



# **KNOWLEDGE.SPIRIT.STRENGTH**

Photograph by a student of SUNTEP 1

**WE ARE TEACHERS  
TO EACH OTHER**

**BY KEEGAN BRODACKI, LOGAN FINES, GERALD LISOWAY,  
SONYA TICHKOWSKY, MERVIN WHITEHEAD, AND THE  
STUDENTS OF SUNTEP**

**A NARRATIVE PRACTICE STORY  
BY TERRI PETERSON**

II



# ***CONTENTS***

***PRELUDE.....5***

***BY TERRI PETERSON***

***PART ONE.....12***

***BY KEEGAN BRODACKI, LOGAN FINES, GERALD LISOWAY, SONYA TICHKOWSKY, MERVIN WHITEHEAD, AND THE STUDENTS OF SUNTEP***

***PART TWO.....36***

***BY TERRI PETERSON***

A graduate Project with  
The University of Regina - Faculty of Social Work

# PRELUDE

*This document describes the stories, hopes, and intentions of a local practitioner and a community of Métis students. It illustrates an empowerment based approach to community work informed by both narrative ideas and the sharing traditions of the Aboriginal people of Saskatchewan. Over the last several months, the students of SUNTEP (Saskatchewan Urban Native Teacher Education Program) have explored and documented their narratives of struggle and determination with the dream of inspiring local Aboriginal youth and addressing social inequities within the larger community. Using the cultural and narrative custom of sharing, the students created a collective document describing the hopes, knowledge, and skills of their community to distribute among their many neighbors. In the spirit of the collaborative praxis, my participation in the creation of 'Knowledge.Spirit.Strength: We are Teachers to Each Other' has moved me to better understand my own story of sustenance and my own use of folk culture. The narrative approach to community suggests a fusion of conventional practice dichotomies and supports a cycle of empowerment that reaches beyond conventional divides. The nature of the narrative approach, with its critical yet wholesome lens, supports a contagious and vicarious hope that seems to touch everyone involved. It nourishes a mutual psychological and social resistance for the participants, the witnesses, and the facilitators. Working in this way sustains and inspires me simultaneously within my work and my life. My knowledge and practice of the folk art 'collaborative consciousness' connects me to a hope that many of us share - a hope for myself, my family, my work, my community, and the world.*

## Background

The western imposition, colonialism, and the more subtle, sustained impact of the modern guiding principles have marginalized Aboriginal cultures and their stories. Adopted policies of assimilation and integration have left First Nations people of Canada and of the world uprooted, marginalized, and disposed (UN, 2008). The knowledge and skills of Indigenous communities have been dishonored and disqualified by the wider community for historical, cultural, and social reasons (Dulwich Centre, 1999; Waldegrave et al., 2003; White, 2003; Denborough, 2008).

The narrative collective approach introduces a process to collectively identify, acknowledge, honor, and richly describe the knowledge and skills of marginalized communities (Dulwich Centre, 1999; Waldegrave et al., 2003; White, 2003; Denborough, 2008). The narrative approach to community also emphasizes, values, and honors the importance of the story and the tradition of storytelling within the Aboriginal Canadian culture. Working collaboratively with Aboriginal people can contribute to culturally appropriate methods of support and inquiry, a culture of respect and partnership within our communities, and create opportunities to honor the First People's knowledge, experience, and culture.

The Métis nation constitutes of a distinct Aboriginal nation largely based in western Canada (Métis National Council [MNC], 2010). The Métis National Council describes the Métis people as emerging out of the relations of Aboriginal women and European men before Canada became a nation (MNC, 2010). The Métis people established communities and practiced a unique culture which has resulted in a new Aboriginal people (MNC, 2010). The Métis people have been marginalized and dishonored within Canadian Society. The Metis culture transcends traditional societal dichotomies. The First Nations people of the world, of Canada, and of Saskatchewan hold unique knowledge and narratives describing their resiliency in the face of the modern imposition and expressing alternative ways to live in the world.

There are historical, social, financial, demographic, geographic, structural, cultural, and individual barriers for Aboriginal people connected to their formal educational participation. According to Health Canada (2009), the Aboriginal people of Canada have lower levels of participation in all types of formal education, particularly at the university level, as compared to the general Canadian population. The Saskatchewan Urban Native Teacher Education Program (SUNTEP) is a unique cross cultural education program that hopes to ensure its graduates are educated to be sensitive to the individual educational needs of all students, particularly those of Métis and First Nations ancestry (Gabriel Dumont Institute, 2010). By sharing the stories of the SUNTEP community, we hope to recognize the value of culturally appropriate Aboriginal education communities and support inclusive education practices within Canada. We hope to inform and inspire the people of the larger community to take action within their lives for both themselves and for social justice. It is very important to this project to honor and share the many hopes, knowledge streams, and skills of the SUNTEP students.

The rich tradition of collective narrative practices as described by Michael White (2007, 2003, 1997), David Denborough (2009, 2008, 2006) and many of the other practitioners connected to the collective narrative

movement have provided a culturally appropriate framework for our project. The narrative approach emphasizes people's expressions of their life experiences. Dominant discourses within our society create the myth of universality and subjugate other ways of knowing or seeing the world. People's stories are understood by the narrative approach as reflecting both dominant and subjugated knowledge(s) and are contextualized in terms of power. Externalizing the techniques of power at work in society allows people to become separate and explore the neglected aspects of their stories and their lives (White, 2007). Narrative practice exposes the web of power and knowledge in which our lived experience exists making marginalized or disqualified knowledge more visible. At the heart of the narrative approach to communities lies the belief that communities already have the stock of knowledge necessary to address any concern that they may face (White, 2003). If these stories and skills are rendered visible, valued, and free within the collective narrative process they can be embraced for future action.

Narrative practices associated with double listening, deconstruction, re-authoring, and the definitional ceremony metaphor can set a stage to honor and express the abundant alternative stories of community members (White, 2003, 2007). Exploring the complexities of people's experiences, questioning the naturalistic understandings and consequences of trauma, and facilitating the construction of the many other narratives involved contribute to constructions of a strong, joined, resilient, and abled sense of self for people (White, 1997, 2003, 2007; Waldgrave et al., 2003; Yuen, 2009). Exploring the absent but implicit narratives involved in people's stories and exploring the responses of people, not merely the effects of trauma and social trauma, will add to the construction of an alternative story (White 1997, 2003, 2007; Carey et al. 2009, Yuen, 2009).

Narrative collective assignments are based on the principle of partnership and break down the usual therapeutic barriers associated with clinical, community, and research practices. The narrative approach also transcends the many contemporary divides associated with the client/practitioner, the healthy/unhealthy, the fragile/resilient, the individual/collective, and the personal/political. The approach hopes to support the community to create multi-faceted narratives but it also supports the participants, and the facilitator, to bring more of themselves and their story to the narrative table. It fuses the fragments created by these divides. Wholeness and balance is valued as both a main principle and purpose of narrative theory and local Aboriginal cultures.

Collective narrative assignments usually include definitional ceremonies, documentation, and the presentation of the preferred narratives of the community (Denorough 2008, Denborough et al., 2006; White, 2003). The documentation is an account of the knowledge and skills of the community. The documentation chosen by the community members can be written, audio taped, videotaped, and/or shared orally. Although there are individual narratives involved, the document is presented as a collective creation balancing the 'we' and the 'I'. The document is reflected back to the community within a community gathering and/or subsequent group meetings, and if the participants choose, shared with the wider community in a variety of ways. These processes thicken the alternative storyline and the narratives of resiliency within the community as the retelling of the stories acknowledges, honors, and has "...significant positive effects on the community members' sense of existence" (White, 2003, p. 50).



