

[Re]Weaving the Fabric of Kinship:

An Analysis of the Role of Names in the Narration of Family History

by

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Family histories not only allow for the maintenance of past connections through narrative, but this narrative also convey the multiple ways that the past is explained, interpreted and rendered comprehensible within the context of the present. As the narration of family history keeps an eye to the past at the same time as it is illuminated by the light of the present, the process of the narration of family history is complex and multi-faceted. My work with one family in *S'ólh Téméxw* (Stó:lō Territory), the Aleck family of Cheam Reserve, alerted me to the complex associations between the individual and collective and past and present, which surface and develop through the narration of the multi-levelled kinship relations. Add to this the complexity of narrating these associations to an individual relatively unfamiliar with both the family and the culture, and the process of narrating one's family history grows even more complex. In addition, the long history of colonial interference among the Stó:lō sullies access to past histories. The compounding of these conditions makes it necessary to approach the process of narrating, writing, and reading of family history with as much self-awareness as possible.

There is a tendency, within literary cultures especially, to conceptualize family histories and genealogies vertically, tracing the lines of descent through generations of ancestors, so that the family history appears to grow and develop linearly. As a result, there is also a tendency to overlook and oversimplify the complicated web of kinship relations that exist within a family's history. Considering the manner in which family history is narrated calls attention to the ways that the act of narration acts as a bridging force between the past and present. Since the act of narration often does not follow a linear or chronological pattern, the very process of narration points to the complexities that exist among networks of familial connections. Thus, the narrative

process itself acts as a method of understanding connections between personal experience and shared memories, contributing to a type of familial or “collective kin consciousness” that acts as a basis for grounding familial experience and history. In this way, family histories are analogous to a potlatch blanket; I will explore this analogy in further detail in the pages to follow.

In a culture that relies heavily on oral narrative to transmit elements of their culture and history, it is important to consider the ways in which personal and collective memories interact in the narration of family history. The process of oral transmission of history is thus both significant and distinctive within an oral culture, and the family history of Irene and Joe Aleck needs to be approached accordingly. I found that the narratives of Joe and Irene Aleck combine to provide interconnections among both family and community members. Projects conducted by former ethnohistory fieldschool students working with the Stó:lō community point to integral connections between narrative and the development of personal and cultural identity. The work of Jodi Crewe and Anastasia Tataryn identifies that narrative is a form of self-definition, as well as a method of connecting to and locating a place within an individual’s culture. Thus, the narrative process acts as a means through which cultural outsiders can access and connect to the collective memories and experiences of an unfamiliar culture. Specifically, Crewe examines “the value of the ethnographic encounter itself” in order to determine “what may be revealed in the interaction or dialogue between cultures, [and] manifest in the narrative.”¹ She suggests that “[t]his can become an exploration of how culture is signified and exchanged, and what role this has on the creation of the personal history itself.”² Comparatively, Tataryn examines the variety of significance that names have to the Stó:lō people, and looks at how, “[b]y giving form and

1Jodi Crewe, *That's our part: Bio-ethnography in S'olh Temexw*, 2005, 2.

2 Ibid.

meaning to Stó:lō identity, ancestral names are elemental to the construction and preservation of Stó:lō social organization and history.”³ Tataryn determines that “[n]ames not only show an individual to whom she/he belongs, thus affirming identity and membership in a collective community, names also ensure that family roots remain and will not be lost.”⁴ Although the subject matter varies between the work of the two students, it is unified through their examination of the place of personal history within collective memory, and the development of identity through the negotiation of the individual’s place within the Stó:lō community. In many ways, the work of these two students provided me with a foundation for my work with the Aleck family. Crewe’s work inspired my interest in the process of narrating one’s family history to an individual who is unfamiliar with the culture, as a whole, as well as unfamiliar with the family specifically. In addition, Tatryn’s work alerted me to the place and function of names in the narration of family history, as names indeed root the memories and experiences of ancestors within the familial and cultural history. For these reasons, my approach to the family history of the Aleck family seeks to understand the significance and roles of names when narrating family history and describing complex kinship associations to a cultural “outsider”. As well, I am seeking to understand how the relationship between names and narrative memory anchor the shifting dialectical relationship between past and present.

A name represents more than an individual; it also carries stories, and provides a connection to the past, including such things as ancestry, history, and land. Although some of these significances are lost or change over time, a name still acts as access point to the stories, experiences, and connections the name carries. Therefore, while a name carries different

³ [Anastasia Tataryn, *What is in a name: Identity, politics and Stó:lō ancestral names*, 2005, 5.](#)

⁴ *Ibid.*, 11.

meanings for insiders and outsiders of the family and the culture, names still act as a type of access point for all those involved in the dialogue, so that an understanding of family history becomes a weaving together of threads of the stories and experiences connected to names.

Family names then function on a personal level in much the same way that place names operate for members of the collective culture. Just like certain places in *S'ólh Téméxw* have multiple names that signal multiple levels of meanings to those with varying levels of understanding and familiarity with Stó:lō culture and history, family members, both past and present, may have a variety of names, or those names may carry a variety of significance, depending on the level of familiarity with the kinship associations contained within a family's history. If we approach the family as “a basis of a nation,”⁵ then, through names, “what emerges is a complex web of family relations linking people and place to a broad landscape,”⁶ as Sonny McHalsie explains in *A Stó:lō-Coast Salish Historical Atlas*. McLeod asserts that through the process of sharing family stories, “the stories become internalized by the individual, and there is a dialectical play between tradition and the present, between individual and collective memory.”⁷ The compounding of stories over time indeed anchors the individual in collective memory, which he terms an “ideological home.” He defines this ideological home as “a layering of generations of stories, and the culmination of storyteller after storyteller, in a long chain of transmission.”⁸ It is not only stories, but the very process of narration that anchors the individual within a

5 Albert “Sonny” McHalsie, “Intergenerational Ties and Movement: Family as a Basis of a Nation,” In *A Stó:lō Coast Salish Historical Atlas*, edited by Keith Carlson, (Vancouver and Chilliwack: Douglas & McIntyre Ltd. and Stó:lō Nation, 2001), 32.

6 Ibid.

7 McLeod, “Coming Home Through Stories,” 18.

8Ibid., 19.

collective kith and kin consciousness, and provides them with a sense of place within the kinship network.

Therefore, place names and family names not only play a similar role, but are intimately connected in Stó:lō culture, as the process of naming family members in narrative inscribes the individual and their associated kinship networks into the land they inhabited for many generations. The relationship between names, kinship networks, and place becomes significantly and necessarily complicated in the interviewing process. Names act as an access point, and provide a type of meeting ground that allow the interviewee to explain family history, as well as to explain the complex relationships that tie individuals to the land and to one another. However, the full meaning that names carry for the narrator remains somewhat inaccessible to the interviewer, as it is not possible to develop a complete understanding of an unfamiliar history and culture, especially in a short time frame. Gadamer examines the complicated role that language plays in an attempt to obtain understanding through dialogue in his book *Truth and Method*. Gadamer states: “Every word causes the whole of the language to which it belongs to resonate and the whole world-view that underlies it to appear,” and so consequently, “All human speaking is finite in such a way that there is laid up within it an infinity of meaning to be explicated and laid out.”⁹ So while it is important to approach the interview process as a type of collaborative dialogue, it is equally important to acknowledge that an “as-told-to” family history is both incomplete and replete with the interviewer’s inferences. This is not to say that these possible inconsistencies are to be viewed as corruptions in the text, however, as Murray, in his study on process of composite authorship notes that “composite authorship [...] entails seeing them not as a corrupted and inferior form, but as a new form which reflects precisely the cultural

⁹ Hans Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, translated by Joel Weinsheimer, Donald G. Marshall (London: Continuum, 2004), 454.

limitations and contradictions inherent in a situation where oral and literate cultures meet.”¹⁰

Consequently, we cannot accept collaborative works of this kind as a transparent “window” into the family life of another culture. Rather, it is necessary to consider how names and kinship connections are signified and represented, both on the part of the narrator and on the part of the author.

