills to pursue post-secondary education are realities that post-secondary institutions need to address. This will mean for example, that upgrading programs are required. Catching up may involve acquiring both academic training and study skills for success in the formal education system (Richardson and Blanchet-Cohen, 2000, p.181).

The Ministers National Working Group on Education (2002), the Royal Commission on Aboriginal People (1996), and the report by Malatest and Associates (2002) concerning post-secondary enrolment rates, all advocate improved access for Aboriginal learners. Access implies adequate government funding resources for the increased numbers of prospective students, but it also includes the initiation of new and the expansion of existing, programs by post-secondary institutions, both on reserve and in the mainstream to increase recruitment, retention and graduation of Aboriginal participants in all disciplines. In access

programs, Aboriginal students are able to prepare for learning in the mainstream. The literature (Richardson and Blanchet-Cohen 2000; Duquette, 2000; Danziger, 1996; Voyageur, 1993), as well as instructor accounts (Coglin & Hanington, 2003; Shuttleworth & Storm, 2003; Soosay, 2003), indicate that students are benefiting from participation in a variety of programs which are currently available at post-secondary institutions in Canada.

The range of access initiatives include the establishment of Aboriginal student admissions policies, quota or designated seat recruitment and enrolment plans, upgrading programs, transition year programs, and outreach or community delivered post-secondary programs. Richardson and Blanchet-Cohen (2000), reviewed three access programs, the first a transition year for Inuit youth called The Nunavut Sivuniksavut Program. The participants in this program learn Inuit history and issues, life skills and academics such as English language and writing skills. The staff provide a constant presence for the students which has encouraged student completion of the program, but "only a handful have gone on to graduate from university" (p.175). Job availability for graduates of the program is good, and the challenge of going on to university away from the north and pursuing academia is unattractive; students have no role models to show them the way. The instructors indicated that the program alone can not make up for, "the inadequacies of the public system" (p.176).

The second review was of the First Nations Partnership Program at University of Victoria which conducts a university access program at Meadow Lake and reports a 60% completion rate. While it was noted that students living in their home community were challenged by trying to balance personal and cultural commitments with academia, family

support appeared to be a factor in completing the program. The third review was of the First Nations House of Learning at University of British Columbia. Rates of completion were not reported, however the University had adopted an admission plan in 1997 to permit Aboriginal students to be admitted with a 67% average and established a recruitment goal of 1 000 students. A future goal for a science access program exists. The First Nations House of Learning reportedly has a comprehensive approach, "to make the University's vast resources more accessible to First Nations" (p.178), and provides support services to students, it is proposing a major in First Nations studies, and the incorporation of First Nations content in curriculum across the disciplines.

Duquette (2000), of the University of Ottawa, reported that in community delivered teacher education access programs the format and location contributed to students completing the teacher training. The retention rate of 58% was disappointing to the facilitators, but reportedly was representative of similar access programs. The University of Manitoba offers a number of access and student support programs in different disciplines, including business education, social work and medicine. The Faculty of Continuing Education offers programs in Aboriginal communities and provides a six months on reserve, six months on campus, transition program. The Aboriginal Business Education Program reports a high degree of success with the tutoring and mentoring of Aboriginal students, and that they have graduated twenty-nine students. Kali Storm (2003), Director of the Aboriginal Student Centre reports that a new credit orientation program on campus for management students which provides study skills training, has had an 85% completion rate, although graduation rates are not yet available.

In Alberta, a wide variety of University College Entrance Programs (UCEP) are offered by mainstream and First Nations post-secondary institutions. Lethbridge Community College has run a certificate program in criminal justice for Native students, which provides academic upgrading in conjunction with career studies rather than requiring upgrading before entrance. Students responded on an evaluation of the program, and it was concluded that the blended program enhanced students' positive attitudes about the program, their experience in the College environment, camaraderie and self-esteem (Vaala, 1998). In First Nations reserve communities in Alberta, such as Siksika, Kainai, Peigan, Tsuu T'ina, and Stoney, tribal Colleges provide upgrading for students. After a lapse of several years, Maskwachees Cultural College on the Four Bands reserve at Hobbema, reinstituted a University College Entrance Program in 2000. The current program focuses on computer skills, upgrading, English language skills, personal life and academic success skills, and an Interdisciplinary Studies course that allows students to plan for further college or university. Garvey Soosay (2003), co-ordinator for the program, indicates that the completion rate for the approximately 30 students in the program is 65%. Of the group that complete the program, 30% have gone on to the University Transfer Program at the College and a further 15% have gone to other post-secondary institutions. The College provides Cree language and Native history within the credit university courses.

The University of Alberta has housed a transition year program since 1985. The University does not fund the program, but does offer quota enrolment in faculties for Aboriginal student applicants completing transition. Cora Voyageur (1993) completed a study of the Transition Year Program at University of Alberta and reported that 67% of the students in transition had completed the program and were pursuing degrees at the

University. Voyageur notes the program was designed to help students acquire skills necessary for competing in the university setting, how to study, do research and manage time, and it provides access to university to students who may otherwise not be admitted (p.117). Voyageur concluded that the program was successful in its aims. The program continues to run, and has been expanded to prepare students for admission to specific faculties by including tutoring in core subjects, as well as personal support. Currently, (Spelliscy, 2003), the program has a 70% completion rate. Of the students going on to the University of Alberta, 50% achieve degrees. As well the program is being offered by Native Student Services from University of Alberta at Grande Prairie Regional College.

In Calgary, the Aboriginal Education Project is housed at Mount Royal College and has provided access programming for a decade. The program combines academic upgrading with Native language, culture and history courses, and students are assessed and then begin upgrading studies at the appropriate level. Students have the chance to go directly on to College programs such as General Studies, and potentially on to university. The program provides student space and lots of personal support to students, and staff respond as needed in order to ease students' transition from dependence to independence. Peer support is also a key aspect of the programming. Completion rates average at 75%. Of those who complete the program, 50% go on to complete a diploma or degree studies (Coglin & Hanington, 2003).

According to Evelyn Moore-Eyman (1990), "The University of Calgary was first in the field of Native education in Alberta, and took the 'support services' approach on the unanimous and insistent advice of the Native Steering Committee" (p.220). In addition to

the support services provided at University of Calgary, a Transition Year Program was run from 1884 to 1990, but this was terminated when Federal government funding lapsed. Further, an Outreach Program offered for almost three decades in Aboriginal communities across Alberta, established the opportunity for students to take up to two years of university before transferring to a main campus. At present, the Outreach Program occurs at Old Sun College on the Siksika reserve, and has had as many as fifty full and part time students enrolled. Both Transition and Outreach programs encourage the development of skills and confidence and engender completion over the long term. Many students take six to ten years to complete a degree. Once students are admitted at University of Calgary, 63% are achieving degrees, despite the present lack of a specific program to assist students with transitions to campus. The student support services which The Native Centre at University of Calgary provides, such as study space, a community lounge, peer support, personal and academic assistance appears to contribute to students' success.

Types of access programming are significant in allowing students to pursue upgrading, personal and life skills, university survival skills and in assisting students to gain admission to college and university programming. Support Services can provide timely encouragement and respond to student needs so that they are able to continue in their studies in the face of adversity. Particular strategies reported in the following discussion, may also have an impact on Aboriginal student education success. Hampton and Roy (2002), conducted a study among Aboriginal students and faculty at University of Regina which is affiliated with First Nations University, formerly Saskatchewan Indian Federated College. The study based on written narratives and four focus groups revealed that facilitating success for Aboriginal students was founded upon the development of a

"positive professor/student relationship, as relationship-based teaching is congruent with the values of many Native communities" (p.9). It was important for students to feel trust in and mutual respect from instructors, and to be engaged in "respectful partnership relations" (p.10). Faculty who were accessible to students, appeared to care, who had an interest in Native culture and participated in Aboriginal cultural events, were regarded as partnering students.

Hampton and Roy (2002), also reported that the cultural relevance of the curriculum content, or use of First Nations content was a method of encouraging student success. Curriculum which included Native perspectives, contemporary issues and opportunities for students to personalize the material were preferred by students (p.14). The inclusion of oral and storytelling sources as legitimate sources of knowledge was advocated. Native students responded favourably to co-operative learning models, such as small group work where the atmosphere was egalitarian, and interpersonal relationships developed as group members completed a project. Opportunities for discussion and real life assignments and a variety of evaluation methods are recommended (p.16). Students reported that the teaching style of instructors had an impact on their success. Professors who created a relaxed environment in the classroom, were open-minded, open to questions and to learning about Aboriginal culture and ideas, and used humour were regarded as effective (p.18-19). Finally the report indicated that it was important that instructors and the institution had an understanding of the journey that Native students were taking, and the barriers that they faced, and the need for a "positive sense of direction"(p. 22).

Collier (1993), reporting on the Kativik transition and the James Bay Nursing Program supports Hampton and Roy's findings. Collier encourages the use of small groups for discussion and assignments, the utilization of humour in the classroom, and taking the time to get to know students who value an interpersonal relationship. Duquette (2000), described elements of an access program for teacher education which included students working closely in relation to a mentor teacher who provided regular feedback, a role model and encouragement. Students in the program were connected via reflective seminar conducted on computer, but also had peers from the program working in the same schools. The encouragement of peers and the program co-ordinator who assisted with problem solving was regarded as valued support.

Duquette recommended that adult students complete secondary schooling before entering the access program, that career aspirations be determined, goals be established, and that students have in place a strong personal support network. In addition, Duquette favours the community based program before students challenge campus, observing that students can build skills, self-discipline, time awareness and management, and that programs should facilitate social connectedness of students. Studies by Huffman (2003), Brown (2003), Danziger (1996), Ryan (1995), Haig-Brown (1995) Archibald et al (1995), support the idea of community based programs, and the need for students to be prepared for the transition to a main campus. Tribal colleges and community programs where students can receive academic and personal counselling, advising on programs, upgrade their skills and embrace their cultural traditions make it more likely that students will persist in their educational path.

Smith-Mohamed (1998), following a study of mentors and role models, concluded that Native students responded to collaboration in learning. Native students identified mentors and role models among instructors, whether Native or Non-Native if they possessed, "qualities typical to role models and [were]… open-minded and willing to become personally involved with students' learning and achievement" (p. 257). This research reflects clearly the contribution that caring and relationship-building instructors can make to the success of Aboriginal students. Goulet's study (2001), indicates that, "part of caring was to have high expectations for the students," to believe in their success, and to convey this to the students. Young (1996), also supports the notion that faculty and staff need to be knowledgeable about the colonization experience of Aboriginal peoples and acknowledge this in the programs and services provided in post-secondary institutions. Young advocates that, "as educators, we need to develop a vision regarding our role in the process," in order to promote a shift in thinking and structure (p. 50). In her view, programs need to include Native history and issues, be holistic in their approach and involve culturally sound methodologies.

Archibald et al (1995), conducted a survey among students attending University of British Columbia. Students identified factors which helped them to succeed. Sources of support were identified including family, friends and student services offered by First Nations agencies. Students reported that the presence of Elders on campus and involvement of First Nations instructors allowed for "a more open educational climate," and Native programs provided a caring and supportive structure (p. 91). Students also spoke highly of their communities of origin.

> It is clear … that the participants' First Nations cultures had a

> major impact on their UBC experiences, virtually all which was positive. The participants' cultures provided the imperative to choose programs, courses, and topics to actively ensure the presence of a First Nations perspective and to demonstrate the nature of First Nations culture and values … [their origins] gave them support, identity, values, determination and commitment … power a number of positive attitudes and cognitive strengths. Being strong with a First Nations culture, then, constituted a major success factor (p.91).

Educational environments where Native students can learn more about themselves and their history, encounter instructors and peers, and build supportive relationships appear to help students connect and prosper in a learning setting. However, Archibald states in the above quotation, the students' culture is a key element in success. Akan (1999), speaks of her own teachings from Saulteaux Elders,

> I have not lost the vision that these Elders had for us. I was inspired by the words of my grandparents before I left the reserve to come to the city to be educated … The vision that the old people had for us native youth was that we would become educated in the 'whiteman's' schools and in turn educate those who educated us, in the mutual cultural trade. These old people knew that the indigenous cultures had something of value that the western cultures needed to know. They believed that First Nations ought to be regarded as part of the solution rather than as part of the problem in education and life (p. 16).

Akan provides an example of Elder discourse and highlights a number of characteristics of Aboriginal education and learning which youth would receive in "good talks" during their upbringing. The first lesson, is understanding that a learned individual exhibits an attitude of being grateful. Elders exhibit this attitude and are respected when their lessons prove to carry values and attitudes that last over time. Secondly, "Perseverance is emphasized as a desirable character trait for success and survival" (p.17). Perseverance and continuity are part of living and the dynamic process of culture. Thirdly, good thinking about who you

are is a learning process that involves and revolves. Fourthly, "good talks" teach the notion of circles of existence, context, development and repetition of ideas, introspection and self-awareness to encourage reflection on learning.

Akan further indicates that Elders teach the sacredness of learning and teaching, since they are representative of hope, articulate ideals and thus create examples to follow. Akan notes that in Elders' lessons, teaching and learning are seen to be inseparable, interactions occur, externally, individually and internally. Teaching has the responsibility for carrying forward knowledge, or the messages of the Ancestors. The oral tradition of many aboriginal communities teaches that "articulating life in words is often a containing and restricting process," and that, "life is always much more than we can see or tell" (p.18). This is reminiscent of gestalt and the notion that the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. However, elders also teach accepting life at "face value" (Ibid).

An integral element in Elder discourse is the concept of the miracle that the earth represents, and that each person has the responsibility of developing and making use of talents or gifts, identifying one's role and fulfilling it and thereby, one must be true to the miracle, and to oneself. The world is alive and life is full of mystery. Stories and ceremonies teach that the Earth must survive in order for people to survive. The spiritual message which Elders teach involves coming to understand the Creator's will for his people, so that and parents establish a good foundation and positive spirits within their children, with the intent of shaping a good sense of morality.

Ultimately, good education is viewed by Elders as "concerned with character formation or development ... involves the making of human beings (p. 20). The individual needs to strive to build a spirit-centred life, endeavouring to find balance within and without. It is important for Indian people to "always be grateful for your Indianness" (p. 31). In contemporary times, the Elder teaches that it is important to balance both kinds of education, "incorporating old knowledge in a modern context" and to take the best of "white teachings" and to benefit from it as a necessary learning in the present day (p. 28). Akan explains that the term in Saulteaux for education reflects the idea of a life-long learning process. In essence the Elder's "good talks" teach people to "walk with care," an understanding that is achieved through, "hard work, perseverance, a firm belief in a teaching, and willingness to give it away" (p. 32).

2.6 CONCLUSION

Education for Aboriginal people is framed by historical events, the complexity of the process of colonization, the desire and struggle for self-determination, and the circumstances of social, political and economic marginalization. Although residential schools are no longer a coercive force for assimilation in First Nations communities, the reality is that in the education system, "Aboriginal students can encounter an ethnocentric curriculum, authoritative relationships, racist attitudes, and prejudicial beliefs about their inferiority or deficits" (Goulet, 2001). Adult Aboriginal students in post-secondary can encounter similar challenges and obstacles. While the range of barriers to post-secondary participation is numerous, increasingly, Aboriginal students despite the systemic barriers, are finding ways of achieving success.

The literature reviewed in this chapter indicates that contributors to success can include community based programs and access programs such as University College Preparation and Transition Programs. In addition to programs, it appears that the teaching environment, the development of collaborative learning partnerships or inter-relationships with instructors as reported in a few studies, can positively influence success. Other elements which can bolster students are the support of peers and of family, or caring teachers. Assistance in the form of academic advising, financial aid and cultural support in the form of Elders and opportunities for participation in ceremonies and events is regarded as significant in helping students to succeed. As well, the literature (Goulet, 2001; Young, 1996; Archibald et al, 1995) supports the notion that knowledge of cultural origins may contribute to students' experience of success, as can the inclusion of content in the curriculum that is relevant to Aboriginal language, issues, and culture. Finally, Akan (1999), posits that the teachings of Elders and conscientious parents passed on to listening young people in the nature of "good talks," may equip and inspire First Nations post-secondary students with the critical life lessons needed in order for them to achieve success in their educational endeavours. Further research regarding the current influence of cultural teachings about the value of achieving success in learning would be an asset in understanding the dynamics in the education process for Aboriginal university students.

While contemporary research reflects that Aboriginal students are finding some success in post-secondary, the National completion rate of 36% is disappointingly low. The rate of completion of Aboriginal students attending University of Calgary who self-identify to The Native Centre, is somewhat better when assessed over the long term of a decade (63%). However, elements other than the length of time involved to complete a

degree may be influencing the success of Native students attending the University. Previous studies concerning Aboriginal student success which were discussed in this chapter, do not explore the motivations or purpose of Aboriginal students who enrol in post-secondary institutions. Little exploration has been done into what Aboriginal students are experiencing and learning formally and informally in mainstream institutions and programs, where Native studies degree programs do not exist. The studies reviewed and cited in the foregoing discussion, do not report how successful students regard success, or explore their experience of success in academia. As well, the cited studies give no understanding of the impact of success in university, upon Aboriginal graduates. It is intended that this study will help to address these issues related to Aboriginal student success, by sounding the stories of graduates about their university experience and its impact. In order to learn from graduates about their experience of success, it is essential that elements such as voice, oral traditions, Aboriginal world view and ways of knowing guide the research process. The contributions of these elements to the design and development of the study are described and discussed further in Chapter Three.

3.0 CHAPTER THREE: SOUNDING THE PROCESS: METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Telling stories as a way of knowing is a strategy embodied in Aboriginal culture, while oral accounts are also a valid method of historical documentation in contemporary social history. This study is conceived of as a qualitative work, which presents a personal historical narrative in addition to the exploration of the stories of Aboriginal graduates of University of Calgary about their university experience, and their achieved success. The personal narrative presented in this work documents the participatory action research of my key experiences and learning among Aboriginal students in post-secondary education. In the introductory chapter of this thesis, Aboriginal voice was identified as needed in Canadian society and discourse, and in discussion concerning Aboriginal education. On the topic of post-secondary educational success, this researcher regards Aboriginal graduates as a critical source of information concerning their own success. It is vital that those who have graduated from university despite numerous challenges, voice their experience. Story telling is consistent with the ways of knowing in Aboriginal culture and gives voice to a segment of Canadian society who for over a century have been an oppressed people. The stories of graduates may contain an emotive depth as well as a wealth of knowledge about the university experience that cannot be discovered through other types of research. The discussion in the present chapter focuses on narrative history and alternative ways of knowing as they apply to my personal narrative and the stories of the graduates. The design, implementation of the study, collection of graduates' stories,

emergent themes, and the conceptual framework of the medicine wheel in which the stories are explored are further detailed in this chapter.

3.2 WAYS OF KNOWING

While the storytelling approach is respectful of Aboriginal culture, it is consistent also with the historians' craft. Seeking out and listening to the stories of people involved in events is regarded as oral history within the Euro-Canadian scholarly tradition. According to historian Paul Thompson, "In fact, oral history is as old as history itself. It was the first kind of history" (p.25). Thompson and fellow historian Ritchie both note that oral history has been occurring for over three thousand years, from the scribes of the Zhou dynasty in China, to Thucydides of ancient Greece, to Voltaire and Samuel Johnson, until the later half of the twentieth century when the use of oral history re-emerged after a period when historians had rejected the use of oral sources in favour of written records (Ritchie, p. 2-3).

John Lukacs,in his discussion of history as the remembered past, points to an evolution in historical thinking over time to the present day, "from the recognition of objective knowledge to that of subjective knowledge to that of personal participant knowledge" (p.xlii). Thompson as well notes that, "The method of oral history is also used by many scholars, especially sociologists, and anthropologists, who do not think of themselves as oral historians"(p. 82). Thus, oral history is a method of study which spans the social science disciplines since it has demonstrated value and merit in creating oral evidence which may reveal significant dimensions of understanding.

In response to criticism or doubt of oral history as a method, or regarding questions

about the reliability of oral history, Ritchie asserts that, "Oral history is as reliable or unreliable as other research sources" (p. 6). As well, he observes that oral history establishes an opportunity for interviewees to discuss topics that they "might never have thought of discussing otherwise." (p.7) Yet another strength of oral history identified by Ritchie is that it contributes a greater subjective element in the evidence about what has occurred, it has the potential to provide insight about not just what people did, "…but what they wanted to do, what they believed they were doing, and what they now think they did," from which meaning can be constructed (p.7). The interviewer who subsequently does the analysis endeavours to construct that meaning, must be aware of the potential for letting their own cultural perspectives and assumptions intrude (p. 9). Awareness of my own perspectives as the interviewer, was enhanced by the development of my personal narrative in which I describe and explore my experience and understanding of the perspectives and ideas from Aboriginal culture with which I am familiar. Oral history is a dynamic of the story of the narrator, who may be describing and "constantly interpreting" their own actions as remembered and the interviewer who wishes to explore and understand the substance of the story (p. 9).

Lukacs in discussing the subjective nature of history and oral history particularly, observes that history is more than science, " the very purpose of historical knowledge is not so much accuracy as a certain kind of understanding: historical knowledge is the knowledge of human beings about other human beings, and this is different from the knowledge which human beings possess of their environment" (p. 7). History permits exploration of human activity beyond that objective observation which is so central to the scientific quantitative research model. Lukacs also states that because history concerns human beings, it deals primarily, "with what is unique and exceptional" (p. 7). The

narrations of lived experience of Aboriginal university graduates may in many respects be unique on an individual basis, but the graduates are also exceptional individually and within their community, in that until so recently, there were relatively few graduates. By listening to the stories of Aboriginal university graduates it is possible to gain historical knowledge and greater understanding which contributes to teaching practice. An historical viewpoint gained through oral history and the subjective stories of Native students is both fundamental and essential evidence in documenting in order to sound out and understand the human experience of university success.

Sherna et al also reflect on subjectivity in oral history and note that it, "involves at least two subjectivities, that of the narrator and that of the interviewer" (p. 2). While it is paramount that the voice of Aboriginal graduates be the focus of the study, it is also critical that this researcher be mindful of my cultural context, and aware of my own story/history, my own knowledge, perspectives and perceptions, which I bring with me into this study. The relating of my learning in the Aboriginal student community allows me to demonstrate my familiarity with and knowledge of the subject, and enhances reflection on my connections in the community. It will be important to be cognisant of my thoughts and feelings, how I might choose to evaluate information in the stories and to interpret meaning. So that my own cultural context not intrude, to an extent that will falsely colour the findings of the study, it will be crucial in attending to the storytellers to encourage their reflections and to clarify their meanings so that the identification of themes which is effected, is faithful to the narrators' intent.

Further, in order to be faithful to the narrator's intent, Kathryn Anderson and Dana Jack indicate that the task for the interviewer is to listen for how, "expression goes beyond prevailing concepts," in order to permit the interviewee to tell their story and "to reveal experience in a less culturally edited form" (Sherna et al, p. 24-25). Providing a contemporary forum for Native students to tell their stories allows them to comprehensively detail their experience in their cultural context, while the interviewer adjures preconceptions and seeks to listen for the participants' first hand explanation and new information. Oral history interviews allow narrators to feel "more free to explore complex and conflicting experience in their lives," and can be very freeing, allowing both subjectivities, interviewer and narrator, to go beyond conventional understandings. Important to this research completed in 2003, which deals with matters relevant to Aboriginal people in Canada, is the observation made by Sherna that the opportunity exists as well in oral history for "recovering the voices of suppressed groups" (p. 9).

Liebliech et al (1998), acknowledge narrative as a mode of cognition and note that, "People are storytellers by nature. Stories provide coherence and continuity to one's experience and have a central role in our communication with others." In the social science view of narrative inquiry, stories provide: "One of the clearest channels for learning about the inner world … through verbal accounts and stories presented by individual narrators about their lives and their experienced reality" (p.7). Story as a focus for research also permits the generation of meaning and an understanding of the culture and social world of the story-teller. Each narrative is unique in the details and emphasis and choice of events to be narrated. This uniqueness can produce rich data which can be interpreted in

light of subject related knowledge and information possessed by the interviewer. As Lieblich observes about this interaction, "In the process of such a study, the listener or reader of a life story enters into an interactive process with the narrative and becomes sensitive to its narrator's voice and meanings" and interpretation relies on "the personal wisdom, skills, and integrity of the researcher," since it is an intuitive activity which "requires justification… self-awareness and self-discipline" (p.8). Narrative inquiry can achieve new insights and clarification of connections, it can more completely convey experience and the impact on an individual, add to our understanding of an individual's subjective recollection of experience and their social, cultural and historical reality, and it has the capacity of enhancing empathy by shedding light on perceived causes, conditions or happenings and their pertinent relationships, in addition to increasing the emotional enrichment gained from hearing or reading compelling narratives (p.172).

As noted by Joan Archibald, Director of First Nations House of Learning at University of British Columbia, story is consistent with Aboriginal ways of knowing, and "stories engage us as listeners and learners to think deeply and to reflect … the engagement of story, storyteller, and listener" creates, "a synergy for making meaning through the story and making one *work* to obtain meaning and understanding" (p.1). In her book Decolonizing Methodologies, Linda Tuhiwai Smith identifies story as integral to all of Indigenous research, characterizing story as powerful and a viable method of connecting the past and the future, representing both diversity and truth, it is egalitarian in allowing some measure of control for both story-teller and listener/researcher, and promotes the sharing of "understandings and histories" (p.145). Smith also describes a variety of projects consistent with Indigenous research whose goals she asserts, must contribute to the

survival and struggle for self-determination of Indigenous communities the world over. According to Smith some highlights of the functions of Indigenous research including story-telling are celebrating survival, remembering, connecting, envisioning, restoring, creating, discovering and sharing (p.144-160). The narration of stories concerning the experience of university by Native graduates who are engaged in reflecting on their success has the potential to address many of these characteristics integral to Indigenous research which seeks to give voice to colonized peoples who have previously had their humanity denied. The voices of First Nations peoples in Canada have indeed been suppressed by the mainstream, and the voices of Aboriginal peoples have not yet been fully recovered. It is fundamental to this study that Aboriginal university graduates voices be heard, and that the experience of success be revealed as potentially empowering to future First Nations post-secondary students. The voices and stories of Aboriginal graduates are presented in Chapter Six of this study. My narrative set out in Chapters Four and Five, connects my own experience with that of First Nations students. Together, the graduates' narratives and my own, connect with the functions of Indigenous research as described by Smith, by telling about remembrances, celebrating the survival of Aboriginal peoples and envisioning change.

3.3 SELECTION OF PARTICIPANTS

Participants in the study were selected on the basis of their ability to contribute to an understanding of the lived experience of Aboriginal students which lead to success while they were attending University of Calgary. Therefore, participants selected were Aboriginal graduates of the University of Calgary. As well, participants needed to be individuals willing to share their stories and contemplate their past 'lives' and experiences,

and by their involvement in the study potentially benefit future native students. Aboriginal graduates of the University of Calgary who frequently came to study or to seek assistance at The Native Centre while they were undergraduates, and who had demonstrated involvement and a willingness to support their peers, were invited to participate in the study. All participants were known by this researcher because they had utilized the services of The Native Centre. As well, all were on record with The Native Centre as Aboriginal graduates. The Centre maintains a public list of graduates which is given a high public profile, so that new students and visitors to the Centre can observe and be motivated by the names of family, community members and friends, who have graduated from the University of Calgary. In order to capture both quality and depth in the stories, the number of participants was intended to be limited. Twelve Aboriginal graduates from a variety of degree programs were asked to participate, as were male and female graduates. The participants were also drawn from urban and reserve backgrounds, since it was possible their stories may express either similarities or differences in experience of success at university.

Graduates invited to participate in the study were individuals who had maintained a relationship with The Native Centre after graduation (1992-2002). While they were undergraduates the participants were often in The Native Centre, and since graduation they had maintained or renewed contact whether by making periodic calls to inquire about graduate school, speaking at the September orientation for new students, 'stopping in' for a visit when in Calgary or near the University, bringing relatives or friends who were considering post-secondary to The Native Centre for guidance or assistance. The participants were familiar with the staff, students and operations of The Native Centre. In

the process of locating participants for the study, I initiated contact by telephone or in person, over a period of four months, with twelve Native students who had graduated from the University of Calgary, but had been in contact with the staff within the last three years for one of the reasons described in this paragraph.

Participants were initially contacted informally, which is appropriate in the Native student community, so that I could inform them of the Masters research, and ask if they would be interested in participating in the study. Each graduate was then sent a letter previously given ethics approval, which provided a further description of the study. The letter was followed-up with another personal phone call to confirm the graduate's willingness to participate, and to set up interview dates and times. In a few instances subsequent contacts were made either by the participant or myself, if it was necessary to adjust arrangements. All twelve graduates contacted indicated a desire to participate, but it was not always possible to find a mutually agreeable date and time. A total of nine interviews were arranged and conducted. The participants all expressed a strong interest and willingness to participate in an interview. One participant even made a special trip to Calgary from a considerable distance, in order to be interviewed, although I had indicated that we could meet at their location so that the time taken for an interview would not overly interrupt their work week schedule.

In preparation for the interviews, graduates were asked to reflect upon how they initiated their post-secondary education, to remember stories of their life as students at the University of Calgary, to consider what subjects and events were the most meaningful experiences for them, and what were the contributors leading to their success. Many

Aboriginal students when they initiate their University careers and first contact The Native Centre, indicate that they are motivated to pursue their education by a desire to assist their own people, or the Aboriginal community in general. Participation in this study was regarded by many as one way of doing just that - giving back to the Aboriginal student community of The Native Centre. Consequently, participation in this study contributed to the community interests of Aboriginal graduates, as well as the goal of The Native Centre to support the success of Native students. The willingness to participate also reflected the relationship graduates felt existed with the staff and students of The Native Centre, and was an opportunity to engage in reciprocity by assisting those who helped them in their studies.

3.4 PROCEDURE

In the interview, the participants were invited to share personal stories about their University of Calgary experience and University success. Each participant was given a consent form approved by the Faculty of Graduate Studies which detailed their rights and the purpose of the research (Appendix B). The consent form explained that there was no reason to anticipate risk to participants who were recalling past events of their experience and University success. In accordance with ethical considerations, participants were invited to share the stories they felt comfortable telling about. Participation in the interview was not intended to cause narrators concerns beyond what they may encounter in their regular lives. However, in the event that distress occurred, participants were to be assisted in accessing appropriate support services (such as University Counselling or an Elder). As well, participants were informed that they could ask questions, stop the interview at any time, or withdraw from the study. Participants were fully informed of how their stories were to be used, and were provided with a transcribed copy of the interview to review in

order to ensure accuracy and agreement with the information recorded. Follow-up calls were made to the participants so that they could make additions to the interview if they wished, and most of the participants contributed briefly on points of clarification regarding the transcription.

Since the nine participants were individuals who had accessed the services of The Native Centre, the researcher and participants were known to each other, and a rapport previously existed with the interviewer. Preliminary contact by phone before the interviews helped to re-establish a positive relationship. Interviews were set up at a mutually agreeable time to take place either in the researcher's office or in a space the participant identified as preferable. Story-telling interviews were intended to take one hour, but participants were encouraged to take the time they needed to share their experiences, which could provide the greatest understanding of their success at university. Interviews took between one hour and one and a half hours. Demographic information concerning gender, age, location of upbringing and previous education was collected; however, the focus of the interviews was the telling of the stories of the nine participants in their own words. Each participant was invited to choose their own pseudonym, to protect their identity. The interviewer had prepared an interview schedule (Appendix C), to act as a focus for the stories of the graduates and to prompt recollections not immediately forthcoming. During the interviews, the graduates welcomed the questions, rather than speaking extemporaneously, but as stories began to be told, there were times when it was unnecessary to ask all of the questions, since graduates volunteered many of the details of their experience with little prompting. The questions generally fell into the categories identified above concerning preparation for university, challenges, meaningful events or

experiences, how success was achieved and how were they affected by their success. Discussion during follow-up calls to clarify transcriptions also allowed participants to address how success may interact with individual wellbeing, and whether the issue of assimilation was a concern for participants.

3.5 TREATMENT AND ANNALYSIS OF STORIES

The stories told by Aboriginal University graduates were audio taped and then transcribed. Confidentiality of narrators was protected and their names known only to the researcher. Narrators are not referred to by name in the study, but by their chosen pseudonym only (see Chapter Six).

The stories shared in the interviews were explored by the researcher, to identify broad emergent themes. This process involved, immersion, multiple and thorough reading of the text of the stories to search and sound out previously unknown or unconnected themes revealed in the gathered material. The themes were then reflected upon. As Belenky (1986), observes,

> In order for reflection to occur, the oral and written forms of Language must pass back and forth between persons who both speak and listen or read and write – sharing, expanding, and reflecting on each other's experiences. Such interchanges lead to ways of knowing that enable individuals to enter into the social and intellectual life of their community. (Belenky et al, p. 25).

From reflection on the themes it was possible to ascertain the essence of the experiences of Aboriginal students attending and successfully graduating at the University of Calgary and to interpret them for a meaningful and better understanding. The expression of experience in story format provides insights, which may be useful to the development and implementation of policy and contribute to the provision of programs and services for

Aboriginal students in University, in order that the opportunities for experiencing success be enhanced.

An analysis of the stories was undertaken. It became increasingly apparent that in order to treat the stories in an authentic manner, interpretation of the material should reflect an Aboriginal paradigm. Several contemporary members of academe, both Native and Non-Native utilize or make reference to the medicine wheel when they explore issues relevant to Aboriginal education (Cohen, 2001; Hampton, 1995; Calliou, 1995; Friesen, 1995; Nabigon, 1995; English, 1996; Young, 1996; Smith, 1999). As I read and re-read graduates' stories, a point of learning I was given years ago, by a student echoed and resounded. As the student and I planned and prepared a package of information for a joint conference presentation, the student remarked that, "When you talk about us, you need to talk about the medicine wheel" (Personal Conversation, 1995).

The medicine wheel paradigm is essential and critical to the world view of Western Plains peoples and may be encountered in the expressions of other First Nations and Indigenous cultures. In many Plains cultures the medicine wheel is considered an integral and a sacred philosophic process of being, thought, action and spirituality. The wheel or circle represents the life cycle or may be employed to depict a tremendous range of ideas and relationships. Cohen likens the wheel to a network or web which involves "the expression of Indigenous thought and experience" (p.141). Friesen (1995), notes that, "... variations in interpreting the purpose and function of the medicine wheel abound, its use as philosophical model is commonplace among northwestern Plains Indian tribes ..." (p.118). Hampton describes the medicine wheel as a model or pattern for organizing themes and as

a matrix for ideas (p.16). Nabigon identifies the utility of the medicine wheel as a model for healing in the Native community, while both Calliou and English describe the efficacy of the medicine wheel as a pedagogical model. Young also asserts that the appropriate research model for use among Native students is the medicine wheel.

Cohen utilizes a web format, while Hampton employed a six point pattern to illustrate themes, still other models appear in the work of theorists and pedagogues as a circle or a central circle surrounded by one or even a series of circles. The medicine wheel traditionally presents ideas relating to the circularity of nature and of relationships and interactions. The notion of four as a cosmic or universal number is entailed in the medicine wheel for example in the four directions, the four seasons, the four races of man, the four ages (child, adolescent, adult, old age), the four elements (earth, fire, water, air). As Calliou describes it, "various cultural communities associate different aspects of their humanness, seasons, colours, animals, plants and minerals," with the wheel so that it may resemble a, "compass for human understanding" (p. 51). Implicit in the medicine wheel are interactions, relationships, and connectedness. The medicine wheel is a, "circle of harmony and courage which symbolizes the integration of physical, mental, spiritual, and cultural aspects of living," and also symbolizes the "continuity and connectedness of events with the added dynamics of movement" (Ibid).