Almost at SUNTEP Photo by Terri Peterson

## About this Document

In June of 2010, I returned to the small northern city of my origin, Prince Albert, Saskatchewan to meet with a group of nine Métis post secondary students studying within a culturally appropriate learning center – Saskatchewan Urban Native Teacher Education Program (SUNTEP). I had connected with a local community member a couple of months previous who suggested that the students of SUNTEP would be interested in coming together within a collective narrative project. I also met with an educational practitioner, Joan Sanderson, to discuss the possibilities of such a participatory project with Aboriginal students. With the support of two local Métis community members and practitioners, Kathleen McMullin and Brigette Krieg, The project was approved by the Research Ethics Board at the University of Regina. I provided a collaborative narrative framework for the students' knowledge and hope to be shared and documented. Part one of this document is a compilation of the SUNTEP community narratives. It is

presented as a joint expression within the manner of the collective narrative document. The students directed the documentation of their stories. Some community members decided to distribute the document under their name and others decided to remain unknown. All of the stories in 'Knowledge.Spirit.Strength' are the property of the community members.

The community met several times within the SUNTEP campus and the Prince Albert community to explore, share, witness, and document their stories, skills, and hopes. The community was the driving force behind the project and informed the process along the way. As a facilitator, I asked questions to learn more about the skills, knowledge, hopes, dreams and the stories of sustenance of the community. The conversations were recorded and transcribed to inform the text contained in collective narrative document 'Knowledge.Spirit.Strength: We are Teachers to Each Other'. The project was named by the community members and the specific expressions of the community members were respected in their entirety as much as possible within the text. The community thickened their purpose of empowering Aboriginal youth and people. They focused the themes of the conversations and reflected on the developing document each and every session. The facilitator asked questions during the conversations towards the intention of energizing the whole and chosen narratives of the SUNTEP students. The participant presented their narratives in text, poem, photography, and song illustrating other forms of expression and demonstrating their use of folk culture. Many of the photographs included in this paper are the visual expressions of a participant. The community was very excited to use the medium of music to communicate their collective narrative. Their main purpose in participating was to share their story with others and bring hope to young people and a core group of young men decided the best way to do this would be in the medium of music. Jesse Brown, a local musician, facilitated their musical expression and produced the audio recording included. The students expressed themselves using the electric guitar, drum, and keyboard. They chose the style and sound involved with their collective expression. They also wrote the lyrics and sang the song.

The group explored and responded to 'Yia Marra' (Denborough et al., 2009) as a way to connect their stories. 'Yia Marra' is a collective narrative document by the people of Ntaria/Hermannsburg (Denborough et al., 2009). This document is related to a long term Dulwich Center project focused on linking stories and initiatives of Aboriginal communities in Australia and began in the community of Port Augusta (Denborough et al., 2009). The community created a collective narrative letter and sent a package to people of Ntaria/Hermannsburg through the Dulwich Centre.

The community wanted to share 'Knowledge.Spirit.Strength: We are Teachers to Each Other' with their many neighbors – northern communities, First Nations communities of Saskatchewan, Saskatchewan high schools, government officials, other cultural learning centers in Canada, Aboriginal groups within the province and Canada, the teacher's federation, the people of Ntaria/Hermannsburg, and other students within their school. The community has many ideas of how to share their stories with others in the future. We will continue to find ways to share more with others.

The writer has reflected on her experience of facilitating and witnessing the community's stories in the documentation in Part Two of the document. I utilized the narrative definitional ceremony framework within this reflection and would like to acknowledge Brigette Krieg, Pat Keyser Judy White, and the Saskatoon Narrative Community for their collaboration and narrative questions (White 2003).

Thank you to the many partners of 'Knowledge.Spirit.Strength'. This narrative document illustrates and acknowledges the knowledge, spirit, and strength of a community. The expressions and narratives of the students of SUNTEP are very important to every person in our community as none of us can be free until we are all free. The community stories could aid and inspire justice within our community for all who live inside of it. 'Knowledge.Spirit.Strength' could inform both educators and the facilities they work within to create inclusive learning environments. It could support a child whose context is affecting their ability to perform. It could alter how the school system works with that child. It could inform the larger community of the lived experience of young Métis people and protest the marginalization of Aboriginal people and youth. It could offset the swelling of racism within the larger community of Prince Albert. Knowledge.Spirit.Strength' can inform government policy and programs. It could emphasize the value of schools like SUNTEP, The First Nations University of Canada, etc for our whole community. It could provide a testimony of hope, resiliency, and solidarity. It could inspire. There are so many possibilities of where these stories can take us all when 'we are teachers to each other'.

If you would like to contact the SUNTEP community or the facilitator involved in 'Knowledge.Spirit.Strength' please write to:

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Or

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We'd love to hear from you!



As you are reading **'KNOWLEDGE.SPIRIT.STRENGTH'**, I invite you to respond as an outsider witness within the categories of the narrative definitional ceremony outlined by Michael White (2003).

### **1. IDENTIFYING THE EXPRESSION**

As you listen to the stories of the Students of SUNTEP, which expressions caught your attention or captured your imagination?

Which ones struck a chord for you?

What in particular impacted you?

### **2. DESCRIBING THE IMAGE**

What images of people's lives, identities, and the world did these expressions evoke?

What did these expressions suggest to you about these people's purpose, values, beliefs, hopes, dreams, commitments?

How would you characterize what struck you?

What did it speak to?

### **3. EMBODYING RESPONSES**

What is it about your own life that accounts for why these expressions caught your attention or struck a chord for you?

Do you have a sense of which aspects of your own experience resonated with these expressions and with the images evoked by these expressions?

### **4. ACKNOWLEDGING TRANSPORT**

How have you been moved on account of being present to witness these expressions of life?

Where has this experience taken you to, that you would not otherwise arrived at, if you hadn't been present as an audience to this presentation?

In what way have you become other than who you were on account of witnessing these expressions and stories in the way that you have?

What new possibilities does it evoke in your work or your life?

# ***PART ONE***

***KNOWLEDGE.SPIRIT.STRENGTH.***

***WE ARE TEACHERS TO EACH OTHER***

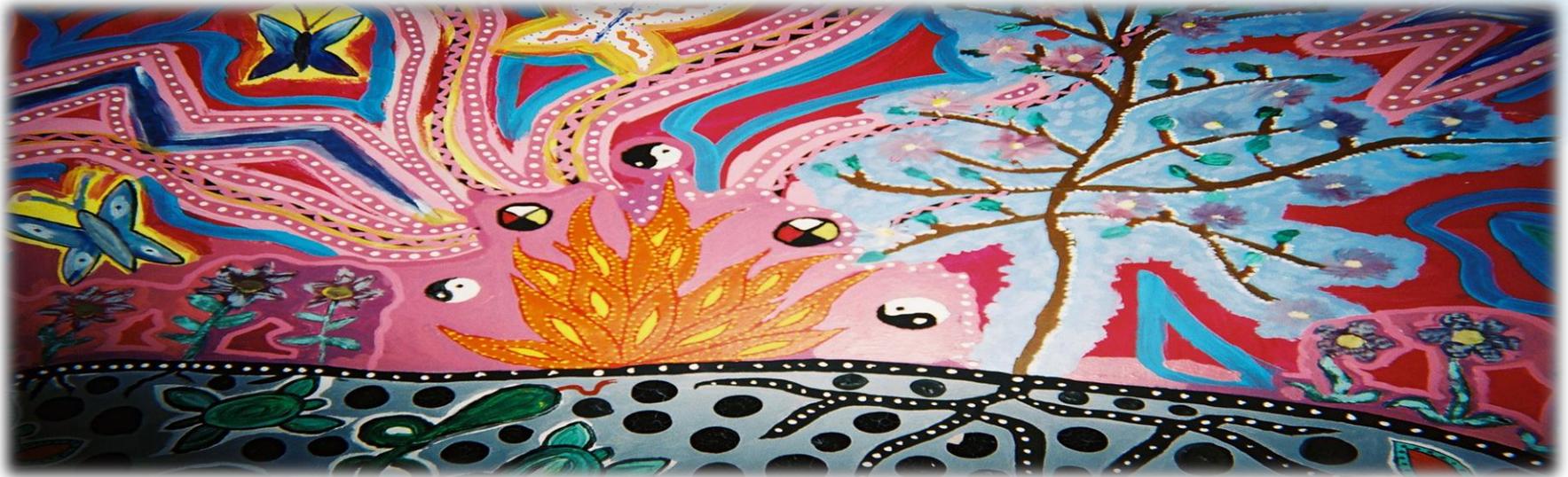
Photograph by a student of SUNTEP 3



## **The Little Man**

A lot of people don't get a chance to tell or hear their stories. The little man doesn't get to voice his experiences as it's usually the big man's story that is heard. People need to hear stories they relate to. We need to tell the stories of the little man.