Considering this requires that I, as writer, and you, as reader, question all assumptions that we bring to the text. Cruikshank acknowledges this necessity when approaching oral narratives, as she states that “Oral tradition anchors history to *place*, but it also challenges our notion of what place actually *is*.”¹¹ She goes on to explain that we must especially be aware of our notions of what constitutes the narrative process:

Oral tradition also complicates our definition of what constitutes an *event*. We usually think of an event as a discrete, apparently bounded incident, and view stories as illustrations that may supplement our understanding of such events. But our definitions reflect our own stories, and events defined by a historian may appear epiphenomenal in indigenous accounts that invoke a very different kind or sequence of causality.¹²

The process of narration, as the dialogue that emerges from it, is thus non-linear; instead, it is a layering and interweaving of selected anecdotes. In an attempt to avoid an “epiphenomenal” narrative, I have chosen to approach the Aleck’s family history through the analysis of the place that names have in weaving the narrative of family history.

10 David Murray, *Forked Tongues: Speech, Writing and Representation in North American Indian Texts*, (London: Pinter Publishers, 1991), 68.

11 Cruikshank, “Oral Tradition and Oral History: Reviewing Some Issues ,”413

12 Ibid.

As the threads of narrative memory intersect and interconnect to constitute the family history, it becomes clear that the telling of family history sharply differs from that to which it is metaphorically compared: a “family tree”. In fact, the dialectical relationship between the past and the present indicates that family history really is not simply analogous to a tree; rather, an additional, and perhaps more suitable metaphor may be that of a potlatch blanket, as family history is a weaving together of the stories and experiences that are connected to names. Just as pieces of the blanket were pulled apart and lost, or added to and mended, pieces of family history are also lost, shifting, added, or reconnected. Sonny McHalsie describes the potlatch scramble:

in front of every longhouse there used to be a special “potlatch platform”. The platform was about four meters high and one meter wide. Below the platform all the family’s guests gathered and waited in anticipation as a man on the platform gathered a giant wool blanket into his arms. When everyone was ready the man threw the blanket into the air, and as it fell all the people waiting below scrambled to grab hold of it.¹³

What followed was “everybody grabbed a little piece of the blanket and then one of the members of the host family came along with a knife and cut the blanket up so everybody got a little piece to take home.”¹⁴ Sonny continues, explaining:

Those little tiny pieces of blanket were more than souvenirs. People brought them home and put them somewhere safe. After they had participated in enough scrambles one of the weavers in their family took all the little pieces and carefully pulled the wool threads apart and then wove them all together again into a new blanket.¹⁵

The threads of these potlatch blankets are thus representative of the dialectical relationship between the past and present with regards to narrative memory. Both the threads and memories can exist separately; however, as a part of the blanket that comprises family history, they are

13 Keith Carlson with Albert “Sonny” McHalsie, *I Am Stó:lō! Katherine explores her heritage*, (Chilliwack: Stó:lō Heritage Trust, 1999), 92.

14 Ibid., 93.

15 Ibid.

interconnected in many ways and on many levels. As the memories that comprise a family history are lost, added, mended and rewoven, the history is renegotiated and reinterpreted over time. Furthermore, they are not contained or limited within the family history they comprise, but overlap and interweave with multiple histories at multiple levels.

What follows is an exploration of the multiple ways names act as an access point to history, and an analysis of the roles names play in the telling of the Aleck's family history. The subsequent section details the Aleck's experiences of losing and reconnecting to names and the significances those names carry, with a specific focus on the Aleck's process of reconnecting and reweaving narrative kinship ties.

Ancestral Names: The Ties that Bind.

"I was born in an age that loved the things of nature and gave them beautiful names like *Tessoualouit* instead of dried up names like "Stanley Park".

-Chief Dan George¹⁶

These words of Chief Dan George, the father of Irene Aleck, suggest that names themselves are not only aesthetic and melodious, but have a life; these names contribute to a sense of a living connection to the past. Similarly, ancestral names allow for the maintenance of kinship connections of family members—past, present, and future.

Both Irene and Joe Aleck use names to express their sense of connection to generations past. Irene references both place names and ancestral names in the description of her genealogy:

My roots are from *North Vancouver*, the *Burrard* reserve, the Indian word is *T'slewit*. Which is based at the *Burrard Inlet*, Burrard Inlet reserve #3. Which we are told is a Branch off of Squamish Nation...My Grandfather was *Chief George James*, Sloyholt, and his wife *Annie*, she has an Indian last name. I have a family tree. She came from *Upper Squamish*. My mom was *Amy Jack* daughter of *Henry and Christine Jack*, and *Christine* my grandmother was a descendent of *Chief Capilano*. He was one of the last Chiefs to have three wives and he had three sisters, so Christine's mom was one of the sisters. So

16 Dan George, "I was born 1000 years ago...", *The UNESCO Courier*, December 2001, 16.

that's who my family was. My dad was a descendent of *Chief Wads'ook*. He was a very powerful leader, like he hung onto his territory for a long, long time. He was old when he passed away, old for that time (emphasis added).¹⁷

Here, Irene's account of her ancestry connects the past generations of her family to the land, as she assures that not only was Chief Wads'ook "a powerful leader", but he also "hung onto his territory for a long, long time". Irene further explained her family connections, recalling that her grandmother, Christine Thomas, married a man from Wales, John William Thomas, who had jumped off his ship and swam to Squamish. They had a farm together around Squamish until John Thomas died, at which point she married Henry Jack.¹⁸ The genealogical charts held by Stó:lō Nation, however, do not include this information,¹⁹ proving the necessity of maintaining the oral narratives and names that are a part of the family history. Without these, this important information relating to Irene Aleck's ancestry would be lost. Through her narrative account, she inscribes her family history into the land, ensuring that their memory is embedded in the present landscape.

Joe Aleck also connects family to place names in the narration of his family history. He recounted, "My mom was Cecilia Aleck-Thomas, and my real dad was Freddy Cheer, Popkum. I was born right in our little homestead on the east end of Cheam".²⁰ He goes on to explain,

I stayed home til I was ten years old. I was raised by my parents and my mother. I mean, my great-grandmother, Lucy Olali, and she died in 1948, and she was one hundred and

17 Traditional Use Study, Transcript, Interview with Irene Aleck. Recorded by Valerie John and Pat John, Aug 8, 1996.

18 Irene Aleck in interview with Carolyn Bartlett and Stephanie Danyluk, May 11, 2009.

19 Alice Marwood (Genealogist, Stó:lō Research and Resource Management Centre), conversation with Stephanie Danyluk, May 11, 2009.

20 Traditional Use Study, Transcript, Interview with Joe Aleck. Recorded by Valerie John and Pat John, July 25, 1996.

nine years old. And maybe this is the story I will go on to, because [I] spent a lot of time with her, or she raised me.²¹

While, like Irene, Joe does connect the names of his ancestors to their place of origin, his naming of his great-grandmother, Lucy Olali, spurs him on to recall his experiences with her, as she was the person he was most connected to throughout his childhood. This type of recollection occurred multiple times throughout my time interviewing Joe,²² and suggests that the naming of Lucy Olali acts as an access point for Joe's memory, in that it not only prompts memories of his childhood, but it also functions as a opening through which he can narrate his experience to a cultural outsider.