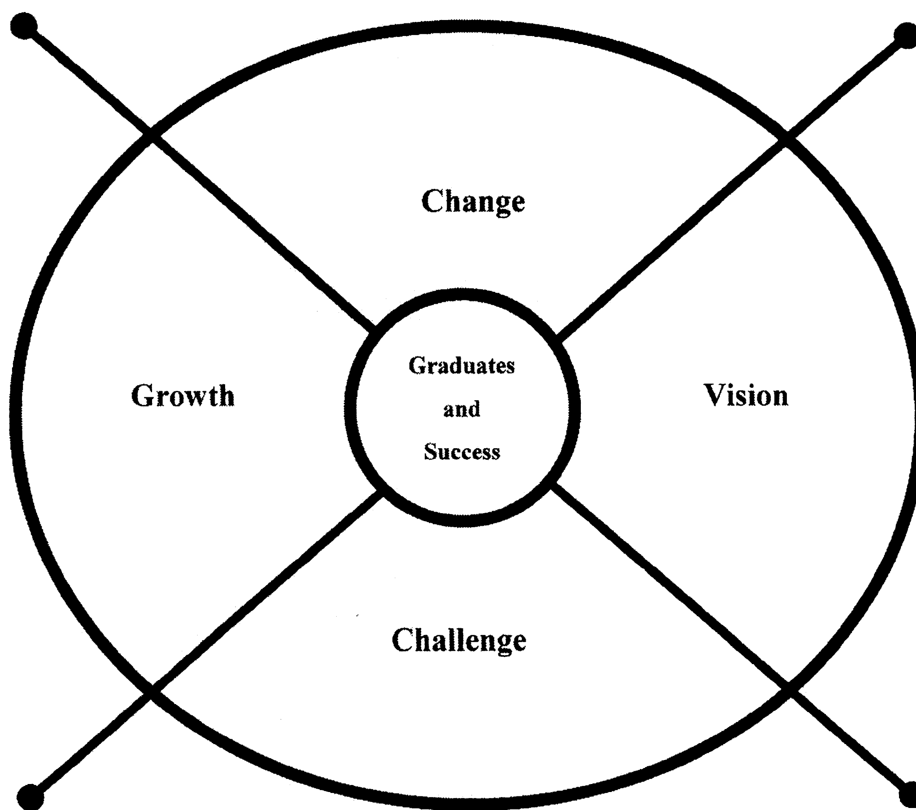
Additionally, as a teaching tool or research model each of the four directions typically seen on a medicine wheel, is usually ascribed with certain values, qualities and attributes, or capacities other than the traditional seasons, signs, and symbols. Each of these ascriptions may be placed at one of the four directions, which may be described as

quadrants, spokes, doors or "corners" of the wheel. Discussion of the wheel generally begins in the eastern direction; however, the aspects of a wheel are not seen as being isolated, but as part of the whole and interacting in a constant and dynamic process within the wheel.

Discussion of the wheel customarily begins in the east since it is regarded as the place of new beginnings, the dawn of a new day, and symbolic of spring, identity, and spiritual energy. Following the path of the sun from the east to the south, this direction of the wheel represents summer, the earth, power, freedom, respect, feelings or emotional energy. In the west is found the autumn, host to introspection, relentlessness, education, action and physical energy. In the north resides winter, wisdom, culture, vitality, thought and cognitive energy. These examples of directional characteristics were identified by Calliou (1995), Hampton (1995), and Friesen (1995) and demonstrate the breadth and quality of the constructs which may be attached to the medicine wheel to make it a functional model.

As the themes such as vision and change, emerged from the reading of the stories, it became increasingly apparent that the process the graduates had experienced could be best conceptualized and portrayed within a medicine wheel model. After considerable reflection a medicine wheel model was devised by the writer which depicts the graduates and success resting at the centre, or heart of the wheel. In the east representing new beginnings, is found vision. In the south there is challenge, and the west embodies growth, while the northern direction signifies change (See Figure 1). In light of this model which is explained further in Chapter Six, the stories of University graduates were sounded, studied and interpreted.

Figure 1. Medicine Wheel Model For Success



3.6 CONCLUSION

The research methodology involved oral and narrative traditions, and ways of knowing which are consistent with the story telling practices utilized in Aboriginal culture, and oral history research. An oral and narrative approach provides the opportunity for the voices of Aboriginal university graduates to tell about their experience and their success. The stories of graduates were audio-taped. The researcher then closely read and studied the stories in order to identify emergent themes. Telling my own story provides the opportunity for reciprocity and for reflection upon what I have learned during multiple years of teaching in the Aboriginal student community. My narrative (presented in Chapters Four & Five), establishes the context from which the study developed, and the perspective from which I proceeded to analyze and interpret the stories of First Nations University graduates. A medicine wheel model was adopted as the most culturally sensitive approach and was utilized in the process of analysis and interpretation. The medicine wheel contributes to a culturally integrative discussion of pertinent themes enhancing, “teaching, learning, contemplating, and understanding our human journey” (Calliou, p. 51).

Peter Wesley was quoted in Chapter One regarding his observation that storytelling in the Native tradition may be rambling and potentially may not contain a specific ending. The personal story of my experience, does not yet have a conclusion, since I am still teaching in the Aboriginal student community. In my story I relate my knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal people and their culture. In developing this narrative, I have endeavoured to explore what I have observed as a younger person, been involved in pertinent to Native people, and learned latterly over the almost twenty years I have spent

teaching Native students in their home community and at The Native Centre. The narrative organized into two parts, is an excursion not only into my experience, but what I have witnessed of the Native community in Southern Ontario and Alberta, as well as chronicling educational programming, issues for Aboriginal students in university, and current increases in student enrolment, success and graduation. It is my intent that the narrative in the next two chapters is expressive of sharing, inter-connectedness and consistency with Aboriginal methodology.

4.0 CHAPTER 4: SOUNDINGS FROM THE PAST: PERSONAL NARRATIVE: PART I

4.1 NOW AND BACK THEN

"Why do you do this?" The question was posed to me abruptly in the midst of another conversation. Since the interrogatory came from a student at a point when we were discussing university course matters that were challenging the student, I was startled by the change of topic and wondered what had prompted the abrupt non-sequitur.

The student, who I'll refer to by pseudonym as Dan, and I were talking informally in the lounge of The Native Centre, but a number of distressing issues were surfacing. The question Dan asked, unrelated to any for-going conversation, gave me pause and caused me to consider whether Dan was trying to distract discussion away from the subject of his current academic struggles. I wondered, whether Dan felt threatened or intimidated by our discussion of problems he was encountering, or whether perhaps he was angry at a relative stranger intruding into his situation. Since Dan was an adult student accustomed to handling the day to day and coping with work-day expectations without the involvement of either close supervision or advisors, the well intended advice I was offering, may have been regarded as hugely unwelcome trespass.

Dan's question, I considered, may have been prompted by feelings of conflict concerning the wisdom of taking the risk as an adult and returning to school. The question may also have reflected frustration at the number and range of challenges Dan was encountering in his return to school, and a desire to talk about anything other than the

current issues. I wondered as well, whether Dan's question was an expression of anger at someone from mainstream culture and Non-Native, who was witness to the frustration engendered by his university trials.

As a person of Non-Native heritage, I have worked in the post-secondary Aboriginal student community since 1984. For the last twelve years, since 1991, I have been Co-ordinator for Aboriginal Students in The Native Centre at the University of Calgary. My experience has shown me that Aboriginal students in the university context, many of whom are adults over twenty-one, confront numerous challenges and frequently battle with frustration. My experience, in addition, has shown me that many Aboriginal students encounter Non-Native teachers warily and with an absence of trust. I have also come to understand that this lack of trust has been learned.

Working in The Native Centre, I have observed that despite struggles and challenges, and despite in many instances a strong distrust for mainstream Euro-Canadian culture and people, an increasing number of Aboriginal students are creating success for themselves at the University. Significant change is occurring for Aboriginal people who decide to pursue a post-secondary education. A decade ago the number of students who went on to graduate each year at University of Calgary was still small, but in recent years that number has more than tripled. As Co-ordinator in The Native Centre, I have viewed this phenomenon with excitement and pleasure. It is extremely good to see so much success occurring for individuals who have shared with me many of the painful issues, personal traumas, and daunting circumstances that encumber them, and which are part of daily life for Aboriginal people in Canada. For those Aboriginal people who seek a

university education, life can become complicated many times over by the taking on of the challenges of a post-secondary education. Developing a more thorough understanding of the experience of Aboriginal students, as well as acquiring a tremendous appreciation for the success Native students are achieving in University are some of the rewards for me along the pathway of my own journey, while working in a First Nations College on reserve and in The Native Centre.

In many respects, my present journey began back in 1984 when as a graduate student I was assigned to work with Professor Evelyn Moore-Eyman, a very dynamic educator who was Co-ordinator in The Native Centre. At that time, The Native Centre resided on the fourteenth floor of the Faculty of Education accessible only by the stairs from the lower floors. Professor Moore-Eyman was an instructor of Social Studies Education and Education Curriculum, as well as the Co-ordinator of The Native Centre. In her role as Co-ordinator, Professor Moore-Eyman was dedicated, determined, and purposeful. In her position as my graduate Supervisor, she involved me in the Centre, acting as a tutor in the newly instituted Transition Year Program. During that year, I tutored two groups of 12-13 Native students who had come from across Western Canada to participate in the program, although the majority were from Alberta. The majority of the students were non-matriculated adult students, but there was a tremendous range of English language abilities. I recall that only two or three had a senior high school capacity in English; most had elementary school at best, and one or two had almost primary English language skills. I tutored these students in History and English and worked with other instructors to assist with skill development in note-taking, reading, vocabulary development, studying and writing.

In the first semester I was delighted that all the students passed their History course, and in the second, the majority passed their university English course. However, some of the students subsequently failed English or one other university course and so, could not continue at the university. A number passed everything, but life issues, unhappiness in the city or for other personal reasons chose not to go further at University of Calgary after the first experience. No documents exist in The Native Centre now of that first transition year. But, some eighteen years later, a few of the students I believed to be most able have still not completed post-secondary programs. Occasionally, I encounter one of these students and we reminisce about 'Transition,' and I try to talk them into returning to university – so far, without success. Of that initial Transition Year group from the 1984/85 academic year, only a handful went on to complete their degrees at University of Calgary, while at least two that I am aware of completed degrees at other universities in Alberta.

Yet, at the end of April in 1985, the immediate outcomes and impressions of that first year for students in Transition were most positive. The majority of these students with so many educational deficits and challenges had accomplished so much! Students, such as Howard who was forty years of age, or Vera who was thirty, had not finished elementary school, but had taken and passed one or more university courses, their vocabulary now included large numbers of sophisticated English words, and although they had perhaps never written more than a page or two in their lives previous to the transition experience, had now learned to write a research paper of ten pages or more. Students who began the year visibly trembling at the idea of writing tests and exams had found new knowledge, developed skills and a greater confidence in their abilities. It was an amazing teaching

experience that I enjoyed greatly! But, I little anticipated it would be the start and the continued focus for me of what is now nearly twenty more years of teaching endeavours.

Prior to becoming a tutor of History and English for Native students in the Transition Year Program, my experience with Native peoples was not extensive, nor had I established a definite or determined goal to teach in a Native community. However, quite possibly, somewhere in my youth an interest in Native peoples had been sparked. I grew up a child of the 1950's, in a village, Sutton West in Southern Ontario, which was situated on a quiet river that fed a mile away, into Lake Simcoe, a substantial body of water not quite large enough to be counted as a Great Lake. The community was predominately Euro-Canadian where differences in heritage were few, and largely related to religion. Local history during my school years, featured the "founding families," the Bouchers, Chappelles, Andersons, Glosters, and Sibbalds.

Although they were fifth generation Canadian, my own parents were later arrivals in the village of Sutton - new people, since they came only after World War II. Our heritage was English on my mother's line and Irish/Scots on my father's side of the family. My father was a teacher which was a profession that enjoyed little remuneration and moderate status at the time. However, the Sibbalds had considerable status and were important in the history of the local community for their 'gentrified' English origins which dominated the social scene. The prestigious Sibbalds were acquaintances of Governor Simcoe when he came to Ontario in the early 1800's. The Simcoe connection is still given proud attention, since the family commissioned a gift of a stained glass window sent to grace the Anglican Church, St Georges, established on the Sibbald's estate. The Sibbald

home became a museum where the family's English way of life is preserved for visitors, including records of significant family connections such as the relationship to Sir Edmond Hilary of Mount Everest fame, and displays reflect developments in the surrounding primarily English community.

Also important in local history, Canadian author and humourist Stephen Leacock, grew up in Sutton, and novelist Mazo de la Roche summered in the area. Both are buried in the Anglican cemetery at St. George's. The Church is a picturesque stone structure ensconced solidly on a lofty bluff above the shore of Lake Simcoe. On many occasions during my childhood, my family made pilgrimages to this verdant portion of parkland, on outings to visit the church or museum, or to walk along the shore. From this point on the lake it was possible also, to see at a distance across the water the big island, the main island in the group of islands which composes the Georgina Island Indian Reserve.

The presence of the Reserve on the island was in many ways an analogy for the relations that existed between the people of the mainland and the "Indians" of the isolated spot of land out in the lake. The majority of the area's Ojibwa people lived on Georgina Island, while a few families lived on smaller islands, and a very small number lived on the mainland. During my childhood years in the area, there was very limited interaction between the two communities, and no concept of a shared history – or a shared present. Native people were not an acknowledged part of local history by Euro-Canadians, nor were they viewed as involved in society like everyone else. The occasional presence of Indian people in town created uneasiness – certainly for Euro-Canadians, many of whom assuredly tried to make things uneasy for Native peoples.

For Native people from the island, venturing into the Euro-Canadian community that was Sutton, was entering foreign and unfriendly territory. And yet, they had no choice. In order to shop, Native people had to come across the lake, catch a bus and come to the nearest centre of any size, which was Sutton. I recall that as a child, I heard town's people make jokes and loudly ridicule the "Indians," who were simply going about their business, and shopping completed, waiting on a public street corner for the next bus to take them back to the vicinity of the lake, and thence back to the safety of the Island. I recall that as a young person, I found this ridiculing of Native people by town's people disturbing, and reported what I had seen and heard to my parents, who indicated that the town's people in question were behaving very badly, and were showing both ignorance and unkindness because the Indians were different. I do not recall a specific mention of prejudice or discrimination, but in hindsight, that was certainly what was occurring, and was typical of the prevailing attitudes in Euro-Canadian society about people of different culture and heritage.

Interactions between the Native community and the Sutton community were not generally fostered. Only once in my childhood did a group of townspeople that included my family visit the island. Sadly, the occasion was a funeral. Several Royal Canadian Mounted Police had perished, drowned while crossing the lake. The funeral was to be held in the church on the island. Many townspeople made the trip by ferry to the island on a hot summer day, and then walked the dusty mile or so to the church along a sandy roadway which wound past many Native homes. Although the village of Sutton and other neighbouring communities were by no means affluent, I have memories as a child (I was

perhaps nine or ten), of being shocked at the evident poverty of the homes and families we passed as we crossed the island to the funeral. For the Ojibwa people, it must have felt extremely threatening to have a hundred or so white strangers suddenly appear in their community.

The children living on the Island attended school there until they reached grade eight. At that time, they then had to come to the mainland to go to school. Since the lake was unpredictable and dangerous especially in the fall and winter months, the children had to board in Sutton with families that had space available. It must have been terribly difficult to live among strangers, knowing that family was not far, but being unable to see parents and siblings, making trips home only for a few weekends when the lake was frozen over and the ice was safe to cross. While I was in grade eight and nine and throughout high school there were only a few Native children. My recollection is that for the most part, the Native students were very quiet, sat closely together if possible, had little interaction with the rest of the students, and generally showed little interest or did not do well in school. For these students, trying to achieve an education meant having to cope with loneliness, time away from family and friends and having to brave the perils of Lake Simcoe, unpredictable wind and waves, treacherous storms, freeze-up and thaw. The situation I am writing about took place many years ago, however, in only the last decade the Ojibwa people lost both a teacher and a doctor from the community, in tragic circumstances on the lake.

The majority of the Ojibwa students were not in the academic stream in high school, nor in the decade of the 1960's, did many complete high school. Fortunately, there

were one or two families whose children seemed to fare better. There was one family, the Michaels (a pseudonym), with four sons that lived on one of the smaller islands and the boys had attended rural schools on the mainland since grade one. I was in high school with the third eldest of the sons. He was well liked by his classmates, although there were still occasional jokes about Indians, he did not seem disturbed by them. He and his brothers were popular students and often involved in school life, in drama productions (eg. Shakespearian plays), and on the football team. All the Michael brothers went on to some post-secondary education and to realize successful careers. But, they were definite exceptions in the decades of the 1960's – 70's. At the time, of course, how exceptional they were and what strong role models they were was not something I realized.

However, this family was truly exceptional! For all the members of one Native family to achieve both academic and socio-economic success, at a time when the majority of Native peoples in Canada did not even dream of such possibilities was most unusual and markedly different than the norm. Typically, Native students were dropping out of school, and were left with grim prospects for employment and opportunity. In retrospect, the roots of the Michaels' success may have been the greater exposure these brothers had to mainland schools throughout their education, but it may also have been a strong cultural grounding received from their parents. Such a grounding may have made it easier for them to manage in a Euro-Canadian setting where Native culture and people were not regarded as a part of daily activities. Although the boys did not talk about or make much of their culture, their mother was extremely knowledgeable about Ojibwa culture and spoke the language. On a few occasions, she made presentations in the Euro-Canadian community in Sutton about her people, and was very proud of her heritage. Her sons had an excellent

example, which may have helped to develop their own apparent security about who they were. It is a source of great sadness to me that, the teacher who perished in tragic circumstances in Lake Simcoe during the 1990's was a member of this family.

In my own experience, in retrospect, it is possible to identify some family influences which may have encouraged the teaching career at which I eventually arrived. I earlier described my parent's explanation that people who ridiculed Native people were ignorant and uninformed. My parents were high school teachers and administrators and were also in a good position to observe how Native students usually did not manage in the high school. Additionally, there were family stories from my mother about my maternal Great-Grandfather and a Great-Great Uncle who had been friends with and been Protestant ministers on occasion in the Native community. A family heirloom of which my mother is always very proud is an Ojibwa Bible given to my Great-Grandfather by Chief Benson of the Rama reserve in 1893. The Bible also contains the Ojibwa name, Washegeshig which translates as Bright Day that my Great-Grandfather was given.

The association that my Great-Grandfather enjoyed with Chief Benson was a source of interest and pride, and was frequently mentioned by both my Grandmother and Mother. In our childhoods, my cousins and I sometimes contemplated becoming teachers and health professionals and having the adventure of working with Native peoples in the Northwest Territories. So, I recall there existed an interest, curiosity and a sympathy in my home environment regarding the life circumstances of Native peoples.

As an adult, who eventually became a teacher of Native students, I have developed a far greater awareness and understanding of how the lives of Native peoples have been impacted by Euro-Canadian governments, churches and society. I have often wondered about my ancestors who were prompted by their religious affiliations to work among Native peoples and hope profoundly that they were not among the worst of their kind who effected so much damage in the fabric of Native society. Since my Great-Grandfather was given an Ojibwa name, it is possible and probable that he was a well-regarded friend. I earnestly and keenly hope that was the case. Nonetheless, the stories about his honouring by the Chief of the Rama reserve may have indirectly resulted in piquing an interest which has lead to my own eventual career. It is also my intent that in my own work, I respond to and be directed by what is in the interests of the Native community and individuals, and do not try to dictate or define the pathways and choices of the Native students with whom I come in contact. It is important to me, that students and I encounter each other in an atmosphere of respect, mutual respect, where each of our traditions and believes can be honoured, and it is possible to work towards both a greater understanding and the achievement of goals and dreams.

I left my home town of Sutton to attend university and take teacher training to become a high school teacher. During my university studies, other than an optional course on the Netsilik Inuit people, a short weekend conference regarding the problems on the Six Nations Indian Reserve which I chose to attend, and the reading of Harold Cardinal's "Unjust Society" in a Canadian history course, my education - the standard higher education curriculum and teacher training - did not include any information about Native peoples in Canada. Upon completion of my teacher training, employment became an issue,

exacerbated when I moved to Calgary. Teachers were in over supply, and there was little interest in a new teacher from Ontario. One teaching job offer materialized. Indian Affairs offered me a teaching position on the Stoney Reserve in the elementary school, living on reserve. I was not enthusiastic about teaching the lower grade levels. As well, newly in Calgary and newly married, I was not keen on being away from my spouse. Additionally, although I may have considered teaching in the Territories in my youth, the real possibility of being isolated and alone in an unknown Native community, in a strange province, seemed daunting to me as a young adult. I rejected the opportunity to teach at Morley, but no other teaching offers arose.

After substitute teaching in Calgary, then moving back and forth between Alberta and Ontario, I sought alternative employment in retail and for a time with the Alberta Government. Desperately needing more joy and inspiration, I decided to return to university in 1982, so I applied to the Graduate Program in Education at University of Calgary. As mentioned earlier, it was in my Graduate Program that I met Professor Moore-Eyman and was given the remarkable teaching opportunity within The Native Centre's Transition Year Program. Teaching in the Transition Year Program, I felt very much in my element and found the adult Native students with whom I was working a tremendous group, at times daunted by the learning process, but highly motivated, hard working, and striving to achieve. In many ways it was ideal – not having to motivate students and establish discipline with young students in a classroom. These adult students were anxious to learn and I was having a great time tutoring and teaching.

I anticipated continuing to work in this milieu for the next year, but as things happen, changes were underway. Professor Moore-Eyman retired and a new Director came to The Native Centre who wished to make changes in programming and personnel. The designer of the Transition Year, Dr. Frederick Carnew, however, was appointed as the new Director at Maskwachees Cultural College on the Four Nations Reserve at Hobbema which is located between Red Deer and Edmonton, Alberta. Dr. Carnew several times offered me the position of tutor/instructor in the University Program at the College, and when my husband coincidentally accepted employment in the Edmonton area, I accepted the fortuitous opportunity and agreed to take what I regarded as my first real salaried teaching position at Maskwachees Cultural College.

Teaching at Hobbema would be a tremendous shift from working at the University of Calgary. The reserve was located north of Red Deer along Highway 1A between two small towns, Wetaskiwin and Ponoka. Although it is called 'the reserve,' it is in reality four reserves, with four Cree First Nations who were forced to settle as one community. But, each is strongly conscious of its independence. The four Nations Erminskin, Samson, Montana and Louis Bull sent students to the College, and supported the programs at Maskwachees Cultural College on the basis of the size of their Nation and finances available. Samson Nation had the largest population and contingent of students, and over the years supported the College when the financial need arose, because of their increasing number of successful post-secondary students.

4.2 TEACHING AND LEARNING AT MASKWACHEES CULTURAL COLLEGE 1985 -1991

So, there I was, all set to start teaching at the College in September of 1985. I was optimistic, although the Director, Dr. Carnew had indicated that the setting was not conventional and that the College was housed in an old residential school. He indicated that he would have to find space and build an office for me over the course of the summer. Even so, upon my arrival at the College I was filled with excitement, and then when I saw the building, somewhat non-plussed. Much of the building was boarded up. The exterior badly needed painting, the entry-way was dimly lit and dank, the stairways were in poor repair, and I was soon to find that first winter that when the wind blew, it came through the building and interior temperatures dropped, so that we had to wear coats and gloves indoors in order to stave off the cold. Dr. Carnew had found space and built me an office – in what had been the shower room. I had paneled walls, indoor/outdoor carpet, a window, a desk that would stay upright if wedged against the wall, a shaky bookshelf, a door which could be closed when privacy was needed, and sufficient lighting to make the space comfortable for use. The shower room with the same basic furnishings was 'home' for the next five years. Most of the building, it turned out was derelict, in fact it was a source of some humour that it was a condemned building sold by the Department of Indian Affairs to the Ermineskin Cree Nation for $1.00.

The College during that first year occupied roughly a third of the main floor, a small private cafeteria occupied a corner of the basement and Red Deer College offered some secretarial and General Education Diploma courses in classrooms on the top/second floor. Under Dr. Carnew's leadership, changes took place in the building and the College

grew very rapidly over the next few years, until Maskwachees Cultural College eventually occupied the whole building. Although the growth of the College and the desire of so many people to try to go to school was a good thing, the expansion into other parts of the building was difficult for returning students who had lived in the building or attended it when it was a residential school run by Roman Catholic priests and nuns. The opening of rooms and wings in the building could ignite a firestorm of painful memories for former students recalling hardships and abuse. The building was believed to have ghosts as well, of children who died away from their families. Opening another wing of the building was accompanied by emotional trauma for students, and cleansing and purifying ceremonies of the space performed by Elders. I saw again that it took great courage for Native students to seek a mainstream education.

The building served as the College for over the next decade, but has now been demolished to make room for a beautiful new high school designed and decorated using Cree motif. But, I sometimes reflect fondly on the less than perfect, mostly uncomfortable, old College structure. While for students the building had not previously been a safe place, the College was the site for me of many good and special learning experiences. Gradually as the College expanded, and it became student and community owned space, the old shadow of the residential school began to lose its power. Recently, I spoke with one of the students of those early years at Maskwachees Cultural College, and I found that for him as well, thoughts of those times taking university courses were positive, and together we recalled some of the pleasures and the peculiarities of the College.

In 1985, the Four Nations which comprised the Hobbema reserve communities were launching an educational initiative. The College had previously been the site for major endeavours in cultural preservation with some teaching, as well as the occasional offering of a University Outreach Program from The Native Centre at the University of Calgary. With the hiring of Dr. Carnew who had many years experience in program development in the Northwest Territories and at University of Calgary, the community leaders were initiating an expansion of the teaching activities and programming at the College. When I joined the staff, I was the only tutor for eighteen or twenty Cree students in the University Program, many of whom had participated in a Transition Year Program provided by Dr. Carnew the preceding academic year. This meant that they had completed the skills upgrading which was part of 'Transition' and two or three university courses. One or two students had some university courses taken elsewhere or years previously.

In the fall of my first year at Maskwachees, Dr. Carnew, his secretary and I were the only Non-Native personnel working in the main space of the College, with four cultural staff and an accounting clerk who were Native. This changed very shortly. Initiatives began that first year with the introduction of an adult high school upgrading program off-site elsewhere on the reserve, and an alternative program with a strong cultural component, for children experiencing major difficulties in the elementary system. The next fall, in addition to other education program initiatives, a large Transition Program with fifty students was initiated and several additional teachers, Non-Native for the most part, were hired to help organize, co-ordinate and instruct in the Program. All the programs continued to expand in the next several years and Maskwachees College soon acquired provincial accreditation for courses and programs, (for example the high school, Emergency Medical

Technician Training, and Computer Accounting). The College was a hive of activities where everyone was a learner, students and staff alike.

My first year teaching at Maskwachees Cultural College was a novel experience, working in the challenging physical discomforts of the College building, getting to know the Native staff, some of whom were distrustful of a strange white person, getting to know the students who were both curious and somewhat, although less, distrustful, and tutoring groups in a whole new range of courses including Psychology, English Literature, Canadian Studies and Geography, as well as assisting students individually with assignments and essays. Some of the distrust was mutual. When students offered to teach me Cree in the midst of much mischievous laughter, I declined. I was also adjusting to hearing another language spoken all around me. This was Cree territory and understandably, those who could speak their language did so, although typically they would also let non-Cree like myself know what had been said if it was a topic that included me. Not all the students did claim fluency in Cree. Several of those in the 1985-86 University Program, had lived in residential school where efforts had been made by their instructors to keep them from speaking the language. I discovered that among students in their thirties and forties, Cree was still often spoken, but among students in their early twenties who were younger than the last residential school generation, the majority did not have fluency, could understand in part what was being said in Cree, but did not feel secure enough in the language to try to speak it. Many people in residential schools had been disciplined for speaking Cree, the result was an undermining of the vitality and universality of the language. Additionally, according to my students, some survivors of residential school of their parents generation, made the decision not to teach their children Cree, believing it

would cause their children problems in school and in society. The loss of language was only one of the results of residential schools that the students told me about.

Although I was knowledgeable that the residential schools and the impositions of Euro-Canadian culture, religion, government, laws and the Indian Act had had a tremendously adverse impact on Native peoples, learning about what had occurred from a Native perspective was extremely affecting. While the loss of language was devastating, so also, was the loss of traditional systems of knowledge, beliefs and customs, family breakdown with the loss of child rearing practices, the loss of self-sufficiency, independence, self-respect and dignity. The community at Hobbema was in a state of turmoil, where individuals and the society as a whole were struggling with tremendous social and economic problems. The situation at Hobbema is a daguerreo-type of reserves across Canada. A few elements within the community were endeavouring to find ways to heal the problems existing at Hobbema. Maskwachees Cultural College, and its community driven programs, and the students enrolled in them were trying to make positive efforts towards that desired healing.

My students taught me many things about their own culture and I learned that there were many individual differences in beliefs, practices and experience. Only a very few had never gone to residential school and had been reared very traditionally. The majority had been in residential school or were raised by parents who had experienced the scourge of a strict Catholic upbringing. I learned in that first year that most of my students had been no further than Calgary or Edmonton in their lives, although one or two had been to Europe. The majority knew very little about the world outside the reserve; they were uninvolved, it

was a world that for the most part, did not include them. However, while the Cree language was spoken, mixed with English, the English that most of these students possessed was quite basic, mixed with slang, and the vocabulary was generally at an elementary level. I also learned that for every generality there are exceptions - since one of the students who joined the program later in the year, had her International Baccalaureate.

My students emphasized to me that Native groups do not all share the same culture, that Cree and Blackfoot although both Plains tribes, had very different cultures as well as languages. In Canadian Studies classes and tutorials, we talked about stereo-typing and the Professor traced for us all, the development of the European's false, frequently uninformed, unreal images, and stereo-types of North American "Indians." I came to know that it may be alright for a Cree person or someone who is considered accepted to refer to other Cree persons as Indians, but that it was not alright for someone who was an outsider. My students regularly talked and joked with me about the term "Indians," but were sensitive to the term, if a visiting professor or strangers in neighbouring towns referred to them as Indians. I learned to coach professors who came from a university to lecture, encouraging them to refer to Native people or First Nations when discussing Aboriginal peoples or issues in history or Canadian Studies topics.

I also learned to expand my skills in perspective taking. During one Canadian Studies tutorial, the students and I were viewing a video of a television news investigation of the plight of Native people living in urban areas in Western Canada such as Regina and Winnipeg. At the conclusion of the video, I was surprised that my students showed no interest in discussing the video. They were normally a very talkative group, but everyone

seemed determined to leave and began gathering up books, paraphernalia and coats to leave. I was in a quandary, trying to sort out how to spark a discussion, and wondering what the problem was for these students. I paused briefly, and then from somewhere found the insight to inquire, "Is this, a white perspective?" My students, some of whom had gotten as far as the door, all turned around, came back, replying "Yes," almost in unison, sat down and began to tell me why it was a white perspective.

This was a moment of revelation, in my teaching career. I had viewed the video as a sympathetic portrayal of the conditions existing for Native people and a critique of the government for permitting the problems to continue. The students had seen it as a negative picture of Native people, effectively a condemnation, and a portrayal of incompetent Native peoples, a depiction which lacked any positive understanding of the many good elements of their culture and communities. I was truly surprised by the reaction of the students, but gained an empathetic understanding about the narrow, unbalanced, often negative and incomplete representation of Native people, which for many decades had characteristically predominated in the media and Canadian society as a whole. I could also appreciate how this continuing negative representation impacted Native peoples. It was important to these students, and many students since then, that First Nations be seen and realized as real people, not all destitute alcoholics, not all movie villains, or even noble "savages," but normal, ordinary people striving in a profoundly difficult post-colonial situation to provide safe homes and build strong communities for their families.

Relations had always been good with these students, indeed many had sought to be on friendly terms with me, but after this experience, greater trust and warmth existed. Our

rapport seemed to spread via the "moccasin telegraph," so that new students in future years felt safe to approach me with great friendliness as long as I worked at Maskwachees Cultural College. My students found it important as part of their culture to establish a personal relationship, while I, reared by teaching professionals in Euro-Canadian culture, had learned to be professionally friendly, but aloof. It is a cultural difference that I am still aware of in my dealings with students. There were of course, a plethora of other cultural differences. My students loved to point out many of those cultural clashes that they were aware of; they would laugh about "Indian time" when they were - frequently - late, but wonder why white people were so anxious about the clock; and they were critical of the rampant materialism they saw driving Euro-Canadian culture, and wondered at the lack of family and community values, and the absence of spirituality.

We enjoyed discussions about the differences in Cree culture and mainstream culture, which helped me to come to an awareness that Native cultures have much to offer, such as the understanding of human connectedness with the earth and with the universe, and the practice of respect for other people and other beings and forms, and the ways of knowing integral to Aboriginal culture, so different from science which seeks to label, control knowledge and the environment. I became aware that there are many alternative ways of operating in the world, and that Euro-Canadian culture is not the only worldview possible. I also learned that a superficial or stereo-typical view of any culture (whether Euro-Canadian or Cree, or Blackfoot, etc.), does not do it justice it. While different cultures may have different strengths, having to operate in an unfamiliar culture can present tremendous challenges. Students in the University and Transition Programs at Maskwachees in pursuing post-secondary education, were having to operate in Euro-

Canadian culture, as well as begin to find their way in the complex expectations of university courses and linear thought modes.

Cultural differences that emerged included the time orientation which I previously alluded to. Since in contemporary times there are vast differences in the experience of Native peoples, I have heard individuals, especially those living in urban areas, assert that there is no such thing as Indian time. However, many of my students both acknowledged the existence of Indian time, and faced real challenges organizing their endeavours not around family or community matters, but re-orienting themselves to be at the College for classes at a certain time, on a regular basis, and completing projects by a specified date set by a professor. These artificial times were in conflict with the cultural way of being someplace or doing something when the time is appropriate. In the Cree community at Hobbema, events start when everything necessary is on hand and everyone agrees it seems to be a suitable time to commence an activity – when the time is right. As more Native people move into urban areas and come to a greater understanding of the clock, the traditional idea of time is somewhat less prevalent, but for Cree students at Maskwachees College, the cultural practice of traditional time still played a role.

In Cree culture the indirect rather than the direct was customary. In traditional learning modes, people learned when they were shown how to do something without exhaustive verbal instruction. As well, many lessons were learned indirectly through Elders telling stories which encompassed and ensured the passing on of values, beliefs and understandings. An individual with a problem might ask an Elder a question, but the responding story may not provide a clear or singular answer to a matter. An individual

would have to work, reflect and synthesize, to learn indirectly from the stories a message of significance. In academic and teaching settings, Euro-Canadian culture tends to be much more direct, so that ideas are explained and stories often end with a specific moral. Students whose learned cultural tendency was to be indirect, frequently found themselves in difficulty on assignments for failing to answer the question. More often than not, students who believed they knew what was needed to satisfy an assignment, had chosen an indirect approach, and did not present a direct answer on the given topic, which is the expected approach to be used in writing university assignments and papers.

Students from Cree culture tended to be indirect, but also to write in a style which made their answer to a question implicit. Students frequently concluded that a Professor would understand what they were saying or writing, would be able to make the needed connections in the Aboriginal cultural way. However, in Euro-Canadian cultural mode, a student is expected to state their thesis and conclusions, both at length and explicitly. Additionally, in Cree culture there is a strong understanding that all things are related, and that there is an inter-connectedness of things. This way of thinking contrasted sharply with the Euro-Canadian cultural mode of expression that expects students to discuss individual ideas alone, and manage them as separate, and particular. Multiple choice exams present huge challenges for students who first have to deal with second language issues, and a lack of sophistication in English, and then try to identify the single correct answer from a list of answers, when in the holistic pattern of thought and understanding all the answers could be considered to have some connection to the subject under question.