## Our Hopes & Our Intentions



Student Art on SUNTEP campus 1

### **Determination & Struggle**

It is important for us to tell our stories of determination and struggle. It is important to us to let our communities know who we are. Sharing our stories has helped us to be true to ourselves and define ourselves. If our stories are clear, they can help other people be true to themselves too. Determination is very important to us. It is what got us here! Many of us had a really hard time in high school because of what was going on for us outside of school. We would like to share the stories of how we broke the old ties that held us down. The stories of how we moved on and moved forward in our lives. There are so many pressures from our peers, our families, and our society to do certain things and be a certain way. People get lost at times but everyone can find their way back. Sharing our stories can help us all to resist the pressures and become clear about who we are and what we want for our lives.

### **It has helped me see myself and other people more clearly**

We want to tell the other sides of the story. People look down on others if they do something wrong. Society can reduce a person to their appearance and judge others without really knowing the whole story. Sure people make

mistakes but this is not their only story. People's stories include what led up to the mistakes, what is behind the mistakes, and what a person has learned from the mistakes. It is important to tell the whole story so people can see themselves and their mistakes in different ways. Sharing the whole story and listening to others in my community do the same has helped me see myself and other people more clearly. It has also helped me to get through some of the losses in my life. My relative was killed recently but even in this kind of situation there are two sides to the story. There are always reasons for people acting out and doing things to hurt other people. Anger and violence can become a circle. His killer had a story of pain and loss. He came from a broken past. There are many reasons for his anger. Seeing all the sides of the story can help us to forgive others and stop the cycle of violence.

### **Stories of keeping the hope**

I grew up on a reserve in Saskatchewan for most of my life. I want to share some of my stories of growing up on a reserve. The poverty, the alcohol, and the losses on a reserve can make it a hard place to live. I want to tell my story because other people might relate to it. It might help them in some way. Young people are struggling in our communities. The young people are experiencing so much pain. There is a real lost feeling that comes from being separated from your family. Suicide is a real problem for the young people in the communities around us. It has affected us too as one of our classmates lost her boyfriend recently, and another classmate lost her husband to death by suicide years ago. It is too prevalent. If we tell the stories of keeping the hope, we may be able to help other young people. Our stories may help to guide others and help them to make sense of the hardships they have experienced. All of our stories include people who helped us to understand our way. We hope the youth in our communities find their path and find a positive direction for their futures.

### **You find out who you are as a person through standing up**

A person is never finished growing or telling their story. We are never a finished product by any means at any point in life. People continue to change and develop their whole life long. For me, it has been important to know who I am but not to become stuck inside of a story of myself. It has also become crucial for me to put who I am into words, into practice, and into the world. For years, I knew in my heart that I wanted to become a teacher but I kept it deep inside of myself. I have learned to step out in my life because if I don't it won't make a hill of beans to anyone else. I won't make a difference in my life or in the life of anyone else. Stepping out and standing up is very important to me. Determination is made up of thinking, feeling, and taking action; a balance of the heart, the mind, and the gut. It is more than just talking a good game, I need to back it up with game. Taking a stand has helped me to solidify who I am. You find out who you are as a person through standing up.

### **Trying means something in itself**

All children and communities have value. Some children are just not as lucky as others but they still need the same opportunities as everybody else. All people deserve to be uplifted. Every child should know that they are important and that learning is essential to their lives. It is vital to try and help the kids who are struggling because trying means something in itself. It is important for the educator to adapt and evolve, not simply dismiss. One of the reasons we want to become teachers is we believe that every student should have a chance. People may sometimes struggle but everyone should have the opportunity to learn. We want to help those kids and let people know that there is always a reason behind someone's struggle.

## Story, Music, Humor, Faith, Heart & Soul

### **Anchors against the Wind**

When I was younger and going through a lot, I had this notion that I was the only one. I didn't realize there were other people going through it too and it helps to know you're not alone. People have problems and people go through rough times in life. All people need inspiration and support in their lives. We have to seize and hold close the things that help us to carry on. The things that can anchor a person against the wind and hold them up when times are hard. The things that give us our lives and give us ourselves essentially.



Photograph by a student SUNTEP 4

## **Talking and Sharing**

Reciprocal communication has really helped me to get through the rough patches in my life. I have to talk things through to get it all out. I don't really need to talk about the stuff in the middle. It's the stuff that really bothers me that I have to get out. When I talk things through with friends, they could say nothing and it would still help me to figure stuff out. Getting it out there, analyzing it, feeling understood, and connected are all part of it. Talking it out helps other people at the same time as it helps me. I can tell that talking and sharing helps others because I can see it in their faces. We can help each other by sharing our stories with each other and seeing things from a different perspective. I've really developed my skills in reciprocal communication over the last year. Over a year ago, I was going through a really, really rough patch and terrible anxiety plagued me twenty four hours a day. My breathing was three times faster than normal and I got the jitters all the time. I had the worries about my future, about going to school, about my girlfriend, about a whole bunch of things. It was really putting me through the wringer. I started talking to a psychiatrist to figure out what was going on and it really reinforced how much talking things through with someone can help. All these things that seemed to be such a huge big deal in my life were not big at all in the light of day. I had thought I was going through so many problems when everything was locked inside but when I talked about it and got it all out, I began to wonder 'why it all was such a big problem?' Talking things out really helps me to shake it off and get clear about what I want for my life. I use talking and sharing all the time now. I'm practicing and teaching the art of it with my family and friends.

## **We use humor to get us through**

Many of us have learned to laugh to cope in these times of crisis. We use humor to get us through. We use humor to bring people together. Having fun together and being funny is important in our community. We can laugh at ourselves, with each other, and through the hard parts of life together. Laughter is a big part of who we are. Making a joke can make anger, sadness, and disconnection just go away. Laughing can help me when I'm nervous or scared of something. It can transmit discomfort into fun. I learned humor from the television, friends, and my dad. My dad and I have a very similar sense of humor. We both love to tease ourselves and tease each other. We get together and bug my mom. My good friend, his brother, his dad, and I have had these laughing sessions since I can remember. We get together, tease, and burn each other. I remember learning this way to bond from the older guys in my life. It's a way of connecting but also of getting it all out. When I am feeling down or feeling sad, laughing is the easiest way to get my mind off of things. I can laugh through the discomfort and remember how funny it is at times. Joking about it helps me to share things with my friends and family. Once I can joke about the pain of something I know I am over it.

### **It is my faith that sustains me**

I know faith can be a firecracker of a word and I know there is discomfort, judgment, and misconceptions connected to the different religions and spiritual practices of people. I feel like religion has gotten so mixed up in other things and confused with other things. I would like to feel like I could bring that part of myself and my story forward and not feel so judged. My spirituality and my beliefs are very important to me. I would like to share them, but not impose them, because they are a big part of who I am. When I am going through a difficult time, there is a combination of different things I do to get through it. I will pray, reflect, and talk with friends. It is connected to my faith and to God. It's not about a set of rules for me but a relationship between me and my creator. Sharing a mutual faith with others has helped me to be true to myself. It's the connections attached to my faith that help to sustain me. My mom and dad first introduced me to my faith but I had to take those next steps to really make it my own. I have learned about mutual faith with mentors and friends. When I was in my early twenties I became connected to a pastor of mine who was very close to my age. We were both into Lord of the Rings and Star Wars and all sorts of 'nerdy' stuff. I was really struggling at the time with some aspects of my life and he helped me to create a vision of who I was and who I wanted to become. We helped each other really. My friends and I talk with each other when we are going through hard times. We are there for each other; talking, venting, joking, praying, reflecting, and supporting each other. We help each other get through it with mutual faith.