The list of names and places provided by Irene and Joe Aleck may at first appear to be a list of their genealogy up to the present time. However, the names that Irene Aleck's ancestors carry also have another role in her family history, as they were the reason for the union of her parents, Amy Jack and Dan George. Irene explained the circumstances of their marriage during one of our interviews:

Cuz they had such a love story mom and dad, they really did. Fell in love cuz they were betrothed. They were one of the last families of the two Indian tribes to be betrothed, cuz they both come from a long line of chiefs, eh. That's why...Amy comes from Chief Capilano, and Chief Henry Jack's line of chiefs, and my dad came from Chief Wads'ook, you know, the famous chiefs of the North. So they came for her when she was only fourteen, and she started crying. She said, if you make me go, I'm gonna run away. I'm gonna hide, and you won't find me. So, Tá:l told dad's parents, you know, she still plays dolls and hide and go seek. She's just a little girl yet. Come back to her when she's sixteen. So when she turned sixteen, they came n made arrangements for them to get married, and they got married. But over the years, they fell in love with each other. And it was so strong.²³

21 Traditional Use Study, Transcript, Interview with Joe Aleck. Recorded by Valerie John and Pat John, July 25, 1996.

22 See appended transcripts of interviews with Joe Aleck and Stephanie Danyluk, May 15, 2009 and May 20, 2009.

23 Irene Aleck, May 13th, 2009.

Here, Irene again explains her ancestry, but with another purpose. She illustrates that the significance of the family's names were the reason behind the union of her parents, as they "both come from a long line of chiefs". The naming of Irene's ancestors, in this case, not only provides historical and kinship connections, but it also demonstrates that names were the very basis for this connection. The union of Amy Jack and Dan George represent generations of interconnections formed by the joining of the families of the two tribes, and by extension, two territories. James Morton explains the history of interconnections between the Squamish and Musqueam:

The Musqueam, belonging to the Stalo tribe, lived along the Fraser River, while the Squamish occupied the Howe Sound area. Burrard Inlet became a disputed region when anthropologists, in the early 1890s, began to search for evidence of the first natives to settle on the inlet. By this time there was a mixture of the Musqueam and Squamish living largely on the north shore. It was concluded that the Musqueam were probably the original settlers; but the two tribes, quite oblivious to the inconvenience they would cause the well-organized white man, had intermarried over many years.²⁴

While the names of Irene's ancestors represent a history of interconnections among two Aboriginal groups, another layer of historical meaning exists behind Irene's account. Her description also signifies the history of outsiders imposing names on Aboriginal groups, as Morton identifies the "white man's" desire to separate and categorize the two tribes. In addition, Irene and Joe made clear that the term "chief" was not a Coast-Salish term, but that this term was imposed on them by outside "authorities", who also modified the method of choosing leaders for the bands.²⁵ James Morton expands on this detail as he recounts his interview with Chief Louis Morton, who explained, "They did not have chiefs in the old days. They had siems [siyá:ms], the fellows who were respected for their soundness and good deeds...When the white people came,

24 James Morton, *Capilano: The Story of a River*, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1970), 19.

25 Irene Aleck and Joe Aleck in interview with Carolyn Bartlett and Stephanie Danyluk, May 11, 2009.

they appointed chiefs whether people respected them or not.”²⁶ Thus, even the terms and conditions for naming have a complex history, which informs the history of the family.

Names, then, signify multiple levels of meaning. The types and levels of meaning that the name carries vary from person to person, depending on their level of knowledge, experience and connection to the name. In many ways, names also connect an individual to a shared narrative, as it becomes as an access point for a variety of memories, both personal and communal. For me, in my discussions with Irene Aleck, this was certainly true, as the connections that narrative memory supply to names, such as to Irene’s father, Chief Dan George, began to acquire multiple levels of meaning throughout our conversations. Dan George was familiar to me as a celebrated actor; however, as I began to see what Dan George meant and represented to Irene, my own associations I had to the name of her father shifted as she shared her experiences and memories. Similarly, the name Chief Dan George carries a variety of significances for many different people. To some, he represents the breakthrough of Aboriginal people into the world of film and drama. To others, he is a poet, author, and musician. To many more, he represents the struggle to foster understanding between Aboriginal groups, and among Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. To Irene, however, his name represents all these elements and much more, as she carries a variety of personal experiences with her father in her memory. She described one of these memories, prior to her father’s fame, when her family played together in a band:

Soon as my dad said we were gonna...wanted to go on tour, he had these posters made for us....with a picture of all of us in the poster, and then day, time and place, you know, to put out and advertise where we were gonna play and what time. So we had this equipped to up the interior, and start with the dances all over, and then my dad met this farmer from Chase, he’s saying bring your family and put them in my backyard, and at least you’ll have a place to stay. Cuz you can’t afford motels and hotels. Bring your tents and just set up camp in the backyard. You’re free to use our laundry and our toilet. They had an outhouse then, but.....you’re free to use anything that we have. So we did, and was it ever

²⁶Morton, *Capilano: The Story of a River*, 19.

nice that summer when we had played everywhere....we were like something really new because the only ones touring at that time was Evan Camp, this other guy, and Tel??Tel?? Telson?...another group anyway, there was two of them....so a lot of times, they were in the same town as us. And we'd go and put our poster over theirs. And Camp said Dan George, you sneaky little shit, he says.....He says, I know what you were doing. (Laughing) Then one time we played in Merit, and there was nobody at his dance. Absolutely nobody. Everybody came to ours. So he told his band "pack up", he said, "let's go and dance at Chief Dan's". So they did, they came and had a good time.²⁷

In this way, through the sharing and compounding of narrative memory, the signification that the name carries is also shared. Irene and Joe further complicated the signification of Chief Dan George's name in her discussion of the forced changing of names that occurred within the residential school system:

Irene Aleck: Like Joe said, we got strapped for talking Indian, so we lost our language. Because, when you want to hang onto your language, it's taught to you right from little. And look at—my dad was five years old, and he couldn't even speak English when they brought him into boarding school. So he would converse with Harry his brother, and if they did, they got strapped.

Joe Aleck: And they changed his name.

Irene Aleck: And they changed our name, like our last name should be Sloyholt.²⁸

Dan George's name therefore also signifies the rupture that occurred in Stó:lō history with the removal of traditional ancestral names. Irene connected the loss of names and history to later struggles that Dan George had to contend with, including alcoholism. She described a moment of contention in her parent's marriage:

...she left him twice. We were down picking berries way down in Washington, quite a ways from here, and he questioned my older sister if you think she'd take me back? Sure, she said daddy, mom loves you. It's only when you're drinking, you know, that you become....she doesn't like it. So...he came down to pick mom up. I remember they talked all day inside of the....the little shed. And when it got dark, they came out, and they said, okay, kids, get to bed now, and they sat outside and there was an old cot sitting there, and they sat on the mattress, and they talk again, and they were still talking when we went to sleep. And I guess my mom made conditions to allow him to come home, eh? And I

²⁷ Irene Aleck in interview with Stephanie Danyluk, May 13, 2009.