I observed additional challenges existing for students in their written work. Since Aboriginal cultures are based in the oral tradition, students often struggled with the location of knowledge, and what knowledge was valid. They did not accept that knowledge could be found only in books - an understanding which is much to their credit. However, university culture tends to be dependent and rely on knowledge found in books and print materials. Since they were in university studies, students were required to use books and work with the ideas that they found in them. Few courses or professors were accepting of the use of oral sources. As well, essay writing required students to go on at length on a single subject, to elaborate and discuss, and many students were challenged by having to work in this format and in acquiring the skills of writing at length and in a thorough and explicit manner.

Respect is highly valued in Cree culture, much as it is in many Aboriginal cultures. One aspect of a broad application of respect, is the practice of acceptance. Individuals are taught to accept what Elders and others present, and it is not considered respectful to question or dispute another person. For some students, learning that in university courses they were expected not to accept everything they read or heard as absolute, but were in fact required to question and critique the books and other sources they encountered, was a shock and a challenge to their understood way of doing things. It was a matter of concern for students to adjust their thinking in order to try to do this. On more than one occasion, I witnessed students in real distress at and objecting to being asked to "go against their culture," in this way. For at least one student with whom I worked, it went so against previous teachings about his culture, that it was a deciding factor when he chose to drop out

of the Transition Program. Thus, learning some of the skills needed at university could create considerable dissonance for students.

Maskwachees College students often struggled with the values differences they had observed to exist between mainstream and Cree culture. There was concern that obtaining an education would undermine traditional ways of doing things. They found this disturbing and criticized the materialism which they saw spread so widely in mainstream culture. It troubled my students that people in mainstream culture seemed to put themselves first, and the pursuit of individual gain and wealth ahead of the welfare of their community or family. They noted that Euro-Canadian families did not assist one another, that seniors were abandoned and institutionalized by their families. It disturbed them to see the influence spreading in their community and Elders being housed in lodges. In the Cree way, family and community were considered paramount. Families lived closely together and maintained a supportive network. This closeness was engendered by practice as well as language. A child has many mothers and fathers in the Cree community, since all close female and male relatives are called mother and father, respectively; cousins are regarded as siblings, and elders are all grandmother or grandfather.

It bothered many of my students as well, that they saw materialism creeping into their own community beginning to erode traditional Cree customs. They reported that they believed that the priority of community and the traditional idea of sharing were no longer being upheld by many people. Some on the reserve were busy acquiring wealth (luxurious homes, expensive vehicles, and high incomes), at the expense of other people who were much less fortunate. Since employment on the reserve was in short supply, only a few

were doing well financially, when the reserve had millions in government and oil revenues, and corruption was widely rumoured. The majority of the population existed on social assistance supplemented by monthly oil royalties, which at that time were being issued to members, by each of the four First Nations at Hobbema. My students were greatly concerned that there did not appear to be strong leadership to preserve traditional Cree social customs of sharing and observing obligations to the community. They saw all this as exacerbating the social problems rife on the reserve, and contributing to community breakdown.

Another value that students introduced to me was balance and the concept of the medicine wheel. In Cree belief it is most important for the individual to strive to achieve balance. Students noted that white people placed all their emphasis on thinking and mental activity, and ignored the emotional domain, and they regarded this over-emphasis as unhealthy and unbalanced. In Cree culture, the emotional domain was given considerably more weight. But, as well, the spiritual aspect of humanity - a key part of the traditional medicine wheel - students identified as lacking in Euro-Canadian culture. In the circle which is used to visually portray the Medicine Wheel, four main components of human-ness are featured: the physical, mental, spiritual and emotional. Cree culture teaches that ideally one strives to have balance within each of the components, but also among the components, so that no single one is attended to more than the others. Cree students noted that Euro-Canadian culture included religion, but not the same core notion of spirituality, and spiritual connectedness which is fundamental to a Native worldview.

Communities as well as individuals can strive for balance, and this is even now apparent in the movement towards renewed spirituality and healing which is very much part of the Native community. Aboriginal people across the country were at one time deprived by law of the right to practice the customs and rituals which were so integral to their spirituality. That is no longer the case, and traditional spirituality is being re-established in numerous Native communities, although it still has challenges from mainstream religious groups. Some Native people seek to practice Native spirituality exclusively, while others have found ways to balance - or reconcile - the different ideas and believe systems. At Maskwachees Cultural College, Elders were available so that students or staff could learn about traditional spirituality, which was so central to Cree culture and the life of the community. Elsewhere in the community, too, there were strong movements being lead by a new generation of spiritual leaders to help people find the strength, self-respect, and balance inherent in traditional Cree culture.

The many cultural differences made learning in the linear style difficult for students, who when they came into the Transition Year Program in preparation for the University Program, in only a few months had to begin to operate in a different cultural mode. These students came predominantly from a problematic academic background and were non-matriculated adults returning to school after leaving many years before. Academic challenges represented only a small portion of the issues facing individuals who were coming from a fractured community, that had experienced dispossession, coercion, extreme deprivation, the loss of culture and social order, and the loss of civil and human rights. Although, changes in the situation of Native peoples as wards of the Federal government were initiated in the 1960's, for people living on reserve, including those at

Hobbema, the outcomes of generations of colonization, dispossession and abuse were, and are still being felt. Social problems dominate the lives of the people, as do economic concerns and the viability of reserves. The violence on reserves is extreme, and eruptive; there are many deaths. A tribal policeman told me in 1986, that in the proceeding year, over ninety people had died in a population of 6000 – from a variety of causes to be sure, but the majority of deaths were among young people.

Laws once kept Native people captive on reserve. Now, reserves despite the exigent problems, are homelands, a place where culture and language can be fostered and maintained, and they represent a safe haven and community for Native people to come home to. As well, they represent a territorial basis for First Nations when they deal with Federal and Provincial Governments. Reserves can be a place Euro-Canadian culture does not hold complete sway. However, within the Transition Year Programs and University Programs at Maskwachees Cultural College, the dilemma existed for students, that if they were going to accomplish a mainstream university education, they would have to learn the essential skills and ways of thinking required at university. And, for all that university is quintessentially Euro-Canadian, the achievement of a degree could offer opportunities to the Cree students, both within their own community and off the reserve.

The voluntary acquisition of Euro-Canadian university culture, therefore, presented a conundrum for students, frustration at times, strong aversion at times, but adult students in Transition, demonstrated a considerable ability to learn differing cultural expectations. I recall having students feeling conflict with the modes that they were learning, who asked “Why can’t we do it our way, the Indian way? Why does it always have to be the European

way?" or students telling me that having to write more and more, or having professors talk at length about a subject was a demonstration of "White people talk too much!" But, in the face of academic stress or other struggles, Maskwachees College students showed that the exercise of humour was another Cree cultural expressions and strengths.

I recall a tremendous amount of laughter and humour in the teaching and learning environment. It took people past the rough spots, and was very unifying. It was key for students and staff to share laughter and for everyone to be laughed at on occasion. For example, during a round of self-introductions in a tutorial group on the first day of the Transition Year Program, I introduced myself as coming from Ontario. In a class of fifteen students from Hobbema, I expected to be the only one who could say that. But as we went around the room, first one person, and then another introduced themselves as coming from Ontario, all of us started to laugh. I was amazed, and of course at first thought that one or two might be kidding. It turned out that at least three students were indeed from Ontario and were not born at Hobbema. By the last few introductions people were having fun with this unusual circumstance, and saying they came from Ontario, just to extend the laughter. Our group had great fun just doing introductions! Laughter was an ideal way to begin the transition year for nervous new students, and it was consistently part of seminars and tutorials.

Over the five year period during which I taught at Maskwachees Cultural College, the programs including the Transition Year Program grew substantially. As previously indicated, fifty students were enrolled in the 1986-87 Transition Year Program, as Unclassified students taking a University of Calgary courses at Maskwachees Cultural

College. In subsequent years, as many as seventy-five students a year came into the program. In their first year, students completed twenty-five hours a week of instruction, taking upgrading math, and in the fall a single university course in addition to a full slate of seminar sessions on academic skills building - reading skills, writing skills, study skills and learning strategies (on computer). Students were also taught about learning styles and how to benefit from capitalizing on their strengths when learning.

The fall university course was an Introduction to Psychology, which for the first few years was taught by Dr. Carnew. This course being taught by the designer of the Transition Year Program, was the focus for a number of activities which took place in tutorial/study groups and seminars. As well, note-taking could be taught through the course delivery, and assignments encouraged students to learn more about their own Cree culture and community. In the winter semester, students were enrolled in two university courses and they completed additional tutorials and seminars. Students who took the spring semester could study the Cree language which was a key initiative from the College in the community. All students at every level of study were encouraged to study their own language. In the next year, students who went on into the University Program continued to be supported by a tutor and required tutorials for each subject.

Despite the comprehensive support, not all students completed the Transition Year Program, some dropped out, some failed to pass their university courses. Often, family circumstances caused students to drift away from the Program. Where possible, students who were in danger of not completing, were guided to withdraw so that no ‘F’ grades would blacken their transcripts to prevent further university in the future. My fellow

instructors and I exerted ourselves to make it possible for the Transition Year students to complete. This included copious amounts of time spent on individual meetings for extra help, and following-up with students to make sure they didn't miss too many classes, assisting with lecture notes and so forth. The students for the most part, really wanted to succeed, they had to work harder than they ever had before to grasp so much new information and acquire new skills. At the end of that first year program, one student asked a group of us how many students had completed the program. No formal number taking had been accomplished at that time, and the instructors group estimated that only about 50% of the students had completed. We were not happy with this number. But, the student who had made the enquiry, was delighted, and told us that was "really good!" (Personal Conversation, 1986). It gave us something to reflect on.

In a community struggling with so many difficult life issues, having a cup "half full" was indeed a positive. Once again it was a matter of perspective, and for Euro-Canadian instructors, a new perspective was much needed encouragement. A fifty percent completion rate was good in a community where so many had left high school and were trapped with no foreseeable future prospects in an environment where hopelessness was prominent. Fifty percent represented numbers of individual people who had succeeded in an academic program far more challenging than anything they had ever encountered before. The completion rate was relevant to us as instructors, but it was not the only thing that mattered. Attempting university, being willing to risk the challenges, was in many ways, its own success for the people who came into the Transition Year Program. As instructors we learned that taking a course or two, making an effort to do something with their lives, or initiate some control of their own lives, was a significant measure of success.

Co-ordinating the University Program also allowed me to continue to work with students who I first instructed in the Transition Year Program, as they made progress in their programs. We worked closely together in a variety of subject areas, learned together, and frequently teased and laughed together. The University Program grew, as did the Transition Year Program. In my last fall semester at the College, over a hundred students were registered in courses in the University Program. Gradually, due to financial concerns, the College began taking courses from other academic institutions, and the close working relationship which had existed with the University of Calgary was lost. It developed that some students once they had accomplished their full two years of studies and were ready to go to main campus, chose to go to university campuses to which they could commute, such as University of Alberta or Augustana. For transfer reasons, it was a benefit for them to have taken courses approved by those universities.

Since 1990, only a small group of Cree students from Hobbema have gone on to University of Calgary to graduate. As well, the University of Calgary Native Centre, terminated the Outreach Program through which Maskwachees Cultural College had offered courses to students. As a result, fewer Cree students from Hobbema have chosen to complete degrees at University of Calgary during the 1990's. When the occasional Cree student has come to University of Calgary from Hobbema, and has contacted The Native Centre since I began work there in 1991, it is a source of pleasure to me to talk with them and hear about the College, and who in the community I know, that they might be related to. Now, in 2003, it is a source of great pleasure for me to have some of my former students achieving their Social Work degrees from the recently inaugurated Faculty of

Social Work Access Program, which is being offered at several locations around the province. Two of my former students completed their degrees and attended The Native Centre graduation banquet and powwow in June 2003, which made the annual celebration even more special for me.

Teaching and learning at Maskwachees Cultural College was a remarkable experience. I had the privilege of working with students who demonstrated tremendous motivation, care and concern for their families and their community. Although I was Euro-Canadian, I was welcomed and treated with generosity, respect and friendship by my students. I will always remember the laughter we shared. The memories of the people, their stories, their strength, and my opportunity to be involved in the community for a time, will always be with me. Being a guest in the Cree community and learning to understand other perspectives was a truly valuable experience. Teaching and learning at Maskwachees Cultural College was a gift, which I will always treasure.

Leaving Maskwachees Cultural College was truly difficult. I enjoyed the students, many friendships, and the teaching environment despite the physical discomforts, immensely, and valued the many fine colleagues I met working there. During my five years (August 1985- October 1991), at the College, my responsibilities had multiplied so that I was Head of the University Program, managing the enrolment and registration of students, co-ordinating the Outreach courses which involved identifying courses that could or should be offered, locating professors by advertising, interviewing and arranging their hiring by the sending Institution where a course originated, orienting professors to the College and students, supporting professors in their teaching and liaison with students,

supervising the Colleges instructional staff in their roles as tutors, tutoring in courses myself, instructing groups in the Transition Year Program, working with students individually as needed, and being frequently called upon as confidante and friend when the lives of students were complicated by a crisis. While I was working at the College, I had also become the mother of a son. I was finding that the demands on my time and energy were extreme. Also in 1991, the College encountered financial difficulties and it seemed that our family's economic interests would be best served by re-locating to Calgary.

I remain grateful to the community at Hobbema. Teaching at Maskwachees Cultural College and learning from the students of the community had given me an invaluable opportunity to understand more about the many fine qualities of Aboriginal culture, more about the many issues facing Native peoples, and much about the challenges facing Aboriginal individuals who chose to become university students. This grounding would be most helpful in my work at The Native Centre.

5.0 CHAPTER FIVE: SOUNDINGS FROM THE PAST: PART II

5.1 INTRODUCTION

When the University of Calgary advertised a position in The Native Centre as Co-ordinator, I applied and received an interview. In large part because of my employment at Maskwachees Cultural College working with Aboriginal students taking university courses, and the relationship through the Outreach Program over several years with The Native Centre and the University, I was offered the position. My family and I made the move to Calgary, where once again I had the good fortune to be teaching in the Aboriginal student community. In this part of my story, I relate details of the organization and activities of The Native Centre during the decade 1991- 2000, my additional learning about student experiences and issues in the university setting, and the positive outcomes I have observed occurring for Native students attending University of Calgary.

5.2 TEACHING AND LEARNING AT THE NATIVE CENTRE

I began work at The Native Centre in October 1991. I was the fourth member of a largely new staff. Previously, the Centre had functioned as both an academic research department and a student services area, but it had recently been through a major mandate review and revision. During the previous two year period, there had been considerable controversy, and all of the former staff I had known for many years, had left the University. There was concern about financing the Centre in the absence of Federal funding, and about having the Centre respond to a diversity of students from across the country, who might be of either First Nations or Metis heritage. Following the mandate review, a decision was made to maintain the student services portion of the Centre mandate, so that cultural

activities could be fostered as well as academic support, while the Centre could also act as liaison with the Aboriginal community around Calgary, a relationship which needed to be renewed and cultivated. Shortly before I joined the Centre, a new temporary Director was appointed. The staff complement of the revised Centre consisted of a receptionist, an administrative assistant, a co-ordinator and a director. However, budget cuts in 1992 meant the loss of the receptionist position. While the new Director was Cree, the administrative assistant and I, were both Non-Native. Our task during our first year was to salvage The Native Centre as a place for students, by establishing a co-operative team, and deliberately creating a welcoming and safe environment for students. At the end of our first year, when we were attending a faculty function at his home, then President, Dr. Murray Fraser, personally congratulated the Director, George Calliou and me on our success, the success of the team, in saving The Native Centre.

Aboriginal students attending the University of Calgary were extremely pleased to have George Calliou as Director, during his appointment which lasted nine years. George provided a strong role model for students as an individual Native person who wore braids and represented Native heritage proudly, but had demonstrable success in the mainstream. He had previously worked in the oil and gas industry in Alberta, and had a profile as a public figure in the city of Calgary. George was well known and respected in the Aboriginal community as well as the business community, as a person with considerable knowledge concerning Aboriginal history and culture. He was a popular speaker, able to impart his knowledge and contribute to the creation of a better understanding of cultural perspectives among both Native and Non-Native audiences. Mr. Calliou followed a traditional spiritual path, and his leadership in cultural and spiritual matters was appreciated

by students at The Native Centre and Non-Native students and staff across the University. In addition, George's friendliness, generosity, egalitarian philosophy, welcoming and avuncular manner encouraged students to seek him out, and to co-operate in developing a positive environment within The Native Centre.

As Co-ordinator, I possessed a basic understanding of some of the challenges Aboriginal students would be encountering at university, and I had worked closely with students while they developed the academic skills that they needed to survive. I was knowledgeable about the history of Native peoples in Canada, but this had been refined by a better understanding owing to my experience at Maskwachees Cultural College (Chapter Four), of the present day life issues of Aboriginal people. I had learned too, to work with students in an informal and friendly way, and to recognize customary Cree and other Native ways of showing respect and relating with others. My knowledge base about the institution included information and processes relevant to students seeking to be admitted or to register at University of Calgary, how to meet academic requirements when writing papers and assignments, and how to work within the hierarchical university organization. During the first year, and each new year at the Centre, it was a priority for me to be available to students, and to establish a rapport so that students would feel comfortable and confident talking to me about any matter - academic, financial, family or personal.

The administrative assistant Donna Meckling joined The Native Centre on a part time temporary basis in the spring of 1991. Donna had no previous experience working in a Native milieu, but applied herself to learn about Aboriginal history and culture and was (and is), friendly and helpful with students. Donna assists the Director in budget and

administrative matters, and assists the Co-ordinator in the provision of a University Outreach Program on the Siksika Reserve, east of Calgary. Especially in the many years absence of a receptionist, Donna's effectiveness in welcoming and assisting Native students and other visitors to The Native Centre, and in providing efficient guidance or sought after information has been most valuable. Donna supports the activities of students in The Native Centre in countless ways, and cheerfully contributes to the endeavours and the achievements of students, and the effective operation of services for Native students at University of Calgary.

The staff of The Native Centre through-out the decade of the 1990's, maintained a close and mutually supportive working relationship with the First Nations Student Association (FNSA). The FNSA continues to be housed in The Native Centre, with an office and a lounge space for student use. As well, a small computer lab and study space was provided for students and meeting rooms within the Centre could be booked for study groups. The space which The Native Centre occupied was in a building opened at the time of the 1988 Olympics, hosted in Calgary at the University. As a result, the space and furnishings were fresh and new, and in sharp contrast to my previous surroundings at Maskwachees College. The Native Centre was often admired and envied by visitors from other Native student service agencies and universities both from across Canada and from overseas. Since we occupied the space together, the staff and students worked in close proximity and deliberate efforts were made to encourage collaboration in a range of activities such as orientation, potlucks and Native Awareness Week events. A key initiative for the staff of The Native Centre and FNSA was the creation of community.

Community is an integral element in Aboriginal cultures. For First Nations students leaving the reserves, or Metis students leaving the settlements in order to come to university, it was critical to be able to find and connect with a community where there were other Native people, and where they would feel safe and secure and not feel isolated or alone in a completely foreign environment. For this reason, it was crucial to include new students and any accompanying family, in orientations to meet staff and senior students knowledgeable about the university experience and willing to share stories, tips and encouragement. Orientations included a welcome, prayers and inspirational talks from Elders, and often a family barbecue – since children and spouses with the student also needed to be welcomed to the city and to learn about the challenges 'their' student would be facing. The Centre, throughout the year was a venue where students often brought family, to wait while they attended classes, to participate in potlucks or Christmas parties, to hear special speakers, or to have fellow students or a relative watch a child while the parent attended classes and fulfilled university requirements. In the lounge, study and computer areas, senior students provide valuable peer support and mentoring for new Aboriginal students, encouraging them through the process of finding their way in University, through the apparent maze of classes and assignments, and around the pitfalls of locating accommodation, childcare and schools in Calgary. The existence of community at The Native Centre, in my view, has been a vital support to students making the transition to University of Calgary.

The shortage of staff and budgetary constraints at The Native Centre over the last decade have made it impossible for staff to provide comprehensive academic supports for students similar to those which were in place at Maskwachees Cultural College (Chapter

Four). A proposal for a transition program was submitted in the 1992/93 academic year, but it was not supported by University administration. Student service units on campus were encouraged to rely increasingly on the volunteer energies of students as budget cuts required staff reductions. During the 1990's, many of the Aboriginal students newly enrolling at University of Calgary were non-matriculated adult students who had completed or were completing high school upgrading in order to be admitted. Thus, students had some academic gaps and after several years outside the education system, were having to adapt quickly to the expectations set in University courses. This circumstance was a major concern for the staff of The Native Centre especially since university policy had been revised to address the admission of Aboriginal students.

In 1991 General Faculties Council of the University of Calgary adopted an Aboriginal Student Admissions Policy, which encouraged admission of Native students who met minimum University requirements, into the Faculty of General Studies, (now Communications and Culture). While we were unable to provide a transition year program, some academic support for students was deemed necessary by both the Director and myself. I prepared and submitted a proposal, for a part-time series of study skills development seminars to be conducted by student volunteers. This program, Society for Aboriginal Master Students (SAMS) was approved and undertaken in 1993. We had two students volunteer to facilitate groups of six to twelve students and assist them to acquire university study skills. In the following year the same two students volunteered, but one, was also a Social Work student completing his practicum in The Native Centre, and this student, Darin Keewatin was able to devote extra time and energy to devise materials or

work individually with students. This dedication helped to make the program more effective for students.

However, once Darin's practicum ended, succeeding volunteer facilitators could never put the same kind of focus and energy into the SAMS program. Our worst fears about running a volunteer program were realized. It was just not feasible for most Native students to volunteer significant amounts of time and energy away from their own education, and away from family responsibilities. Facilitators found it difficult to commit the necessary time due to the pressures of midterms and papers as well as health issues, and family crises. New students always struggled with time management. Going to a study skills session seemed like time they could ill afford from their compulsory assignments. Gradually the program dissolved, one on one mentoring took its place, with inconsistent results for students. The problem remains for programs such as the Society for Master Students, when it is not required but voluntary, or when students do not receive any academic credit for participating in them, they are less likely to stay involved. Ideally, as well, facilitators should be recompensed for the effort they devote. A post-secondary trend, in student services especially in the United States for mainstream students, is to include many study skills activities as part of a first year credit course.

The Native students attending the University of Calgary, were a very diverse group. Students were from the local First Nations, Blackfoot, Stoney (Assiniboine), and Tsuu T'ina, but were also from reserves as far away as Quebec with Algonquin heritage, the Maritimes with MicMac heritage, and the Arctic with Gwitchen or Inuit heritage. For these students from distant places, as it was for me, spending time in The Native Centre

was an extremely important avenue to learning about the traditions of the local First Nations. Even though their own traditions were different, many students felt a bond with the local First Nations peoples, and found themselves welcomed into the community at The Native Centre, and subsequently into the larger Aboriginal community in Calgary.

Aboriginal students coming to The University of Calgary face a number of different challenges than the students who are beginning their studies at college on reserve. University program students who are non-matriculated adults encounter academic mountains to climb, wherever they attend. However, Aboriginal students attending a mainstream university, must take on their mountain climbing in full view of "the experts," the predominant Non-Native student body which has come to university while just out of high school, with a firm foundation of academic achievement, Euro-Canadian cultural mores and world view, and with few burdens of responsibility. For many Aboriginal students, coming to University of Calgary represents taking a tremendous risk - it is intimidating - to enter a place that is so decidedly Euro-Canadian, where the people and what transpires there is so unlike things familiar in a Native milieu. Native people in universities are still only a small percentage of the population, less than 3% province wide. Therefore, going to university can appear to mean being alone. As well, many Aboriginal people have acquired low self-esteem due to the inter-generational effects of residential schools, and the culturally damaging policies and practices of the churches and the Federal government, and are well aware of the negative stereotypes perpetuated in society about them. Thus, volunteering to climb an academic mountain, while your self-esteem whispers against it, and since possibly everyone watching around you expects you to fail, takes

tremendous fortitude. The Native Centre community helps students not to feel alone, and not to give in to potential self-defeating internal messages.

Aboriginal students coming to Calgary from reserves or the North, can encounter considerable culture shock moving to an urban environment. The presence and impact of so many people, buildings, so much traffic and noise can be debilitating, as is the feeling of distance from nature. Additionally, Aboriginal students may find it difficult to locate affordable housing, when some landlords in the city do refuse to rent to First Nations people. Many non-matriculated adult Aboriginal students are parents of young children. Housing can be a problem for families who need dwellings which permit and accommodate children and pets. The result may be finding housing at substantial distances from the University, which then presents transportation issues. Students with vehicles have the concerns of paying for fuel, maintenance and parking on campus. For students who may not have a vehicle, using public transit may require considerable travel time, which could limit choice for classes when they have to be home in good time to care for young children. Aboriginal students frequently voice the wish that there was specific housing and child care for them in Calgary which could help to meet their needs for affordable housing, with the support of Aboriginal neighbours and culturally based day care responsive to student schedules.

Attending University of Calgary while raising a family, of course means that many Aboriginal students have added responsibilities. Shelter, food and clothing for the several people in the family are the first care. Parents often find that their coursework and academic careers receive attention only after everything and everyone else is taken care of.

Aboriginal culture teaches the expectation that family is a central and most important obligation. Family consists not just of one's children, but of parents, grandparents, uncles and aunts, nieces and nephews. Aboriginal university students living in Calgary may have other family also living here who rely a tremendous amount upon them, or they may find they have to make many trips home to the reserve to manage family concerns. The Native Centre endeavours to help students learn about the strategies and mechanisms within the culture of the University that will allow them to juggle assignments, or defer assignments and exams when their personal lives or family situations, or care must take precedence.

Financial issues can contribute to the range of difficulties with which Aboriginal students must deal. Aboriginal students coming from reserves, in most instances are sponsored by their First Nation. The sponsorship pays some or all of their tuition and provides a living allowance depending on the number of dependents. The amount of sponsorship was set by the Department of Indian Affairs twenty years ago. A single student is to receive $675.00 a month. Twenty years ago, this amount made it possible for a student to manage but, this is no longer the case. A few First Nations in Alberta (eg. Saddle Lake, Samson, Siksika), have altered the sponsorship for students knowing that the funds allotted by the Federal government are insufficient. The adjusted amounts still do not amply meet the needs of students living in a high rent area such as Calgary. As well, instances still occur of students not receiving their living allowances from the responsible agency on time, so that they can manage to pay their rent at the beginning of the month and provide food for themselves and their children. Dealing with irate or impatient landlords is a frequent problem for Native students, whose First Nations do not administer funds with the students' requirements in mind. Aboriginal students especially those with young

children in their families, struggle to cope with the expenses of living in the city. Few have relatives that they can call upon to assist them financially, and those with responsibility for young dependants, find it a strain to try to manage a job at the same time that they care for their children and juggle classes.

Currently to qualify for scholarships at University of Calgary, students are expected to carry 4.5 full courses, and earn a Grade Point Average above a 3.0. Adult Aboriginal students with families, typically, seldom meet these criteria. Encouragingly, there are an increasing number of corporate scholarships available to Native students over this past decade, but the number of students now pursuing post-secondary surpasses the quantity of scholarships available. Metis students at University of Calgary do not have First Nations funding, and so they must either acquire a burden of debt or work throughout their university careers. Working students often are less able to carry the required number of courses to be eligible for standard scholarships.

Financial burdens cause some students to leave university either completely or for a period of years. One student from a western province was denied funding in her second year because she was studying outside her home province. She is still trying, almost a decade later, to secure sponsorship from her First Nation to return to university. Another First Nation denied sponsorship to a student in her last university semester, since she had reached the maximum sponsorship according to the Band post-secondary funding policy. Yet another student lost their sponsorship when their average fell below 2.0. Although the student was permitted by the University to continue her studies, the First Nation withdrew sponsorship for two years. The student had to leave school and has only recently returned

to the University. Despite sponsorship, most Aboriginal students live with a burden of debt. It can discourage completion of a degree, as well as consideration of graduate school, when the individual has to choose to continue to live a precarious, poverty stricken existence.

An issue which has arisen for Aboriginal students studying at University of Calgary has been the unwelcoming environment they can encounter in course lectures. Repeatedly, students have come to The Native Centre often angry, often in tears, needing to confide and to vent about things that may have been said by a professor, or by classmates. Students are frequently frustrated by the misrepresentation of Native peoples in classes, inaccuracies and the perpetuation of stereotypes. These events put students in the position of having to correct instructors or fellow students, and to challenge the system. In my experience, very few Aboriginal students, when they are advised that they can pursue a grievance against a professor, choose to do so. It takes a great amount of energy, and is additionally threatening in an already intimidating situation to pursue a grievance. Most students swallow their anger, and although they are deeply wounded, try to move forward. It is more common for Native students to be non-confrontational, than to challenge someone in authority directly.

In a few, rare instances, students have chosen to meet with a professor and address the mistaken information or troubling issue at hand. In one such instance, the student came to The Native Centre extremely angry about how she was being treated by a professor who was ridiculing her for her opinions and ideas related to Native philosophy during lectures, as well as to her classmates on at least one occasion when she was not present. The

student, Jane, was far from confidant. She had taken three years of connecting with The Native Centre through phone calls, before finally "daring" to apply to the University for admission. She had many doubts about her ability. Jane did not want The Centre to become involved when she found herself a target in one of her third year courses, but she definitely wanted to let us know what had occurred, and sought emotional support from staff and students at The Centre. A week later, Jane made the decision to go to see the professor, to speak to him about his behaviour towards her. As I understand it, the confrontation was heated, and the professor was castigated for his ignorant treatment of her, his prejudice towards Native people, and his bigotry towards women.

After this confrontation, Jane did not drop the course, but completed it. A noticeable difference became apparent in the conduct of the professor. The professor quit ridiculing Jane. Jane reported that he appeared to be showing much greater respect to all his students, including Jane, and generally accorded his female students better treatment. Following the completion of the course, Jane returned to see the professor once more. Jane perceived that not surprisingly, the professor was noticeably nervous to see her. But, then she explained her reason for meeting with him a second time. Her reason was to thank him. She imparted that having been put in a bad situation, she had learned to stand up for herself and was quite proud of having done so. Jane experienced a difficult challenge, which no student should be compelled to withstand. Happily, she was able to achieve a good outcome. What makes this story even more remarkable, is that both this professor and student grew from the experience to develop a positive relationship, and the professor later was a reference for her when she applied to law schools across Canada.

When professors are not as knowledgeable as they could be or dependent on text material that may be inaccurate, Aboriginal students frequently feel compelled to try to improve or complete information. At other times, a student may be called upon by a lecturer to present "the" Native perspective on an issue. As one student described the sensation of being called on to speak for all Aboriginal people, "it is like having a hundred thousand Indians stamped on my forehead" (Personal Conversation, 1997). The fact that the larger society still generally perceives First Nations people as one homogeneous mass, means that Aboriginal students are not seen or treated as individuals with many different experiential and cultural backgrounds, languages, experiences and interests.

Although students encounter courses where First Nations are not always fairly presented, there are also courses and professors at University of Calgary who have consistently during the last decade and more, been knowledgeable and understanding in their teaching about First Nations peoples. There are a significant number of Non-Native professors who are supportive of Aboriginal students and to whose classes, Native students recommend their peers. Students also nominate these outstanding professors for a teaching award given annually for over a decade, by The Native Centre and the First Nations Student Association. Each year there are multiple nominations of professors that students identify as worthy of recognition for their exemplary teaching about Aboriginal people and for their respectfulness, understanding and encouragement of Native students.

Native students attending University of Calgary since 1991 have embarked on a variety of different programs. Frequently in the past, students chose programs in Education and Social Work, and there continues to be a considerable demand for professionals in

these fields in the Aboriginal community. However, students are also choosing to study the Social Sciences, Humanities, Fine Arts, Engineering, and increasingly Sciences, Business Management, and undergraduate programs preparatory to Law and Medicine. In these many different areas of study, students encounter a range of learning challenges and strive to develop requisite skills. But, the acquisition of the necessary knowledge and skills still presents a culturally confusing task.

University culture is a new experience each year for all those just beginning it. The majority of first year and transfer students are from mainstream culture and appear to adjust to the new university culture over a short time. For many Native students not reared in mainstream society and coming to University of Calgary from reserves and small communities, adapting to the new culture may take longer. Many of the elements of the university process, how it is organized, the large impersonal campus, the ways of getting things done, are so dissimilar to Native students' communities and cultures of origin that everything seems confusing and unclear. Native students may feel like they are the only ones who do not understand the system. In this new cultural setting, students struggle with the ways of doing things, addressing assignments when everyone around them seems implicitly to have a concept of what is expected, and they do not. While in their writing process they are' having' to work on being explicit, Native students find that in other classroom operations, all around them Non-Native people are "implicitly" grasping "implicit" expectations to which they are not attuned.

In my role as Co-ordinator, I work each year with students, guiding them through what often seems like the maze of university level language, jargon, procedures and

policies. Students share with me the frustrations that they feel when their classmates do well with such apparent ease on assignments, while they are burning so much energy trying to identify not just what some of the words mean, but what needs to be done to complete an assignment successfully and to meet the expectations of the professor. Together, students and I often go over assignments in advance, reviewing both written and any verbal instruction they may have heard, to isolate the task and the elements that need to be addressed, and how the information needs to be presented. I have learned that interpreting the institution and the university culture to Native students is integral to my teaching practice. With guidance and experience, Native students become much better attuned to the mores and expectations of university, but it demands significant exertion for students to develop expertise in interpreting the culture.

Many students are now demonstrating that expertise. While a few years ago, students would say, "so long as I pass," now more and more seek to excel, to achieve the grades necessary for law school, medicine or graduate studies. At recent Native Centre graduation banquets, we have celebrated students who graduate with high grades with an award recognizing academic achievement. There are always several nominees, all with Grade Point Averages over 3.0. In 2002, the award winner had earned an average of 4.0 and was the Gold and Silver Medal winner in her Faculty. As well, Native students demonstrate that they are no longer just at university to learn what Euro-Canadian culture has to teach, or to learn about our culture the better to understand the white society. Many Native students report that they learn a great deal about their own history, literature and culture in courses, while some not raised in their culture learn about spirituality by participating in events with peers at The Native Centre. It is hugely significant, however,

that through choice, many Native students are willing to teach and share information about their culture in The Native Centre, and in courses with Non-Native students at the University. Each year, Native students are writing papers, oral presentations or organizing cultural guest speakers for their classes. They are teaching about the medicine wheel and spirituality, about Aboriginal world view, telling about residential schools, about grim social and economic issues extant on reserves, but also telling about the vitality of the oral tradition, of Aboriginal artists, writers, cultural ceremonies and communities.

In my daily interactions with Native students, I observe that the majority of students find strength in their culture, which allows them to share it proudly with others. Being raised in their culture and spirituality, or often times, renewing links with their culture has given students a more positive sense of self, and greater strength to encounter and overcome vicissitudes, while garnering a mainstream university education. In sharing their culture with Non-Native peers, professors, and myself as staff in The Native Centre, these Native students exemplify their own cultural mores of sharing, collectivity and community. And, while Native students attending and graduating from University have experienced tremendous challenges, growth and new learning in academic culture, the impact of their presence on the university culture while ongoing, is as yet unclear and not wholly comprehended by the institution. Over each of the last several years, I believe that as Native students have participated in their courses, they meet, inform, alter stereo-types and potentially positively influence attitudes, understandings and behaviours of those they encounter. It is a lengthy, not a short process. Over the twelve years I have worked at The Native Centre, students have voiced the desire for more Aboriginal studies courses or a program at University of Calgary. Interested professors with the support of students have

succeeded in introducing first a minor program in 2002, and recently obtained University approval for a Bachelor's degree in International Indigenous Studies, in the Faculty of Social Sciences, to begin in Fall 2004. The major portion of both the minor and the degree program features courses related to Native peoples in Canada, while international Indigenous content is also a priority. It is an objective of the programs, that Aboriginal faculty will teach in the program. Native students are keen to have Native professors teaching in the University, for the perspective, world view and role model they can provide. Also, since the latter half of the 1990's, more Native students are going on to graduate work, and to doctorate degrees with the purpose of becoming part of academia. Native students are helping to bring their presence, views and influence to the University of Calgary. By attending and succeeding at University, Native students have the potential also to create significant changes in the broader society and in their home communities.