### **I am a storyteller**

I like to tell stories and I like to write them down. When I was seven, eight, and nine years old, I was very sick. I missed out on a lot of school and wasn't able to attend the whole of my grade three year. My grade three teacher was very helpful and always stayed in contact with me. It is because of her I didn't have to repeat a grade but I missed socializing with the other kids. Before this time, I was a very talkative person but out of necessity, writing became my main communication. I didn't like talking about being sick at the time. When I returned to school after treatments, I wouldn't even tell the people around me why I had been gone. I didn't really want anyone to know. I guess I didn't want to be different because I was always different. I was the only one who went to the sleepovers with bags of pills and a little card written to the person's parents with directions of what to do if I got a stomach ache or a headache. I wanted to be normal like all the other kids my age. They got to be kids and didn't have to worry about cancer, medication, and all the other stuff. I didn't want to worry about it either. I've never been the type to feel sorry for myself, I move on fast and don't dwell but I do fantasize and I do dream up stories. It was during this time in my life that I discovered my writing. I was stuck in the hospital and I couldn't run around. It began out of pure boredom but has become my preferred expression. Writing continues to be a big

source of entertainment in my life. It helped me to escape. I still use it to escape and create unrealistic futures filled with adventures. I dream up stories all of the time. I am a storyteller.

### **I'm not crazy I'm just using my imagination**

I used to daydream so very well as a child. I got to the point where I could be physically present in reality and have my eyes wide open but actually be in another world. I loved it! They called it ADD when I was little but I don't think that's really what it is. It was just a person using their imagination. I still like to daydream and I don't always stay focused on the task at hand. I was watching a talk show the other day and on it was an author of a new series of books that are presently quite famous. She was sharing the process of her writing. She revealed that when she was younger, people thought she was mentally ill because she was always creating stories in her mind. People basically thought her imagination was crazy until she become so celebrated in our society. I thought, wow, I do that too! When a person has so much inside, so much imagination, and they get it out and put it on paper, it can make them feel so much better. If you have so much in there and you can't get it out, of course you're going to look crazy. A lot of the time I can't express myself or show my feelings as well as I would like to with other people. Sometimes it is all swirling in my mind and I'm not able to use the words or find the right people. Writing helps me to feel calm and more at ease. When I write, I feel like it heals me. It just feels like the stress or the emotional turmoil is released, so that's why I write all of the time. I dream a lot and that's where much of my writing comes from. It's like putting your soul to the paper.



Photograph by a student of SUNTEP 5

**When you're kind of lost, that's when you figure things out**  
This is my poem of inspiration to fly free with determination.

## The Volcon of Fire

By Sonya Tichkowsky

Volcon of fire, the guardian of mortality  
That reaches from sea to sea  
The beholder of your spirit  
Who mends your broken ways  
To troubles one might face  
The mockery of jeopardy  
Of your external soul  
The pyramid of time  
The sun dial never sleeps  
Everyone is a stranger, no one is familiar  
Clowns with no smiles, bullies with no strength  
Youth of your spirit trapped deep amongst your flesh  
Withered away like a tear, drop from a child's face  
Hardened spirit from broken promises, lies, and deceit  
Wings are clipped away; you are stranded on the edge of a dusty road  
Words sound drowned and dry to the throat  
With a longing for your words to escape your lips  
The willow weeps for your troubles  
The earth knows your pain  
Volcon flies to help you escape  
To mend your broken wings so you will feel free again  
To feel freedom through your wounds  
Reminders of your pain  
But never to imprison you ever again  
Life is in your finger tips  
As you grasp freedom on the Volcon's back

I actually painted the picture of what I believed the Volcon would look like. It is a falcon who looks like fire, mystical and iridescent, and a lady who is a naked, dark shadow. She is inside the wing holding on and flying free. She is difficult to see initially camouflaged within the bird but once you can spot her you realize she has always been there. She has always been flying. I think you figure things out when things are weak. When you're kind of lost, that's when you figure things out. I wrote this poem when I was feeling really confused. At the time I realized that every person has a fear deep down and that, when it really mattered, I could overcome my fear. That's why I wrote this poem, to remind me of who I am.

### **I love the Earth**

I also use drawing, painting, exercising, and meditating as tools to get me through. My parents helped me to learn these tools. My dad is a boxing coach and he has always done the athletic thing; 'it's healthy for the mind and the body to work it out'. Exercise helps to support my positive mind. Both of my parents are pretty artistic but my mom also likes to garden. My mom and I are the nature lovers. Enjoying the outdoors has always been vital to me. I love being outside especially in the summertime. If I'm stuck inside, I feel like a cat stuck in a cage. I feel like my old cat Taz. Taz was a 'inside cat' but once summer came around we would let him outside. Taz loved being free in nature. He would meow and cry to go outside most of the time. I don't know if Taz had some sort of medical condition but tears would actually come out of his eyes when he would look outside from inside our house. That's how I feel too, I just love the outdoors. I love the earth.

### **I was drawn to music and it still gives me life**

My parents divorced when I was two years old and my twin brother and I lived with my mom until we were four. At that time, my mom was developing a pretty serious party habit so she literally dropped my brother and I on my dad's doorstep one morning. Things became more and more hostile between my parents around visitation and custody and my twin brother and I ended up caught in the middle. My mom wasn't able to take care of us; she was working, partying, or passed out. She had the whole apology thing going on, "sorry for abandoning you", but nothing ever changed. I started acting out and my mom kept sending me away. In grade nine I was so confused I decided to forget about it completely and just stay with my dad. This led to a major divide between me and my mom and between me and my twin brother. He had chosen to live with her. Things were really hostile between everyone and I was constantly being pulled to one side or the other. I was seriously angry and I did a lot of stuff I regret. It got to the point that I would do anything I could to throw it in my parents' faces. That was when I stopped caring about school and stopped caring about anything. My grade 8, grade 9, and grade 10 years were

probably the worst years of my life, it was really a hard time for myself and my family, but I had one special teacher who reminded me of who I was and then I found music. The whole music thing really helped to mellow me out. It was like you may yell and scream at me but I'm going to play my guitar and forget that all of this exists for a while. I was drawn to music and it still gives me life. Before I found music I tried a variety of ways to express myself but none of them really worked for me. I've been the 'explosive blow out person', I've been the 'confronting person', and I've been the person who just tries 'to talk it out with others' but I always got burned. Now, if something's up, I generally just put on some music or play some music. No matter what happens in my life, music is the one constant. People come and people go, issues come and issues go, but through it all music is there. It's always in the background. It's the one thing no one else can take away from me. When issues and stuff come up, music is a therapy of some sort. If I find that one song that has the right feel, music that's playing how I am feeling; I can listen to it and come out of it feeling a jillion times better. It makes me feel like 'you know you're human and it happens, it just happens'. When I'm feeling down about something, at first I'm all, 'why me, why me, why does all this crap always happen to me' but if I can find something that connects with that, and for me that usually means a song, it opens it all up and puts things into a universal context.

There's a story connected to music that I keep in the back of my mind. I became really serious about my interest in music during high school. I was going through some pretty rough times and I knew I wanted to play the guitar but I didn't really have the finances kicking around to buy myself a rig, take lessons, and get started. So for a little while, I would just mosey into random music stores and check it all out. The musicians in the stores really had a big impact on me. I would watch them and think how much I wanted to learn to do that. I was still a very unhappy and angry person at this time and I remember going into a specific music store at the Edmonton mall and how two musicians playing in the store really inspired me to deal with things differently. I can see now that this story illustrates how I moved from one period of my life to another. As I entered this large music shop I saw a full on metal head doing his thing with an electric guitar in one corner. It was really angry sounding music and it seemed to symbolize my anger and unhappiness. I watched and listened to him intently, thoroughly enjoying him and his music. I remember thinking, 'wow man, that's cool'. Then I noticed this old guy sitting in the other corner. He grabbed a different guitar and started ripping these killer blues licks. He was playing this mellow sounding blues stuff and I was hooked. It was funny because I went in there digging the angry, metal head guy's sound and then it just changed as I experienced this other sound. The old guy in this other corner just seemed to have so much more going on. The music was a mixture of feelings. It sounded deeper and had more soul. It was a major transition in my life. Until that point, the major way I experienced relief from my unhappiness was to move it out with anger and

aggressiveness. Keep in mind this was just a metal head and an old guy sitting in opposite corners in a music shop playing two different kinds of music, but in my mind it symbolized the conception of some crucial new possibilities for my life. It created some choice and an option for expressing a whole range of emotions. I realized there was a more soulful way of going about it. I was drawn over to that old man and began to work to open myself to the blues. I began distancing myself from expressing everything in anger and expressing everyone's anger. It's like that expression I heard on the radio one day, I believe it is commandment #1 in B. B. King's bluesville, 'life may give you the blues but the blues will always give you life'.