²⁸ Irene Aleck and Joe Aleck, May 20, 2009.

guess one of them was that he stop drinking. So he did, and he never drank again until [after] she passed away.²⁹ Here, Irene shares a very personal experience that is accessed through the naming of her father, suggesting, by extension, that it is through shared narratives, and the compounding of memories and their corresponding meaning, that experience is shared. The sharing of family history thus becomes a very intimate and individual method of sharing beliefs, experiences and culture.

For family and kinship networks, this sense of a shared narrative helps to determine which part of their family history is spoken and maintained. The extent that narratives are shared, influences how an individual chooses to represent their family history, as an increased sense of a shared narrative usually means that less needs to be explained, and more can simply be told. Accompanying family history is the need to know, remember and stay accountable for the historical memory of the kinship network. This accountability then extends to become a method of maintaining the historical memory of the collective culture. As Sonny McHalsie states, the Stó:lō have “a profound statement about something that was important to us: ‘S’olh Téméxw te ikw’wlo. Xolhmet te mekw’stam it kwelat.’ And that basically means, ‘This is our land and we have to take care of everything that belongs to us.’”³⁰ He goes on to specify:

What is “everything”? What is everything to us? Through the place names, then, just following various different places, where each place talks about different things that are out there in our land, in our land, in our world. S’olh Téméxw means “this is our land” and it also means “our world”.³¹

Certainly, this can be extended to include family history and kinship connection; it is through names that this history is communicated, and through shared narratives that it is accessed. These

29 Irene Aleck, May 13, 2009.

30 Albert “Sonny” McHalsie, “We Have to Take Care of Everything That Belongs to Us,” In *Be of Good Mind: Essays on the Coast Salish*, edited by Bruce Granville Miller, (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2007), 85.

31 Ibid.

shared narratives thus contribute to a collective kin consciousness, or a fictive kin consciousness, which connects the members of the kinship network. In many ways, the sharing of names, or the passing on of an ancestral name from one generation to the next, is a method of sharing the narratives and experiences that are connected to the name. Joe demonstrates the importance in maintaining and remembering the ties that the naming forms:

Joe Aleck: I carry the name *Siyamalalexw*. And that's my great grandfather. That's Lucy's...I think first husband? Not sure. But his name was...I think his name was Joe Aleck, too. But his Indian name was *Siyamalalexw*. And...That's my great grandfather. So that's her first husband, I think...or her second.

Liam Haggarty: What does the last part mean?? "*alalexw*"?

Joe Aleck: *Siyá:m*? It means he was the leader of his people. And he was a very good support and a sharing leader. See, the word *siyá:m* means you're...well, our people say *smela:lh*. It means you're not a poor person, not a slave or...you're from an upper...
siyá:m.³²

The word *siyá:m* is so integral to the name's meaning that Joe cannot even separate the name from its definition. So much so, it seems, the Joe does not reply to Liam's query of the meaning of the name "*alalexw*", but remains focused on explaining the meaning behind *siyá:m*. Suttles explains that rhetorically the *smela:lh* are the higher status Stó:lō, "who preserved the knowledge of their own heritage and valued it", while "low-class people were people who had 'lost their history.'"³³ This distinction indicates the intense inter-connections that exist between names, family history, and the maintenance of culture. Especially significant is the polite term for lower class people, which translates as "the diminutive plural of 'younger sibling,'"³⁴ suggesting that a type of kinship connection characterized the relationship between upper and lower classes of the

32 Joe Aleck, in interview with Stephanie Danyluk and Liam Haggarty, May 15, 2009.

33 Wayne Suttles, "Private Knowledge, Morality, and Social Classes among the Coast Salish," *Coast Salish Essays*, (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1987), 501.

34 Ibid., 499.

Coast Salish people. This type of connection implies that there is still a feeling of responsibility and accountability toward those who have lost their family history and kinship connections.

The Stó:lō therefore place a heavy emphasis on the maintenance and preservation of history, and the historical connections that naming provides further instills the responsibility to maintain and care for family connections. Sonny McHalsie describes the place of family history in Stó:lō culture: "...we have what we call *sqwelqwel*. *Sqwelqwel* is our own family's true news or history. When I talk about different places where my family is located, that's my *sqwelqwel*."³⁵

Joe Aleck is making efforts to learn and maintain his *sqwelqwel*, and has only recently received scientific confirmation on the origin of the names of some of his ancestors. After sending away his DNA, he was told the tests confirmed:

You're Polynesian and Asian. Polynesian and Asian. So, you're from... Well, we know that you're father's father is from Hawaii. Helo. The island of Helo. And I forget to mention the village too. And the family goes by his... Kiaho. K. I. A. H. O. Kiaho. That's the name that the family uses there. So, Rory [Joe's contact in Hawaii] told me that to send more information to Texas to get... define the DNA a little more... specific. Because they got all the DNA in Hawaii. Of mine now. Besides Asia. So, I think... I'm not sure how it goes to Lucy, who is my great grandmother for a while was with a Chinese. This recent scientific revelation and interjection in Joe's family history indicates that family history is never static, but that pieces of this history are forever being rewoven as some strands are added and others are lost. As with see with Joe's case, the addition of new information to his family history sheds light on the past, and shifts his present conceptualization of his family history, so that there is a dialectical play between the past and the present. Additionally, the history of Joe Aleck's family unsettles our popular notions and methods of naming and conceptualizing of cultural and "racial" groups. Joe Aleck's family history confirms that cultures are in fact not "race" based, and are as shifting and fluid as the kinship networks that comprise them. In his study on Aboriginal and newcomer interactions, Darren Friesen refers to this cultural

35 McHalsie, "We Have to Take Care of Everything That Belongs to Us," 93.

fluidity, as he examines the “shifting notions of the way Aboriginal epistemologies have conceived of otherness through contact between Stó:lō people and Euro-Canadian and American, Hawaiian, Chinese, and Japanese immigrants.”³⁶ Friesen notes,

The main contention is that, contrary to the historiography’s depictions of unified and static interactions with newcomers, Stó:lō people held complex and dynamic notions of otherness when newcomers arrived...Numerous factors informed the ways in which Stó:lō people approached and engaged in relationships with newcomers, but the strongest ones originated in Stó:lō cultural and historical understanding of others rather than in the racial ideas of Euro-Canadians.³⁷

Although some members of Joe Aleck’s family would not originally have been named as “Stó:lō”, it is through their kinship connections and associations that they become part of the Stó:lō culture and community. The fluidity of culture and kinship connections becomes further exemplified as Joe goes on to explain his family connections:

I remember—I think it was Lucy’s two sisters that married Chinese, and moved to Hong Kong. And I think it was my grandmother that’s Mary Aleck, and her first husband was William Aleck. And he passed away, and married George Douglas from Port Douglas. That’s Mam-mam. And he’s the one that raised Charlie Douglas—or gave him the name Charlie Douglas and raised him. And that’s all [of the big Douglas] family here that come from Charlie Douglas. But my grandmother, that Mary Aleck, I think she had three sisters, too. And they married into [the] Chilliwack [tribe].

While the names of Joe’s ancestors anchor him to multiple places, the connections that these names form contain multiple layers of meaning and significance, none of which are fixed or contained. Each connection informs and impacts another, so that family history is characterized by fluidity and is in a constant state of being maintained. But what anchors the family is the sharing of memories that creates the sense of a shared narrative. As Neal McLeod explains, narrative memory itself provided these connections, as “to tell a story is to link, in the moments

³⁶ Darren Friesen, “Canada’s Other Newcomers: Aboriginal Interactions with People from the Pacific” (MA Thesis, University of Saskatchewan, 2006), 4.