5.3 "WHY DO YOU DO THIS?"

Dan's question framed the telling of my story for the first time, concerning my involvement in Aboriginal education at the university level. As I have reflected on my experience, I find that people are what history is really about, and that in regard to Native people, what I witnessed and participated in during the last half of the twentieth century as a child, young adult and educator has given me the opportunity to be a participant observer in significant events taking place in the individual lives and in communities of Aboriginal people in Canada. Growing up in a small predominantly white community, I learned that Native peoples were dispossessed and degraded, marginalized and dis-respected by the larger society in Canada. But, once I became a teacher in the Native student community, I began to learn a great deal more, about the many issues dominating the lives of Native

peoples, including the failure of the mainstream education system to meet the learning needs of Native students at all levels. I learned that obtaining a mainstream education requires many personal sacrifices for Native students. I learned a lot about Aboriginal cultures, cultural differences and cultural biases, and the role of culture in learning. I learned also that cultures have strengths, and that Aboriginal culture has knowledge and wisdom that can benefit Aboriginal peoples and all peoples. I learned that it is healthy to try to view one's own, mainstream, Euro-Canadian culture (or any other culture), from another perspective and to endeavour to eschew ethnocentrism.

Native students, so many of whom have been non-matriculated adults, have shown me that despite often tragic life and educational experiences, they possess a strong capacity to learn, and the desire and motivation to overcome mountains in order to learn. As a teacher, I have always believed education was extremely valuable and that knowledge is power, but it is the students with whom I work that have taught me just how empowering learning can be (see Chapters Six and Seven). As a teacher, I am constantly learning anew from my students who generously share their cultural knowledge and experience with me, give me the gift of their confidence and trust, and help me to grow as an individual. For these reasons (Dan), I do what I do.

5.4 AFTERWARD

And Dan? Indeed, his question asking, "Why do you do this?" was earnest, and he was seeking a meaningful exchange. His question acted as an initiating catalyst which formed and focussed the personal narrative I have presented in the previous and current chapter. Since the conversation in which the question arose, Dan and I have had several

more opportunities for conversations. We have talked about the many new experiences he has encountered during his studies. Dan is still in university, overcoming challenges, academic, physical, financial and personal. Things came to a climax for him during exams at the end of his third semester, but he weathered the storm of events with incredible fortitude and determination. Soon he will identify a major, soon he will accomplish a degree, and then there will be more and other dreams, more achievements, more…

6.0 CHAPTER 6: SOUNDING THE GRADUATES' STORIES: FINDINGS

6.1 INTRODUCTION

The interview process and garnering the stories of Aboriginal graduates provided a unique opportunity to meet once again with former students and to hear what they wished to share about their experiences at University. It was personally gratifying that the individuals who took part were willing to do so, and were willing to contribute their time and their stories to the research. Since the research is addressing education issues for Aboriginal students in university, the participation of the graduates had the potential to benefit future students within the community of The Native Centre. The readiness of graduates share their stories, confirmed my understanding of the care for community active among Aboriginal graduates. My involvement in the analysis of the stories, the consideration of emerging themes, nurtured the notion that it was appropriate to incorporate the dynamic and holistic orientation of the medicine wheel in order to organize and frame the insights of the graduates. The stories that graduates shared encompass themes and sub-themes, the presentation of which is the focus of this chapter. The voices and stories of the graduates are integral to the study. It was an important part of the process that narrators participate as fully as possible, in the choice of pseudonyms, telling the stories that were significant to them, and expressing their own understanding of success. The graduates also participated in conversations regarding their transcribed stories to ensure the accuracy of the information shared. A brief description of each of the participants is included here in order to profile the diversity of graduates, their character and to create an understanding of the perspectives and values held by participants.

6.2 GRADUATES VOICE SUCCESS

At the centre, the heart of the medicine wheel model, are positioned the individual graduates in relation to success. The phenomenon of the graduates' success and the stories that they share are the heart beat, the vital core for learning which may be achieved from the analytical process. Participants included seven female and two male narrators. Female Aboriginal students in post-secondary characteristically outnumber male students. Duran and Duran (1995) make note of the devastating social psychological impact of conquest and colonization on the male warriors of Native American society. They observe that while men have lost their traditional roles and are struggling and caught up in trauma expressed in a variety of anti-social behaviours, Native women have greater stability in their continued traditional roles. Women physically give birth to the people and thus carry the culture, but now also carry an expanded responsibility for the "psychological and spiritual wellbeing and life of the community" (p.38). Since more female than male students have achieved degrees, it is appropriate that more women graduates be interviewed.

Of the seven female graduates in the study three are married, three are single and one is divorced. The two male graduates are married with children. Eight of the nine graduates are parents and were parents while they were students. The number of children being parented by the graduates ranged from two to five. Two of the participants are currently grandparents, although only one participant was a grandparent (of five children), while she was a student. The age range of graduates at the time that they completed degrees is from 27 to 56 years of age. Only two participants were under the age of 30 when they completed their undergraduate degrees, which is consistent with the pattern of Native

students returning to post-secondary learning at a later age. The average age upon graduation of the nine individuals interviewed was 37 years.

All the graduates have been employed after graduation in fields related to their degrees. Participants' undergraduate degrees included one Bachelor of Social Work, one Bachelor of Education and seven Bachelor of Arts degrees with a variety of majors in Humanities, Social Sciences and Communications and Culture. Four of the interviewees have also achieved additional education in Alberta postsecondary institutions and programs, ranging from another Bachelors degree, to a Masters or professional degree. The graduates possess a bountiful range of academic and life experience which is apparent in the stories they share. The different life experience of participants is also apparent in the pseudonyms selected by graduates, which are diverse, reflecting both Aboriginal names or terms, and English names. The participants in the study were Charlie, Micky, Ineewagi, Walking Against the Wind, Alex, Siapiaaki, Jace, Assiniboine, and Iskwew.

Charlie came from a traditional home and grew up on a reserve speaking her first language, but subsequently spent many years attending residential school. After her father passed away, Charlie was raised by her mother. As a teenager she lived away from family in an urban area and attended a public high school. It took Charlie close to twenty years to accomplish her degree from when she first began to take university courses. Work commitments, personal and family issues were obstacles that prevented the completion of her studies. When Charlie resolved to finish her degree, she enrolled in courses in an Outreach Program. Eventually, she was admitted to the University of Calgary, where she successfully completed her degree despite setbacks including the death of a sibling and her

own ill health. After graduation she was employed in her community, but considers graduates studies. She values her children and growing number of grandchildren. Charlie chose her pseudonym based on a childhood memory. Charlie defines success as happening, "… on a daily basis. What I'll do with my time today. Like, I am living my goal right now… as far as being healthy … but, success to me is just to keep on learning. I love learning!" (Personal Interview, April 3, 2003).

Micky comes from a western plains Cree reserve in another province, but was living in Calgary when she decided to go to university. Micky is from a large family, and is the first person in her family to achieve a degree. She began her studies in the mid 1990's after completing upgrading in grade twelve high school subjects, so that she could apply for admission to the University. Micky balanced school commitments with the demands of her own young children, and volunteer activities with peers on campus. She is considering graduate school, but the financial realities of being a student once again, instead of an employed person providing for her family, are delaying her decision to pursue graduate studies. Micky chose her pseudonym based on the name of a friend. In her terms, success includes a range of ideas, such as,

> …well, completing university, uhm, being able to support my family, in whatever way … I mean it may mean financially. It may mean emotional…. Just being able to support myself and my kids and to just have the choices to do what, what we want to do and what we need to do in our life (Personal Interview, April 22, 2003).

Ineewagi also came to University of Calgary as an adult student with young children. She has a mixed heritage, but grew up on a reserve in another province and Ineewagi has knowledge of some of her Chippewan language. She applied to the

University of Calgary at the urging of the staff of a women's shelter she was living in. Ineewagi completed high school upgrading before she applied and was admitted. Her home reserve placed large expectations on her requiring that she take five full courses (full-time studies). This is a heavy load for someone who has been out of school for several years and has pre-school children to care for. But, Ineewagi sped through a challenging program and then went on to complete a second degree. She is the first in her immediate family to earn a degree. Ineewagi chose as pseudonym a name given to her by an Elder. She speaks of success as,

> I guess to kind of be at the top of my game, uhm, to be able to progress and to do better every time. So, success is when you can learn, and learn from your mistakes, and become the best that you are I guess....You have to fall down and scrape your knees a few times, before you can actually ride the bike (Personal Interview, June 12, 2003).

Walking Against the Wind was reared traditionally and is fluent in her First Nation's language. She has lived on her reserve her whole life and is married with four children. Walking regards herself as a wife, mother, a daughter, sister, grand-daughter. She completed high school upgrading on the reserve before she came to university. She found she was unhappy in her program of study and left for a time. She decided to return in a different program. As well, her father passed away while she was attending university and this was a difficult sorrow to bear. Walking Against the Wind chose her name as being representative of how she sees herself, both when she is studying in the mainstream and when she is among her own family, and people of her Assiniboine Sioux Nation. Walking is the first of her family to achieve a degree. She sometimes shortens her pseudonym to Walking for convenience, as I will do also. Walking states,

> Success to me is an individual setting goals and standards for

> herself or himself and achieving those goals. Success can come in many different ways; it could be getting a higher education. It could be playing well in sports or having a goal to be achieved, and achieving that goal.... Like taking a leadership role in something, achieving a position like that ... and being able to share your successes with the other people and seeing you influence people.... It can be success too (Personal Interview, May 12, 2003).

Alex has spent most of his life living on reserve with the exception of the time he spent living in Calgary to accomplish his degree. He is proud of his traditions and can speak his language. He began his educational journey taking high school upgrading in a Transition Year Program, took further courses in an Outreach Program and then was admitted at University of Calgary. While he was a student he and his spouse were raising two school age children. Since graduating from University of Calgary, he has finished a second degree. He is employed as a manager by his First Nation. He is the first member of his family to achieve a degree, and the first member of his First Nation to achieve a business degree. Alex chose his pseudonym to honour his deceased brother. Alex succinctly states, "My definition of success ... I guess my definition is just to ah, just do it" (Personal Interview, June 23, 2003).

Siapiaaki is a person of mixed heritage who grew up in an urban setting, and attended mainstream schools where she encountered racism. At home, her Native parent followed mainstream cultural ways and her Non-Native parent was an enthusiast and student of Aboriginal culture. Siapiaaki decided to return to school as an adult when personal and employment issues provoked a crisis. She first sought out high school upgrading in a University College Entrance Preparation Program, then went on to College and proceeded to seek admission to University of Calgary. She is the mother of two

children and was a single parent throughout her post-secondary studies. Siapiaaki chose her pseudonym as representing and describing her mixed European and Aboriginal heritage. She contemplates success,

> Hmm, I haven't even really thought about it, but if I were to define success, I would … just simply say living your potential and achieving your potential and expanding your potential as well. When you are on that continuous growth, that in and of itself, is success and that your success is not just a milestone that you achieve, but it's an on-going sense of well being that you are living out your potential (Personal Interview, April 10, 2003).

Jace spent most of her childhood growing up a great distance from her home reserve. She and five siblings were raised by her mother who had fled an abusive relationship. Jace lived in both rural and urban settings, and all her schooling in childhood was in mainstream schools. She was discouraged in school by the racism of peers and teachers and never considered post-secondary education until she was an adult and had been making her own living for several years. She began university on a part-time basis and also completed high school upgrading to obtain university admission. Jace has contended with and triumphed over emotional health issues as well as the academic challenges of university. Jace's pseudonym represents an important physical aspect of accomplishment, independence and freedom in her life. She describes elements of success in her educational and life journey.

> Success for me would be being put on the probation list for not having a good GPA and being successful in getting off that and going through the rest of my university experience. [And success personally] … I was on death's door wanting to die and … everything was so black and so, I didn't want to live… to the point where I appreciate every day and enjoy every day and [I'm] glad to be out of that. Again success, being at such a low point in my life and being on the verge of you know, dying, and to turn around and appreciate life and wanting to live and wanting to do

> things, to have a dream, you know I didn't have a dream before, other than to die (Personal Interview, April 9, 2003).

Assiniboine grew up both on reserve and later with a Non-Native foster family in a community bordering the reserve. He came from a large family, but the circumstances of his upbringing meant he did not know his parents and siblings well, nor did he learn much about his culture until he became an adult. Assiniboine fought many personal issues before he entered a University College Entrance Preparation Program and completed his grade twelve. When he began university, he was married with three school age children and he started university not knowing if his First Nation would assist him to pay for university. He did receive some sponsorship, but finances required that he work throughout his degree studies. The pseudonym, Assiniboine speaks of his identification and improved association with his people. Assiniboine presents his understanding of success, "Uhm, achieving and reaching your goals. To me that's basic, ah … I don't think it's much more complicated for me than that" (Personal Interview, May 15, 2003).

Iskwew was raised on a Cree reserve. Like many individuals in her generation, her exposure to Cree customs and language was limited when she was growing up, due to the impact of residential schools on her parents. As well, she attended high school in a mainstream educational setting. When she decided to take post-secondary studies, she attended a mainstream college to complete upgrading. Iskwew was a married adult and had her first child while she was attending college. Subsequently, she entered a Transition Year Program on reserve. She completed further university courses and then applied to and was admitted to University of Calgary as a transfer student. Iskwew moved to Calgary with two young children and her spouse. Following the achievement of her first degree, she was

employed by her First Nation and then went on to post-graduate studies at another university. The identification of a pseudonym was considered at length until Iskwew finally chose the Cree word for woman. Implicit in the word, Iskwew are qualities including strength, caring, giving and wisdom. Iskwew is conscious that for her, success has evolved:

> … Succcess, uhm, for me it's changed throughout my life experiences, throughout my journey… before my undergrad, success to me was achieving, achieving an education, but it also had more of a material you know, aspect to it and it's changed you know through my undergrad experience and obviously my graduate experience.… I still define it as achieving a desired set of goals, but it's also about maintaining, living a healthy balanced life and I'm still working on that and, because it is so hard. I think that balance is so hard to achieve… just if you think of the four aspects mentally, physically, spiritually, emotionally. Once I really achieve almost to the point where I am comfortable, then I, I've achieved success (Personal Interview, April 24, 2003).

Each graduate acknowledges their own success at university, but does not confine their understanding of success exclusively to an academic milieu. This suggests that the notion of success contains a number of meanings and interpretations which can be explored later in the discussion of findings.

6.3 VISION

At the eastern quadrant of the medicine wheel is the place of vision. It is the direction of spring, where spiritual energy is high, new beginnings are created, vision and ideas are born. The theme of vision emerged from the stories graduates shared about their reasons for deciding to seek a University education. Graduates spoke of their motivations, inspirations and the goals which prompted them to consider post-secondary education.

Walking found her vision for education developing over time. Initially her aspirations were limited, but gradually she began to consider and was encouraged to dream of the possibilities.

> At the beginning, I thought because I dropped out of grade ten, I thought I'll finish high school, but once I started getting higher, it seemed like I was wanting higher… So, first year I was working at finishing grade nine. Once I did that, I wanted to finish at least to grade twelve. And, uhm, I'm a person who sets high standards for myself and I had family members, extended family members who had an education, who had degrees.... They let me see that people can get an education if they wanted to, and I had a goal to go into a [specific] program because I was doing so well … and when I reached the program, it wasn't what I wanted (Personal Interview, May 12, 2003).

Walking embarked on another program and achieved a diploma. It was at that time that her dreams to pursue a degree coalesced and she received further encouragement to motivate her.

> When I finished my… diploma my dad was alive then. He was very ill and bed ridden and he didn't come to my convocation at the college, but when I came back from the convocation he told me, 'Now you have your diploma, now go onto the next step,' and it seemed like already there I had, I had an expectation from my Dad, and ah so, in January I came back and he passed on that following April. But, I always made sure that I would finish for him and for myself (Personal Interview, May 12, 2003)

The encouragement of parents also played an important role in Iskwew's decision to pursue post-secondary. She recalls that her father was particularly influential in inspiring her to think about education and to regard it as critical.

> …My parents particularly my father, you know, 'Education is the key, education is the key, education is the key,' you know, 'You keep going,' and even through our elementary and high school he'd always talk about that. 'Education is the key, education is important,' and he'd always talk to us about the importance of education… So that always stayed with me too and I always knew

> that in order to have… some sort of freedom and feel comfortable I had to obtain, you know, an education. You think back on your growing up years and that's all I ever really remember my father saying, you know… my parents, [were]constantly encouraging, not only me… they had ten children (Personal Interview, April 24, 2003).

Although Iskwew received parental encouragement, it was not until she was the mother of two young children that she finally acted on the lessons from her father and tried college and finally entered university. She says, "At that time I was just thinking of obtaining my degree. I knew I wanted a degree… of course I always dreamed of … a masters, a doctorate… But, it was just a dream, I don't know if I ever thought of it becoming a reality" (Personal Interview, April 24, 2003).

Family influence played a role for Charlie in her return to university after the absence of over a decade and a half. She identifies her son as the catalyst that prompted her decision. "I have to say that… when I saw my son get up there getting his second degree, that was the moment that… I was so proud watching him and I thought all of the sudden, I can. I want to get my degree." Charlie realized that her family was grown up and that work no longer offered a challenge for her. She decided to go back to school and wasted no time in acting upon her vision. "He graduated in May and I went back in September. So that was an achievement, just getting started and then, getting all the way through!" (Personal Interview, April 3, 2003).

Siapiaaki developed her motivation from childhood experiences. Her parents were strong advocates of education and created an environment which developed in her a thirst for learning. Siapiaaki describes this as,

> A life long yearning for higher education, something that was instilled in me by my parents who are both academically oriented and even though they might have not had the same opportunities or the time to spend pursuing an education, they were very scholarly and particular about the way we spoke and always encouraging us to read, and ah seek education; however, my experience in education was not a very good one, but they managed to… help me to see a future beyond that even though they didn't understand what I was going through in my school life… their encouragement and their pursuits and the things that we spoke about at the table and the shows that we watched. We'd all gather around and watch… you know those anthropological type of things, and ohm educational things, and appreciation for the arts, appreciation for history and world travel you know, and that sort of stayed with me and I always felt like I wanted to study great writers, study the greats, and it was a yearning (Personal Interview, April 10, 2003).

In addition to this early foundation which nurtured her desire to learn, Siapiaaki reports that life events and reliance on a spiritual power helped her to rediscover her vision and purpose. At a critical point Siapiaaki lost her job, a breakdown in living arrangements caused the withdrawal of social assistance, and she and her children were homeless and having to rely on family to shelter and feed them. She had applied to a University College Entrance Program some time previously, but as months passed she had given up hope and had forgotten about the program. She regarded her situation as desperate. Siapiaaki recalls, "… so, I supplicated to God and then I supplicated to my grandmother, you know, please help me out here, show me which way to go." Her vision was ignited when following her search for spiritual guidance, "the phone rang," and it was the Entrance Program staff calling to say they had a place for her, "and they said that I could start the next week and there was funding in place for me, and it was just like an answer!" (Personal Interview, April 10, 2003).

Assiniboine and Jace both indicate that their motivations for pursuing post-secondary originated from the encouragement of others. Based on their previous educational experience neither had included or considered university as a goal. Assiniboine is now very goal oriented, but his plan when he went into upgrading was to finish his grade twelve. He had no idea what university was, and it was a college instructor who first suggested he go to university. This recommendation was a contrast to previous advice.

> Actually, ah, late in that first year at [college] when we did our finals, it was suggested to me that I go to university and I thought well, I don't think I, I don't think I can do that. I don't, I've been told all my life that that was something that would be never in my future and… I think that's something that, that's a failing that a lot of educational institutions have… I don't think that they give students as much credit as they should. I think in reality, ohm, it's, it's some people just aren't ready to do specific things at a specific time and maybe later on in their life they'll have success tackling the same sort of thing (Personal Interview, May 15, 2003).

When Assiniboine began university he was curious to see who was right, his former teachers or those who recently suggested he attempt post-secondary. Additional motivation was piqued by observation of his extended family history. He had a relative who he knew had gone to university, and who seemed to be favoured and well regarded by relatives.

> I had an uncle actually, ah, and the whole family thought the world of him. He was as lazy as a pet mouse, but the only thing … all he ever did, was do books and eat. Never cleaned, never washed dishes, never did anything, but this was all kind of overlooked because he was a university student and he eventually became a teacher…. So, I thought well, it was kind of interesting how people view teachers. So… that kind of interested me. The other thing is, I have seen some teachers and they were absolutely horrible at what they did…. And, I really think that those people should find something other to do with their lives because ah, I think there are a lot of good young people out there who will be very, very good at… teaching children and meeting their needs.

> So, I felt that I could do that in a few areas (Personal Interview, May 15, 2003).

Encouragement to set university as a goal originated from a college instructor, but the special treatment given his uncle, as well as the notion that teaching could be improved upon, combined to motivate and inspire an ambition for Assiniboine. When he applied to university he had in place his vision to achieve a teaching degree, but he points out, "I didn't know what, well actually, how I was going to accomplish that" (Personal Interview, May15, 2003).

Jace, too encountered early discouragement about her future, while she was a young person. "In high school, you know the teacher says you're too dumb and stupid to go into [academic] courses; therefore, you take this typing and business machines, and stuff. You can never be successful and do the academic route … and I believed that, for the most part," (Personal Interview, April 9, 2003). Jace credits her decision to go onto university many years later, to a co-worker who suggested that she should try it. Initially, university represented something to do, it was more like a whim with the added attraction that in university she would have the chance to read. She did not understand what coming to university might involve, but as she took a selection of courses and began to learn about a variety of subject areas, she found herself wanting to keep learning, gathering information, and the urge to continue learning, caused her to seek out approachable professors who encouraged and tutored her. Jace found that her tentative vision of possibilities expanded, within the university. Although her vision was not clearly defined when she began, and it took more than a decade for her to finish her degree part-time, the confidence of a co-

worker, and the rewards of the learning process have given her aspiration and strength, "to want to do things, to have a dream" (Personal Interview, April 9, 2003).

Ineewagi indicated that she also had several circumstances that contributed to her decision to seek a university education. Since high school she had worked in low paying jobs with few prospects, started a family and was fleeing an abusive partner. The staff of a women's shelter she arrived at, urged her and others to complete their education. Ineewagi noted that, "...there was a girl living across the hall from me... she was going to university and she was the biggest dope I've ever met. So, I thought well, if she could do it then I certainly could." This realization of her own abilities, the recognition of her potential by the shelter staff and their support, made it possible for her to consider university. An additional impetus came when she considered the future of her family.

> So I thought, well, I got two little kids. Being a [specific job] is not going to cut it for an income to raise these two kids by myself...and I have to make a showing for, at least trying to do something...cause I got all these people around me that are trying to help me get my life together in this women's shelter and I thought well what did I used to want to do. Well, in grade eight I wrote this essay on what I wanted to be when I grew up and it was, I wanted to be a lawyer and I wanted to have two kids...or a set of twins, so it wouldn't interfere too much with my career. So, I thought that was pretty cool, and I thought well, I'll just try and be a lawyer (Personal Interview, June 12, 2003).

Ineewagi called upon the present and future needs of her family, her two children, to motivate her, and she sought out passed dreams to find the vision which would lead her to university. Similarly, Micky located her primary motivation in her family. As a young mother of several children, she had concern not just for herself, but for the next generation.

> ...growing up I've known that there's some things that you just can't get... you need to have to survive. I had my family when I

> was younger, so I never really had any work experience, so I didn't have that to rely on to support my family. I knew that in order for me to support myself and my kids...[I would need] to go to school and get the tools that I needed to support us (Personal Interview, April 22, 2003).

Micky realized that she had always been curious and liked to learn different things, and that going to university would allow her to "develop my mind." Once at university she discovered that "there was a whole world that I hadn't explored... my mind started opening up, and although these people in classes were a lot younger than me... we could talk and... You know we were all kind of the same age after all" (Personal Interview, April 22, 2003). The vision of learning helped to motivate Micky in difficult times, and the idea that her kids might want to go to university one day made her conscious that she was setting the example. Alex, too, considers his children as a strong motivator in precipitating his return to education.

> I had responsibilities as a young adult. Ah, my son inspired me to go back to school. He was only one year old, and I thought you know if I had to secure a future for him, then I better go back to school to create opportunities for us... I set my mind to it and although I was... an unclassified student to begin with, that if I had to achieve and succeed, I would have to ensure that I had a vision to complete the program and I think that really helped me a lot too and to see that yes, it can be done (Personal Interview, June 23, 2003).

Alex vision was for himself to complete, and for his children to be able to accomplish things in the future. Learning became very important to him and he appreciated the potential benefits that an education can offer.

> I wanted to open the doors for myself. I wanted a future. I wanted to create opportunities for myself.... Also, in addition, I felt that in order for my kids to succeed, I had to succeed. If I wanted them to be who I wanted them [to be] then, **I** had to be the person that I want them to be... I mean, if I had that degree, that

> would inspire and motivate my children, relatives too, to complete their education as well (Personal Interview, June 23, 2003).

Ultimately the vision that Alex speaks about is one that extends beyond himself, preparing the way for his children, becoming the kind of accomplished and educated individuals he would like them to become. But his vision goes beyond immediate family and encompasses the future that he envisions for relatives and thus his community. Alex shares with the other participants in the study, the desire for new beginnings, and seeks out an educational path as the way to create opportunities. Alex, Siapiaaki, Ineewagi and Micky are conscious of finding motivation in securing a future for their children. Charlie is inspired by her son's degrees to venture forth to find her success. Past experiences influence the goals and visions of the participants, all of whom had to finish high school as adults. In many instances, such as in the experiences described by Assiniboine and Jace, the past has held damagingly negative self-images which they are driven to defeat. Ineewagi searches her past to find a positive vision to work towards. Iskwew, Walking and Siapiaaki recall the positive messages and supportive environments provided by parents who implanted the thirst for knowledge. Learning about the world, discovering opportunities, and the potential for shaping the future emerge as inspirations which frame a compelling vision voiced by many of the study participants.

6.4 CHALLENGE

On the southern quadrant of the medicine wheel is the summer season and for the purposes of this analysis, the south is representative of the challenges faced by the participants in the study. Summer is a time when things ripen, traditions may be celebrated, emotional energy and feelings are high. The graduates shared stories of the

challenges, the sharp edges of experience, upon which they honed their survival skills. Pursuing post-secondary visions lead to difficult transitions, isolation, hardships and in many instances conflict between cultural traditions and the world view encountered at the university. Sacrifices, financial burdens and personal loss feature in the stories. The discussion of challenges is divided into sub-themes in order to highlight central themes which the stories embrace.

6.4.1 Challenging the Mainstream Experience: Isolation

One of the difficult personal challenges several graduates shared was being adults amidst a much younger student population. The graduates remembered feeling the difference acutely. Assiniboine recalled that there were challenges being a mature student, but that at times and in courses with group work, he was uncomfortable. "We had group work and if you were a mature student, they didn't want to team with you… they did their level best to make me feel very uncomfortable in the classroom" (Personal Interview, May 15, 2003). Charlie recalls her own reaction to studying on campus, "It was scary at first because everywhere I looked, I saw young kids that were even younger than my children, and then, getting into a classroom that was quite scary, because most of the students were so young" (Personal Interview, April 3, 2003). In some of her small classes however, it was easier to get to know students and professors.

Iskwew noted the age difference and experienced it negatively when she found younger instructors who were impatient or unhelpful. One teaching assistant in a difficult course seemed unwilling to work with her and would "instantly brush me off, kind of thing. 'You should know this'… that's the feeling, right." Iskwew found that this made her doubt

herself and caused her to feel terribly inadequate, before the dismissive attitude of someone so much younger, who was clearly intelligent but "cold." (Personal Interview, April 24, 2003). In the midst of culture shock coming to campus, Alex encountered communication problems. He stated, "I was in classes where I was one of the oldest students and I kind of felt uncomfortable," and interacting with younger non-Native students "who just came out of high school" in group projects, he reacted with discomfort, holding himself back and not participating or communicating with ease.

The transition to studying on campus elicited feelings of loneliness and isolation for Alex and several other participants in the study. Alex recalls, that he was "alone and lonesome," and he was "from away and I'm new at campus, I was lost, and although there were services provided, I was intimidated by the fact that I was alone" (Personal Interview, June 23, 2003). The isolation Alex experienced was exacerbated by the fact that his family did not accompany him to Calgary during the first year of his studies at the University. Iskwew came to the city with her family, but for employment reasons her spouse returned home, and "for a little under two years it was just me and my daughters." Iskwew recalls finding that many things "phased" her, trying to cope with university, child care and transition, "I was lonely and even after university itself [daytime classes], I was lonely" (Personal Interview, April 24, 2003).

Jace remembers being very lonely as a part-time student, unsure of what university was all about, and too shy to make contact with other students

> So, I would just come and go. Come to class and then go home. So I never met anybody. I never met any students, would sit in the back of the class and hide, you know, when I would hear the

> lectures and kind of zip in and out as quickly as possible. Ohm, never talked to anybody in class, you know… very isolated, very isolated (Personal Interview, April 9,2003).

Micky found that she "didn't make a lot of friends on campus." Her commitments as a parent required her to leave campus in time to be home to supervise her children after school. She was reluctant to make contacts with younger people who had other interests. Her family was the priority so that she "would rather be home than at a bar" (Personal Interview, April 22, 2003). Walking Against the Wind was a parent too, and she was commuting to campus which made it more difficult for her to socialize. She made few contacts on campus.

> The first year it seemed like I was afraid to talk to anybody, ah. Ohm, in classes, I didn't contribute much. I mostly listened to people talking, people expressing their thoughts… I came here took my courses, then I went back. There, I didn't do, I didn't take part in social activities and with group projects I would meet my group on campus somewhere, but it seemed like it was all focused on studying. When I came here it was the work I focused on. And, went back to my reserve and studied there, stayed there all weekend to do my work, my school work… (Personal Interview, May 12, 2003).

Walking regards her time as very isolating, with no friends on campus and the people in her community were for the most part unaware that she was in university. It took her some time to meet other Native students in her program, and she regrets not having the chance of socializing to a greater extent.

Siapiaaki attended a University College Entrance Preparation program and college transfer program before coming to University of Calgary. She recalls her college experience as being really good, a setting in which she made several close friends who

"assisted each other along our paths," and there existed "intellectual intimacy, sharing of knowledge, personal support as well as academic support" (Personal Interview, April 10, 2003). However, although she had been raised in an urban setting, when she came to University of Calgary, she too, felt the difference. "It was like coming from a small town to the big city. It was bigger… it was more glorious … at the same time it had some of the elements of the big city… less personability… just so many people. You did tend to feel a bit more isolated" (Personal Interview, April 10, 2003).

6.4.2 Challenging the Past: Stereo-types and Self-esteem

For those students who entered university from the reserve, the challenges in regard to making the transition to post-secondary education and into the mainstream were most greatly felt. In Charlie's experience, a critical challenge was taking university courses in an Outreach Program, because it was housed in the building that once was a residential school she had attended.

> That initial entrance through the door just about made me turn back and never come back to the College. Not because of the courses, but mainly because that was the school I had gone to as a young child, and my memories of the residential school are not very pleasant, but anyways… that is something that I had to overcome (Personal Interview, April 3, 2003).

Iskwew found her first college experience daunting. She entered a mainstream college as a young mother, and struggled against self-doubt and stero-types, "I had my first daughter… and I was pregnant with my second daughter… I was the only First Nations woman, pregnant, you know… and I was feeling the stereotypical… image towards Native people. It made it so much more difficult for me, being there, walking the halls at college" (Personal Interview, April 24, 2003). Iskwew had her second child on a Friday, and

returned the following week to write exams, barely able to walk, on the verge of fainting, carrying and nursing her baby. The next few years she attended college on reserve in a University Transfer Program, where she found the support to help her to cope and to improve her confidence and skills. Coming to the University of Calgary and entering the mainstream once again "wasn't easy," and raised many issues. "Not only was it hard for me academically and financially, and emotionally… I think I lacked even at that time, spiritual guidance." Iskwew's feelings of loss and lack of confidence in herself were heightened because, "I didn't see many Native students, I remember because I searched, well I looked around, and when I didn't see many Native people, I don't know, if it was somewhat intimidating. I was intimidated, not just by the new students, but by the whole experience, I was overwhelmed, cause I was lost" (Personal Interview, April 24, 2003).

When Alex started Transition and university courses on reserve, he acknowledges, "I didn't know what the hell I was getting myself into… It was very scary at first. Soon however the learning environment of small classes, other Native students and the support of instructors made the upgrading and university preparation experience a comfortable one. At the college on reserve, Alex recalls, "We were… almost like a family. I had a lot of fun, I knew everybody. I had a one on one basis with the professors and other learners, too… I had all the support in the world, to prepare me for the transition to the University" (Personal Interview, June 23, 2003). Despite this preparation, Alex still felt that at University of Calgary, he found "a big difference," he was plunged into the midst of a majority population, and "It was quite a culture shock for me." One of the impacts of the transition for Alex was that his marks fell. He indicates that, "It was a confidence that I had to rebuild… it was only in my last year that I felt very comfortable with the transition,

and my grades were back to where they were when I was at the College" (Personal Interview, June 23, 2003).

Having lived the experience of being Aboriginal people in Canada, affected not only Iskwew and Alex in their transition, but numerous of the other graduates told of feelings and experiences they encountered at University. Jace recalls that after several years as a student, a campus acquaintance tried to persuade her to go to The Native Centre, Jace resisted the idea and they argued about the idea for months. Jace reflected upon this battle, "She says, 'I'm taking you to the Native Centre,' and I go, 'No, I'm not going'… I was scared to identify as being a Native person… I didn't want to acknowledge that." Jace admits that everyone probably knew she was Native, but her resistance was prompted by "history, from the past," that it wasn't "a very good thing to be" a Native person and, "So, I didn't want to be it here, either" (Personal Interview, April 9, 2003).

Ineewagi reported that generally she was not treated poorly as a Native person, but one strongly felt instance stays with her.

> I'm fortunate in my appearance such that… I don't experience the Red Necked racism that goes around there as much as other people do… I didn't find difficulties in that area with the exception of one course… that was very heated. Like really bad racism. It was an Aboriginal literature class, and it made us wonder why these Red Neck racist people were attending that class… when they had such strong views against Aboriginal people. There were very heated discussions in the classroom… there were heated emails going back and forth… for that class. That class was bad! (Personal Interview, June 12, 2003).

Siapiaaki had a similar experience to Ineewagi in a Native literature course in which she and others encountered entrenched attitudes among Non-Native students. She

found herself, "seeking to sensitize, clarify… a Native experience, a Native history to Non-Native students," and to supplement the information in class with her own experience. She found it a struggle against rigid attitudes, and was frustrated in classes where Native people were "pathologized" or romanticized (Personal Interview, April 10, 2003).

Siapiaaki recollected that although she was not readily identifiable as a Native person always, her ability to be accepted in the mainstream, but having spent time among the Native community in her youth, and on occasion having been identified as Native, made her somewhat ambivalent and disinclined to speak for Native people in general. However, she could still feel alone, and was glad to meet one other Native student in her program, because for the most part, she felt like "the odd girl out, or the odd woman out." This could make events feel like obstacles and Siapiaaki found herself confronting the issue of belonging even in her final year, and the experience seemed to trigger a flashback for her.