## Our Teachers

### **Given a push without being pushed**

Friends and family have meant a lot to us in times of struggle and determination. It is the people in our lives who have motivated us. We are given a push without being pushed. We are moved by people we love to demonstrate a different way of being. The teachers in our lives have reminded us of who we really are and all that we can do. When we have felt alone, they reminded us that someone else cares. These experiences inspire us to tell our stories and to be teachers to each other.

### **If somebody cares like that you don't throw it back in their face**

When I was fifteen, I met a teacher at school who really cared about my existence. I was struggling at home. I felt like no one really cared about me so why should I care about anybody or anything. I was showing up late to class, I was sleeping or fooling around when I was there, and I wasn't handing in any of the assignments. She got on my case because I really wasn't meeting my potential. She just kept getting in my face saying, 'you have to hand this in and you have to hand that in', and eventually she telephoned my parents and got in their faces too. At the time, I was pissed off at her

Photograph by a student of SUNTEP 6



wondering 'who does she think she is' and 'why does she hate me so much'. Over time I got beyond my first impression of her, I saw that she really cared about me and the fact that I could do better in school. I was essentially throwing it all away and it would affect my life in the long run. We had many intense conversations together during lunch period or after school. She made me feel like what I said mattered. She was always telling me 'I could do anything I wanted to if I put my mind to it'. She always asked me 'what I wanted out of life'. Everyone else at the time thought I was a dumbass because that's the way I projected myself but she saw beyond all of that. She told me I was smart. She had an idea of what was going on for me at home and tried to help. Sometimes she would take me to the side, kick me in the ass to get going, and remind me not to give up on school or myself. She was essentially going above and beyond what a school teacher is expected to do. Not many teachers would give up their lunch breaks or stay late at the job to sit and talk with some kid who didn't seem to care about anything. Other teachers would say "you didn't do your homework, tsk, tsk,tsk" and that would be the end of it. There was nothing really there; they didn't care beyond the point of giving me a zero and going on with their lives. I knew she cared. If I didn't hand in an assignment she would ask why I didn't do it or if there was something going on at home that got in the way. She would always give me extra time if I had a legitimate excuse or another chance to do the right thing. I remember thinking, 'hey someone actually gives a crap' and I started doing my work. I began to approach school differently after that partially because of the parental awareness she had created but mostly because I just didn't want to let her down. She was investing so much time, so much faith, and so much energy into me getting through it. When I did screw something up, I didn't care what the principal had to say, I didn't care what my parents had to say, but I did care about facing her disapproving or disappointed looks during class the next day. She was going through all of it for me and it felt like somebody really cared about me. If somebody cares like that you don't throw it back in their face. She was one of the only teachers I connected with beyond the typical teacher student thing. It was one of the things that helped me to get through the hard stuff at home. It was a big part of what got me here to study. It really made a difference to me that she cared enough back then and I hope to do that for other kids someday.

### **Walking my path**

I knew I could do anything because I was doing a lot of things that were much more difficult than going to class. I didn't grow up in a stable home. So even though a sixteen year old girl should be living with her parents, I had to move out and live on my own. I needed to support myself financially so I went to work. I developed an addiction to both drugs and alcohol. It wasn't my choice for my life but that's what happened. I was going too hard at too many things. I didn't have any direction or guidance in my life so I had to learn it all the hard way. Eventually my

feelings changed and I yearned for other things. I wanted to have the things I had always wanted - a home, a family, university, a career. I always had these dreams in the back of my head even when it didn't always seem like it was going to happen for me. When I got up the guts to go back to my high school and ask what I needed to do with my grades to get into university, they basically said that if I couldn't do it the first time I wouldn't be able to get the required marks now. So basically, it was another person in my life saying, 'you're going to fail' again. No one took into account what was going on in my life then or where I was in my life now. I knew if I went back to school, it would be a completely different experience for me. Many factors other than my ability affected my success in high school and when I returned to school three years later I flourished in my studies. I knew in my heart I wasn't stupid! At one time I wasn't even sure I would finish high school let alone go to university and, now, I'm going to teach it. I don't think all kids get that chance. There is this belief out there that if someone does badly in school as a kid, they will do badly forever. When kids are going through rough times, they just won't perform the same. So for a period of time I got lost but eventually I came back to what I really wanted to do and I did it. When I was struggling with drugs and alcohol my little brother moved me to change my life. I had a younger brother who needed me. I needed to make me okay so that he could be okay. He really looked up to me and I didn't want him to see a loser, a freak, or an addict; I wanted him to see me. I wanted to be able to look after him. I wanted to be able to give him the things I didn't have. I wanted to have a house so he could stay with me if he needed a safe place to live. Now I have nieces and nephews and it pushes me on even further. I didn't have many people in my life that I could look up to when I was little. I didn't have the support or guidance that I needed then and I got lost for a while. I don't want the same for people I love. I've known my whole life that I need to be strong. I have always had it in my head but now I am walking my path. So it's like I said, you can get lost for a bit but you can try really hard and you can get it back.

### **My greatest strengths are revealed in my weakest moments**

Although we come from very different backgrounds, it couldn't have been more different in some cases, many of us ended up on the same path and in the same place as teenagers. I had a really stable home life but I did do the whole drug thing in high school. I wouldn't say I was ever an addict but I used a lot and I ended up on a pretty messed up path. I felt like my youth was trapped for a while but I've figured it out now and I can claim it. At the end of grade 12, I decided that I needed to make some big changes if I was going to live the life I wanted for myself. So I left it all behind. I wrote a poem at the time that said 'your greatest strengths will be revealed in your weakest moments' as this has been true in my life. I decided to move on, I changed my social circles, and I ended up here. Like many of us, I knew someone who had been part of our school before. My mom graduated from the

program 11 years ago. It just seemed right that I would go here as well. I hung out at our school a lot when I was a kid (age 4 to 8 years old) and I knew many of the people here already. I'm not sure what I want to be when I grow up but I know my parents worked really hard for me and my sister and I don't want to disappoint them. My mom and dad got married and started having kids when they were 18 years old. They had to work really hard to raise a family, obtain their educations, become professionals, and make a living all at the same time. I feel a responsibility to both of them to make something of myself. I want them to know that I appreciate them for all that they did. I want them to see that all of their hard work has paid off.

### **So I just did what I needed to do**

My mother died in my senior year, it happened so quickly she literally died over the weekend. I shambled into school the morning after like a shell of a person. My mind was blank. The school forced me down to the counselor's office when they got the news but I ended up consoling the counselor about her own parents' death. It was my only visit. I pretty much went through the motions of things. It was the week before final exams so I didn't really have time to grieve. I felt very empty that week, I accepted what had happened, and I moved on. I didn't really go through the whole denial, sadness, and the whole stages of grief thing. I just started doing what needed to be done. I had always been a shadow to my dad. If we needed anything, my brothers and I, we would go and ask mom. She cooked, cleaned, cared for us, and kept our household together. I really had to step up and take care of my little brother. I knew I wanted something better for my brothers and I knew I wanted something better for myself so I just did what I needed to do. I had to learn to cook and clean from scratch. I did some research and learned by trial and error. I knew WHAT NOT TO DO by watching my father do nothing. I began to learn life skills and practical stuff that you apply every day. My younger brother also needed help with school. He always had a harder time in school because he had a harder time focusing than other kids. I learned how to get him to relate to his school work during that time. I learned how to gently guide him with my experience. My experiences of stepping up and helping my brother have really helped me.