³⁷ Ibid.

of telling, the past to the present and the present to the past”³⁸ Through this interplay between individual and collective memory, stories then can not only reflect, but also influence the cultural life of the individual, “as the past is understood as a function of a person’s life experience”³⁹ Similarly, Julie Cruikshank acknowledges the necessity of considering the interconnections between the past and present in oral narrative. Cruikshank reflects on the social function of oral narratives, and states that “...oral tradition anchors the present in the past. This remains especially important in Indigenous societies where genealogical knowledge plays a significant role in explicating rules governing social organization.”⁴⁰ In this way, the process of narrating family history not only explains connections, but also has the potential to ground and anchor family identity through the sharing of collective memories and associations.

The significance of names to family history begins to clarify Joe Aleck’s desire to assert his connections to the name *Alexis*.⁴¹ Joe Aleck wishes to prove his ties to Chief Alexis, who was Chief of Cheam from 1867 to 1888, and who acted as an advocate for Stól:ō rights, and petitioned representatives of the government on behalf of the Stól:ō. Unfortunately, his efforts to prove this connection using the methods customary to Canadian legal system have proven unfulfilling. As Tataryn explains, this difficulty is “primarily a result of inconsistencies in the spelling and reading orthographies of surnames and dates in marriage, birth, death, baptismal and

38 Neal McLeod, “Coming Home Through Stories,” In *(Ad)ressing Our Words*, edited by Armand Garnet Ruffo, (Penticton: Theytus Books, 2001), 17.

39 Ibid., 18.

40 Julie Cruikshank, “Oral Tradition and Oral History: Reviewing Some Issues,” *Canadian Historical Review*, LXXV, 3, (1999), 407.

41 See Tataryn’s *What is in a name* for a more detailed explanation of the debate over the *Alexis* name.

census records.”⁴² Additionally, Joe Aleck states that his connection to Alexis is through his great grandmother Lucy Olali. However, the genealogical data on Chief Alexis held by Stól:ō Nation is inconsistent in its records.⁴³ While my own attempts at researching the connection in order to verify Joe Aleck’s claim are inconclusive, it is still interesting to consider the reasons that the Alecks want to assert their connection to Chief Alexis. Joe stated that he was concerned that the name was not being treated with the proper amount of respect and responsibility, as it had been handed down in a manner that does not reflect the traditions and cultures of the Stól:ō people.⁴⁴ His concern suggests that Joe’s desire to prove his connection to Alexis arises from his feelings of accountability and responsibility to maintain his family history and kinship connections.

In order to appreciate the level of accountability and responsibility felt toward these kinship connections, it is useful to consider the ways an individual’s understanding of kinship inform their past and present connections and experiences. It is important to consider that there could be variance between our very conceptualizations of what comprises the category of “family”. An understanding of Stól:lō relationships to past, present and future family members does indeed complicate the Aleck’s description of their genealogical connections. In his analysis on Stól:lō “Expressions of Collective Identity”, Keith Carlson explains:

In *Halq’emélem*, the same term—*tómiyeqw*—is used to express the relationships of great-great-great-great-grandparent, great-great-great-great grand-uncle/aunt, great-great-great-great-grandchild, and great-great-great-great grand niece/nephew. In this way, people from parallel past and future generations up to seven times removed from current living relatives are considered to hold the same relationship with the current living generation.

42 Tataryn, *What is in a name*, 17.

43For a detailed explanation on these inconsistencies, see Tataryn’s *What is in a name*.

44 Joe Aleck in interview with Carolyn Bartlett, and Stephanie Danyluk, May 11, 2009.

Xwélmexw people, therefore, are informed by the lessons of the past and the requirements of the future when making decisions in the present.⁴⁵

As Carlson describes, many Stólō believe that there is a living connection to their past ancestors. The list of ancestral names that both Irene and Joe provide are therefore not simply signifiers for deceased relatives; neither do they simply signify their “roots”. These names also represent living connections between the past and present. Carlson goes on to state that many Stólō accept that “within a single person’s physical body, multiple spiritual forces and expressions coexist, and these generate ties to the collective group that are much more important than simple individual existence.”⁴⁶ Irene asserts a similar belief, and states that, “we have to pray for the next seven generations, the way they prayed for us, they said the next seven generations have to survive, and they prayed for us, so we should do the same for the next seven.”⁴⁷ Irene also asserted that she feels a living connection with the past generations, and although her ancestors have passed on, “if you call them here—if you say, you know, like say if we’re doing our smudge, and I call on my mom and dad to help us, then their spirits will come.”⁴⁸ The accountability and responsibility for kinship connections is not simply maintaining the memories of your roots, or where you came from. Instead, the maintenance of kinship connections and the names that are a part of these connections are vital in ensuring the future of the family and the culture; these terms also facilitate the easy expansion of the collective.

45 Keith Carlson, “Expressions of Collective Identity,” In *A Stó:lō Coast Salish Historical Atlas*, edited by Keith Carlson, (Vancouver and Chilliwack: Douglas & McIntyre Ltd. and Stó:lō Nation, 2001), 28.

46 Ibid.

47 Traditional Use Study, Transcript, Interview with Irene Aleck. Recorded by Valerie John and Pat John, Aug 8, 1996.,

48 Irene Aleck, interview with Stephanie Danyluk, May 20th, 2009.

Irene's ancestor, Chief Capilano, demonstrated this belief in a living connection with ancestral spirits during his visit to London to see King Edward VII in 1906. The account of his visit to London further exemplifies the significance of names as access points between present and past generations. In his essay on the subject of Capilano's visit to England, Keith Carlson raises the possibility that Capilano communicated with one of the previous monarchs who carried the name of Edward, rather than the reigning Edward VII. Carlson states that "King Henry's decision to bridge the Saxon-Norman divide by naming his son after the Confessor would have metaphysically linked the two Edwards in the Salish mind."⁴⁹ As such, "communication with either of the ancient royal Edwards would have also been considered real and legitimate communication with the contemporary reigning king."⁵⁰ Certainly, this type of metaphysical communication is foreign to many individuals living outside of Stó:lō culture, and Capilano himself recognized the rift that exists between Aboriginal and newcomer mindsets, as he demonstrated in his communication with a correspondent from *The Province*. He explained that "just because Europeans are able to observe Aboriginal behaviour does not mean they understand it."⁵¹ He stated, "They tell you things they have heard, but they do not understand them, for white men go about with a veil over their eyes and do not think as we think"⁵² His statement suggests that, even though dialogue occurs between cultural groups, there is still a need to develop a deeper understanding of the modes of thought that exist behind what is being

49 Keith Carlson "Rethinking Dialogue and History: The King's Promise and the 1906 Aboriginal Delegation to London," *Native Studies Review* 16, no. 2 (2005): 25.

50 Ibid.

51 Ibid.

52 Ibid., 24.

said on the part of all those involved in the dialogue. Certainly, this necessity holds true in my encounter with the Aleck's narration of their family history. Although I presumed to understand their connection to the names they listed, our dialogue prompted a deeper analysis of the roles of names in Stó:lō culture.



Irene and Joe Aleck with their children

Ties lost, ties rewoven:

“Makes me sad, makes me sad, where we used to walk.”

-Joe Aleck, song taught to him by his great grandmother.⁵³

What happens to family history when a name, or part of the history that is connected to that name is lost? What occurs when the connections that inform the name are lost or unattainable?

Certain threads of history being lost or cut off does not mean that family history is necessarily

⁵³ Sung at Thank You Feast held by U Vic and U Sask Fieldschool participants, Richard Malloway Memorial longhouse, May 20, 2009.