> I don't know why, but when I was accepted into the Honours program it should have been a wonderful experience, however, when I went into the class I felt like I was in grade one again and I was six years old and I was the only person with Native blood and therefore, identified as full Native, doesn't matter. 'Your Mom's an Indian'… that's what I, I was trying to figure out how they knew that I was Native, because I don't really look, I look Spanish, Greek, whatever, you know Persian. I've been mistaken, just you know people with mixed ancestry seem to be chameleons for other cultural groups. Anyway, they must have seen my Mom, because she took me to school everyday and I was, ah, treated with a lot of racism, but at that time, it wasn't really overt. It was just the sense of not fitting in, not belonging, and… other children not talking to you. And, and also being made fun of as well, but that came later, you know more intensely. So, I felt that way again and I couldn't … my self- esteem just took a dive. I felt like I was really not that smart at all. It was a very strange experience. It was like I had a post-traumatic episode because I was in this room… everyone was much younger too of

> course, because the average student population and especially in [program] is young, white female and 21 years old, no children… they're all brilliant. They eat, breath, sleep [program]. I felt inadequate and also because I came from a perspective and I hadn't really figured out what my perspective was (Personal Interview, April 10, 2003).

Siapiaaki describes her response in this instance as "internalized colonialism or racism," an effect that left her struggling with the belief that she was stupid and had no business in University. Siapiaaki spoke of another instance when a film was presented in a course and was not accompanied with any discussion. The film of residential school survivors she believed, "might have turned off a lot of people, and people who didn't understand the residential school might think that we're all a bunch of raving lunatics because of it." As Siapiaaki noted, the intergenerational impact of residential schools "manifests itself in different forms" (Personal Interview, April 10, 2003). As well, her frustration encompassed a sense that she was in the wrong program. She was trying to sort out her own perspective amidst many questions about her major, and found herself in conflict with the perspective presented in most classes. "I knew that…I believed art therapy was the most potent for Native People and existentialism was what I thought was more relevant, and here they are science, scientists" but it took some time for her to discover, "I was qualitative… but I didn't know about qualitative perspectives." Only later was this revealed and in the meantime she questioned. "Why am I learning this? I disagree with most of it!" (Personal Interview, April 10, 2003).

6.4.3 Challenging Cultural Conflicts

In addition to being challenged by feelings of low self-esteem and confidence, Siapiaaki's conflict with the process and world view emphasized in her program was an

intense issue. In her courses she was trouble by the emphasis on science, and a "reductionist" approach to human behaviour which viewed it as a product of biology. She felt trapped studying ideas "not relevant to cultural experience." Other graduates also shared experiences of dissonance between their culture and the cultural climate and mores of the University. Charlie recalled considerable difference between the culture she was reared in and mainstream culture. She reflected that textbooks gave information about Canadian society, but did not include her. She observed,

> I noticed a lot of the courses I took tended to, some of the text books, generalize on the Canadian society, the White society per se. I didn't grow up as a White person. I had my own culture that I cherished. I'm proud to say the person that I want to be is because part of it comes from the culture that I was brought up in, and that led me to respect people from all walks of life and all kinds of animals… anything to do with nature, respect of nature (Personal Interview, April 3, 2003).

Charlie felt the text books didn't include much about Native people or culture, and what was included was very general and not an accurate portrayal of diversity among Native Nations. By far the major contrast she noted between the two cultures was competition. It distresses her to see the growth of competition in the Native community which she sees as adopted from white society. Assiniboine, similarly expressed the view that the behaviours of students in the university culture of competition was evident, and at times compounded his struggle to fit in and participate. The students were competing "trying to see to it that they had everything in place so that they would be… first in line to be chosen, and they didn't want to take on any baggage that might hold them back" (Personal Interview, May 15, 2003).

Alex also experienced competition as a disturbing factor in his courses on campus. The competition was intimidating, and shook his confidence. Alex reacted to this by not trying as much "because of the competition, you know and the students that I was with at that time… at first, I did, I had doubts." Alex was further conflicted by concern that academia was not part of his tradition, and university learning was a departure from his culture.

> It was certainly different for me to, having to take courses from a professor versus an Elder. I don't really know, the fear I had was to lose my culture… It was my biggest fear and I didn't, I didn't lose it. I didn't lose my language. I speak Cree fluently to my people, as well… I've never lost my culture. I felt that this, the academic studies, was foreign in our culture; however, I felt that it was necessary for me to pursue my academic studies, but at the same time maintain my culture and my language, which is something that I didn't want to incorporate in my studies at all because it's for me. It's something that I have within me and I, I felt that culture is something that was given to Native people for them to keep to themselves and use it whenever, at the appropriate time. I felt that it wasn't appropriate for me to incorporate it in my studies. However, I could use my culture, such as prayer to help me in my studies (Personal Interview, June 23, 2003).

Alex made every effort to keep his culture separate from his academic life, although his spirituality and other cultural aspects were kept close. He felt that his culture demanded specific protocol which he observed, respected and honoured during his time on campus. The academic culture was foreign, and he was concerned about what he was being taught.

> Elders used to and they still do tell that if you go back to school, you're going to think 'white' you know. In our terms, in our language (Cree phrase) means you are thinking white. And I thought about that a lot you know and… everything that they taught us had nothing to do with culture there. Their culture was different, the white culture, was very different from the Native culture. When I went back home, I was very close and I felt

> good that I was home. Whatever my father or grandfather would teach me I would take it very personal and very, how can I put this… I respect the fact that they are teaching me culture. But, when I came to university it was as a totally different way of teaching. It almost seemed like there was a clash of thinking between what I was taught at home, than I was in university. I set aside the differences, you know, between the culture and the academics, and I just said that I was going to do what I am here for (Personal Interview, June 23, 2003).

At university, Alex essentially occupied a different life from the one he lived at home. From the story that he shares, it seems that as an undergraduate, his two lives, his two ways of living and learning were not comfortably reconciled. By an effort of will and ability he completed his studies. Walking Against the Wind believes that her pursuit of an education has very fundamentally altered her life and that of her family. Although she does not see the alteration as totally bad, she identifies an element of her life that is radically different.

> I grew up at the side of my parents. I mean my parents and grandparents were always there, and my uncles and aunties were always close by. It seemed like we were always together doing things and now it seems like I have my nuclear family. It's not like I'm with my sisters and brothers, my parents all the time. We, my husband and I have our family and we have work obligations and family obligations. We don't spend a lot of free time with the extended family like we did when we were growing up. It seemed like we had schedule. There was not one before (Personal Interview, May, 12, 2003)

Walking misses the connections, the warmth and closeness of extended family and feels the loss. Taking on a university schedule, the commitments and obligations of academia as well as those of employment outside the home, have meant that traditional practices are losing sway. While Walking feels secure that values like respect and helping family are still strong, she regrets that extended family are no longer closely involved in the daily life of her nuclear family.

Both Micky and Ineewagi expressed a sense of challenge in the mode of learning in University. Micky's experience of her new environment caused her "to struggle with being Native, also… my mind wasn't used to thinking in a linear manner." In her holistic way of thought, "I do this and this will happen and then, in a circle it comes back to you, the first thing you started with." In the pattern of thought expected in academics, she realized, "it's A to B… that there is no C, D, back to A. It's just A to B, and I didn't get it… actually figure that out, until probably third year" (Personal Interview, April 22, 2003). Micky was frustrated by these limitations and the fact that when she included indirect relationships and ideas in her work, it was not valued or understood within the linear expectations of her instructors. She too, was aware that her beliefs and attitudes, and her knowledge base about Native culture were at odds and "in conflict with some of the stuff that they were teaching us," and she struggled because "it created confusion within me" (Personal Interview, April 22, 2003). Ineewagi reports similar struggles. She dropped one course which inspired feelings of conflict, but in law school was caught up in the experience that "the whole thing… entire law school is in conflict." She explains her reaction:

> … partly because of the linear, what they call logical reasoning behind everything and to me, it just a lot of times, it just didn't make sense. Now how can you get from A to B doing that? You know, where do you get this? I still don't understand a lot of times where they get some of their rationale from (Personal Interview, June 12, 2003).

Ineewagi dealt with this confusion and frustration by "getting drunk at the end of every semester," or having saved up her frustration, might, "do a radical answer on my exams and take my D or C" grade, even though she knew the answer. Ineewagi felt she had to fight her desire to be true to another way of thinking, to resist creativity or what she

thought was right. By the end of her program she states, "I just learned how to play their game the way they wanted it, and I ended up being like top 10 in the class with my last semester" (Personal Interview, June 12, 2003).

Jace's experience at University was made more troubling because she says she has "always felt different... I've always felt that I didn't fit in really, with the human race, with Natives or with anything." While she felt lost within herself, the subject matter in her courses could at times emphasize her different understanding and life experience.

> ... it seemed kind of foreign, you know. It seemed kind of sterile. I guess that would be a good word... yeah. You know, it didn't fit with how I was raised, it didn't fit, because I was a little bit different, you know, we weren't the typical, normal everyday Leave It To Beaver family, you know... so what they were saying about, you know, normal people and families, and behaviours and stuff wasn't fitting with what I had experienced. (Personal Interview, April 9, 2003).

Iskwew too searched for information, understandings and curriculum that would include her. While trying to find other Native presence, or students on campus, it was disheartening to be in a program where no aspect of Native-ness was apparent.

> I majored in [specific program] and even in that program itself... I realized in a lot of the literature, the class discussions, I didn't see myself... at that time it bothered me and there was a discomfort, and I didn't know how to deal with it or bring it to, bring it out in the open... like in the class for example... because everything was always focused on mainstream women, mainly, and very little was discussed on and about Aboriginal women. And, if there was a discussion it was obviously just minority women, all minority women... I was learning a lot about mainstream women, you know, but I really wanted, I really knew that there was something missing (Personal Interview, April 24, 2003).

Iskwew recalls a book review assignment, and the list of books contained nothing by or about Native people, nothing of "an Aboriginal woman's lived experience."

She felt that the apparent invisibility of her people and her culture, and the focus on the mainstream, "just didn't do anything to my spirit, you know" (Personal Interview, April 24, 2003).

The different cultural environment existing in academia, which all the graduates felt, created tensions, made university a difficult setting in which to try to learn and to fit in. Still other circumstances added to the challenges described by the graduates in their stories.

6.4.4 Challenging Sacrifices and Struggles

Multiple concerns such as sacrificing family life, coping with academic issues, their health, finances and need for support in their endeavours at times challenged the narrators during their undergraduate studies. As previously mentioned, Alex did not have his family with him during his first year on campus, which made the transition additionally difficult. He travelled home on weekends, but also had to give up activities such as "rodeoing" which he had formerly enjoyed. Although Micky and Siapiaaki had their families with them, the heavy demands of their courses, meant that frequently they were unavailable to their children. In Iskwew's circumstance, while there were extended times when her spouse was not with the family in the city, eventually, much of the time, she left the care of their children with her spouse. She remembers at one point telling her husband, "I know you are helping me, and I appreciate that, but at the same time I am jealous." Iskwew believes her husband spent a lot more time with their young children and that, "there were things that I missed out on." As well, she continues at times to feel "guilt, motherly guilt" for being too busy to be involved with her family (Personal Interview, April 24, 2003).

In Ineewagi's journey, although there were supports, there were hardships, and she is now realizing the toll that was taken while she was at university. She observes, "But throughout it all, my own well-being was always pushed to the side… which I am learning now how to deal with." Ineewagi feels the sacrifice she made "was me," her own physical and emotional well-being (Personal Interview, June 12, 2003). In order to try to cope with the demands of a full course load and family, Ineewagi established routine, but it did not entirely succeed.

> But, there I was after Christmas, when at first I was really shy and timid, and I was exhausted. I had a two year old and a baby that was nursing and I was running home from school to nurse my baby, and trying to read my books, and the baby would be hitting my books with her hand and stuff because I was not paying attention to her when I was nursing… I had to develop a real stringent time table. Like every day at five o'clock supper was on my table and the routine in first year really saved me. Like, I had to really develop a routine and stick to it. My kids were in bed sleeping by eight o'clock every night and they got a bath every night. And, they got a story every night too. They got a bedtime story and their bath, and I spent time with the kids, and then I'd like run around trying to do laundry and do my homework at night and stuff, and then my kids would wake up every two hours. Every two hours they woke up until [youngest] was five. … I remember going to the doctor because I was just exhausted (Personal Interview, June 12, 2003).

Ineewagi struggled with exhaustion throughout her studies. This concern was compounded by other health issues and several medical procedures. She eventually had to undergo surgery in the last year of her program. Jace struggled with health issues including depression, and also had minor surgery in the midst of her degree studies. Charlie experienced two major health concerns, which required hospitalization for her and extended treatment to ensure recovery. Although the first instance slowed down her progress to the completion of her degree by a whole year, she did not allow either that or the second health problem to discourage or prevent her from achieveing her degree.

Assiniboine reported that he encountered frequent exhaustion as well, since family finances required that he run a business many hours, evenings and weekends. He recalls struggling with due dates, typing late, into the early morning hours, finishing papers and will never forget the onerous work required in core program courses he describes as "absolutely brutal." Assiniboine states,

> I spent more time at the university, in the library, and in those little rooms in the back, [of The Native Centre] doing that course, than any course I had done up to that moment, and it was a personal challenge, and I remember going home and I was so tired all the time and I needed things, and I wasn't really good typing and I'm still not the greatest. I needed some help because I was still working, on the side right, trying to keep my business going so I could pay the bills… and I had three teenage kids… and I had two boys whose only goal in life was to put me in an early grave (Personal Interview, May 15, 2003).

Assiniboine's recollections give an excellent notion of the pressures felt by him in his struggle to manage school, with family matters and finances. While his First Nation provided standard sponsorship for about four years, because his degree took him longer, by the last year, he remembers he was receiving approximately $600.00 per month to support a family of five. He remembers going gradually, "inexorably" into debt. Only one of the graduates who shared their story did not have children to care for, and all the graduates depended on First Nations sponsorship. Financial strain and family matters involving spouses and/or children were part of the concerns expressed by the majority. When Walking Against the Wind first went back to school, she experienced a marital separation which had a tremendous impact on her ability to provide for her children. Still later, when her family was back together, family finances were affected by her sometimes daily commute into Calgary and the expense of gasoline and parking. Charlie expressed similar financial difficulties with commuting from her reserve.

Alex experienced difficulties with finances travelling home on weekends, when he was alone in Calgary the first year. But, handling the expenses when the whole family lived in Calgary was even more arduous. Iskwew, reported that living costs always "exceeded" the sponsorship she received from her First Nation, and this is echoed by Micky and Ineewagi. However, in Micky's instance, the financial situation was occasionally made worse because her sponsor was sometimes very late, even in paying her tuition, which complicated registration matters for her on campus. Siapiaaki recalls the frustration and fatigue of the financial struggle, never having any money for "extras," not having a vehicle, acquiring substantial debt, having to resort to the food bank, the humiliation of trying to conceal the bags from the food bank, and being "so tired of being poor" (Personal Interview, April 10, 2003).

All the graduates acknowledge the financial support they received from their First Nations and were appreciative of it. For several, however, late and insufficient sponsorship created problems. Sponsorship did not cover the financial demands for students with families living in Calgary. While one student had no family, she still had to work to defray living expenses. Several students felt that sponsorship was the only support that they were receiving from their community. For these individuals, it seemed that they received limited or negligible encouragement from their communities.

Micky felt the erratic nature of her Band's sponsorship demonstrated negligible support for her to obtain an education. Walking recognized the financial support she received, however during her degree studies she recalls, "no support from the community." Her doubts were magnified when "people would know that I am at school… people would

say, 'Oh, you're getting old… you'll be in old age by the time you get your degree." She realizes that people did not value what she was doing, "because they don't have a clue about what it is like to be a student" and that, "when you get an education people kind of look at you differently. When you are trying to accomplish something," it is like the story of the crabs trapped in the pail, the crab syndrome, a result of colonization, "they're so busy trying to keep each other down" (Personal Interview, May 12, 2003).

Iskwew valued the financial support she received and the occasional pat on the back from some of the community leaders, but there were times when she too felt undermined by community elements. "When I come back to my community and you know, when I get asked what are you majoring in, and I tell them… many of the males, they'd start making jokes," and Iskwew felt she had to "stick up for the program." The men in her community also made things difficult for her husband, telling him, "You know she's got you tied around her finger, and you stay home and watch the kids'… they looked down on what he was doing." Now it is possible for her to know that those people had no knowledge and understanding of her education. Iskwew recalls that while there was much talk about people needing an education, the idea was "sort of in the air… not many were following through… it was talked about, but it was never acted upon" (Personal Interview, April 24, 2003).

In general, most of the graduates experienced the support of their families in their education. Two graduates indicated that the support of their families was lacking.
When Jace started university and for several years after that, she did not find "an awful lot" of support. She did not "visibly really see it," and her mother "never encouraged us to go

to school… for higher education, she never once said I'm glad you're in school." At times, her family were concerned for her and recommended she quit, but Jace reports, until recently her family has never indicated pride in her accomplishments. Assiniboine, in the course of his degree studies, felt keenly the lack of support from his family. He reported that his teenage sons seemed to find trouble, to plague him, and his spouse was very negative about his desire to obtain a degree. In the face of financial pressures, she wanted him to go to work to "earn a living and feed the family… that way she could stay at home and be a homemaker." Assiniboine adds that, "She made sure that I knew that. So there were times when I was overloaded and she would say, 'It's not my responsibility. It's yours. You decided to do this" (Personal Interview, May 15, 2003). While lack of immediate family encouragement did not stop either Jace or Assiniboine, it contributed to the many challenges they had to face.

The majority of the narrators shared stories of their academic trials. All had begun their return to education through upgrading, University College Entrance Preparation Program, Transition or Outreach Programming. Alex left school at grade ten, and reported having to "reprogram" himself, when he became a student again, some ten years later. English presented the greatest challenge for him in skills development and as a subject, but he reflects that, "I think attitude had a lot to do with it." Mathematics became a favourite subject, so much so that he took it as an option at university. However, in the midst of other challenges and transitions to campus, he failed his math course which had a serious impact on his grades, and this took some time to recover from, personally and academically (Personal Interview, June 23, 2003).

Jace recalls that she "struggled through the whole time academically." Her writing skills presented special problems. She recalls that for the first essay she wrote, "The very first full page was one sentence long, and it sounded perfect to me." She encountered other difficulties, including reading, she had read perhaps "one book throughout high school." Jace sought help and was identified as a passive learner, and then was taught tools and techniques to help her engage in learning. This did not prevent her being placed on academic probation, although the probation made her strive to learn, so that she would not be kicked out. It took her a long time to understand what university involved. "I didn't know what it meant, I didn't know what it could lead to… I didn't understand what it was… so, I just did it" (Personal Interview, April 9, 2003).

Assiniboine too, found that academics required hard work. He struggled at times with writing, challenging courses and with unfamiliar subject matter. He remembers an English course, "We were doing poetry… now, my background has been pretty rough, and so the kinds of people I hung around with weren't poets, and the idea that I would be sitting down doing poetry, and analyzing poetry, was way out there." Assiniboine also remembers the frustration of only being able to manage three courses or occasionally four, to maintain his passing grades in a semester, while he juggled work and family needs. He had no time for social life or to spend assisting other students who on occasion sought his input.

Walking Against the Wind recalls that her writing skills presented a major challenge, with which she sought help throughout her studies. Although she had completed upgrading and a college diploma, her writing skills had an impact on her grades at university, and it took a while for her average to recover to what it was in college. Early in

her transition to campus, she experienced difficulty getting to know how to, and feel comfortable in using the library. Micky had completed upgrading at college also, but found she was struggling in her courses. This struggle was increased when she sought help from a professor. "I asked the professor, what am I doing wrong here? I can't get this and she just said, 'Well, if you don't get it by now, then you are not going to get it.' I just kind of looked… okay, so you're not going to help me" (Personal Interview, April 22, 2003). After this rebuff, Micky was disheartened and unhappy, her marks were poor. Fortunately, she found an interesting course and eventually, decided to choose an alternate subject as a major.

Ineewagi completed upgrading and applied for admission. She was denied admission, but appealed that decision and when an assessment error was discovered, she was admitted. In her first year, she achieved the necessary 'C' average, and strove each subsequent semester to improve her skills and her grades. She too sought help with writing, reading and analysis. She found her strengths were useful at times in group work. However the constant need to work in groups, she found frustrating. As a single parent, she had responsibilities that other group members did not, and the other students were not willing to accommodate her time pressures. She remembers, "You got these people who are single students, live with their parents, got a part time job, they don't want to meet because they… go to the gym and do their workout… during the day... and it's like, I got a babysitter all day long… let's meet in the Day*!*" (Personal Interview, June 12, 2003). Ineewagi had to scramble to get her work, reading, writing accomplished for her courses and care for family. She felt that when it came to group work, her needs were not facilitated by other group members with fewer responsibilities.

Iskwew reports that several of her early academic challenges, as well as deciding on courses and program, were difficulties because she did not, "know how to ask for help" and, "didn't know how to search for that." In her college experience, she missed the guidance and help of an advisor. As a result she took courses that would not transfer into a degree program and her University studies took her longer than they might otherwise have done. She discovered in some courses that there were "concepts that I couldn't understand." She failed one core course and struggled even when repeating the course. It was the course previously described with the teaching assistant who coldly turned away her request for help. She found it was difficult to ask for help, but also to find help, "even during office hours ... it wouldn't happen." She acknowledges that learning in some courses, required huge amounts of time. "I couldn't figure out some of this stuff … the philosophical stuff you know… I always worked hard at it though" (Personal Interview, April 24, 2003). Iskwew felt at times that she was expected to be some one other than herself, and trying to make the curriculum relevant to herself, always proved challenging.

Each of the graduates encountered challenges at university, including transitional issues, loneliness and isolation, feelings of low confidence and self-esteem, cultural conflicts, financial and academic hurdles. However, each of the graduates tells stories of experiences that reveal considerable growth while they were at University of Calgary.

6.5 GROWTH

Growth is located on the western quadrant of the medicine wheel. The west represents the season of autumn, and is an important place for finding education, relentlessness, action and physical energy (Hampton 1995, Calliou, 1995). Growth

occurred for the graduates and is apparent in a number of different ways. All the graduates grew tremendously in their academic skills, abilities and achievements. None were overwhelmed by the academic demands placed upon them. With time, motivation and work they learned how to do what was required of them in their courses and programs. They finished their degrees, most with grades well above average. All have expressed interest in graduate studies, while as noted earlier, four have already achieved additional academic credentials. Growth is evident in the focus and perseverance that the graduates remember calling upon to see them through.

6.5.1 Perseverance

Despite questions and doubts about being in University, Micky worked through, "consolidated those feelings," so that she could "just get on with it." Quitting was not an option for her. In order to help herself persevere, she strove for a balanced view.

> I've been through a lot of, a lot of like painful situations in my life. So, I've suffered a lot. Being at the university is not, wasn't that bad. It would never be that bad. You know when we were broke we had no money, you know, wondering where I was gonna pay for things or even have gas to come. It was never, I just knew I had to get through it. I would end the suffering and the pain [because] I knew it would end with finishing school and so like I think that's, just maybe it just doubled... [her purpose] (Personal Interview, April 22, 2003).

Siapiaaki recalls that at one point, she was on the brink of quitting. In her last year, filled with doubts, struggling financially, she had the opportunity to take a job. Instead she decided,

> ... to just plug away. I overheard a conversation on the C-train. I learned a lot riding on the C-train, because there's all these other university students around and... they're sharing their struggles with each other... I realized it was a universe of struggle. You know, there's all these referrals to 'I think I'm going to end up in the loony bin, you know if this

> continues, like even the lack of sleep and stuff.' Anyway… one girl was talking about quitting and the other one's like 'You've gone too far, you can't turn back… if you turn back, stop now, you'll be inadequate. No one will recognize you for almost completing a degree. You're going to piss away everything that you've worked hard to achieve all this time. You're going to piss it all away.' It was just like that resounded in my head after, you'll piss it all away! [laughing] (Personal Interview, April 10, 2003).

In addition, Siapiaaki reminded herself of the grim and unhappy situation she had been in before deciding to obtain her degree, and she used positive thoughts to motivate herself to keep going for another semester. She did not want to be known as someone who had "almost finished her degree," especially when she knew she would be the first person from her First Nation to achieve a degree in her program. She regards perseverance as a value that was part of her Native culture that was passed down through example, and in the old stories of hunters and warriors persevering through hardship.

Ineewagi did not contemplate quitting. Initially, she anticipated being kicked out for failing, but quitting was not in her plans. Once she began to succeed, she established new goals for herself, striving to do better each semester. She recalls, "the goals were deliberate. Goals are the only way that I can move forward" (Personal Interview, June 12, 2003). She found as well, that it became important to her to succeed so that there was a chance she might be able to right some of the wrongs experienced by her ancestors. Alex recalls that remembering his goals was important for him much of the time. However, on one occasion, he did decide to quit.

> I remember one time I said I had enough. I couldn't take it anymore. I drove home. I turned around, I came to my senses, by Airdrie and said, 'What am I doing here? This is my third year and I'm closing the door on my opportunities and I said, 'No!' I came back. Talked it out… by myself and I thought about it and decided it wouldn't be fair on me, and it

> wouldn't be fair on my family and those who supported me. So, I toughed it out and it worked out (Personal Interview, June 23, 2003).

Alex recalls that he used self-talk, but also talked with others and listened to motivational tapes to keep himself persevering at the most difficult times.

Assiniboine credits his own stubbornness, a family trait he says, with letting him persevere. Additionally, he called upon previous unrelated learning to help him. He notes that as "a hunter, you have to make very quick decisions… if you're going to be successful. You have to make the right decision and you have to make it fairly quickly, and I've been good at that." Assiniboine feels he made good decisions in his first year, such as planning the number of courses he could manage, and how he would run his business part-time.

Charlie and Walking Against the Wind pointed to personal qualities in their nature that prevented them from quitting. Charlie indicated that she has always had determination, but she focused on one year of University at a time. She also described herself as someone who can adjust and adapt within a given environment. She notes that cultural teachings including determination and (ekagimat) "trying very hard" played a role in her success. Walking Against the Wind identifies determination as a source of strength. "I was determined to achieve that goal. Yeah, and it seemed I was gaining academic knowledge and experience, and at the same time, it was like discovering myself as a person" (Personal Interview, May 12, 2003).

Jace acknowledges that she could have quit, but never considered it. Before long the "love of learning," discovering books, reading and ideas became important to her.

Another important cultural factor was the knowledge that women in her culture were strong and powerful, and she "wanted to be strong, just like them" (Personal Interview, April 9, 2003).

Iskwew recalled that there were occasions, "But, very few times" when she wanted to quit. The desire to quit arose in times of the most stress, but she avoided thinking about the possibility of quitting. Self-talk worked for her as well, "I think because I knew, thought, 'No, I need to keep going" (Personal Interview, April 24, 2003). Iskwew followed her parents encouragement to smudge and pray each day, and when she was feeling "really low" she would "go to my parents, and they would lift me up… I'd go back to Calgary with a fresh perspective" (Personal Interview, April 24, 2003). Her reliance on the support of family to keep her going, is expressive of the important role many families played in the lives of successful students.

6.5.2 Support Systems

Graduates shared stories of the significant support systems which existed or developed for them while they were students. Support systems generally had to be newly established and included peers, The Native Centre, and friends in addition to changing family relationships.

Ineewagi is unusual in recalling that when she came to the university she "felt a real sense of community there." She lived on campus in family housing where there were other Native students, and "spent a lot of time at The Native Centre." Ineewagi accessed the services of The Native Centre even before she was admitted, and continued to be

involved in activities there with her family. She established a circle of peers and participated in cultural activities with her friends, such as Sweats, Full Moon Ceremonies and Pipe ceremonies. Her support network included relatives, fellow students, neighbours and friends, "we would share dinners… I would send my kids over… I had a huge babysitting network." As well, she had a friend who came in to be "cleaning lady," and counsellors who showed faith in her and encouraged her progress (Personal Interview, June 12, 2003).

Micky's parents and siblings were in another province, so that they were not available to help her, and she was aware that "my sister at the beginning wasn't very supportive… she thought she should be the one" to go to school. However, Micky's spouse and children provided her with support and care.

> … the older one's, if I was writing a paper or something, you know, they'd take the younger one's out. Like, they'd say 'Mom's working on a paper, or Mom's studying lets go play outside, or let's go to the park'… I wouldn't have to stop what I was doing and yell at them, or say can you please do something else quietly … my husband… would take the kids out and… I would just have the whole house to myself. Like things like that he would do for me… take care of the bills so that we didn't have to worry… he would make meals, so that I didn't have to rush (Personal Interview, April 22, 2003).

Micky also found her husband greatly supportive in sorting through the confusion and conflicting values she sometimes encountered in University. Although Micky did not choose to be part of lots of social activity, she did connect with fellow Native students at The Native Centre because "you can't go against what you are and The Native Centre helped a lot, I did make a lot of good friends here" (Personal Interview, April 22, 2003).

Jace initially, had only the encouragement of a co-worker to come to university and knew no one on campus. Over a period of a few years, she connected with a small group of individuals who had coffee and took squatters' rights at a table in one of the campus lounges. It was one of these acquaintances who eventually brought her to The Native Centre. "She physically brought me up, and we probably sat here for an hour and a half and met people and, I was amazed at the friendliness, I thought 'this is kind of alright'… then I started coming up here" (Personal Interview, April 9, 2003). As an undergraduate, Jace extremely gradually built a support network of peers.

Alex felt the transition to campus from college, where so much was done on the behalf of students, the strain of leaving his family and the strong support of a peer group behind. Eventually, his family did join him and their support made it easier to go on. Alex says that the support and sacrifice he received from his family, "he'll never forget." Early in his transition, he relied on "mentors that helped me throughout my school years; one individual who passed on, was my father-in-law. Whenever I was down and out, I'd give him a call and ask him to encourage me" (Personal Interview, June 23, 2003). Alex's own father was another strong support with whom he would talk about academics and culture. Alex was informed about and quickly became involved in The Native Centre, studying and meeting peers. He is conscious of, and expressed appreciation for the help given him at The Native Centre.

Siapiaaki "felt very supported" by her sponsor who was proud of her, "thought it was so cool that I was studying [specific subject]" and called her "our star student." She had the support of her mother and children throughout her studies. Her mother assisted

with child care, shelter and finances. Siapiaaki valued the support of a close friend who also came to University. Together they connected with other students at The Native Centre. Siapiaaki particularly enjoyed discussions of ideas and culture among the Native student community at The Centre and recalls her pleasure "the good experience," in growing along side of other Native students (Personal Interview, April 10, 2003).

In addition to the support of her parents, Iskwew gives tremendous credit to her husband for deciding to stay at home and care for their children. She indicates that, "he was very instrumental in my academic achievement, because I also shared thoughts with him… self-doubts… and he'd say, 'No keep going, you can't quit.'… I'm grateful he has a great relationship with his daughters." Iskwew connected with a staff person at The Native Centre, but found herself too uncomfortable to connect with the group of students in the Centre. Gradually however, she "started making friends" of other Native students in her classes. "I thought I needed to make an effort and we started talking and chumming around, and that made things a lot easier, having that social network" (Personal Interview, April 24, 2003).

Walking Against the Wind also found a group of Native students in her program with whom she could sit during class and work on group projects. Her contacts at The Native Centre were with staff. When Walking began post-secondary education, her mother and grandmother thought she should stay home with her children. Once Walking was back in school, it was her spouse encouraging her and, "because of my extended family, I was able to finish my [degree]. I had four kids and they had their activities, hockey, soccer… My parents, my brother and my sister all helped… took the kids to their activities, if I was

studying, and my husband would take them to the movies when I needed to work on a paper at home (Personal Interview, May 12, 2003).

Assiniboine made contact with The Native Centre before he was admitted and utilized the facilities and the help of the staff throughout his studies. He made friends within the community of students at The Native Centre, participated in few events, but studied and had coffee with friends regularly. His immediate and extended family did not provide obvious support, although his spouse managed the bills and the debt that gradually accumulated. Assiniboine found assistance, constructive help and support in his endeavours among his Native and other friends.

> So, we've been friends for a very long time, ohm, his wife is English, of course, and she loves poetry. So, we used to sit down at night and, ah, before I went to university we would meet as two couples and we would go out to dinner or have dinner at our place, and he and I would sit down and we'd watch the hockey game and the wives would sit in the kitchen and gab, right. But, after I started going to university it was my wife and him would sit, watch TV, and his wife and I would sit in the dining room and talk about poetry… analyze, dissect, what is it about, what is the author trying to say, what is the message, ah, how is it being written, why is it in this form. We would analyze everything (Personal Interview, May 15, 2003).

Charlie had a good support network when she started on campus, and some of her peers made the transition to campus with her. Her family, extended family, and unofficial adoptive family also assisted her and encouraged her studies. She recalls many mentors in her life supporting her efforts, as well. Her contacts at The Native Centre were primarily with staff until her health required that she do some resting between classes. She then developed a circle of friends at The Native Centre where she came to relax in the lounge.

Charlie found that the students in a women's health course provided strong support during the difficult times.

> ...we took a course in counselling and the realities of what happens to a person who is going through chemo... I was able to just tell them what it was like... they can't visualize what its like for a woman... and the effect of chemo and I was right there and I said 'Hey you know like, this is what happens,' and I took my wig off and I said, 'Look, I got no hair.' Ah, needless to say, except maybe the two young gals they, I think they just about broke down... But the rest... they came up and hugged me... (Personal Interview, April 3, 2003).

Charlie had the support of peers and professors in this instance, but also, in another setting when she first began university in the Outreach Program. One of her professors was a pivotal support for Charlie when she was taking classes in the building which was an old residential school.

> ...it was again a professor that really helped me, because I ended up telling her what happened and she said no, just keep coming back, and she would even look out if she thought I was going to be not coming. She'd see me sometimes. She'd be on the look out for me. She had my phone number, and she actually did call me one time, [concerned about] why I didn't go, but I have to say again that it was the teachers that really believed in me and the students too. Oh, [the building] even that itself was a real hindrance (Personal Interview, April 3, 2003).

Charlie found the professor in this course supportive, as were her professors hugely encouraging during her final and most difficult year. Several other students expressed that they felt they had the support of professors in their studies. Assiniboine identified two professors who took the time to relate to him on a personal level, showed an interest and that they were "human." Iskwew felt that the head of her program, who also taught a number of the classes she took was supportive of her and her interest in Aboriginal Women. Walking Against the Wind found the content in Native studies courses and the instructors who taught them to provide both learning and support. One course especially,

which covered the legacy of colonization, and the wonderful professor who taught it, remain in her memory.

Siappiaaki remembers the Native studies professors she took courses with, but about a professor in her major she says, "I just fell in love with him, like, as a professor." Her professor was able to bring into question the scientific world view, involved her in his research and supported her thinking. This had a lasting impact. Jace found several professors who continued to encourage and support her studies. Ineewagi had the support of a special professor in her undergrad, who encouraged her to aspire to do excellent work. Alex remembers an English instructor who encouraged his interest in literature and commended his bravery in returning to school and being one of very few men in the program, thus inspiring him to continue his education. In addition, he recalls a Math instructor he had studied with formerly, who supported his transition to campus and who is someone Alex will "never forget," because of his concern for students and his excellence in teaching (Personal Interview, June 23, 2003). The relationship between professors and students often can be the dynamic arena in which learning occurs. The graduates remember the influence of supportive professors.

6.5.3 Learning

In the stories shared about their learning, the participants recognized that in their formal courses and their informal experiences they had grown. They had learned a lot about many subjects, about other people and cultures, and a considerable amount about themselves. Jace speaks positively about her personal growth at university and what she learned. She recalls:

> Tons of courses were real meaningful in different kinds of ways, you know, depending on what the course was, but I think the main course that created such an impact on who I was, and what life was, and teaching and everything was General Studies 300 and 500 because it was so different, it blew my mind away, because it was not... normal, typical way of teaching... he didn't want you to regurgitate, he wanted you to be creative... the readings were on the old philosophers and what they were trying to say, but the way he taught, made them come alive... and make sense, you know, and it was like I understood how the White world, or whatever you want to call it thought, or where it began, where a beginning was for them and how they thought and do, and therefore, that made a real big understanding of the European way of thinking versus the Native way of thinking, or anybody else's way of thinking. It just changed, it changed my area of focus on what I wanted to study. It changed how I studied. It created more eagerness, because reading that philosophy stuff isn't easy, but he made it so alive that, you know, he made it so meaningful (Personal Interview, April 9, 2003).