### **It was really hard you know**

I have always enjoyed learning. In my elementary school, there was a group of girls who were jealous of me because of my high marks. They would wait outside for me every day and beat me up after school. I never told my parents but I was always scared to go to school. It was really hard you know. I would enter the school through the principal's office because if I went through the main door someone would punch me or pull my hair. I didn't tell anyone what was happening to me, I just went through elementary school like that. I tried to stay very quiet. I

kept telling myself that getting an education was important but I just couldn't take it. I quit school when I was fifteen. I had children and got married very young. My husband committed suicide soon after our marriage and I was left to raise three kids by myself. My husband had problems in his family. They were always picking on him and I guess he just got tired of it. Before he died he had returned to school and was studying to become a teacher. It can be hard to try to do things differently from the people around you. I was a widow for eleven years before I went back to school to finish up my high school and I received my diploma in 1993. I went to work as a teacher's aid at the elementary school on my reserve. I loved going to work every day and I loved working with children. When I saw the bullying in the school I tried to stop it. I am quiet and shy so it wasn't easy for me to speak up but I talked to the kids, the teachers, and the parents involved. Some of the kids being bullied wouldn't show up the next day at school and I would be reminded of how scary school can be for kids. The school began to address the issue and we finally got guidance counselors at our school. Witnessing the bullying brought back a lot of memories. It was hard to face but I did it for the kids. I became motivated by my experience at the school to study at the university. Although the road hasn't always been so straight forward, I am here now. I have raised my children and I have a good man in my life. I am a mother, I am a grandmother, and I am becoming a teacher like I always wanted!

### **No one needs to be stuck doing nothing**

My kids are getting older now and my eldest son will soon graduate from high school. I'm hoping to influence him to stay in school. It gets harder to go to school as you get older and get more responsibilities. I am trying to help him do it now. I live on a reserve and I see all of the people struggling with poverty and the lack of options that go with the lack of formal education in the community. It is not the way I want my children to grow up. It is not the way I want my children to live. My son walks around and visits. He gets a firsthand look at what life is like for people living in poverty. I'm hoping it impacts him and helps him to see what he needs to do at school. I push him every day, telling him to get good marks, stay in school, and be positive. I tell him what he sees around here is not what I want for him. It's not what I want for anyone. Living on the reserve is pretty tough because living on welfare is really tough. There isn't much work available and it's hard to get off of welfare. Living on welfare means living on 200 bucks a month. The poverty line is up here and you are way, way down here. It's a cycle whole families get caught in and it is such a hard way to live. I don't want to see myself or my kids in that situation. I am a father and I am a role model. I'm trying to be a role model to my nieces, nephews, and all the kids on our reserve. It's important to me! Having this as my purpose helps to keep me strong. Having role models and teachers at our school continues to help me. I want to share my story with my reserve, and other reserves, to let people know that

anyone can live the way they want to live. I want to be a role model and show another way of living. I am proof that anybody can get an education no matter how old they are. No one needs to be stuck doing nothing. Drugs, alcohol, even friends don't have the power to hold anyone back. We can continue to move, grow, and make a life for ourselves. My mom was pretty heavy into education and made sure that all nine of us kids graduated from high school. She had a pretty big job to do but she did it. Mom stopped drinking when I was a boy and went back to school to become a teacher. Many of my brothers and sisters followed in her footsteps. Their stability has made me want to build stability for my family. It's like getting a little push without being pushed. These hopes for myself, my kids, and my community started at a young age. It has been my purpose for a long time and it's what motivated me to go back to school and become a teacher. I want to be a role model to my community and let people know that anyone can do this; go to school in the middle of their life and change their life. You don't have to be a rocket scientist or a genius to come to school or to get an education. It is possible to start over. I'll never stop learning no matter how old I am. I'll always have that hope to better myself a little bit everyday with what I learn. I figure, you might as well just grow with it and become a better person while you're at it.

## Being Métis

### **Believe in who you are**

Being Métis, a person can get caught on both sides of the argument. Métis can describe both a specific culture and a person who is part of both Caucasian and Aboriginal cultures. When people from one part of our culture say negative things about the other part of our culture, no matter which one, it affects us. It can make us all feel really bad about who we are. We have all had different experiences as Métis people and there is many different ways to be Métis. Some of us have grown up in very active Métis homes and some of us have just begun to learn about the Métis culture. We are all different but we all have the same hope for change and justice. We hope all Aboriginal people, within Métis homes and within the larger community, will feel the satisfaction of believing in who they are and in their rights as the first people in Canada.

### I will stand up for it

Many of us have stories about racism and the pain it has created in our city. We have lost friends because of racism and the negativity it represents. When I speak about my culture many people are shocked that I would 'admit' to being Métis. I am not visibly Aboriginal so people make 'native jokes' in front of me regularly and are shocked when I don't agree with their humor. There is an on-line social networking group that I was introduced to recently called "I'm not racist, I'm from P.A."(Prince Albert). Racism is still normalized in many areas of the city we live in and in the Northern regions of our province. I have been called a "fake Indian", a "squaw", and a "half breed" and this has really hurt me. There are so many myths connected to Aboriginal rights in Canada. I've often heard people say that the government should get rid of treaty rights altogether without understanding the treaties themselves or what the treaties symbolize for Aboriginal people. Many Canadians do not know what Aboriginal people went through during colonization. Many Canadians are not aware of the recent history, policies, or barriers to Aboriginal people in our society. Government policy has focused on minimizing the rights of Aboriginal people for many, many years but there are different sides to the story in Canada. We have all had lengthy conversations with the people around us about Canadian history and the reality of Aboriginal programming in Saskatchewan. I've never really won standing up to racism. I've tried several times but, you know, you never really win. I am not going to stop doing it though. I believe strongly that the first peoples of Canada should have distinct rights. Many people will disagree with me but this is one of my primary beliefs and I will stand up for it.



Student Art on SUNTEP campus 2

### **Sometimes I feel spread out but mostly I feel lucky**

I am half Polish. I was raised beside a very small and Polish community. Being Métis was thought of as shameful in my community. Many Métis people I know still won't acknowledge it in town. There is a large divide in our city (Prince Albert) between Aboriginal people and Non-Aboriginal people, or I should say First Nations and Non-First Nations people because much of the population is Aboriginal but no one would know it. Open racism is still okay in the small community I live in, actually it is almost expected. I worked in the restaurant in my small community for three years and because I am not visibly Aboriginal, people would say completely inappropriate things to me. I didn't even know what to say in response. I was weird or rude if I spoke up. The rules of the town dictated that I was the one out of line for thinking racist comments were ignorant and unacceptable. As soon as anything came up about money or funding for Aboriginal development people in town got mad and it would be the main topic for the restaurant. Most people don't know anything about treaties or the history of Aboriginal people but reproduce the attitude of 'they are getting everything for free'. The mother of a good friend of mine asked me recently if my parents' paid taxes and I wondered if she was kidding me. She was an educated woman but she didn't know the facts. The reality is that many people are really uninformed. I didn't have many Aboriginal friends or First Nations friends until I came to SUNTEP because I was raised on a farm and wasn't exposed to the practices within Aboriginal culture. Until I came to SUNTEP, I looked at being Métis as more of a political thing. I always knew my rights and the fact that my uncle fought in the resistance for these rights. Now I am beginning to understand the cultural side although at times, putting it all together still feels confusing. I have many cultural influences. I don't have to fit another person's definition of Aboriginal person or Polish person or French person or English person or Catholic person or Métis person. Right now I am just sorting through it all, taking what I find valuable from each culture, and doing my own thing. I want to create my own set of values and my own personal system. Sometimes I feel really spread out or tired of this process, but mostly I feel lucky to be exposed to so many different ways of being.

### **Not a cultural Métis**

Even though I am a Métis, I am not a cultural Métis. I am a Métis person but I grew up in a completely different culture. I was adopted at ten months old into a farming family with a European Canadian culture. Even though I am a Métis person, I didn't know anything about the Métis culture growing up. I was raised in a culture which was strongly based in religion and God. This year I have learned many things about Métis culture. I haven't replaced the culture I grew up in, but the Métis culture has become another part of who I am.