“destroyed”. It does mean that it must be reconstituted and rewoven. The fluidity of family history does not suggest that family connections or history are unstable. The fluid nature of family history simply means that, as the history shifts, the perception of these family connections change over time. So while ancestral names provide and demonstrate connections between the past and present, I came to understand throughout my time spent with the Alecks that, while these memories connect these names and anchor the family history in both time and space, family histories are in a constant need of maintenance and care.

This need for maintenance and care in no way nullifies or silences the past. When listening to the narration of family history, the importance then lies in an awareness of how the history is represented, and how the ties that constitute the narrative are woven. It is then equally important not to impose our own interpretations or evaluations on another individual’s or culture’s history. Keith Carlson addresses the long history of imposing outsider’s interpretive models on Coast Salish culture, and he reminds us that,

Beneath, and before, these externally imposed interpretive models lies a history of collective identity reformation that Salish people have both negotiated and interpreted for themselves. By paying closer attention to the narratives that Salish people emphasize as they explain their history, we are offered glimpses into not only their past but also their indigenous means of processing and interpreting history.⁵⁴

This is not to suggest that some level of interpretation is not necessary; it only means that it is necessary to be aware of what informs the worldviews of all of those involved in the dialogue, and thus attempt an awareness of points of rupture or variance in interpretation. Cruikshank demonstrates this necessity in her statement that “to take orally narrated accounts seriously is not to suggest that they speak for themselves in any simple way, or that their meanings are self-

54 Keith Carlson, “Toward an Indigenous Historiography: Events, Migrations, and the Formation of ‘Post-Contact’ Coast Salish Collective Identities,” In *Be Of Good Mind: Essays on the Coast Salish*, edited by Bruce Granville Miller, (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2007), 174.

evident.”⁵⁵ Consequently, by listening to how families, such as the Alecks, constitute their own history, we can begin to distinguish how, in spite of lost connections, memories and ties are rewoven in order to reconstitute and reclaim parts of familial and cultural identity that may have been lost or hidden for a period of time.

Both Irene and Joe Aleck discussed the process of losing and reweaving ties throughout their family history. They each attended residential school, and identify their experiences at these schools as moments of great personal loss and rupture from their cultural and familial ties. Irene spoke of her school experience:

And then we went to school....for grade one and grade two only. Down at Deep Cove. Just not even three or four miles from where I live....ummm...(pause) They came and got us...like you know everybody was forced to go to boarding school. So I started grade three or ... must have been two. Grade two. At St. Paul's boarding school. And I was there for nine years. I just got sick of it, and I told my mom that's it. I'm getting out of here. I'm tired of it. The nuns were really shitty. They were awful. Mean as could be.⁵⁶

Irene went on to describe the impact her time at residential school had on her family connections.

She discussed her relationship with her mother, saying that “In that way I hardly got to really bond with my mom cuz I was in boarding school. I finished that, and went right to work, and then from work I went to Mission with my new husband.”⁵⁷ Additionally, Irene identified the intense trauma that her entire family experienced as a result of residential school, recalling her gradual understanding of the influence of the past on the present:

I started to learn all these things about family violence. And I learned that it comes from past pain and hurt. So then I was able to understand why my dad beat my mom up—cuz he was in boarding school right from age five up to grade eight. And they wouldn't let us go any further. They said that's it, you're finished. You can go home. So daddy went home. And then when Joe and I married, we were both in boarding school. He was there longer

55 Cruikshank, “Oral Tradition and Oral History: Reviewing Some Issues ,”408.

56 Irene Aleck May 13, 2009.

57 Ibid.

than I was, but...but I understood why he was violent with me. Because of all the pain and hurt he had inside of him. Then why we fought, and sometimes why I was just in a rage at my kids. There was just so much...anger in there...⁵⁸

The sharing of experience and, by extension, the shared narrative allows Irene interpret and understand the events of the past. In her words, she makes clear how an understanding of the past informs her understanding of the present. However, Irene also indicates that her present awareness of past moments allow her to reconstitute her memories of the past. This dialectical play between the past and present becomes the act of reweaving memories that make up a family history.

The dialectical relationship between the past and present does not suggest that the loss of connection is easily rewoven, understood, or that the interpretation or reconstitution that occurs as a result of this loss is an easy task. Certainly, this is the case with Irene's memories of her forced removal from the Burrard reserve, following a bitter conflict with community members that resulted in people launching a petition against her residence on the reserve, and in turn, her attempted suicide. She explains, "they sent around a petition to kick me off the reserve...Everybody signed, except my uncle and my friend from boarding school, she's married to my cousin...But the whole reserve signed it. And it just drove me right out of my tree. I just went completely out of it."⁵⁹ As with Irene's circumstances, some ties are lost or removed. Although this removal means that there may be some loose threads remaining, the removal itself becomes a vital moment in the family's history, and requires that the fabric of family history be reconstituted.

58 Irene Aleck, May 20, 2009.

59 Irene Aleck, May 13, 2009.

Joe Aleck also spoke about the consequences of the removal of ties and connections. He described the struggle that resulted from his loss of connection to his family, specifically, and his culture, as a whole. He recalled the control that the Church and Government had over his community from when he was very young:

the missionaries were very...(pause)...they were the gods of the community, I guess you would say. You did everything. If they asked you to do something, well, you had to do it. And they had ahh...teetotallers on the reserve, you know, what you call 'em--"guardians"--that worked on the missionaries' behalf and on Indian Affairs behalf. Squealing on the rest of the Indians. So, I mean, a lot of people got...were sent to jail, or something because--some maybe started making home brew, or...or were really bad--so the missionaries would kick them out of church, or excommunicate them, or whatever. And the Indian Agent, he was just as powerful, if not more powerful. He would come into your house, and look around, look under your beds. If you had more...three or more blankets, said you don't need all of the blankets. Give me one, I'll take it down to so and so down....he's just got one, so.....My mother used to make our own blanket things.....or patches....like quilts. And so, I remember my mom telling me, you know, before I went to residential school....fold it up and go hide it away in the kitchen. Indian Agent's coming. Cuz if an Indian Agent saw it, he'd take it, and you can't say anything.⁶⁰

Like the forced erasure of names on behalf of government and church officials, the forced removal of Joe's family's blankets is representative of both family and cultural connections on the part of these officials.

In addition, Joe expressed the alienation from his family and culture with the removal of these ties as a result of his time in residential school. He stated, "I'd never been hugged once I don't think. By anybody. And I was there for more than ten years. Or heard people say, like, anything good."⁶¹ Joe continued to describe the conditions at St. Mary's residential school that contributed to the loss of connections to family and culture:

At St. Mary's, you weren't even allowed really to do anything other than the Catholic Church. Otherwise you were savage, or something, for trying to practise our way of spirituality. And when we were--pretty hard to speak our language, even, because at St.

⁶⁰ Joe Aleck, May 15, 2009.

⁶¹ Ibid.

Mary's, there's probably less than half a dozen from this area [who were Stó:lō]...⁶²Vancouver Island and Lilloet—they spoke their own language. That's where I lost most of my language. Cuz I spoke fluently before going to St. Mary's. Because my grandmother—great grandmother—raised me and never spoke English.⁶³

Here, Joe demonstrates that some connections were lost among members of Aboriginal

communities, but he also articulates his attempts at reconstructing and reweaving connections.