While Jace knew only a little bit about her cultural heritage before she started university, she "learned more by doing papers in courses" on the subject, even though, the courses themselves had a Western orientation. Jace learned to search out information relevant to her. Jace learned to accept the differences in ways of thinking. Jace learned that she was seeking more opportunities for self-expression, a chance to explore who she is without being judged. She found this opportunity in women's studies courses. She became an active learner achieving better grades and developed a desire to keep on studying. All of what she was learning helped Jace to think positively, she "developed a dream" when before she, "never had a dream in my life to be somebody or something" (Personal Interview, April 9, 2003).

Alex learned to apply skills he knew about in the university setting. He remembers that he needed to apply goal-setting behaviours, "When I needed it, I had to apply it, and I applied goal-setting strategies as much as I could." He struggled and "plugged away," but

now thinks of himself as "a person who does things and completes." Alex did not take many Native issues courses, but recalls political science and anthropology courses where he benefited from the discussion about relevant First Nations issues. He acknowledges the differences in world views of academia and Cree culture, but now knows he can be successful working in either mode. One of the most rewarding educational experiences for him was meeting International students from Germany, South Africa and England, who wanted to speak with Native people. He remembers that "they thought we'd be wearing beads and what not," but he also found they were intrigued and inquisitive about Native culture. He noted that they were "more objective," interested, and less biased than mainstream Canadians (Personal Interview, June 23, 2003).

Walking Against the Wind reported that "understanding the impact colonization had on my people, knowing the characteristics of it and knowing why we are the way we are today was really helpful information… one of the greatest gifts I got from the University." Walking knew her culture when she began University, but her studies taught her, "I carried both cultures, but now I know what is mine." Walking grew to appreciate, "who I am, where I'm from, and because we studied other cultures, other peoples' way of life." She believes it is important to give back to her community and to share her learning, "we need to educate the people, not only academically, but to help them grow, to help them understand where we came from, why we are the way… [Native society functions]" in order to build self-esteem, "and so, that they're not so busy trying to keep each other down." Her "biggest learning" she believes is not to feel "inferior" to Non-Native people, "being successful made me understand that all people, any race, any ethnic background,

we're all different, individually… I am proud to be who I am" (Personal Interview, May 12, 2003).

Iskwew, recalls in her frustration about the lack of Aboriginal content in her courses, that she began to do her own research into written information about the lives of Aboriginal women. She located a source and "brought this book to my instructor's attention, and said I wanted to do a book review on this." Her request was approved and the instructor indicated an intention of adding the book to her reading list. In university Iskwew discovered "how much I didn't know about my culture… because what was being taught made me so uncomfortable." Native people often appeared as "specimens." This point of view, made her want to find out the truth, and contribute to the accuracy of what is written. Iskwew realizes that much of her university journey has been to learn about and understand herself and her experience. As she learned about Aboriginal history, she found that women were traditionally, "highly respected and highly regarded… considered the centre of the tribe or the centre of the family, the centre of the community." Iskwew began to realize and recognize "certain qualities" such as "taking on some leadership" which she possessed, even while growing up.

Iskwew regards her most positive experience at university as the Graduation Banquet and Pow wow hosted by the Native Centre. Significant role models and family supporters were there, but she learned, "it was just the experience… being in a roomful of Natives… the power you know… the energy, the humour… it moves my spirit" (Personal Interview, April 24, 2003). The best experience at university for Charlie was "all the discussion with the students, and the professors … because I could connect with them."

Charlie had "a couple of professors ask me to get up and talk," about Blackfoot culture and her life experience. Another time, a professor complimented her work and asked her to provide a copy to share with the class. Charlie also found helping her classmates on the reserve to be a special opportunity which she describes as "uplifting." Going to university sparked her interest and love of learning, made her more aware of her background, and made her want "to find out more about her heritage," because she had developed a "more positive attitude about" her people. Also, on a personal level, Charlie recalls, although she had goals and determination, "the surprising thing was a lot of what I did find out about pursuing a goal, was all the determination that a person has, I found out I was able to do it" (Personal Interview, April 3, 2003).

Micky knew her cultural community growing up, but university taught her to be aware of the differences between Nations, such as Cree versus Ojibwa or Iroquois. She met many students from diverse communities and learned to respect the differences. Micky believes the experience opened her mind. Micky "got to know a lot of good people" at university, but it became apparent that Native people "had similar experiences growing up." While it was good to share that experience with people, it was also important to determine that the dysfunctional experience had by so many, and which seemed 'normal,' is "a tragedy, nobody should grow up that way." Micky valued the chance to talk and share ideas with open minded people, because, "the people that I grew up with have closed minds and can't see beyond hurt feelings." Micky is conscious that with several "strikes against" her, it was more likely that she would have been a "street walker… an alcoholic… a drug addict" rather than a university graduate. She now realizes, she has talents and tenacity.

Micky loves to share what she has learned with family and friends, to open minds (Personal Interview, April 22, 2003).

One of Ineewagi's notable learning experiences occurred in her first year. In a geography course, she became so angry about a video of third world women who were nursing babies and being supplied simultaneously with birth control pills, that she spoke up in a class, demanding answers about this unsafe practice. Her question sparked a whole class discussion and caught an instructor with no answers. She recalls, "That was a significant turning point, and I remember that class, there were a hundred and fifty people in there, and I was able to speak in front of them because I was mad about what I had seen… and they listened to me! This is cool! … when I say something people are going to listen, nobody thought I was ridiculous." Ineewagi's university experience was shaped by this event, after which she says, "they couldn't shut me up." Ineewagi discovered she had leadership skills in group work as well, and organized meetings to take place in the building where she lived, so that she would not have to worry about babysitters. She planned her degree closely and included options which were diverse in experience, and allowed her to accomplish her degree quickly. She participated in an archaeology dig, travelled abroad, received an "Indian name," and studied in cross-cultural courses to learn more about Plains culture and ceremonies. Ineewagi knows she has acquired confidence and is aware of her competence, she is not afraid to make mistakes and grow (Personal Interview, June 12, 2003).

Assiniboine is conscious that "all the way through university, I was constantly growing… in knowledge… in maturity." Before university, he always did what was best

for himself. He regards that as "not the right way of doing things." He recalls, "I had to do a lot of reconstruction work, and I thought university was extremely helpful in enhancing, or creating a set of guidelines, that I was willing to live by." Assiniboine "liked what was happening" for him, and he learned to connect with students, friends and professors who could help him to grow. University helped him to realize that there were "sources out there," about Native culture. Since he had no Elders close by and had had limited family contact growing up, he did not know as much as he wished about his people. He now knows how to find sources on Aboriginal topics which he pursued at university, and continues to pursue, on his own. His focus on Native history has taught him a lot about the common experience of Native peoples. He now has "rows and rows" of books about Native experience and culture. He credits university for giving him knowledge, a broader perspective, and ethical guidelines to live by. (Personal Interview, May 15, 2003).

Siappiaaki discovered at university her "love for Native literature." As well, she relished the experiences of discussing philosophy with a fellow student for hours, and reading for more hours in the library tower, an opportunity which she describes as "amazing and wonderful and stimulating," since it enabled her to, "understand things in my own life and things about the world, and realizing that I wasn't completely wrong about some things." The experience she says, "gave me a new language." At university she was able to learn more about her heritage, learned more about history and the "impact of European civilization on my culture and people." She learned about culture in general, and how to be "reflexive," which is "reflection and processing, discovering yourself in your own culture, when you encounter a new culture" (Personal Interview, April 10, 2003).

Siapiaaki regards her University experience as informing her creative process, and leading to risk taking in the dramatic arts. In addition, she discovered that her perspective was a qualitative one, and she rejoiced upon finding both her world view and herself accepted in her program. She found in her studies, when she encountered a conflict related to cultural ways of knowing that, "the answer lay ahead and you had to stay on the same path in order to find it… quitting school" wouldn't have allowed her to resolve the conflict. Siapiaaki followed through on her educational journey, until she found the place where her perspective would be regarded as validated. She recalls, "In the non-experimental methods class, it was meaningful because I reflected quite a bit… I put things together… I seemed to have answers, [they] thought I was brilliant… I had found my niche, my groove." Siapiaaki was able to integrate her traditional cultural ways of knowing with what she was learning at university, and in so doing, she came to a greater understanding of her perspective and herself (Personal Interview, April 10, 2003).

6.6 CHANGE

At the Northern quadrant of the medicine wheel lies the winter, a season of great endurance and change. Winter represents vitality, wisdom, culture and cognitive energy, it presages renewal. Change is a theme that flows throughout the stories of the graduates. Change is apparent in how they view themselves as a result of their learning and their success. For many, success at university has meant the development of a more positive self-esteem, in a stronger sense of spirituality, and in feelings of improved well-being. Success has had an impact on them, and their stories acknowledge and reveal considerable change.

6.6.1 Personal Change

Assiniboine is grateful for the educational process he went through at university. Before university he was a "blue-collar worker," with a "skewed and very definite way of looking at the world." He recalls that he was "blissfully isolated" and uninformed about what was happening in the world, he didn't know, "what is happening at the provincial level, the federal level or International levels." He "could care less" about the world, and even about "what was going on in my own culture." His success at university has changed all that, he has become informed. He regards himself now as "versatile," working in a profession where he is a "role model," willing to "take on challenges… not afraid to try something just because I don't know anything about it," and he is someone who can "shoulder responsibility," and who is willing to go the "extra mile," and spend, "personal time helping," others out, because he likes "how it makes me feel about myself." When we discussed whether success at university made him feel assimilated, Assiniboine noted that, university had the opposite affect.

> I've kinda gone the other way. I grew up with a 'white family,' it was always 'fit in'… Most of my life, I was trying not to be First Nations, we were taught it was a bad thing. It took me awhile to get over it, but people still try to make me feel bad about Indians… University helped me grow. I've been told that I've grown by people I respect. Once in awhile, I do a personal inventory… I think I have a long way to go yet, but, I've grown a lot (Personal Interview, May 15, 2003).

Although he has much to be proud of, Assiniboine speaks of his growth and change with humility. He continues to learn more about his culture and spirituality. He assists in ceremonies, where he continues to learn a lot. Recently he assisted with a vision quest, he says of the experience, "I found it very peaceful" (Personal Interview, May 15, 2003).

Ineewagi, also with some humility, describes herself as, "exhausted, ohm, relatively ambitious, quite ambitious, and I guess you'd have to say successful… someone that can pick themselves up, learn from their mistakes, and carry on, and do better each time." Before university, she says she was "a mess… I was an alcoholic… I was totally not confident unless I had alcohol." Her university experience has made it possible for her to change, to look after herself, she has "quit smoking, drinking using drugs," and she "enjoys going to sweats and spiritual activities… clear and worthy of being in the ceremonies." She does not feel assimilated, but more "outside" the mainstream, "indeed an expert in my culture." Ineewagi has confidence in her knowledge base and her skills in her profession, where she feels she can educate others about Aboriginal people. Before her university learning and success she wasn't "happy" with herself and felt "there was an imbalance in [her] entire being." Now she is "constantly working towards a balance, and sometimes I get close to it" (Personal Interview, June 12, 2003).

Iskwew recalls that before university she "lacked confidence… was sort of questioning… who I was… my identity… I lacked the knowledge, experience and understanding… I was a young mother… really scared." She sees herself as having achieved some success in the academic sense and regards it as "a great feeling, a great accomplishment." She learned that she possesses "perseverance and determination," and she applies those strengths in her life. She is conscious that she is "more clear who I am… my identity… as a First Nations woman and I am even empowered." Learning the history, roles and qualities of First Nations women "brings a certain… power," and understanding of the spiritual being and authority ascribed to women in traditional culture. Iskwew does not believe that she was being assimilated in her education, because,

> … it was on my terms, not the governments terms. I don't see myself as adhering to government aims, I was raised with the belief that education is important if you do want to contribute… learn how the white man thinks. It is on our own conditions that we get an education, to contribute back to our communities (Personal Interview, April 24, 2003).

Iskwew has acquired university knowledge, but also more knowledge from her culture and her parents about the importance of spirituality. It is an important part of her belief system, "inherent in" her, and part of what helped her manage life at university. She notes that the university where she completed a second degree made it difficult for First Nations students to maintain their spirituality when smudging was prohibited, "they no longer allow us to do that… it's a struggle." She regards the acceptance of an Aboriginal world view as another on-going struggle. But, within her own person, she now finds a better balance, "really content, and at peace, and happy." Iskwew sees this as a daily challenge, working on new goals and seeking a successful balance (Personal Interview, April 24, 2003).

Jace indicates that her learning and her success at University has radically changed her life and who she is. Before university, she lived with no dreams and no thought of a future. When she started university she was "shy… scared," and lonely, "wanting to die." The knowledge and experience she acquired over many years as a part-time and then as a full-time student, taught her a great deal about the world, as well as extending her learning about Native peoples, and by "focusing on her own culture [she] was able to learn more," about her heritage. The experience has had an impact on her sense of well-being, which she describes now as being "very positive, healthy and mature." Jace is no longer the "shy and quiet" individual she once was, she has gained "confidence" is comfortable doing a "lot

more talking and sharing and laughing" and says that she has, "more of an answer to who I am, more of the answers as to my identity." She knows that she is a person with "gentleness, tremendous patience, calmness," and an ability to be helpful to others. She dreams of providing a scholarship for another student from her reserve, so that they can achieve an education, too. (Personal Interview, April 9, 2003).

Siapiaaki recalls that in the years prior to university, she was someone with "strong opinions… more conviction" in her opinions, which were based in "emotion" and "irrational." Her "self-esteem was lower, with the anticipation that it would grow once [she] entered school." At present, she sees herself as, "somewhat anal retentive [laughing] … an intellectual person who is… shy, but at the same time confident enough to speak out and act out… express myself." At the University of Calgary she was able to explore both sides of her mixed heritage. She regards herself as "acculturated, but not absorbed" or assimilated, and although she is comfortable with many areas of mainstream society, she feels "authentic in [her] Aboriginality." Going to school with other Aboriginal people at university has given her "more intimacy, and a sense of belonging and kinship" within the local Aboriginal community. Additionally, Siapiaaki attributes improvements and changes in her relationship with her mother and with her children, to the knowledge she acquired about the inter-generational impact of residential school. She developed the knowledge and skills "to make improvements in parenting." Siapiaaki feels a greater sense of well-being, and that aspects such as her social, mental, emotional and physical are "definitely, very much improved." University was a "healing experience and a stepping stone" to other modes of healing (Personal Interview, April 10, 2003).

As a grandmother when she went back to school and university, Charlie had a wealth of experience and she indicates a sense that "anything I've tried in my life as far as work or learning something, I've always been able to achieve it." Despite this confidence she encountered obstacles at university, but has become someone she describes as a "learner… a person who never stops learning in life." Charlie lived her dream of achieving a university degree, and the dream of her mother that she would go to school. Charlie does not feel assimilated by the experience of her mainstream education she says, because the "degree was for my satisfaction." She feels comfortable in either mainstream or Blackfoot society, but is conscious sometimes that she feels "out of place when talking to my own people. They judge the way I talk… my Blackfoot is being judged, because I was away from the reserve for so long." Charlie developed a "more positive attitude" about her heritage at university, and is finding greater acceptance back at home now that her relatives are getting to know her. Achieving a degree "at this late stage of life" has given her an extremely positive outlook, "I feel good." Her spirituality supported Charlie through great challenges while she was at university, and she indicates that this "has increased my belief in a higher power." Charlie gives "thanks everyday for another day" (Personal Interview, April 3, 2003).

Micky says that when she came to university she was "timid… afraid of a lot… wasn't sure what my function in this society was… wouldn't know how to perceive" her role; she lacked information, purpose and confidence. She believes success not only affected her life, but changed her life. Micky finds she is no longer unhappily "dependent on people;" she is "unstuck" from a poor situation. She says, "It's awesome. I feel powerful. It is good!" However, Micky has found that although she does not feel

assimilated, her education has set her "apart... other Natives see me differently. People come to me to solve their problems." Micky is uneasy with this relationship, noting that some treat her almost like an Elder. She states "I don't like it… I am nowhere near that." Micky relates that the basic spiritual beliefs she held going into university are "… still intact. Education has brought them more into focus, validated some and brought questions to the front." Overall, she regards the impact of university and success as a positive experience. Micky asserts, "I have more freedom, more choices… I feel I can do anything. I could be put in any situation… sink or swim… I could swim" (Personal Interview April 22, 2003).

Alex described himself as a young adult who before university was "closed… shy… unsociable… I lacked confidence." He says that from his university experience, "I've learned to be a man of integrity, and a goal setting person… my successes… opened my horizon and my perspective about myself… so, I learned a lot about myself going to school." Alex sees himself now as someone who is "more professional about how I conduct myself, and… confident in myself… I'm more confident in communicating to people… I feel good about myself whatever I do." Alex has taken on positions of responsibility for his Nation; his degrees have brought him the opportunities he hoped for within his community. He is firm in his beliefs and in his culture, and glad to be able to contribute to his First Nation. He encourages "others to complete their education," including his two children and his spouse, because he feels motivated by his degrees and the skills he acquired. Most importantly, he says, "I am a man of integrity and I like to maintain that about myself." When new opportunities and challenges arise, Alex feels, "I can do whatever is expected of me." (Personal Interview, June 23, 2003).

Walking Against the Wind is proud to describe herself as a "Stoney Nakoda woman," fluent in her language, who values and participates in her traditions and beliefs. Walking was not always proud. Prior to university and success, she says she was "a person who had low self-esteem." The greatest impact of her success was on her self-esteem. Walking says that now, "I am proud to be who I am. I grew to appreciate my own language… the language is strong in the community still… with the knowledge and skills that I gained here, I can contribute to the community in a positive way." At university, Walking indicates she "regained pride… I put history together. My spirituality became very clear." As a result of her experience, Walking states: "I know who I am, where I came from; I can deal with my personal issues, I can be well, my husband can be well, and my children… in my personal growth and development, I've learned ways to communicate with them." Walking Against the Wind speaks eloquently on the matter of assimilation and whether it is a result of University success.

> The knowledge and skills, I gained from over here, I need those to make a difference in my community. We can't live like we did before, hunting and trapping, we are influenced… we have to keep moving with the mainstream. We have to look at our relationship with the Federal government, the agreements and resources, so that we can make progress. We can not be isolated without contact. We need to hold on to our traditional beliefs, to be more productive citizens of Canada, and for the people to recognize, that we are people like anybody else. We are not inferior. We are unique. We need to start building bridges with mainstream society. We can not be further isolated… our parents were isolated in residential schools. We have programs, but the people seem to think we are inferior, and we are not. We are not assimilated. We can make the choice. We can decide what to take from the mainstream and what we want to retain from our own culture. We need to balance these things. The attempt has been made to assimilate us, we were wise… It wasn't easy to convert the mountain people (Personal Interview, May 12, 2003).

Her words make it clear, that Walking Against the Wind understands the power of choice. She believes that "success makes you speak out," and she observes that, "I was really quiet, I didn't speak out much in the undergraduate program, but you should see me in my [future] graduate courses." Walking, dreams of writing her first book (Personal Interview, May 12, 2003).

The personal growth and change which occurred for each of the graduates is profound. The impact of their success did not affect only the graduates. Change has occurred within their families and communities because of their experience. The broader impact of their success is also shared by the graduates in their stories.

6.6.2 Family and Community Change

Assiniboine says the most obvious impact of his success on his family is, "we own a really nice home, [spouses name] always wanted a minivan and she drives one now." In addition to changes in material possessions, Assiniboine notes that, "when people come over to our home… they act differently now... it makes me smile, because I don't feel any different than anybody else, but other people's perceptions of who we are is kind of different." The impact on the family has been more than material differences and the changed perceptions of acquaintances. Assiniboine is proud that his daughter and a son are completing college programs, and he is pleased that his relationship with his sons has changed. Formerly they were getting into trouble. I used to be very rough handed… and now I'm more inclined to sit down and listen and talk things through and reason… we make a decision, well now we have to live with that decision and I think they understand that it's a better approach, and I think they understand they have to take responsibility for

their actions… it's had a positive effect on the way I talk to them (Personal Interview, May 15, 2003).

Now his sons are settling down, setting goals and working to achieve them. The perception of Assiniboine has changed in the community of his reserve. He believes that many of his extended family are happy for him but feels that some "seem to be angry" that he has some success. He knows that in the event orientation of his Native community, he has acquired also, significance for having taken university professors to his reserve to meet with the leadership and conduct research. In his extended family he is now seen as a very different person. He recalls that in his younger years (30's), he was constantly in trouble on the reserve. It took the combined condemnation and force of several siblings to make him leave. Resentment existed in the family circle for many years, but now his siblings introduce him proudly, and he says one, "asked if I would take his son and let him move down here and move in with us… he's been with us now for a couple of years," going to school. Assiniboine says that "the perception of our community of me is different" (Personal Interview, May 15, 2003).

Success has meant a difference in living style for Ineewagi and her family as well. When the research was conducted, she was working in a position of authority for a First Nation managing a staff, dealing with critical issues, and being compensated accordingly. She is now able to provide a superior level of living for her family. She laughingly notes, "I have an eleven year old that thinks I am going to buy him a Lamborghini," it is a contrast from being a student when the family was "dog dirt poor." However, having their mother be a student for so many years has had other affects, Ineewagi notes that her children, "like

reading" and they usually say, "When I go to university, I'm going to do this..." Their view of the world is that they will be attending post-secondary institutions, and Ineewagi suggests to them "it might be easier without kids, they have seen how rough" it was. Ineewagi's Mother who helped to care for her children, has now gone back to school and is training in the nursing profession. Although she lives many miles from her home reserve, when Ineewagi graduated, the reserve posted the information on the local news-board, and she is celebrated as a "big success story," a role model for other people in her community. As a newly prominent member of her community, she has been appointed to the board of one of the companies on reserve and travels home to monthly meetings. Ineewagi is now contemplating running for chief, in which position she will have even more opportunity to influence her fellow community members (Personal Interview, June 12, 2003).

Iskwew was the first in her family, and the first of ten siblings to finish a university degree, and she realized that this would change her life and that of her family. Her children are strong academically and doing well in school. They know that university is something they can hope to achieve. Several of Iskwew's brothers and sisters now are enrolled in post-secondary education programs and are training to work in their community. Iskwew works in her community assisting women to change their lives. She often speaks to people in small groups or individually and talks about earning her degree. She says,

> Some of the individuals I see, when I talk to them, they're very attentive, so I know they're absorbing and processing what I am saying and hopefully… they will make positive decisions, perhaps to continue their academic career … even finishing their grade twelve, to obtaining a degree, to continuing on … I think that's also part of my contribution back to my community, to try to reach as many people as I can and letting them know that it can be done … whether that is sharing my story, whether through my thesis… hopefully one day my dissertation…

> hopefully one day writing a book. I hope I do leave a positive impact… positive image (Personal Interview, April 24, 2003).

Iskwew has hopes for the men in her community also and has a vision of a stronger community circle, she believes that soon, "it's going to be the women who perhaps remind the men of these values and principles and… whatever grows out of that, I think will be something beautiful, something great." In order to help to make that happen, Iskwew feels that it is "part of my duty to constantly encourage, just like my father, my parents did with me" (Personal Interview, April 24, 2003). Although Jace is many miles from her home community, she shares Iskwew's desire to encourage others to come to university, "to have a challenging and successful career at school." She has explored the possibility of sponsoring someone from her reserve in post-secondary education. As well, Jace actively supports local Native students' endeavours, and volunteers to speak with adolescent and adult groups of students (Personal Interview, April 9, 2003).

Siapiaaki tells the story of how she was able to apply what she was learning in her psychology classes and in Native studies courses within her family. She learned about child development and a great deal about the legacy of residential schools. She was able to make peace with her mother who had gone to residential school, and acquired a strict and sometimes abusive way of child rearing. Siapiaaki identified some of these "nun-like" behaviours in her own child rearing practices, and apologized to her children and began changing the pattern of behaviour. She also realized that one of her children had stopped growing emotionally and was in a "dark place, she had an altar of beheaded dolls hanging from her ceiling" and dressed in a gothic fashion, and played gothic music all night. Siapiaaki then set an emotional environment to assist her daughter, she says,

> She was emotionally fixated at a very young age, so I took her back… I told my youngest, okay, you are going to have to move over, [name] is gonna be my baby again for awhile… so, I slept with her and I apologized for anything, mistakes I might have done, and it all came pouring out, and every night we'd talk late into the night, and I'd hold her like she was younger again. I dismantled her room… I didn't measure her growth or anything, but she is reconciled, and then she moved on… started dressing in softer colours … she became a pretty young woman reading literature and writing poetry, and was not reflecting such dark things (Personal Interview, April 9, 2003).

Siapiaaki indicated that in addition to the healing that has occurred in her family she believes her children's outlook on life has been influenced; they demonstrate an interest in the world around them, an interest in politics and a desire to learn and know more. They set goals that include world travel and helping others, "she's going to Cambodia and assist the poor, and next she's going to Italy to design school. It's helped to broaden their horizons because I broadened mine." Siapiaaki sees her children "blossoming" in things like acting and public speaking, spheres which she has also taken on. Since before her graduation, she has sought opportunities for creative and dramatic expression, and her children participate in similar activities with confidence. In her employment and in her artistic endeavours, Siapiaaki is a part of the urban Native community, and is a strong positive role model for the Aboriginal people with whom she works. In her creative endeavours she feels, "… I make a big contribution… helping to raise consiousness… and promoting the arts and the community, and giving local talents a venue to showcase their stuff… I really believe in the potency of the arts… as a healing tool." Siapiaaki wants to promote community healing through her endeavours, and looks forward to working on reserve at some point in the future (Personal Interview, April 9, 2003).

Charlie works in her community of origin, she brings her professionalism and dedication into the workplace with her. Her co-workers can see the motivation (she is the first person into work in the mornings), standards and purpose she brings to performing her work well, and that she shows real caring towards those she assists. Charlie also is a volunteer with a health organization and tries to inspire others with her own story, the story of her journey, her illness, recovery and her education. But, she notes with sorrow, "The people I had been helping are Native people, my own people. They don't seem to want to have hope." Charlie is a strong support, with lots of hope to share. She spends her free time among her family and extended family. She cherishes time with her family and grandchildren, caring for them and teaching them about their Aboriginal heritage.

> I was reading a book to her [grand daughter], about the Native people from down East, and I said this little girl is a Mohawk Indian. She's got a ribbon dress. "Grandma, you could make a dress for me?" And, I said, "Yeah, but it would be a different dress… definitely, I pass on my culture, I actually made ribbon dresses for both my grand daughters (Personal Interview, April 3, 2003).

Micky finds that her success has had an impact on her family. She is able to provide more for her children, but she sees the greatest impact will be in the future. Her children are able to aspire to training and education.

> My son was going to go into the trades, and now he's decided that he will go on to university and that's just seeing me do it, and he had to watch me do it with a family, whereas, he's going to do it with his family behind him, not carrying the family. So, I think he's wrapped his head around that, and that he can do this… my younger [daughter says], I'm going to be what you're going to be (Personal Interview, April 22, 2003).

Micky is living and working a long way from her reserve. However, she feels the pride of her family and she has a sister who is now, "going on to business school. I don't know if she ever believed in her intellect, but when I talk to her… I just keep telling her,

you'd be awesome." Micky has some concerns that she is less welcome on her reserve, that she knows too much and that people find her "scary." But when her First Nation's education counsellors and the chief saw her, she says they "started shaking my hand and she said, 'You're one of our graduates, we're really proud of you." Micky contributes to Native students in the Calgary community both in her work and as a volunteer, letting young people know about the demands and the opportunities of post-secondary education, and she encourages young people not to "give in to peer pressure," but to take their education and their future seriously (Personal Interview, April 22, 2003).

Alex feels that his educational success has "opened the doors" for him. He is now a leader in his community and his own success, lead him to encourage his children to pursue post-secondary education. They are both now in college. His wife completed a diploma recently, and his brother finished his degree in 2003. Alex is conscious in his leadership role in the community that he is an influence.

> I hate to talk about myself, I'm quite modest, but I have to say that I'm a role model to others, I have had people come up to me and ask me about the University of Calgary… and what it is like to go back to school, … how scary it is. I had an impact on the adult students… but more-so, now that the children, the younger generation are starting to know me in my community, and what I have accomplished, they're starting to look up to me too… I was very honoured (Personal Interview June 23, 2003).

Alex is an individual who occupies several high profile roles and responsibilities in his community. He is accomplishing much for the benefit of the community, and as an individual he prides himself on the competence and integrity that he brings to his work. The demonstration of these qualities can be a positive influence upon the adults and young people who are considering post-secondary education and seek out Alex as a role model.

Walking Against the Wind, began work on her reserve after graduation. She was employed in a position of responsibility and authority. One of the things she was able to do, was encourage her staff and co-workers to go back to school to finish their education. As a manager, she was able to provide schedule adjustments and time off and financial assistance, so that her staff could go to school to further their education, training and opportunities. She says of this circumstance, "they were getting back to school part-time … it was really good, I see it as progress and when you are successful, and people like what you do, they see you as a role model, and when you support them they appreciate it" (Personal Interview, May 12, 2003).

In her family, Walking sees positive results for her children. "My daughter is eight years old and she says, "Mom, I'm going to be a boss just like you." Her eldest son just graduated grade twelve, one of the few young people in the community to do so. He currently has responsible employment. Her younger sons are "thinking about what they are gonna do, and I'm glad that they're thinking about it." In addition, Walking's sister went back to finish her grade twelve, and is now planning to study social work. Her brother who for many years lead a life of hardship due to poor self-esteem and alcohol, has sought treatment. Walking observes, "He dealt with a lot of emotions… his face kinda changed when he came back. Now he is seeking employment." Walking has hope for his future.

Walking Against the Wind tells the story of a recent encounter with racism. In a local grocery store, a customer service person deliberately bypassed her to serve a "white lady" standing behind her in the line-up. Walking had the courage to voice a complaint, "I've been experiencing racism all the time, since childhood, I thought, I'm not going to

take this." Walking spoke up against this discrimination, speaking with both the customer service person and the store manager, telling them, "I don't like what I've experienced here." She received an apology and has found that in customer service the staff, "won't treat me like she did anymore." Walking Against the Wind is able to show Native and Non-Native people that racism needs to be addressed, she knows, "If I were to fight racism, then I would be fighting all the time, but I pick and choose, when I express myself, because I don't have the energy or the time" to be doing it constantly or all alone. Since she began speaking out about racism and the experiences of Native people, Walking knows she is having an influence. This past year a Non-Native man who previously heard her give a presentation, told her that what she said, "made a difference in my life;" he now seeks to be a friend to Native people and attends public events on the reserve. Walking's education and success inspire her to teach others, and she has found she can make a difference in communities both on and off reserve.

6.7 CONCLUSION

Aboriginal students who have graduated from University of Calgary shared stories about the experience of success in post-secondary education. The stories shared by the individual graduates tell of compelling events in their lives. Each of the graduates voiced what motivated and inspired them to seek a post-secondary education. Several types of challenges along the way made it at times, extremely difficult for the graduates to achieve what they had set out to do. The graduates' stories also tell about the growth that they felt they had experienced in their ability to cope with personal and learning challenges, in the acquisition of knowledge and skills in their disciplines, and in their better informed understanding of the impact of historical events upon Native peoples. The graduates found

that they also learned a lot about themselves. Change is a primary outcome of the post-secondary experience which the graduates voiced. The success and change the graduates achieved has the potential to affect others. Depicted in the model of the medicine wheel are the four themes inspired by the graduates, and which emerged from their stories, Vision, Challenge, Growth and Change. The elements are viewed as balancing one another, and no single element is conceived to exist in isolation from the others. Each of the elements interacts on the medicine wheel, with the others, dynamically, such that challenge may grow out of vision, but growth may encourage new vision, or new challenges, or change may inspire new vision and the need for growth. The stories of the graduates reflect both inter-relationships and connectedness with family, peers and community. In the discussion of findings which takes place in Chapter Seven, the themes of Vision, Challenge, Growth and Change are explored further, and interpreted regarding the dynamic interaction with success. The perception emerges, that the stories shared by graduates about success at university, voice powerfully the impact of that experience as it continues to resound around them and through their communities.

7.0 CHAPTER SEVEN: SOUNDING THE HONOUR SONG: DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 INTRODUCTION

The stories which graduates generously shared, telling of deeply personal experience, the search that began the journey, of loneliness, self-doubt, intimidation, hardships, cultural dissonance, academic challenge, sources of strength, learning and growth, of success achieved, change realized, perpetuated and engendered, reflect the fortitude, wisdom, and accomplishment which is recognized in the singing of an Honour Song. The sounding of the Honour Song is a celebration and an expression of great respect, and it was, and is my intent that the graduates and their stories be faithfully imparted and shared. The presentation of the stories within the framework of the medicine wheel was designed to express findings in a culturally appropriate configuration. In this chapter the interpretation and discussion of findings is presented in the same spirit of cultural respect and understanding.

7.2 GRADUATES' PERSPECTIVES ON SUCCESS

Nine Aboriginal graduates agreed to participate in the study and to share their stories about coming to, working at and completing University. While these nine graduates do not speak for the experience of all Aboriginal students who have attended, or who are attending University of Calgary, the stories that they have shared reveal much about the Aboriginal students who ventured into post-secondary education in this mainstream institution and graduated between 1992-2002. At the time of their graduation, the participants varied widely in age and life circumstances, all were adult students, some

having come from reserves, some having lived predominantly in urban settings, eight having children, one having no children and one being a grandmother. While there is diversity of life circumstances, each participant prepared academically for university, through upgrading, Transition or Entrance Program before being admitted to the University.

Each of the participants had found success at University, however, each offered a personal conceptualization of success. Ideas of success differed; Alex advanced the action orientation of "just doing it." Assiniboine spoke of the straight forward notion of setting and achieving goals. Micky defined success as being able to support her family financially, as well as in the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual domains. Charlie, Siappiaaki, Jace and Ineewagi's definitions of success included ideas about life-long learning, expanding potential and continuing growth. Success, implied doing something well, according to Walking Against the Wind, and involved the search for balance as expressed by Iskwew. A similarity in all these definitions is the consistent theme of action and process. Each of the graduates, presents a definition that makes it apparent that success is found not only in their education, but is active elsewhere in their lives in an on-going way and on a daily basis. Success is not just a finite target but a process, which involves, "doing, achieving, learning, living healthily, searching, balancing."

Additionally, Jace identifies the healing nature of success in learning which has encouraged and helped her both to live and to dream. Micky presents the idea that success means having choices, being able to choose. Her understanding of success, speaks of how personally empowering the potential for and achievement of success can be. Walking

Against the Wind voices the idea that success is sharing your achievements with people and influencing others. Her description reflects the potential for community to share in and benefit from individual success, but Walking's inclusive thinking also speaks strongly of the orientation toward sharing and concern for community, so central in traditional Aboriginal values. Developing a healthy balance, self-sufficiency, traditional values including community orientation and the concept of success as process are all consistent with a Native world view. Generally, success at University does not appear to have shattered time honoured ideas about learning and education which existed prior to the imposition of a Euro-Canadian model of education. While the graduates' stories indicate the inclusion of some aspects of Euro-Canadian notions of success such as accomplishment of specific goals, a strong Aboriginal view of the learning process relating to success, and the vital element of successful learning being employed for the larger group, emerges as paramount.