### Wholesomeness

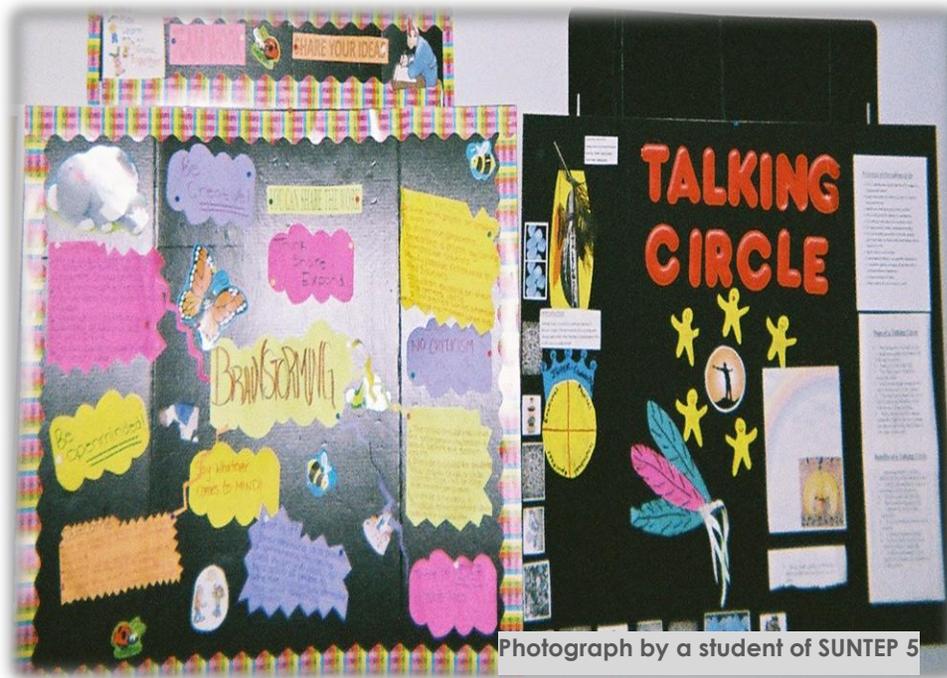
Our school supports us to consolidate our identity. I have always felt confused about who I am even as a little girl. There is a lot of racism within the city I grew up in. I have always fit into the mainstream culture because of the way I look and this has always left me feeling uneasy. My grandfather is half French and half Cree, so a lot of my relatives on my mother's side look Native, and on my dad's side they are all, you know, regular, white, Caucasian people, settlers. I always felt like I could be friends with anyone but I never really knew who I looked like or where I fit in. I've never felt fully accepted in any of the groups I've been a part of but I am beginning to feel that way within my school and with Métis people. My experience was always half sided so I felt like I was always split down the middle, one side one way and the other side another way. Recently within our school, at culture camp, a Métis man spoke to us and explained how he understood the term Métis. He gave testimony about his life and what it has meant to him to be of Cree, Objibway, and French cultures. He spoke about acceptance, practice, and wholesomeness. In his life, he has learned the necessity of accepting all that he is to be one with himself. He shared that his mom practiced Catholicism and his dad followed traditional Aboriginal ways. He described coming home from Church on Sunday morning and heading into the sweat lodge. He grew up in a family that actually combined the two ways. This doesn't often happen. In fact, it's very, rarely heard of and I never really saw it as an option before. It meant a lot to hear someone talk about trying it. In his testimony, he shared working hard to move through the shame and accept all of himself, everything that he is and all that makes him, to become wholesome. This made sense to me because I have always struggled with my identity. I didn't know who I was or where I belonged so I was trying hard to fit everywhere. His message inspired me to appreciate everything I am, and see it as beautiful.

### Spirit

We believe the Aboriginal culture is a practice and a way of being. It is connected to your spirit, not only your bloodline.



## Connection, Community, & Standing Up



### **We're moving mountains**

We are doing something differently in our community. We share our stories with each other with bravery and honesty. Having the guts to talk about the pain and seeing the commonalities among us has helped us to move mountains. We have all faced hardships – we've been through it and we understand about it. Sharing our stories has created an atmosphere of care, respect, and mutuality in our community. You don't really know someone until you hear their story. Sharing created a feeling of peace and led to a real closeness between us. This is really important to us. It makes us feel strong about ourselves and our community. We feel inspired by each other's honesty and determination. We want to do the same for other people.

### **Conversations help us to know we are not alone**

When we were in high school it was an effort to participate. At SUNTEP, we have the support that we need. We participate fully in our learning here. It's almost like they disguise learning. Our holistic development is recognized within our program and this helps us to be successful. We value both relationship and connection. We see these values echoed in our school and it links us. I have learned to embrace the positive within my thinking and within my life. It is very important to me. Our whole class helps each other to try to stay positive. Most of the time everyone says 'hi' or 'good morning' and if someone seems sad we will ask the person about it. We are always having conversations. Conversations are a really big part of our school and they help us know we are not alone. It helps us to believe in ourselves.

### **We are teachers to each other**

The Community is strong here. It's like a family. I went to one of the main Universities in our province ten years ago. My brother, my sister, and my mom had all gone there so I felt like I should go there too. It was hard for me. I moved to the capital city from my small, northern reserve community and I felt alienated. I felt assimilated. It was hard for me to adjust from reserve life to big city life. I felt like a small person in a big place. I was overwhelmed and lost. I didn't know how to do anything there. At the time, I was a kid fresh out of grade 12 and I didn't feel ready. It was too much for me at the time and I didn't know how to take it all in. The education system on the reserve did not prepare me for it. This is a big issue for Aboriginal students. My kids attend school in our neighboring town so they can gain the skills necessary for a university education. The fact is most students do not get a full educational experience on reserves. The funding for books, science, music, and all of those kinds of things are often removed from the school budget and used for other expenses. That is what happened to me. I didn't get the skills I needed in elementary school and high school to function at the University level without some initial support. My English writing skills were terrible and I didn't know where to turn for support. I just couldn't complete that first year of University, but years later I found my way back. Education has always been important to me and to my family. When I moved back to my reserve a couple of years ago, I knew I had no choice but to go back to school. It is hard living on the reserve, because there is so much poverty and little opportunity for employment. I had heard about the closeness and intimate atmosphere of our school from a friend and I thought, hey, I could do that! It's a family here, it's a real community, not of 20 000, but of 100. We know everybody and we feel comfortable with each other. I drive forty five minutes to the city to get to school but it doesn't stop me from wanting to come every day. We all want to be here. We are being supported by our friends and our teachers. I know the librarian and she knows me, I know the secretary and she knows me. If I need help with something, it's always easy to find. I could go up to anyone and ask for help and anyone can come and ask me. We just shoot the breeze about it. We are teachers to each other. Our school makes me feel comfortable and safe, and like a family, we are connected. People feel welcome here. I would invite anyone to come and see our community. I would ask people to come and sit in on a few of our leanings to better understand programs like ours. We are holistic here. We are down to earth. We can be real here and we can be ourselves.

### **Blossoming**

I like to sit back and take life in most of the time. I've always been an observer. I've never really found the opportunity to say what I wanted to say, so I've just been the quiet one. We have lots of shy students here but over

the last year we have all really opened up. Our community gives us the opportunity to speak our minds. We can have different points of view but remain open enough to see the different sides of things. You can actually see everyone in the class blossoming. When we first met each other, we were asked to go around the circle and share our names. I was really nervous about it and I didn't want to do it. Soon afterward we were asked to present some of our personal story. Our teacher really set the tone sharing first within the circle and describing many complex stories from his life. The fact that our teacher opened up in such a real way inspired each and every one of us to do the same. It made it easier for everyone to share more of their stories and sharing them made us all closer. It felt like a connection was created between us from that day on. It was like a trust bond intertwined us all. Hearing where people were coming from helped us to understand each other. It was hard to share but everyone showed respect and openness towards each other. It felt differently within the group after we shared with each other in the circle. I felt released from tension and judgment. The room filled with a peace. I am much more comfortable with sharing now. I am expressing myself within our school community and in other communities. People really miss out on a lot if they don't get a chance to express themselves. I know all through high school I felt misunderstood. I didn't think what I had to say was important. Most people will start feeling misunderstood if there isn't a place where they can express themselves. We all make an effort to create support and safety in our community.