He described multi-layered trauma that he witnessed, as well as his attempts to change the system, while working as Administrator at St. Mary's:

But, a lot of things gradually kinda changed...but, not to any great extent. And as it went on—as I took over, we had more and more children that were, I guess, were abused more at home. Either that, or they had no parents. Or parents didn't want them. So I guess, a lot of orphans and abused children. Whether it was physical, or sexual or...just because people were—like some communities drank. Everybody drank in the community. So everybody was abused. And we got—sort of the left over children. And I had to go back to Indian Affairs and go to the Human Resources and say we got some—a lot of students at St. Mary's that are still covered under the ah social development, you know, and the welfare's still paying...paying for them. And Indian Affairs is paying—not only just me, but the residential school, and the student residence for having them there—looking after them. So it took me a long time to straighten that out, cuz a lot of them didn't even know where their charges were.⁶⁴

Although a loss of connection has occurred, these losses are contextualized within the texture of the narrative memory of the present. This loss of connection becomes part of the history, and cannot simply be passed over as a historical void. Rather, the explanation and interpretation of these types of loss in the present becomes the basis of reconnection to the past; it is these reconnections that allow for the comprehensibility of the past, in spite of these losses.

In many ways, Irene and Joe Aleck exemplify the attempt to reweave and reconstitute their personal, family, and cultural history through their attempts at understanding the past, as well as the attempt to connect to their culture and traditions. They recognize the role the past

⁶² First place name referenced too muffled on recording to distinguish.

⁶³ Irene Aleck, May 20, 2009.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

plays in the construction of their individual and family identity. As Stuart Hall acknowledges, “cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories.” Hall continues to explain:

far from being grounded in a mere “recovery” of the past, which is waiting to be found, and which, when found, will secure our sense of ourselves into eternity, identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past.⁶⁵

The Alecks reweave and reclaim their family history, so that it is not simply a narrative of struggle and loss, but out of the interplay between past and present emerges a story of healing and reclamation of both personal and cultural identity.

The Aleck’s actions assert the importance of creating and maintaining family and kinship connections. Throughout their married life, Irene and Joe Aleck have adopted a daughter, and have taken in over seventeen foster children, and all but one were informally taken into their home.⁶⁶ Irene contends that assimilation has changed concepts of kinship and giving, as people are no longer interested in giving their best to aid others. Additionally, she expressed how the family structure and community connections have shifted from their more traditional forms:

A child wasn’t just brought up by Mom and Dad, it was brought up by Grandmas, Grandpas, Aunts, Uncles, older cousins, everybody had permission to mould that child, but it was mostly moulded out of love. Everybody loved that baby, held it and kissed it, you know and took care of its needs. It was everybody’s child because we had that communal living idea.⁶⁷

Thus, Irene’s conceptualization of family extends beyond the Western bourgeois notion of the “nuclear” family. Irene explained the moment behind her motivation for fostering so many children, as she felt it necessary to provide them with connections:

65 Stuart Hall, “Cultural Identity and Cinematic Representation,” In *Film and theory: an anthology*, edited by Robert Stam and Toby Miller, (Malden, Mass: Blackwell Publishing, 2000), 704.

66 Irene Aleck, May 11, 2009.

67 Traditional Use Study, Transcript, Interview with Irene Aleck. Recorded by Valerie John and Pat John, Aug 8, 1996.,

I always said that I would adopt. I wanted to adopt because I met this little girl who was only seven years old, and she was part Indian and part Chinese....nobody would have her. She was already in twelve different homes, and each home that they put her in, she was really abused...it was like she was just sitting there like this [stares blankly ahead].....you know how little children's eyes look when they're.....trauma.....when they experience trauma.....that's the way she was.....so I felt when I get married, I'm gonna adopt.⁶⁸

The Alecks are thus motivated by the desire to provide others with ties and connections, extending their kinship network beyond the immediate “tree” of their family.

The Aleck's creation and maintenance of kinship connections extends to the community, as the Alecks display a real sense of responsibility for their community. Both Irene and Joe have been active in reconnecting members of the community to cultural and family ties. Upon accepting the position as the first Aboriginal residential school Administrator in British Columbia at St. Mary's school, Joe attempted to change the structure of the school, so as to allow for the students to spend more time at home with their families. Irene and Joe Aleck discussed some of the difficulties he encountered while attempting to change the system:

Irene Aleck: Not all their staff, but some of their staff didn't like having a Native Indian as their boss either there. They wanted to over-rule him, you know, trying to be-boss him around instead.

[Joe laughs]

Joe Aleck: Yeah, it was really difficult, ah...since I was the first one...I know like people-seems like ah ten people were right around there watching for me to fall down, eh? Do something wrong so that they could kick me out. But luckily, I guess, I had a lot of help there. And a lot of people supported me, you know, from the Chiefs... a lot of the Chiefs...Some ah, they had a Board of Directors advisory group for St. Mary's. And ah...Like Shirley Leon, she was from Agassiz, she was a cultural manager for Coqualeetza. She was a chair person for the advisory. And got...convinced Ottawa that we should train a Native person. And things kinda changed, a lot of different things. Like, we allowed the children to go home, you know, like different times, and different holidays. You know, some long weekends. Because before they weren't allowed to go home long weekends. Or Christmas n Easter n things like that...and the summer. Cuz even like sometimes there were some of the orphans-or some of the children that had no homes in the community. It was my duty-and the staff a lot-to find foster homes. It was really hard.⁶⁹

68 Irene Aleck, May 13, 2009.

69 Joe Aleck, May 20, 2009.

In spite of these hardships and struggles, Joe emphasizes that a different kind of kinship network was built among individuals at St. Mary's, and these relationships endure to this day:

So that was...it was really hard to...well, I knew what I was getting into, but, I know...I didn't expect it to be that hard, because Indian Affairs is pretty strict. Every protocol, or every rule, you had to follow. But we managed. Like I say, I had some good help. And I knew a lot of the parents, eh, and a lot of the students. It was almost better that way. Right, even to this day, no matter where I go...You know ah over the island, the coast, Lilloet way...old Mr. Aleck, like...this is a story. Funny story. Went to that...what's the name of that pub on Granville there...Nelson Place?? And had some former students come there, and we were drinking in there and...I think my son was playing in the band there. He sang in about half a dozen bands. And a couple of big guys there who were...some of the students were bigger than I am, hey? And ah we were talking away, joking and telling stories and reminiscing, you know...And just, after a little while, I see this guy sticking his hand up, and I say Stan, what do you want?? "Mr. Aleck, can I go to the bathroom??" (Laughter) "Oh, okay". Yeah, everybody had a laugh. Cuz they still remember doing that, you know?? Yeah, that was funny. So, like, no matter where I go it's...I remember and know a lot of the students, hey, all over.⁷⁰

Joe's statement "no matter where I go...I remember" is significant, as it signals the simple act of remembering as an important part of the process of maintaining connections. Although they may not suit commonly held notions of what constitutes kin, Joe's work life further exemplifies his belief in the importance of maintaining kinship connections. After St. Mary's school was closed, Joe explained that he no longer had the desire to work for Indian Affairs, and instead spent many years teaching Stó:lō culture and Halq'eméylem in various places, including Coqualeetza, Agassiz, and Seabird.⁷¹ Although he retired from teaching some time ago, Joe still remains actively committed to reconnecting the Stó:lō community to their cultural ties, as he is on many Boards of Directors and advisory committees, and is a respected Elder in the Stó:lō community. Joe's time at St. Mary's, as well as his work that followed, allowed him to create his own fictive kinship connections, as well as to provide others with these connections.