7.3 VISION AND SUCCESS

The research reviewed for this study concerning Aboriginal students' post-secondary success (see Chapter Two), does not generally focus on the motivations of Aboriginal students who seek a university education. It is possible that this omission is based upon the assumption that Native students go into post-secondary for the same reasons as other students in Canadian society. It is also possible that many educators assume that because the legacy of residential schools and other imposed educational ventures have left a deeply negative impression on Native peoples, that when they do enter post-secondary education, they do so reluctantly, and without a strong desire to participate in a mainstream

educational setting. However, the graduates who shared their stories indicate several strong motivations and a considerable desire to be successful in post-secondary education.

While the imposition of European style of education discouraged and deterred generations of First Nations people from participating to their full potential in the learning system and culture of the invaders, several of the graduates reflected that it was the influence of their parents which inspired in them a desire to go on in their education. Walking Against the Wind had the desire to pursue her education tucked close to her heart; initially she contemplated achieving only grade twelve, but she saw members of her extended family with degrees, and her aspiration grew especially after she obtained her grade twelve. Once she completed a diploma, it was her father, then too ill to attend her College graduation, who urged her to finish a degree. When her father passed away, Walking made sure she finished her degree for him, as well as for herself.

Iskwew acknowledges now that she too had dreams of higher education. She recounted in her story that she believed that possessing an education could give one freedom. It was her parents, especially her father reiterating throughout her life, "Education is the Key," which implanted the idea that education could help her to a better future (Personal Interview, April 24, 2003). As a parent herself, she took on the world of post-secondary education, knowing that what she was achieving would be important for her daughters. Siapiaaki's parents reared her in a home where education was valued. Her parents established an environment where the desire to learn more about the world was nurtured. The early inspiration of her parents helped to guide her into upgrading and post-secondary education. Despite their own alienation and that of their parents from the Euro-

Canadian education system, the graduates looked beyond the past and took possession of their present and future.

Walking Against the Wind, Iskwew, and Siapiaaki acknowledge and credit their parents with inspiring the desire for education. Although their parents had experienced residential schools and had limited education themselves, they understood that for their children, education could contribute to a better life. The parents' encouragement and guidance are indicative of the 'good talks' of the Elders described by Akan and presented in the literature review, and show that parents and some Elders still share 'good talks' about getting an education with the younger generations; that Elders continue to provide strong positive guidance to those who will listen. Aboriginal people often observe that it was the Elders and leaders who insisted that the provision of education be enshrined in the treaties. In their foresight, they knew that education in the 'whiteman's' ways would be important for their people. Education helps to bring different knowledge, skills and understanding into Aboriginal culture which can be shared within the community. As well, understanding the 'whiteman's' ways is important training when used to the benefit of the community, and which can help modern day leaders both to ensure that treaties are honoured and to negotiate any new necessary agreements with governments and Euro-Canadian society which are configured by and ruled by a complexity of laws and a burdensome bureaucracy.

Family played a critical role for Charlie, Ineewagi, Micky and Alex concerning the motivation to go back to school. Charlie was motivated by her son's accomplishments to complete an unfinished project, to finish her degree. Both Charlie and Micky found that a taste of learning awakened a vision to learn more about the world and all the ideas that

were opening up before them. Before Micky discovered the world of academic learning, she was prompted by the need to support her family financially, to gain tools which would allow her to secure employment for herself and a future with positive potential for her children. She was conscious of setting an example. Ineewagi, also was motivated by her children and knowing that she needed to be able to provide for them. Supportive 'others' encouraged her to try, but her desire for a positive future for her family and a vision of what she might accomplish, kept her going. Similar to Micky and Ineewagi, Alex was a parent with young children. He sought to gain an education so that he could secure opportunities for himself and his children. He believed he needed to provide an example for his children - to be what he wanted them to be - so that in the future they would become capable and successful. Alex had a vision for himself, his children and for others in his community of a brighter, better future.

Assiniboine and Jace found themselves in post-secondary education when individuals, up-grading instructors and co-workers, urged them to try it. Both of these graduates, had had childhood experiences in the education system that quashed childhood hope of succeeding in academics. Pique and also curiosity about their ability to succeed in post-secondary caused them to venture, to see if they could prove wrong the teachers who had narrowly defined their abilities. They came to university in their thirties, resilient despite previous adversity and discouragement, risking themselves, looking for hope. Assiniboine and Jace were able to find hope, create vision and ambition for themselves. Charlie, Micky, Ineewagi, Alex, Walking Against the Wind, Iskwew and Siapiaaki also brought hope with them to their studies. It made it possible for them to overcome alienation, to become strong and resilient throughout the challenges they would face at

university. The hope the graduates found, or brought with them, engendered a powerful vision. Their vision was inclusive of family, parents and children, it extended to community, and presages a future full of promise and possibilities.

7.4 CHALLENGES AND SUCCESS

The vision of a future conceived and nurtured by the graduates, inspired their post-secondary quest. Their journey led them to encounter numerous challenges. The literature concerning Aboriginal students in post-secondary identifies many of the challenges Aboriginal students typically encounter (Hampton and Roy, 2002; Haig-Brown, 1995; Archibald et al, 1995). My own experience teaching on reserve and in The Native Centre, also has enabled me to observe that in the transition to mainstream post-secondary institutions Native students meet with loneliness and cultural challenges and conflicts. The graduates who shared their stories met the challenges they found in academia, but some of the difficulties they overcame were unforeseen or greater than anticipated.

All the graduates whether they came from the reserve or urban areas, found coming to the University a lonely, often isolating experience. None of the questions asked of the graduates was specifically designed to elicit whether or not they had felt lonely. They were asked what they remembered about first year, about challenges they encountered. All at some point in their story, recalled feeling lonely and apart from others. Even Ineewagi, whose story tells that she enjoyed the best adjustment to campus, felt "shy and timid" in her first year, afraid to speak to people (Personal Interview, June 12, 2003). For others the loneliness was more extreme. The reasons for feelings of loneliness had a variety of causes. For several graduates, Assiniboine, Charlie, Iskwew, Alex, Micky,

Walking and Siappiaaki, the age difference between themselves and the majority of teenage and young adult students was apparent, and they found it isolating, "scary", a circumstance that shook their self-esteem and made them feel "terribly inadequate" (Personal Interview, April 24, 2003). Those coming from College settings where they knew everyone and were accustomed to close relationships, felt the pang of loss for the support network they left behind. Alex and Iskwew were at times alone without spouses and other family members and this made the feelings of being lost and alone even worse. Feelings of isolation were intensified, since most were acutely conscious of their Nativeness. Finding few or no other Native students in their programs made the situation more intimidating. Jace feared to be identified as Native, and Iskwew and Walking were afraid to talk to anyone. Alex lost confidence, found he wasn't comfortable communicating with other students even in group projects, he quit trying and failed a course. Ineewagi and Siapiaaki were confronted by the entrenched negative attitudes about Native peoples in their literature classes. Being a Native person in an extremely Euro-Canadian institution compounded the loneliness and isolation students might feel as strangers in an unfamiliar and potentially unfriendly setting amidst a large population of Non-Aboriginal people.

Although it is not surprising that these former students felt isolated, lonely, and out of place, the depth of these feelings, the extent and the duration is noteworthy. Several of the graduates did not begin to feel more comfortable until late in their programs: Alex in his third year on campus, Jace after almost a decade as a part time student. Walking and Iskwew, established a very small network of two or three classmates and a staff member at The Native Centre, but did not participate in events at the Centre, unlike the other graduates. With the exception of Walking and Iskwew, the graduates spent a great deal of

time at The Centre, socializing with friends, studying, resting, or volunteering in a range of activities and being part of a community. In view of the isolation, loneliness and disaffection experienced and described by all the graduates, more endeavours may need to be made to ensure that new students are noticed, included, and involved sooner on campus and in Native Centre activities. In this regard, an expanded range of scheduled events, to which students may come and meet other members of the Aboriginal student community, warrants consideration. It may also be advisable to identify opportunities for assisting Native students to develop their network by informal interactions with other members of the campus community.

While consciousness about being Native contributed to the loneliness of the graduates, the same self-consciousness, made students feel very aware of how others were viewing them and responding to them when they were in mainstream post-secondary education institutions. Iskwew recalled feeling a negative stereo-type when she attended College, pregnant with her second child. As a Native person at University of Calgary, she looked for other Native people and finding few, was overwhelmed, and felt a complete lack of confidence. Alex reported his confidence was "shattered" trying to manage among the white majority population. The narrow perceptions of classmates made Ineewagi and Siapiaaki sensitive to the degree of racism operating in some classrooms on campus, and threatened their self-concepts. Siappiaaki recalled an instance when joining an honours program class, she experienced a traumatizing flashback of a time in childhood when she was identified as a Native person and treated badly by her peers. These feelings caused her self-esteem to plummet, and left her shaken and unsure of herself. Charlie's return to

University began at an old residential school, and while contemporary racism was not an issue, recollections of mistreatment and unhappiness left her overcome with fear and doubt.

Consistently, the graduates reported feelings of low self-esteem and confidence, as well as experiences that triggered such feelings of doubt. They described their experience again and again as intimidating. The feelings of low self-esteem arose early in their University careers, but also re-occurred during later years in their programs when new or uncomfortable circumstances negatively affected their sense of competence and self. After succeeding at University, the graduates reflect much stronger self-esteem. Programming to address self-esteem issues, that lets students explore stereo-types and builds a positive sense of self, earlier and more directly, has potential to be of benefit for many Aboriginal University students.

All the stories of the graduates reflected aspects of conflict between mainstream culture and their own. Siapiaaki was challenged by trying to identify her feelings of conflict, struggling to reconcile what she believed with what she was being taught, as well as seeking to understand what indeed, was her perspective. It took most of her university career before she encountered an approach, a methodology accepting of her perspective and world view. It was a lengthy and disturbing process. Charlie was at a loss to discover either some representation of Native people or something other than a generalized view of Aboriginal people that did not accurately portray her community. The competition avidly practiced within the culture of the university and amongst the students, confronted Charlie's own cultural expectation of co-operation and sharing.

Assiniboine and Alex experienced a similar reaction to competition as Charlie. It had a negative impact on them both and caused them to encounter difficulty in working with classmates, and impaired their sense of confidence. Alex too identified a significant clash between his culture and academia. The classroom setting alone was a contrast to learning in the company of an elder and spiritual leader. The dichotomy between styles of learning and content was present for him throughout his studies. His solution was to survive by keeping what he was learning in each setting, separate. On campus he set aside his culture, in order to protect it. He worked to learn from academia what he needed to know that might be useful to him or to his community. Walking found that elements of academia and mainstream culture invaded her life. She and her family became tied to the 'clock,' and a set of responsibilities and obligations outside the family. She mourned the loss of closeness with her extended family.

Micky and Ineewagi spoke of considerable conflict with linear Euro-Canadian thought modes. Micky reported that she struggled a great deal trying to understand a process that ignored the connectedness of ideas, was so particular and specific. In addition to process, she also found the content confusing or contradictory to her beliefs and understandings. Talking with other students and her spouse, helped her to sort through the confusion. Ineewagi constantly battled with linear logic, and with her instincts, her own desire to resist and follow a different path, to present her culturally based process and perspective.

Both Jace and Iskwew experienced feelings that what was being taught to them in no way included or applied to them. Jace felt keenly that the 'norm' did not describe her or

her family. Iskwew sought to hear and learn about the experience of Aboriginal women, and found a void. This specific lack and the general exclusion of ideas and understandings which are part of her Aboriginal culture, left her "unfed" and her "spirit wandering" (Personal Interview, April 24, 2003).

Mainstream culture has been slow to acknowledge let alone adopt knowledge, philosophies or ideas from Native culture beyond the most utilitarian such as foods (corn, tomatoes, potatoes), or technology (canoes, snowshoes, toboggans), and even these are seldom credited to Native cultures. In the short term, the likelihood of the incorporation of Aboriginal approaches, world views, and perspectives into the mainstream seems remote. However, Aboriginal students do bring strengths from their culture with them to university, such as a capacity for synthesis and seeing the connectedness of ideas. As well, possessing an Aboriginal perspective often encourages the capacity to bring objectivity and critical inquiry to Euro-Canadian thought and perspectives (Personal Conversation, Glenn Wilkinson, 2002). More needs to be done to familiarize students with their cultural strengths, with the contrasts and conflicts they will likely encounter, and with strategies for coping with conflicts. It is critical that students do continue to search for elements of similarity, for ideas that they can apply in their own lives, and for opportunities to discover more about their heritage, and to share their valuable fundamental beliefs and philosophies. Aboriginal faculty and knowledgeable, open minded Non-Aboriginal professors may also play important roles as role models and mentors, helping students to reconcile shared cross-cultural understandings and values, in addition to the knowledge that many similarities as well as a differing views and perspectives are present in our common humanity.

Each of the graduates encountered numerous sacrifices and struggles, some of which can be addressed by programming. Most experienced academic issues. Consistent with the literature, the graduates had quit the education system when they were teenagers and only returned to pursue post-secondary education many years later when it seemed the best recourse, when memories of frustration, failure and alienation had faded or been overcome, when they had developed a vision. Each of the graduates completed upgrading or additional programming, but several still needed help with writing and English language skills. Other skills such as reading and effective studying continued to require further development. The need for workshops to enhance skills in these areas is apparent. However, students often feel that they do not have the time to spend on anything 'extra.' Ideally, a credit course which assisted them to adjust to learning expectations in a university setting and that did not require work extra to their courses of study would be a benefit to many Native students.

A few of the graduates recalled coming to the University without spouses or family. Moving the whole family created issues around schools, employment, community and support networks for other members of the family. Housing convenient to the University and schools might ameliorate social isolation in some instances. Alberta First Nations or other agencies have sponsored and make available housing to adult students in Edmonton. An expansion of available housing for First Nations students in Calgary managed by agencies in the Aboriginal community is desirable. A housing community for students and their families may be instrumental in helping students to develop a support network for themselves as well as their families. A Native student community which could share similar financial constraints, could share cultural activities, and families could

support one another with child care. Some of the graduates remembered that their families were unsupportive of their decision to go to school. However, if the family could be part of a network or community where all the families contained one or more students intent on succeeding in university, the few families who were not so willing to encourage education, may come into contact with a more positive understanding and influence. Those supporting a student by managing the home, could then be supported. Going to University means that students are often away from their families, studying alone for long hours. A network of associates and friends in a housing community can support other members of the family.

Iskwew felt she sacrificed time with her family to complete University. She acknowledges that the sacrifice has had some positive outcomes for her family, but the many hours she put in may have been excessive. Once again, early assistance with learning issues in academia may contribute to students developing greater efficiency sooner in University. There will be pressures and deadlines to meet, but frustration and failure may be minimized. Several others, Ineewagi, Charlie, Assiniboine and Jace experienced levels of exhaustion, ill-health, and even depression when scrambling to figure out how to learn in their new environment, and finding out how to juggle the responsibilities of home and school. These matters too, may be addressed in seminars, a credit course designed to include coverage of such issues, or in support groups in a Native student residence complex. Maintaining one's health where possible, through a balance of activities, including exercise as an essential, is a message which needs to be brought to the attention of new and continuing students.

All the graduates reported financial pressure while they were at school. This was exacerbated for those with children, and where there was only a single income. Students who commuted, such as Alex traveling home on weekends, or Charlie and Walking Against the Wind traveling into the city several days a week for classes, found the expense of vehicle maintenance, gasoline and campus parking onerous. Sponsorship and student loans do not accommodate these types of expenses. Inadequate or erratic sponsorship often left Micky, Siappiaaki and others in an awkward situation, having to rely on the food bank to feed their families. The graduates recalled living in poverty, with no funds to manage children's activities, or at times, food, and acquiring worry and debt. Sponsorship issues for funded students are in the purview of First Nations and must be addressed at the Federal level where funds for Aboriginal students in post-secondary have been capped. This is a political issue which requires National attention and lobbying. At universities, it is possible to make more bursaries and scholarships available to Native students with families, and to unfunded students. In this regard, deliberate development to increase grants and scholarships for Native students merits consideration.

The graduates completing degrees at the University between 1992 and 2002, had numerous challenges with which to cope. Loneliness and isolation, stereo-types and troubled self-esteem, conflicts in world view and perspective as well as cultural learning differences, and a series of sacrifices and struggles including personal health, family, their support systems in addition to academic and financial issues, all of which could present challenges. There was a great deal to discourage them from completing post-secondary studies, and often only limited or sporadic encouragement to continue. Each of the graduates encountered and contended with virtually all these issues. Coping with a single

major issue can be difficult. Coping with several burdensome issues at once, demonstrates the tenacity and strength of the graduates and their vision. The graduates who managed to go on, to apply themselves with industry even when things were bleak, succeeded in growing, finding new resources and fortitude within themselves. They kept their vision before them, persevered through trials and looked to family, friends or to the community within The Native Centre to support them in their journey.

7.5 GROWTH AND SUCCESS

In the narration of their stories of success, the most of the graduates recalled ways that they dealt with the challenges and struggles. In order to keep going in situations where it would be easier to quit, the graduates used a variety of strategies that helped them to retain their focus on their studies in order to realize their vision. For several of the graduates perseverance was related to goal setting.

Alex, Walking, Ineewagi, and Charlie found goals very significant in the process of post-secondary education. When he was on the verge of quitting, Alex remembered the goals he had set for himself and his family. He knew that if he left, he would not achieve something that was highly important to him but also his family. Walking recalled being determined to achieve her goal, and while it seemed at times to be a long way to go as yet, quitting would not make the goal more achievable, but more distant. Ineewagi remembers using goals and re-setting them throughout University. From wanting to pass in her first two semesters and achieving a minimum acceptable 'C' average, she established new goals for raising her average each semester, and concomitantly inspired herself to diligence and to find ways to be a more efficient and capable student. In a manner of speaking, Charlie

also set annual goals, focusing on one year at a time, dealt with the present matters before her. She worried about completing one year successfully, before contemplating the next, while directing energies into adjusting and adapting to the new requirements and expectations of the current series of courses and professors.

Self-talk, review and re-evaluation were other critical elements for several of the graduates as they endeavoured to persevere. Micky mentioned how when she was struggling or frustrated, she identified her doubts and "consolidated" her feelings, and then dismissed quitting as an option, knowing that what she was encountering, although often difficult, was better than other experiences in her life. Siapiaaki also found self-talk of benefit. When discouraged by events in her program, or persistent poverty, she would review what her life had been before university, and consider what the potential life after a degree might be for herself and her family. She reminded herself that she did not want to be someone who almost finished a degree. Alex relied on this inner dialogue at times too, considering what he would be giving up if he quit and closed off the possible future. Wanting a future with opportunities for their families encouraged the graduates with children to keep going.

There were cultural influences which influenced the graduates to keep going. Jace and Charlie both noted that they had been taught to persevere by the strong role model of their mothers. Siappiakki remembered traditional stories about hunters and warriors who did not give up. Perseverance was consistent with cultural teachings in Siappiaaki's understanding. Perseverance taught as central to culture and learning echoes the premise that there is much of value in the continuing influence of cultural lessons and 'good talks'

by an Elder, as previously advanced by Akan (1999). Iskwew, Walking, Alex, Ineewagi, and Micky practiced the spiritual aspect of their culture while they were students, participating in smudging, ceremony and prayer on a personal basis, meeting with elders to learn more about their culture, and/or attending larger ceremonies. Iskwew noted that she recognized the need to keep going in her studies, and smudging and prayer were important inspirationally and as ways of coping.

Assiniboine believes he was able to persevere because he evaluated his program and made good decisions about what he could manage, how many courses he could take in a semester, achieve acceptable grades, run his business, and be with and provide for his family. He determined how much he could balance, and tried not to extend himself beyond that. He recognizes that that meant he did not become involved in many student or social activities. If he had done so, his degree would have taken longer and he may have experienced greater difficulty passing his courses. Another element that helped the graduates to persevere was personal assessment. Assiniboine and many others recognized how much they were learning, valued the knowledge and experience they were gaining. The graduates realized the growth that was occurring, and as Walking observed when she did a self-evaluation, she did not want to quit, but to go on.

Support systems were an important factor in student persistence, but were also an evident demonstration of growth. Personal development occurred when students successfully established new systems or realized they needed support in their education challenges and then purposely endeavoured to utilize individuals or members of their families who would help them to survive a difficult time, to keep going and to find success.

Ineewagi started university not knowing Calgary really well, completely unfamiliar with campus. She involved herself in The Native Centre meeting people and participating in events. By living on campus in family housing and connecting with several Native students and their families who were living there at that time, she expanded her support network of child care providers and friends making the same changes as herself. One or two of Ineewagi's relatives were also key supports on the domestic scene, while she maintained connections with counsellors who urged her to continue her education.

Micky, Alex, and Iskwew found their spouses particularly supportive. Micky's spouse managed the bills, provided her with study time by taking the children out, and talked over with her the information she was learning and helped her to maintain a strong sense of her Cree values. Alex recalled the strong support of his spouse and family, the sacrifices they made in order for him to go to school. Iskwew relied a great deal on her spouse to manage the home and provide child care so she could go to school. Her spouse helped her to recognize that quitting was not truly something she wanted to do.

The graduates with children recognized the support of their family, who gave up time with them so that they could study. Micky's older children entertained and distracted the younger children from troubling her when she needed to get work done. Siappiaaki's children went without extra-curricular activities, and time and attention while their mother was at school. Walking acknowledges how much her children encouraged her success, and recalls how often she could not take them to their activities. Her parents and siblings and extended family saw to it that her children were taken out to their games and practices. Iskwew too, recalls the time together her family sacrificed. In addition to his children

supporting him, Alex relied upon very substantial support from extended family, his father and father-in-law.

Several of the graduates had or established friendships on campus and had the support of peers. Jace developed a specific group of friends on campus over a period of some years, before she expanded that network to include Native peers. Iskwew developed the acquaintance of a few Native classmates and they supported one another in their studies. Walking also found friends among the Native students in her program. Assiniboine had the support of friends both on and off campus. Charlie had a network of friends who came to campus with her, but she found many new friends among her classmates. Siappiaaki and a friend began University together, but gradually developed a circle of Native students who supported each other on campus.

All the graduates reported finding support at The Native Centre. Walking and Iskwew primarily were in contact with staff, and came to the Centre in order to seek clarification of program issues, or for tutoring or for support when they were troubled or discouraged. Ineewagi, Micky, Alex, Siappiaaki, Assiniboine, and eventually Jace and Charlie established solid supportive connections with staff and among their peers at The Native Centre. They volunteered and participated in student activities and reciprocated the concern and friendship they received by supporting their peers. The support of The Centre and peers was memorable for and valued by the graduates. The beneficial effect of this support was remarked by Siappiaaki who recalled how wonderful it was, "growing alongside of other Native students" (Personal Interview April 10, 2003).

The graduates reported encouragement or support and significant learning from at least one faculty member during the time in which they completed their degrees. Charlie recalled a professor who helped her to manage the transition back to an educational setting when it happened to be in a former residential school. Other professors contributed warm support for her when she was ill in her final year, urging her to keep going, and demonstrating concern for and confidence in her. Assiniboine found two or three professors with whom he could relate on a personal level, and who could guide and support him in his studies. Alex experienced the encouragement of professors especially during his university courses in a transition program before he came to campus. Iskwew found the head of her program took an interest in her learning and progress. Walking encountered a professor in a particular course who contributed to her knowledge and understanding in a dramatic way and whom she found approachable and encouraging on a personal level. Jace also had her learning profoundly influenced by a professor, although there was no direct personal support as such. Siappiaaki after several years of seeking for answers, found a professor who responded to her ideas and welcomed her perspective and world view, and nurtured her involvement in research and learning.

Professors can provide significant support and mentoring of Native students, and although all the professors these students described were Non-Native, their support was felt. Exceptional instruction, as well as an exceptional willingness to encourage Native students, appears to be a significant element in Native student success. While several of the graduates encountered a small minority, one or two professors who were sensitive to their concerns and responded to them as individuals, this seems to have occurred rather by chance, as a fortuitous circumstance within the culture of the University. An increase in

contact or connection between supportive professors and Aboriginal students is desirable to enhance mentor-ship and the success of Aboriginal students. Increases in Indigenous Studies programming with instruction provided by Indigenous and Non-Indigenous professors who are informed and aware, may contribute to a broader base of support for Native students at University of Calgary in the coming years. Increased presence of Indigenous students and faculty may contribute to enhancing the general campus environment for Native students.

A major aspect of the growth the graduates experienced at University was the learning they acquired. In their stories about success, the graduates recalled that knowledge, experience, and personal insight were some of the greatest rewards and triumphs which they accrued. Jace recalls that despite her difficulties as a learner, and a strong sense that much of what was the 'norm' did not apply to her, the knowledge that came her way was intriguing. When possible, she explored her own heritage and learned about her culture and people who were a long way away. She came to understand the influence of cultural heritage on her ways of thought, and to accept that differences in world view exist. Inspired teaching sparked her to seek opportunities for self-expression, and through self-discovery she was able to grow a positive attitude and develop dreams for the future.

Alex acquired new knowledge and skills, and applied skills such as goal setting. He was able to recognize that he is capable and competent, a 'doer.' Additionally, at university he met International students and faculty who were fascinated by Aboriginal culture, and although they may have possessed stereo-typical images of how Native people

appear, they did not hold the negative and highly discriminating attitudes and beliefs, he was accustomed to meeting among Canadians. The more sympathetic view helped him to see himself, Aboriginal people, and Canadian society more clearly. Walking also developed a better appreciation for her community as she learned about colonization and its impact on First Nations people. Aware that she frequently operates in two cultures, Walking was able at university to identify what belonged to her culture, and she learned to be proud to be a First Nation's woman, while appreciating other cultures in the world.

Iskwew found that what she learned and experienced at University taught her a lot about herself as an Aboriginal woman. She learned that it was possible for her to assert her own desires, to learn what she wanted to learn and to seek out what moves her spirit. Iskwew also realized that she can make a contribution to other's learning, and she has come to be more comfortable with herself, to value the traditional roles and respect accorded to women in her culture, and to acknowledge her own capacity to lead. Ineewagi learned to question, to speak up and out. She learned to organize others. Through a variety of rich educational experiences, Ineewagi grew and became a strong, confident and competent individual.

Micky similarly learned that she has strength and ability. She learned a tremendous amount about the world, that there is still much more to learn. During her years as a student, she grew to understand about the diversity of peoples including Aboriginal people, and to recognize that the Aboriginal experience in Canada is tragic and wrong. Micky knows who she is. Charlie also developed pride in who she is. She learned more about her heritage and to take pride in sharing her knowledge. She learned it was

possible for her to connect with professors and classmates, and although she regarded herself as a determined person, she found out to her surprise, that she was able to succeed at university.

Assiniboine acquired knowledge about his Native culture and traditions while he was at university. He discovered he valued growing and learning and continues to learn about his heritage. At university he found ethical and life guidelines which he internalized and employs in his career and home-life. Siapiaaki experienced learning about her history and culture, colonialism and residential schools. She was able to address her own behaviour and begin to heal. She discovered her 'self,' and explored artistic and creative endeavours. Critically, Siappiaaki learned that if she persevered in the midst of much confusion, frustration and dissonance that answers would eventually come. Siappiaaki succeeded in finding in the scientific milieu, a theoretical approach, and perspective which valued and allowed her to honour her Aboriginal, holistic world view.

All of the graduates learned the necessary knowledge and skills to accomplish a degree. However, despite their own misgivings at times about what they were learning, the graduates all sought and continue to seek to share what they learned. As they were learning, they shared the content of their courses with their spouses, with their children, with other family members and with friends. Several, for example, Assiniboine and Siapiaaki shared their knowledge and experience by adopting new ways of managing family matters. All the graduates either expressed a desire to share what they learned with others from their communities, or they are involved in actively teaching, facilitating healing

programs, or volunteering as role models to reach others and extend the benefit of their learning.

7.6 CHANGE AND SUCCESS

The outcome of the vision created and nurtured spiritually by the graduates was change. While graduates spoke of opportunities, desire for learning, preparing for the future, they inherently spoke of change. Change emerged from the vision of the graduates. By encountering challenge, responding with tenacity and growth the graduates both demonstrated and precipitated change. Change was a predominant theme in the stories of the graduates.

Dramatic personal change was the highlight of success achieved by the graduates. This was most evident when the graduates described themselves and then contemplated the person each of them recalled before they began university. The graduates' description of the impact of success at university on self-esteem, confidence, identity and character is remarkable. While much of the knowledge and form of study they engaged in at University was antithetical in many ways to Aboriginal culture, the overall experience enhanced well-being and spirituality. Assiniboine changed from a troubled, closed individual, estranged from the world in which he lived, to a professional person informed, versatile, a responsible role model governing himself by principles and ethics. He is stronger personally, proud of his people, growing in his spirituality, connected to and helping others.

Ineewagi came to university struggling with alcohol addiction, but this is no longer controlling her life. Now she describes herself as ambitious, confident, a skilled

professional. She is secure in her culture, participates in the ceremonies and does not battle the spectre of assimilation. She works at achieving traditional wellbeing, the balance of the mental, physical, emotional and spiritual, and sometimes gets close. Iskwew, too strives for that balance on a daily basis, and sometimes feels contentment. Before University she questioned her identity, but as she has searched and studied it has become clearer. University did not assimilate her into the 'white world,' she approached it on her own terms, and completing her degree gave her a great sense of accomplishment, taught her about her capacity for strength, determination and leadership. She feels empowered (Personal Interview, April 24, 2003).

Jace experienced a similar major change in finding and understanding her identity. She began University isolated and despairing, contemplating dying, but overcame challenges and grew. She has learned about and takes pride in her heritage and explores who she is in her self-expression. She has developed a firm sense of self and wellbeing, and is confident and sufficiently secure to help others.

Siapiaaki too, reports changing phenomenally. She changed from an, "irrational, opinionated," and insecure individual into someone with knowledge, confident, informed and secure. She expresses her ideas in creative forums, and by learning more about her community and colonization can identify herself as "acculturated, not absorbed" into the mainstream. She carries with her improved skills in many life facets, including parenting and healing (Personal Interview, April 10, 2003).

Charlie came back to university to accomplish a dream she had left unfinished, she pursued the dream for herself and for her mother who had no opportunity to go on to school. She gained more than her degree, she found pride in herself, pride in her heritage and an understanding that let's her "feel good" about herself and her people (Personal Interview, April 3, 2003). Alex also changed with his success at university. He approached education lacking in confidence, closed to others. Along with the integrity and professionalism he sought, he became firmly and proudly First Nations, and an open and sharing individual, involved in his community.

Micky was afraid, her identity was confused, she felt she had no purpose before she tried and succeeded at University. Her success has brought her a strong sense of identity. She views herself as capable, someone others turn to as a problem solver. She is independent, contributing, someone with freedom and choice who is able to manage to, "swim" in any situation (Personal Interview, April 22, 2003). Micky feels and is transformed to someone with ability and purpose.

Walking Against the Wind suffered low self-esteem before she completed her education. She graduated with pride in herself and her people and a strong sense that neither she nor her people were inferior. She explores her potential as a leader, and asserts that she and other Native peoples decide their own future. Success brought Walking the ability to speak out with a powerful voice, and the desire to seek to influence others.

7.6.1 Impact of Success on Family and Community

As success played a role in significant change for the graduates, their educational success and they themselves have gone on to have an impact on their families and communities. This impact is on-going and can not be fully comprehended, as yet. However, the graduates all identified ways their success was having an impact on those around them. They observed that their families experienced their success in a variety of ways, and the graduates were conscious of how they and the presence of their success were at work in their communities.

Change within the family took a variety of forms. For some of the graduates, an immediate and clearly apparent change was going from poverty to relative affluence. Assiniboine noted his family now had their own home. But other things had changed within the family including the dynamic between his sons and himself, where his role modeling of rational discussion, goal setting and planning, set a new tone and atmosphere. His daughter and sons were pursuing post-secondary education. He observed that his community was responsive to the change in him, regarding him and his success with respect. A brother, who once drove him from the reserve, now trusted Assiniboine to raise and educate his son.

Ineewagi felt her family was benefiting materially from her success, and while this made her smile with pleasure, she was even more pleased that her children had aspirations to follow in her foot-steps, to go to university to study and to travel like their mother. In her community, her success made her a public role model, established her as a leader and potentially as a chief who will influence many community members. Iskwew, also puts her

leadership abilities to work for the benefit of her community. She provides a presence, a positive role model speaking to individuals and groups, encouraging them to pursue an education. In her own family, her children know that they can succeed in school and go on to university. Several of Iskwew's siblings have followed her lead and gone to university, and will soon be in a position to use their education and success contributing to their community.

Siappiaaki reflects that her education and her success altered relationships in her family. Her understanding of the legacy of residential schools helped her to heal her relationship with her mother, address her own parenting and heal relationships with her children. Watching their mother exploring and growing in the world has imbued her children with a desire for learning and broadened horizons. Siappiaaki uses her knowledge about healing in her work in the community, as well as in artistic and creative enterprises, which reach a wide audience within and beyond her specific community. Charlie, too employs her knowledge and experience within her community, in her work and as a volunteer, helping people to address personal issues and to heal. In addition, she teaches proudly about her culture to her grandchildren.

Jace and Micky both work at a distance from their home communities, but they have established community where they work and live. Each of them is a positive role model for young people, and they seek to inspire them. In the work place they are visible success stories, involved individuals who care about the well being and success of others. Micky's success has had an impact on her nuclear family. Her children include post-secondary education in their plans, and she has influenced her sister to return to school.

Alex has had a similar influence on his family. His children both young when he began his education are themselves now attending post-secondary institutions. His siblings are graduating from University, and he is sought out by community members who want to know how he got past the fear and achieved success. As a community leader, exemplifying high standards in integrity and competence he is an exceptional role model for others. As a political leader, perhaps a future chief, his impact on his community continues to grow.

Walking's children watched their mother go to school and succeed, and then become an influential leader in their community. Walking's eldest child completed grade twelve and her other children anticipate doing the same; they think about their future in education and leadership. Walking's success encouraged her siblings to change their lives, to complete high school, to begin to heal and to envision a future. Walking's impact on her community is barely begun, but she is using her voice to bring racism to the attention of both Native and Non-Native communities. When she shares her story as she has done with audiences, Walking Against the Wind proudly carries her success and the culture of her people, and she finds she can change the attitudes and understandings of the Non-Native and Native communities around her.

7.7 THE PROCESS OF SUCCESS

Stories shared by the graduates and framed within the conceptual model of the medicine wheel help to identify emergent themes pertinent to understanding Aboriginal student success. Aboriginal students who attended and graduated from the University of Calgary in the decade of 1992-2002 captured success in their educational endeavours. Their success was the outcome of a dynamic process of vision, challenge, growth and

change. Vision was the spiritual and literal beginning of the process which students initiated. Developing a vision, an aspiration for things to be different, a desire for learning and opportunities, represented a critical first step in the journey to come.

Vision continued to play a potent motivational role in the process of success throughout the academic careers of the graduates. The strength of the vision which the stories revealed, can not be underestimated. The graduates were encouraged and inspired by the teachings of parents. They were motivated by desire to improve the conditions in their own lives and the imperative to achieve, in order that their children could also one day, seek to succeed in their education. The graduates' vision was intergenerational and inclusive. Their vision, or conceptualization of what could be, also extended to siblings and community. Vision fired, fueled and focused the energies and efforts of the graduates. Their vision, was a spiritual connection with and hope for, the people. When as students they encountered challenges, hardships, and struggled with their environment and the culture within which they were required to operate, they could revisit and mobilize their vision once again. Vision kept them firm in their resolve.