### **My Kids**

Being part of the SUNTEP community has really helped me to connect more with my kids. I have always been a real quiet guy. I grew up in a family where no one really knew how to talk to each other. Over the last year, I have learned not only how to express myself but that sharing is essential in my life. I make more time for my kids now. We sit around and talk about things with each other. This is what I want for them. It's what I want for myself too. I have made connections here. I am invited by my teachers to traditional ceremonies. I have always known my culture but now I am practicing it. I participate in sweats as often as I can. After a sweat I am cleansed and the world looks new again. I have been attending the church of my childhood again. I want my children to grow spiritually in all the many ways and feel part of a community. It feels good to get back to my faith again.

### **Heart & Soul**

We are a society that is more fixated on a single western world view. A view focused on logical thinking and science; focused on using your mind rather than your heart and soul. Intuition is a valuable part of a person's being but it is not always valued in our society. I believe everyone has a gift and I think I am a seer. I am a seer but I am still learning to see. I can see something which I know in my heart to be true, but I fight myself about it. It's like

a denial. I tell myself that I am wrong because it's something I don't really understand. Most people don't go with their intuition or their soul. I have been trying to understand my gift since I was a little girl but there is something 'hush, hush' about it. It's hard to talk about something when there is little language to describe it. It is hard to learn about something when so many people fear it. For the longest time, I felt like an outsider because I have always understood the world with my heart and soul. At SUNTEP, we are introduced to another side of the world. We are beginning to understand the importance of different ways of thinking. I have always felt connected to a holistic Aboriginal view of the world. It has always made sense to me yet society seems to challenge and criticize this way of thinking. Our school shines a light on all of it. Our school is offering us an education, but also supporting us to open our minds. We talk about the importance of our environment, and how everything connected to our environment is essential to our survival. It is our survival. We discuss our beliefs about the spirit of all things. We talk about balance and the circle. I am able to know and express my understandings of the world in a fuller way from my experiences here.

#### **A hope in itself**

One of the hopes of our school is to inject Métis and Aboriginal content into Canadian schools by teaching the teachers in a culturally appropriate way. My hope is to add more than culturally appropriate content, but also illustrate a different way teaching, living, and being. Many of us here wouldn't be in school right now if it wasn't for this opportunity and our school. It's like a hope in itself. Places like this allow people who have potential to go far in life, meet their potential and obtain a degree. People don't have pockets deep enough to be able to afford a university education. Like most of us, if I wasn't here I would be out there breaking my back somewhere just trying to make a living.



Art on SUNTEP campus 3

Music is what many young people turn to in hard times. Music is a very expressive form of storytelling.  
This is our music and our song.

## Stand Up

The traditional drummer plays to pray  
Our elders share and show us the way  
The hoops make wings to help us fly  
We share a trust and we share a tie

Heart and Laughter  
We tell our story  
Fire and prayer  
We share a song  
Brother and Sister  
In the honored journey  
We'll be ourselves  
Our spirits strong

Stand Up!  
To find out who you are  
Rise Up!  
Break out of the war  
Speak Up!  
Believe in who you are  
Stand Up and you'll find it!

Finding your path, finding your right  
Embracing what's full, embracing your light  
Teachers to each other, anchors in the storm  
Trusting your spirit, a circle we will form

Stand Up!  
To find out who you are  
Rise Up!  
Break out of the war  
Speak Up!  
Believe in who you are  
Stand Up and you'll find it!  
Say it clearly  
Share your song

Say it clearly  
Tell it strong  
If you're down, look up, look around  
You can get lost but you can right it

Stand Up!  
To find out who you are  
Rise Up!  
Break out of the war  
Speak Up!  
Believe in who you are  
Stand Up and you'll find it!

11/11/2010

# PART TWO

## A NARRATIVE PRACTICE STORY



Public Mural in Downtown Prince Albert -Photo 3 by Terri Peterson

### A flame feeding a flame

Collaborating with the SUNTEP community has been a gift to me and my life's work. Witnessing, reflecting, honoring, and documenting their stories has moved me to recognize and support myself in a fuller way. In witnessing these narratives, I am stirred to remember a dialect of my childhood and a part of myself I had forgotten to value. I am moved by their many stories which 'shine a light' on my own use of 'heart & soul'. The community members' courage to live and share from a holistic standpoint fosters my own courage. I am inspired to honor the 'wholesomeness' within myself, my life, and my practice. My hopes for myself, my clients, and my community are reflected by the narratives of hope within this document and sharing these hopes with each other has emphasized my hopes within myself. Witnessing the development of the community stories has helped me to in turn develop and thicken my own stories. We move each other. We hold up each other's social and psychological resistance towards the impositions of social norms, hierarchies, and dichotomies. I am reminded of my stories of sustenance when I facilitate the thickening and documentation of theirs and we carry them forward together. I am reminded of who I am as a practitioner as I helped to document the stories of the 'Knowledge.Spirit.Strength'. The questions I ask of them I must also continue to ask of myself. I am so grateful to have 'so many teachers' along my path. It is the folk art and the gift of our practice.

Collaborative practice offers such a gift in its parallel form. The stories of SUNTEP inspired me to both try to distinguish and name the art of collaborative consciousness that has sustained me in my life. I am moved to explore what it is, how I learned it, and renew my lifelong commitment to it. I am also moved to connect this act of sustenance to narrative practice and our work as therapists. Collaborative consciousness is a 'wholesome' and authentic connection between people that facilitates growth, inclusiveness, and furthers our understanding of ourselves. It is a value of others in action. It is the openness to another and the attunement with another that facilitates an openness within ourselves. It is deep listening. It is being with another and being moved by another. This movement can support another's 'wholesomeness' and our own. It is a critical collaboration. Supporting the marginalized story within another will support the marginalized story within me and then another and then in me and so on. It is fluid and transmittable; your story touches my story, your resistance touches my resistance, and your hope touches my hope. There is solidarity within this joining and a mutual courage. It is a flame feeding a flame. Clarity and energy can be shared back and forth between and within each person involved. This does not negate the de-centered stance, thinking about the questions, or focusing on the 'client'. It is not an either or scenario. It does not involve an imposition or a presumption or any confusion of who is who. It is a movement between and within. Collaborative consciousness helps to thicken the story of ourselves within ourselves and demonstrate our story to another. It is not only in expression that we create bravery and resistance but also in listening. The narrative approach invites the practitioner to have this experience with a call for fuller intention, expression, and witnessing within practice. It invites the practitioner to use their head, their heart, and their spirit. One of the community members showed me the Métis infinity symbol tattooed on her ankle. I hold onto the image like a gift as I express the movement involved in collaborative consciousness. It is these circles I think of when I describe the movements of collaborative praxis within my life's work. It is 'unconditional regard' in action. It is a movement expressed by body, tone and language. It is expressed and understood with a felt sense. It is an energy communicated with gestures, a person's eyes, and may even be expressed in the more subtle forms and energies that are difficult to verbalize; an exchange of the life-force.

We share our underlying values, intentions, and hopes with others directly or indirectly. Being intentional within our narrative practice cannot be separated from being intentional in our lives. What is the knowledge we have? What are the hopes, skills, dreams, and values involved both in our work and our life. How can I bring more of myself to my life's work? Who can I talk to about my work? Who will facilitate, witness, and acknowledge my knowledge, skills, and values so I can continue to build my story, my wholesomeness, and my joy? Who will join me in mutual exploration, growth, and resistance? Flame to flame and story to story.

Figure 1 – Métis Infinity Symbol

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All of the photographs included in Part one, the cover, the table of contents, and the photo setting of the pages were taken by Logan Fines.

The Photos of SUNTEP art, of Prince Albert, and Figure 1 are by Terri Peterson.