During their academic studies, the graduates often relied upon the potency of their vision; however, the nature of their vision meant that they would encounter numerous challenges, many of which have been documented in previous chapters. (Chapters Two, Four, Six). It is apparent that initiating a journey, searching for success means that there will be challenges. Some of the challenges faced by students are predicated on previous experience within Euro-Canadian social and educational systems and are the result of marginalization, alienation, shattered confidence and self-esteem. The graduates shared the

information that when they were confronted by multiple challenges, they took recourse in several strategies. Finding and utilizing strategies were conspicuous elements in the growth of the graduates while they were students. These strategies can be shared with new students who are also taking the post-secondary path. Following is a summary of the strategies shared by the graduates that contributed to their growth and success.

7.7.1 Success Strategies

Goal Setting: As students, they set goals, both long term and short term. Trying to meet goals enabled them to look ahead and prevented them from quitting. Setting short term goals, for each semester and/or for each year, allowed them to focus and work on what was immediately before them. As well, they could evaluate goals and assess how well they were meeting them, and make adjustments as required. When on the verge of giving up, they would revisit the goals intrinsic in their vision, and motivate themselves to keep going.

Self Talk: It was important for students to identify the source of the feelings they were experiencing in the face of academic, personal, cultural or financial challenges and feeling the desire to quit. Once the feelings were acknowledged, students could proceed to consider their alternatives, review what life had been like before university, review options if they quit, re-assess their reasons for coming to university. In their internal dialogue they would tell themselves to dismiss quitting, not to give up, that the outcome of having a degree was better than the alternatives, that life at university was not nearly as difficult as prior experiences, and that quitting was not fair to themselves or their families when so much effort and sacrifice had already gone into the journey.

Reliance on Culture: The graduates sought and found guidance within their own cultural teachings, stories which conveyed the message of persevering through difficulties, and the 'good talks' of parents who wanted them to achieve learning for themselves and their community. Cultural messages surrounding personal sacrifice for one's family and community also supported their efforts. They located themselves within their spiritual customs, adhering to spirituality in daily smudging and prayer for those who were reared in the traditions and understood them. Those who were less familiar with Aboriginal cultural beliefs and values, learned about their spirituality from Native peers and elders. They began participating in ceremonies and cultural events, and found strength and support for their educational endeavours. Striving for the cultural concept of well being and balance helped them to keep a perspective on choices, manageable activities, and what they were learning.

Planning: All the graduates needed to plan. Planning included where to live, whether to bring families to the city, how long their studies would take to complete, how to stretch finances, how to organize their time. Assiniboine especially noted the impact of planning and decision-making on his success, determining how many courses he could reasonably manage a semester, bring in additional income by working, and still spend time at home. His choices meant little social involvement as a student, but contributed fundamentally to his success.

Learning Assessment: The graduates conducted periodic personal learning assessments. They realized how much they were gaining in knowledge and experience, and were growing. They recognized the extent of their learning in general, and specifically about

Canadian history, the process of colonization and its impact on First Nations, their cultural heritage, diversity and other peoples in the world. The graduates were aware of the learning they were acquiring about themselves, their qualities, ethics, capacity for professionalism and leadership, their ability to try new things and to contribute to fellow learners and to their communities. They came to value the potential for more learning yet to come, and did not want to abandon their opportunities for growth at university.

Support Systems: While they were completing their university degrees, the graduates established and interacted with a variety of support systems. Not all had precisely the same network, but support was integral to finding success. For most of the married students, a major element was spousal support, in running the home, child care, managing finances, encouragement and moral support. Nuclear families played a significant role as well, with children sacrificing play time, standard of living and parental attention, so that their parents could study. Extended families that were close by helped with family matters and child care, while those at a distance were frequently telephoned and depended upon to provide needed verbal encouragement. Native peers and classmates in programs were another vital support. As well, Non-Native fellow students and friends were significant support for several students. The development of support was made easier for students living in family housing, where both Native and Non-Native neighbours were close and relied upon.

Exceptional instructors, especially those knowledgeable and understanding of Aboriginal culture and experience, were remembered with appreciation by the graduates. All the graduates found support in the Native Centre. For some, the interactions with staff, were what they welcomed when trying to learn how to survive and find their way in an

unknown and strange environment. But, for the majority, The Native Centre facility which provided a safe place, a staff and Aboriginal student community where they could meet, befriend and be supported by other post-secondary students like themselves, where they were able to participate in ceremonies with Elders or contribute as volunteers to cultural events, was a mainstay of support which bolstered student success in the university.

While the literature related to student success (Huffman, 2003; Brown, 2003; Hampton & Roy, 2002; Duquette, 2000; Young, 1996: Archibald et al, 1995), indicates the merit of support systems among peers and instructors, goal setting and being strong in one's culture, in the processes described above, the graduates have identified additional strategies. Considerable benefit was derived by the graduates, from self-talk and the personal assessment or review of their lives before and in the hoped for future, which accompanied self talk. As well, the awareness of, and ability to assess their own learning helped them to appreciate their new knowledge and growth, and then, determine that they wanted to continue to learn. Several of the graduates were not raised entirely in their culture, and could not have been described as being strong in their culture when they began university. Those students less familiar with their culture did not give up, were not engulfed by challenges, but went on to succeed. In this circumstance, being in post-secondary contributed to the students becoming more knowledgeable, and involved in Aboriginal culture. Thus, while it is desirable that, students already possess a knowledge of their cultural traditions prior to university, post-secondary students can still embrace their heritage, and this circumstance can contribute to their university success. The Native Centre is one of the first Aboriginal student spaces to be established in a Canadian university, over thirty years ago. Aboriginal students in other mainstream post-secondary

institutions would be well served by having similar space, cultural opportunities and support services. The graduates shared that the community, support, and encouragement available to them in the Native Centre were essential elements in their process of success.

The outcome of vision, challenge and growth for the graduates was change. The graduates, themselves, were clearly comfortable with the notion of change, and were open to change. The graduates initiated a process which would result in change. They envisioned change, withstood the multiplicity of challenges in their path, they grew, adjusting and adapting, incorporating new knowledge and skills. The graduates grew by relating what they learned to their own lives and by grappling with and frequently resolving two apparently disparate world views. Ultimately, the stories shared by graduates showed that they realized the change which they, themselves, instigated. The change which came about as a result of the process of success was profound. The graduates changed on a personal level, new knowledge and skills represent only a portion of the realized changes. From the stories shared by the graduates, the following personal changes were evident:

7.7.2 Changes Achieved by Graduates

Self-Esteem: A tremendous and remarkable change occurred in the graduates' own self-esteem and confidence. When they first became students at university, they carried with them feelings of low self-esteem, essentially a low opinion of themselves, and they experienced long periods of self-doubt and shaky confidence. The stories reflect that most were timid and shy, felt isolated, and often they felt out of place, unsure, intimidated and perhaps that they could not compete or be comfortably part of the larger student body, or be included and treated without prejudice, or be accepted when working in groups. Success

effected a change in these feelings, attitudes and self -regard. The descriptors which the graduates used to tell about themselves and the impact of their success show a radical difference. The graduates speak of having confidence, as well as of a strong sense of who they are as individuals. They appreciate and are proud of themselves. Their confidence extends beyond their university success into their daily lives, into family relationships, and into their careers. They demonstrate a sense of assurance, belief in themselves, and a positive outlook that they can 'swim' when the situation demands it.

Self-concept: The graduates experienced change by learning a great deal more about themselves and developing a sense of their inner attributes, becoming secure in who they are. Their years at University and the challenges they encountered and managed to cope with tapped their capacities, and they found they had the necessary fortitude, strength and endurance. Some were surprised by their success; they had not previously known they had enough determination, enough tenacity to see the process through. The graduates discovered other capacities within, which before may have been less apparent. They found in some instances, that their former teachers had been wrong. They were able to succeed in academics. They had intelligence and ability; they were able to learn and succeed among the academic elite in a mainstream post-secondary institution.

The graduates' self-concept changed to recognize and include capacities for strength of character, professionalism, ethical standards, purposefulness and creativity. They became engaged in the world around them. The graduates changed, to embrace the qualities they found within themselves such as leadership, problem solving, organizing, managing, care and concern and the willingness to help others, to be role models and mentors. Changing

self-concept for the graduates meant they no longer had to be silent or invisible. They could be involved, speak out with inner resolve, they could contribute to society around them, and be forces for change.

Pride in heritage: The opportunity to gain knowledge about the history of colonization, the impact of having another culture and religion imposed, the devastating effects of the residential schools, the realization of other government and societal attempts to demean and eradicate them and their culture, changed how the graduates felt about their people. Some had wondered what was 'wrong,' that their people were so despised and embroiled in so much social dysfunction. They developed a better understanding of just how difficult it was for the people to survive and to go on, when the traditional social mores were destroyed and the people had been given no cause for hope. The graduates took pride in the strength of the people to endure, in the elements of culture and language which still are evident. They became aware of the diversity of Aboriginal cultures. They became aware of the value of what was theirs, the merits of an Aboriginal life philosophy, perspective and world view. The graduates gained in knowledge and a new wider experience about other peoples, places, cultures, and the impact of colonization around the world. They developed respect for other peoples, and great pride in and respect for their own heritage. They developed increased pride in who they are as Aboriginal men and women.

Well-being: As their self-esteem, confidence, self-concept, pride in their heritage, and sense of who they were changed, the graduates' sense of well-being changed too. The graduates now find themselves happier, more satisfied with life, content and balanced. They are involved with their communities, inspiring and creating change for others. Those

who were reared in spirituality are stronger and continue to develop their understanding of that aspect of themselves and their culture. Several graduates apply themselves now to learning more about the spiritual nature of traditional cultural practice and belief, and find great peace in doing so. Others are conscious of better balance as something they have achieved, and this contributes to their well-being. They recognize that balance is on-going, and frequently while they can be content with their daily lives, they know they are better equipped and able to adjust in the search for balance on a day to day basis.

Empowered and Unassimilated: A concern for some of the graduates as they undertook their university education, was that they would not only learn the white-man's knowledge and ways of thinking, but that they would become 'white,' be assimilated. But, the graduates although they succeeded in academia, came away with a greater appreciation for their own culture. They came away with the desire to contribute to their own communities, to be part of their own and the larger Aboriginal community. They came away with a strong sense of who they are, and pride in who they are. Their educational success did not cause them to be assimilated, it strengthened their resolve not to be assimilated. They learned how the white people think, but many other things, besides. They sought, arranged and completed their education on their own terms. It was not imposed. They sought an education, making the choice for themselves, and not to serve the interests of government or other mainstream agencies. Based upon choice, the graduates chose the educational path that would serve them. In their success, they are empowered and unassimilated.

Family Change: The success of the graduates changed family circumstances and family relationships. The graduates are able to provide much better for their families on a

financial level, and now are able to meet the needs of their children for shelter, clothing, food and 'extras' including entertainment, vacations and extra-curricular interests. Of greater significance are the improved relationships between the graduates and family members, in some cases with parents, some with spouses and in most cases with children. The graduates developed better communication skills and parenting skills. Change occurred too, in regard to the future for their children. The children do well in school, in creative enterprises, and they speak of a future in which post-secondary education, career, travel, artistic expression and involvement in community and the world are dreamed of, and anticipated as accessible realities.

Community Change: The success of the graduates is leading to change in their communities where they are role models, mentors, and respected individuals.
Their success influences siblings and others to invest personally in an education, to modify unhealthy habits and behaviours, and to cease to be helpless and without hope. Their success demonstrates that there can be hope and that individuals can create their own change. As leaders, managers, teachers, caring and concerned individuals who pride themselves on integrity, involvement, ethics and professionalism, the graduates personify the positives which can be realized from change. As proud members of their communities who value their heritage and culture, they personify positive aspects of tradition and continuity. The graduates personify a balanced inter-relationship of continuity and change which is a positive path for others to follow.

7. 8 CONNECTING WITH AND TEACHING THE PROCESS OF SUCCESS

The stories and information shared by the graduates may influence those who follow their path into mainstream post-secondary education. While they were once students who contributed to my knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal culture, the graduates have again shared their experiences, perspectives and insights and have helped me to learn about their process of success. Understanding the nature of the process of success can guide and empower teaching activities among new First Nations students in The Native Centre. The process of success, conceptualized and interpreted within the medicine wheel, frames learning according to an Aboriginal model. It is a process which can be viewed as growing out of, or belonging to Aboriginal thought, and it is a process which Aboriginal students beginning university can follow, employ and become engaged in. It is a process which can be brought to the attention of Aboriginal students, as they embark on the journey through post-secondary education.

Inherent in the process of success are vision, challenge, growth, and change. Students can be made aware of the need for a strong motivation, goals and aspirations. The graduates who shared their stories were inspired by a range of hopes and dreams which ignited their desire and determination. As a parent with a school age child, I have seen at first hand, how desire to learn can be blighted and self-esteem eroded within the mainstream education system. My son did not have issues of race or culture with which to struggle in his early school years, but his motivation to learn has been inhibited, nonetheless. The graduates did experience discrimination and indignity, in addition to educational challenge as young people, and yet they were able to rekindle their motivation

as adults. It requires an extraordinarily powerful vision to overcome past wounds, to defeat the challenges of post-secondary education.

Aboriginal students may be guided to know and appreciate that there will indeed be challenges - there may be stereo-typing, loneliness, cultural conflict, academic and financial concerns. However, it is important that students know that these hardships may be managed, and that growth can occur from difficulties successfully met. Challenge is a part of the process of change, and being equipped with this knowledge may assist students to deal philosophically with hardships. Finding, and teaching strategies, about dealing with challenges such as cultural conflict, warrant exploration and development.

Aboriginal students new to post-secondary education can benefit from learning about the potential they have to grow and to learn. The graduates demonstrated remarkable growth in their process of success, elements of which new students may be inspired by. The growth evident in the experience of the graduates is a model new students can follow to seek out similar growth themselves; growth in accomplishments, knowledge and skills, in ability to cope with hardships and discovering support networks, in learning about the history and valuable world views of Aboriginal peoples, in learning about themselves and the strength and qualities they possess. New students can be taught by the tangible growth and success of former students, what they have to look forward to.

Likewise in learning about the process of success, new students can be encouraged by the graduates' stories of the impact of success and the change that it has triggered. New students may find the post-secondary path less arduous if they can be given the hope of

positive outcomes, and appreciate that their success can mean desired change for themselves, for their families and possibly even for their communities. Helping students to appreciate the change which can come their way, that they can continue to be Aboriginal peoples, with strong self-esteem, confidence, a positive sense of self, with pride in their heritage, may also contribute significantly to how the journey is made. Knowing that at the end of their educational journey, there are many personal and shared rewards, may ease the trepidation for students and motivate them to step forward with greater assurance. The elements of the process of success are interconnecting. In the success and change of the graduates, is the material for new, confident vision for those who venture after them. The process of success depicted by the medicine wheel originates with Aboriginal graduates, and their successors also possess the ability, power and choice to make the process theirs.

The process of success as described and explored here, in this chapter, is only a single example of the potent perspectives and world views which are inherent in Aboriginal cultures. In almost twenty years working with Aboriginal students, I have attempted to come to an understanding and appreciation of First Nations' perspectives and philosophy. I am conscious that there is much more to learn. I am also aware that in the larger society, very little is known, understood or appreciated about Aboriginal thought. As I 'travel beside' Aboriginal students while they take post-secondary journeys and engage in the process of success, I wonder how much less traumatic the process may be for them if mainstream academia or society should become aware of and begin to value the knowledge which Aboriginal peoples have to share. However, the mainstream, and the elements of academia and science within it do not yet appear to generally acknowledge or welcome Aboriginal perspectives.

7.8.1 Connecting and Reconciling Paradigms

Science and the spirituality which is fundamental in Aboriginal thought, indeed are generally perceived to be opposing perspectives. Science is focused on the outer world and is dominated by the imperative of devising technology for our consumer society. Indeed, modern science seems engaged in a technological tornado, bombarding society with faster, novel, more sophisticated, rapidly obsolete consumer items. With modern science and technology we pollute the air, the earth and the water. Technology and science pull us away from the earth, estrange us from one another, from other species and even from the planet, and seek to plunge us into outer space on voyages to Mars, reputedly a cold and distant place. But, we are encouraged to seek, to conquer, to colonize and to deplete in order to make fortunes on Mars. In contrast, Aboriginal thought encourages the individual to explore inner space, to grow in understanding of the sacred, to value the connectedness of oneself, with people, with the earth, the creatures and all of existence, the universe. Aboriginal philosophy advocates balance, sharing and respect, ideas urgently needed in mainstream society, which seems to be disconnected and out of balance with the earth, intent on mastery, and we are blindly bent on scouring the environment.

Science at its best encourages inquiry, is flexible and open and is of course intended to contribute to a better understanding of our world, to explore, and study and be searching out new ideas and understandings. In Euro-Canadian thought it is understood to be the right way of learning about the world. In Aboriginal thought, the exploration begins internally, and this is integral to learning and growth. Science as it is commonly understood, places little value on the spiritual. However, over the few weeks during which

I write the final sections of this study, I have encountered influential speakers whose ideas seem fortuitously to contribute to the question about whether mainstream society is ready to consider Aboriginal perspectives. At a recent Power Within conference (March 5, 2004), well known author Deepak Chopra spoke about both science and spirituality and presented the unusual perspective that science is spirituality. Although he did not identify the source of his ideas, Chopra presents an almost Aboriginal perspective in identifying the primacy of connections in the arrangement of everything in our world, human connectedness to the earth, and in establishing connections between the ideas of science and the ideas of spirituality.

Chopra set out the ideas of Einstein and Quantum Theory concerning the understanding that the universe and everything and everyone in it is made up of particles, and these particles are inter-connected with each other. Chopra also referred to the Einstein-Podolsky-Rosen Paradox which advances the idea that there are hidden variables, that all the connections and action between particles can not be reliably quantified or known - that there are mysteries which science can not quantify. From Chopra's analysis it became apparent to me that Einstein shared with Aboriginal thinkers, the notion that everything is connected and acts and reacts upon everything else. This similarity of thought supports the idea that science and spirituality may indeed be the same thing, share similar conceptualizations, and that they can be more alike than one usually understands them to be. It supports the notion that there can be a better balance and understanding created between the paradigms. This juxtaposition suggests as well, that academia and Aboriginal thought have much to share, and there is great potential to learn from one another about connections, understanding inner voyages as well as outer voyages of

discovery in the universe, and finding ways of balancing world views. At present, the academy generally is seldom inclusive of Aboriginal thought and does not respond purposefully to this potential for sharing knowledge.

A visiting scholar who spoke at University of Calgary, Robert Fuller, (March 19, 2004), author of Somebodies and Nobodies, a new study which details Rankism in Western societies, provided an insightful exploration of the hierarchies which exist in society and concomitantly, provided a convincing explanation for why Aboriginal perspectives and voice are seldom acknowledged or considered. Such hierarchies lead to abuses of people and of power, and those with the power can effectively close off much of the originality and creativity of human beings by framing and entrenching order and systems which exclude all those who do not fit in for one reason or another. Such systems discourage, are intolerant of and even punish diversity. As I listened to Fuller, I concluded that colonization in North America, essentially synonymous with the dispossession, silencing and marginalization of Aboriginal peoples was/is an extreme application of rankism. The results of the application of extreme rankism, for example in residential schools, are abundantly clear in present day Native communities. Fuller identifies specific hierarchical systems in contemporary society where rankism is especially operative, and education is one of those he elaborated on. He challenges educational systems to reject academic elitism - rankism - in the belief that in so doing, society would be better served by the release of far greater creativity. Fuller, additionally, advocates a dignitarianism movement to counter rankism. Dignitarianism, he regards as universal respect and greater egalitarianism. Such a movement within academia could encourage greater appreciation and respect for diverse peoples, thought, and cultures. Fuller, himself, acknowledges that

many First Nations in North America were more advanced than European societies, even the Greeks, in the practice of democracy, and egalitarianism. As more representatives of academia do express appreciation for the contributions, perspectives and ideas of Aboriginal cultures, a visible, more tangible presence may yet emerge. The presence of more Aboriginal people working within academia may further contribute to a better balance between rankism and dignitarianism, and to the evolution of shared knowledge.

Recovering dignity, decolonization, and reconciliation are on-going issues for Aboriginal peoples. The Chief of the Assembly of First Nations, Phil Fontaine spoke at a conference entitled Residential Schools: Is Reconciliation Possible (March 12, 2004), at University of Calgary, and he, and others there, were seeking ways to address and redress the damage caused within Aboriginal communities by residential schools. His message concerned the need for reconciliation as part of the recovery of Aboriginal peoples, but also as significant in the well-being of the larger society, in which Native peoples have the right to participate, on their own terms. The Honourable Donald Mac Donald (member of parliament), and clergyman Bill Phipps also speaking at the conference, noted the damage done to the fabric of Canadian society by the systematic oppression of Native peoples, and the need for healing in the Native community, which was regarded as equally necessary in the larger society of Canada, where the efforts to obliterate Aboriginal culture were condoned. A highlight in the dialogue about residential schools and healing occurred when Fontaine spoke inspirationally of the need for Aboriginal people to voice their successes, that this would be a path to restoration and renewal. The process of success which emerged and is presented in this study, was a healing path for the graduates. As Aboriginal people increasingly share their successes, heal and grow, the sharing of other elements of

Aboriginal culture and thought may also be extended, and over time received and valued in mainstream society. The telling of their stories by the graduates is a significant initiative by Aboriginal alum to voice and share their success in academia. The graduates are role models in restoration and renewal, and their success is having an impact on them, their communities, and in the imaginable future, in academia and the larger society.

7.9 RECOMMENDATIONS

Although it was not the intent of this study to research former students feelings about The Native Centre, all the graduates spoke about their connections with The Centre. The sharing of stories of success by the graduates and their reflections on their experiences have helped to confirm that The Native Centre is providing much needed support services and to identify several areas, which may be addressed. In order to enhance the welcome and support for students as they develop vision, meet change, experience growth and change the following recommendations are made.

1. **Teaching the Process of Success**: New students may be assisted in understanding the process they are initiating when entering university, helped to define their motivations and goals, and to understand that their vision of what may be possible is a critical pre-requisite. New students can be prepared to anticipate challenges along the way, given information about what to expect and ways to meet and manage challenges. As well, new students can be prepared to persevere, to expect considerable growth and the benefits of that growth. New students can become aware that the process of success can bring positive outcomes, and there is a scope of change that they are likely to realize. First year experience programming is recommended to address and teach the process of

success and the interconnectedness of vision, challenge, growth and change.

2. **Share Stories**: The sharing of stories in which the graduates took part demonstrates the effectiveness of the oral tradition in passing on experiences, lessons learned, and personal development. Aboriginal graduates have much to share with students new to post-secondary. Inviting and involving alumni and others to tell their stories as part of programming and as frequent guest speakers is recommended.

3. **Alumni Mentors**: Alumni can share stories, but may also be willing to act as mentors and role models for junior students. An alumni mentor-ship program should be explored, to gauge alum interest, program feasibility, and organizational model. Alum can guide new students in the academic experience, but may also contribute to choosing careers, preparing for transitions into employment, dealing with criticism from and tensions with other Aboriginal people who reject Aboriginal university students and regard them as abandoning their culture.

4. **Transition Programming**: The shared stories of the graduates make it apparent that there persists a considerable need for both supported upgrading and the development of skills to meet university expectations of academic learning among the adult Aboriginal student population. The graduates recommended that new students learn about their strengths and weaknesses and have a learning profile, that they participate in workshops on writing and reading, and establish support systems. These matters can be addressed in a Transition Program. The stories support the need for Transition programming in a mainstream institution to address issues including and concerning, racism, self-esteem,

different cultural learning styles and strengths, contrasting values, and common connections.

5. **Indigenous Studies**: The graduates shared that they had learned a great deal about their heritage in university. Often this was a result of their seeking and efforts and not part of the standard curriculum. The students noted how significant information regarding history and colonization was to their understanding about the circumstances of the Aboriginal community, and to their healing. With the introduction of a minor and also a major in International Indigenous studies, new avenues now exist for students to learn about the world-wide impact of colonialism upon Indigenous peoples. Not all students will wish to major in this area, but whenever possible, students can be recommended to take courses in this area. Indigenous instructors can become role models for students as well. The graduates noted that their classmates were largely uninformed and carried many stereotypes of Aboriginal peoples. It is recommended that consideration be given to including a universal degree requirement for all University students to broaden their degrees by taking a course in Canadian Indigenous studies.

6. **Scholarships**: The graduates indicated frequent financial hardship. It is recommended that The Native Centre enlist the expertise of the Student Awards and Finance office in expanding the number of awards available to Aboriginal students attending University of Calgary. Awards and Scholarships which are allocated for Aboriginal students should have criteria which adult Aboriginal students raising families and taking a minimum course load are able to meet.

7. **Housing**: Family housing was a need for the majority of the graduates who came with young families. Isolation of families, lack of community in the city was a challenge. It is recommended that partnerships in housing for Aboriginal students and their families be sought. As family housing development expands at University of Calgary in the future, opportunity may exist to explore housing dedicated to Aboriginal students and their families.
8. **Welcome Activities**: In addition to the current orientation to The Native Centre, which welcomes Aboriginal students, other activities are needed on campus to demonstrate an Aboriginal presence, to help reduce feelings of isolation, alienation and loneliness. As well, mainstream students have little understanding of Aboriginal culture and history. It is recommended that to create awareness of the relationship with Native peoples which underlies the way of life of all Canadians, The Native Centre extend partnership with the general campus orientation, so that the welcoming ceremonies for the campus community include a traditional Aboriginal welcome song, and a hoop dancer. These minimal but significant additions can create a sense of presence on campus for Aboriginal people, and can provide for the general body of students, an introduction to Aboriginal culture and the fundamental understanding that all Canadians, and Canadian institutions, are situated on Aboriginal land, shared with us by treaty agreements. Consideration needs to be given to other opportunities of emphasizing respect for Aboriginal culture and peoples within the institution. As well, activities provided by The Native Centre in partnership with the First Nations Student Association, may be enhanced to encourage greater involvement of new students and their families in events, such as barbecues and guest speakers.

7.10 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

1. Research exploring the experience of aboriginal students according to Faculty in order to compare experiences, rates of success and growth could be most informative.

2. A study comparing the experiences of admitted adult Aboriginal students to regular age (18-21) Aboriginal students, may help to identify differences in adjustment, and needs.

3. A study of the voices of Native graduates by decades, 1972-82 and 1982 – 1992 may clarify if significant change is occurring in the experience of Aboriginal people in post-secondary education.

4. A study to identify and explore the cultural styles and strengths which Aboriginal students bring to learning, and the areas of similarity and difference between mainstream and Aboriginal culture would contribute to the preparation of materials for use in Transition and first year experience programming.

5. Research exploring the work being done, or careers chosen by Aboriginal graduates in their communities may provide a more precise assessment of their influence as role models and in creating positive social change.

6. More Aboriginal graduates have gone into Masters and PhD degrees. A

study of the topics of research, the kind of research pursued and the contributions made to academia, could advance understanding of the value, merit and contributions of culturally diverse perspectives and world views .

7.11 CONCLUSION

By applying their words to the world, participating in the oral tradition and story telling, the graduates made the study a special time of sharing, teaching and learning. Stories voiced and shared by the graduates reveal the intense and profound nature of their experience and their hard won success. The graduates generously shared their stories with this researcher and were pleased to be able to contribute to the community of students who are following them into post-secondary education. The graduates reported finding reflection on their process and time achieving their degrees was something they valued, since they had not previously reviewed or reflected on the period they spent at University. They enjoyed the opportunity provided by the research, although their reflections were not always pleasant, when recollections included feeling lost and alone, or being judged and treated according to negative stereo-types, or feeling insecure, inferior, excluded or invisible and unwelcome. Much change still needs to occur for Aboriginal peoples to encounter a real welcome in the environment of academia, to have Aboriginal history, ways of knowing, thought and perspectives understood, imparted and valued across a breadth of curriculum in post-secondary institutions.

It is critical to note that despite the discomfort felt by the graduates, there was sufficient enticement in what they were learning, in what they often times were able to teach themselves, in the growth and learning that they achieved to keep them striving for

accomplishments in order to complete their degrees. All believed that they had learned a tremendous amount about the world, peoples, cultures, about their own heritage and especially about themselves. They were inspired to learn more, to share their learning, to create, and to apply their learning for the benefit of others. Several regarded their University of Calgary experience as a gift, as an experience that gave them hope, the confidence to dream, and the voice to speak out against discrimination and inequities. Many have gone on to second degrees and still others plan to complete graduate work, pursuing topics relevant to Aboriginal people and contributing to the body of knowledge present in academia that represents Aboriginal epistemology.

By gathering the stories of the graduates and presenting their experience in the model of the medicine wheel, the study is intended to incorporate an Aboriginal approach and presentation of data. The themes which emerge in the analysis of and reflection upon the stories have guided the discussion of the graduates' experience of success. The inter-relationship of the medicine wheel with the stories has led to the identification of a dynamic process for success. Regarding the process as action oriented is consistent with and Aboriginal world view. The encouragement and inspiration which the graduates derived from traditional stories, from the desire to become what they wanted for their children, and from the guidance of parents and elders, clearly shows that trying to develop knowledge and skills for one's benefit and the benefit of the community, continues to be consistent with Aboriginal cultural attitudes about learning and achieving.

From continuity with traditional attitudes, teachings, and value placed on perseverance and determination, the graduates were able to engender success and change.

Change is inherent in Aboriginal culture and a traditional learning process, and with a perspective that looks forward and takes into account seven generations. Within the process of success which evolved in the medicine wheel the graduates exemplified interconnectedness. The graduates were connected to parents, children and community. These were a large part of the vision which inspired them. At times losing a parent or concerns about childcare represented challenges. At other times, the support of parents and children, or community elements was instrumental in graduates' perseverance, learning and growing. The change and success which had an impact on the graduates, is having an impact on their families and communities. In the medicine wheel model of the process of success vision, challenge, growth and change are aspects which balance one another and interact closely and often.

As a teacher, I continue to learn from Aboriginal students about the strengths of their culture and world view. The medicine wheel model that has emerged from the study, takes an implicit process for success and makes it explicit. In the future it can be used as a cultural guide or model for Aboriginal students attending university. New students can be introduced to the model and encouraged to integrate it into their own experience of discovery and growth at university. Introduction of the model, can include building an awareness of the relationship with Aboriginal culture and traditional values, such as connectedness and balance, which their fore-runners, the graduates, carried with them and embedded in the model. The graduates also brought with them or readily developed and enhanced, great comfort with change. Their vision was a prerequisite that shaped the quest to seek change, that provided fortitude for rising to meet challenges, which sustained them,

helped them to persevere and achieve growth, while the scope and dynamics of their achievements and success were both the catalyst and results of change.

Change was a mark of success for the graduates, and their success had an impact on themselves, their family and their communities. Aboriginal students coming to the University in the future would be well served to hear about the stories of these and other graduates. The success and change experienced by the graduates was ultimately empowering. Although the graduates experienced hardships and conflicts, the success and change which they accomplished continues to be active in their lives. They achieved their success on the basis of choice, for their own purposes, and on their own terms. While the literature related to Aboriginal students in post-secondary typically emphasizes loss of culture, the graduates who shared their stories reflect not loss, but growth and gain. The graduates transcended previous educational and life experience, personal circumstances, cultural dissonance, tremendous challenges in an urban, mainstream, post-secondary institution. The graduates adapted, and accrued knowledge, skills, a powerful sense of self and pride in their heritage. The voices and stories of Native graduates elucidate a vision of empowerment, hope and self-determination which can be shared with their successors who take the path leading to post-secondary education. By sharing their stories, the graduates have given voice to the process of success. By sounding the stories of the graduates and participating in their own process of success, future Aboriginal university students can envision the moment, when they too, will stand in the circle of graduates and hear the singing, of the Honour Song.

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* Authors names or initials appear as published in source materials.

APPENDIX A

Record of Native Graduates Self-identifying to The Native Centre

Year of Graduation	Number of Graduates[1]
1971	1
1972	1
1973	0
1974	0
1975	2
1976	7
1977	11
1978	6
1979	11
1980	7
1981	6
1982	9
1983	9
1984	3
1985	6
1986	14
1987	15
1988	12
1989	9
1990	5
1991	6
1992	23
1993	30
1994	19
1995	20
1996	19
1997	40
1998	54
1999	45
2000	53
2001	32
2002	40

[1] Totals include undergraduate, professional and graduate degrees.

APPENDIX B

Interview Questions

1. Do you have a definition, your own definition for success?

2. How would you describe yourself? How would you describe the person you were before you began university?

3. What brought you to university? What was the experience of coming to University of Calgary like for you?

4. What do you recall about your first year on campus?

5. Did you encounter any particular struggles at University?

6. Were there problems that you felt challenged by?

7. Were there times when you wanted to quit? What did you do instead?

8. Were there times when what you were learning at University seemed to be in conflict with your culture or your own beliefs? How did you deal with this conflict?

9. What kinds of support did you receive from family or the community?

10. Was there a course or courses or other experience that you remember as the most meaningful for you? Why?

11. What were the best experiences for you while at University?

12. What kept you going?

13. What do you believe contributed to your success at University? (To what do you attribute your success?)

14. How has your success affected/had an impact on your life?

15. Does your success impact your family? How?

16. Does your success impact your community - if so, how?

17. Is there anything you'd like to add about what students need to know to be successful?

APPENDIX D

CONSENT FORM

Research Project Title: Honour Song: Native Students Voice Success

Investigator: Peggy Dobson
I am currently a Master's student in the Graduate Division of Education Research in the Faculty of Education. I am requesting your participation in my research project, which is outlined in the following consent form.

This consent form, a copy of which has been given to you, is only part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more detail about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

The research project ***Honour Song: Native Students Voice Success***, is designed to record and explore the stories of Native students who have graduated from the University of Calgary. The stories and voices of Native graduates are believed to contain valuable information about their experience at University, and insight about events or circumstances which may have contributed to their success. This information may assist in programming for future Native students as they pursue post-secondary education at the University of Calgary. Due to the nature of the information being studied, Native graduates of the University of Calgary are being asked to participate by telling their stories.

So that a face-to-face interview can be conducted and your story may be recorded, we will meet for a minimum of an hour, allowing time for us to discuss this consent form and any questions you may have. I will then record on tape your story of your experiences as a student at the University of Calgary. You are free to speak about the information you feel you wish to share, and are under no obligation to share anything that makes you feel uncomfortable. The research is in no way intended to inconvenience or upset you or to put you at risk. Should you experience a concern, you may ask questions about the research or withdraw from it if you so desire, at any time, without any problem. Should an issue arise and you wish to meet with a counsellor or an elder, appropriate arrangements will been made for this support. Participants are not being remunerated for their part in this study. However, the researcher will reimburse any expenses incurred in travelling to the interview.

The information which is collected on audio-tape will be stored in a locked cabinet in my office at The Native Centre, University of Calgary. With the exception of the time needed for transcription, all tapes will be kept securely and exclusively in my possession. Once this research project is complete, the tapes will be kept for five years in accordance with the policy set by the Faculty of Education at the end of which time, they can be destroyed. Information gathered will be treated with the highest confidentiality. No one will be advised of your participation and your identity will not be revealed at any time in the

research report or during the presentation and discussion of University experiences. Participants will be referred to only by pseudonym.

Should you wish updated information about the progress of the research you may call me at any time. I will contact you once transcription has occurred, so that you can confirm that the story you have provided is complete to your satisfaction. As a participant, you are welcome to a copy of your own story and to a summary of the results of the research.

Your signature on this form indicates that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding participation in the research project and agree to participate as a subject. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the investigators, sponsors or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time. Your continued participation should be as informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation. If you have further questions concerning matters related to this research contact:

Peggy Dobson (403) 220-4298 or

Dr. Cecille DePass (403) 220-5634 (Graduate Studies Supervisor)

If you have any questions or issues concerning this project that are not related to the specifics of the research, you may also contact the Research Services Office at 220-3782 and ask for Mrs. Patricia Evans.

Your signature on the line below is an indication that you have read this form, understand the research, and are willing to continue.

____

Participant's Signature Date

____

Researcher's Signature Date