70 Joe Aleck, May 15, 2009.

71 Joe Aleck, May 15, 2009.

Irene is equally committed to reconnecting community members to their cultural roots. She spent a number of years working in the prison system as a Native Liaison for the Native Brotherhood. She has also worked as a counsellor in battered women's shelters and transition homes, and has spent five sessions as a live-in Elder at Tsow-tun Le lum Treatment Centre. In her account of her time spent working in the prison, women's shelters and treatment centres, Irene makes clear her understanding of the need for kinship and cultural connections:

And working at the Transition House with all the battered women, and then working in the prison, I saw both sides of the coin. And a lot of it had to do with foster homes. Like we found out in a survey that 65% of all the inmates were in foster homes. And all those stories that they told me. God! It was horrible. Lots of times I'd be crying coming home from work, I felt so bad for them. Kicking a man when he's already down, that's just rubbing his face in the mud.⁷²

Irene's statement demonstrates her belief that, even though these individuals did not retain the ability to maintain connections to kinship and cultural networks, they can still connect to individuals like Irene through the telling of their own experience. She exemplified the effectiveness of sharing narratives and experiences in her description of her experiences of running the sacred circle with prisoners while she worked as a Native Liaison:

And it's sort of like a therapy—you go each in turn holding the feather—eagle feather—and then you just talk what's bothering you...something in the past, or something current, and it's a real healing. And when you smudge and hold the feather, it's just really really affective. Like sometimes you're holding, and you think I've got nothing to say, there's nothing bothering me. Then all of a sudden you just start talking, and it starts coming to you. They say that our ancestors really help. Yeah so—I mean, where I worked, they all had already the sweat lodge and every time we'd start our Brotherhood meetings, we'd do a smudge. And prayed. And each time, um, sometime I gave them a topic, like well, let's talk about things that bothered you in the past...⁷³

72 Irene Aleck, May 20, 2009.

73 Irene Aleck, May 20, 2009.

For Irene, “all those stories that they told”, or the sharing of narrative memory, not only accesses moments of connection, but also allowed Irene to aid others in reconnecting to their cultural and spiritual roots.

The Alecks assert the benefit of their reconnection to the traditions of the Stó:lō, and Irene and Joe especially emphasize the importance of their return to their traditional spirituality. Irene explained that she and Joe “switched right over” to their traditional religion.⁷⁴ She described the initiating factors for this reconnection, saying, “I just thought that, you know, after the experience that Joe and I had, we really needed to hang onto our Native religion because we were so hurt by what happened in the schools, and what happened by the nuns and the strap and such.”⁷⁵

While it is important for the Alecks to hold on to their traditional spirituality, Irene and Joe do not necessarily promote the idea that one type of belief is superior to another. Irene stated:

We follow our Native Indian ways to pray, you know, with the sacred circle, and praying in this way. But early on, in boarding school, I...like when I went to confession and Communion, and any time I was at Mass, you know, I felt really at peace. You know, I felt God...but I didn't like the way they were so judgmental.⁷⁶

To the Alecks, the importance lies in the connection that you feel. The Alecks described how the process of reconnecting to their spirituality was initiated through their son, Jim:

He went to Poundmaker's Nechi Institute to take up alcohol and drug training. And then he went through a whole course on sexual abuse family violence. And while he was there, they taught him about smudging and praying in a healing circle, and then going into the sweat. So, he was the one that brought Native Indian religion to Joe and I. And we've been doing it ever since, like—we should be smudging every Sunday, or doing something, but....ah, on the main holidays, like Christmas and Easter...you know, we do something to honour our Creator. But that doesn't mean we don't pray every day. Like one Indian

74 Irene Aleck, May 20, 2009.

75 Irene Aleck, May 20, 2009.

76 Irene Aleck, May 20, 2009.

leader said, we had no churches, we had no books, because our whole life was a prayer to the Creator. The minute you woke up in the morning, we sang a song honouring all his creatures 'n' everything that he gives us to live on 'n'...they felt really one with all the creatures.⁷⁷

The reclamation of their spirituality allows for the re-construction and healing of the Aleck's connection to their cultural identity. The Alecks reconstitute their religious connections, as they maintain connection to the Catholic faith, as they pray to the Creator on the main religious holidays of Christmas and Easter, at the same time as they are devoted to their traditional religion. Irene defines her initiation as a Winter Dancer as the high point in her reconnection to her traditional spirituality and healing process. Irene emphasized:

Even just talking about boarding school makes me want to cry. Feeling heavy in here. [places hand on chest] The biggest healing I did when we got to was going into the longhouse. That really helped. I'm not allowed to tell all that they did with us, but it was certainly a really powerful way of healing. Helped a lot. And I'll be a dancer til the day I die. So every winter, I get sort of lifted up higher and higher, and it just makes you feel so good. That's the best thing I ever did for myself...⁷⁸

The Aleck's process of reconnecting to their traditional spirituality has not been easy, as they have been met with criticism by both family and community members. However, both Joe and Irene reach back to their memories of spiritual practices in the past, thereby asserting the necessity to retain these practices in the present and future. Irene described her reaction to her sister's criticism of leaving behind her Catholic faith:

She was even more mad at me when I went into the longhouse. Cuz she said why would you choose to do that when mom and dad never believed in it? And I said, they sure did. Like, our grandma from our mom's mom—I said Tá:l Christine took us almost every year to Musqueam. I remember sleeping on the benches in the longhouse as a wee little girl.⁷⁹

In employing the past in her explanation of her reconnection to her spirituality, Irene

demonstrates that present identities are indeed posited through past connections to memories and

77 Irene Aleck, May 20, 2009.

78 Irene Aleck, May 20, 2009.

79 Joe Aleck, May 20, 2009.

experiences, just as her sister evokes her past connections to emphasize her competing view. Joe recalled his own childhood memories of practicing his traditional spirituality in a similar way:

I used to—my great grandmother was the one that raised me. We'd walk from our—from out back there—all the way to Frank's house [for the Winterdance].⁸⁰ That's where the big longhouse used to be. Only one in Chilliwack. None here. We'd take all day to walk because we didn't have a car, horse or anything. To there, and they'd dance, and we'd sleep in the longhouse. Granny would bring a blanket, and she'd—at night time, she'd put the blanket down there, under the steps, like. And ah so okay—she called me Chi'ya. Like, I didn't even—you know, I didn't have an English name as far as I thought, but I did I guess. But anyway, ah, she'd fix it up, and tell me to lay down, and of course right away—um, after walking and all that, and I'd go to sleep. I was only probably five or six. So all that time, too, at our homestead, they used to come to our house because we had a bigger one room house. And there wasn't that many dancers around here, too, anyway.⁸¹

Through the telling of his experience, Joe exemplifies that the past not only informs the present, but through the maintenance of connections (or through reconnection) to the past, the past is actually propelled into the present, thereby ensuring the survival of past memories into the future. Similar to the untying and reweaving of potlatch blankets, threads of memories that were unbound or unconnected are rewoven and reconnected. These memories are created, constructed and survive through narrative memory.

Family history, then, is never a complete narrative. However, names are inextricably tied to the process of narrating family history. Since names act as carriers of memory and history of the family, they can be conceived of as a type of door through which the “ideological home” that is created by the compounding of shared memories can be accessed. While names allow for the creation and maintenance of kinship connections, they also are an integral part of the constant reweaving of family history, as they become the connector of the threads of memories: the ties that bind. These ties permit the sharing of personal narratives to an outsider. Listening to

⁸⁰ From Cheam Reserve to Yakwekwioose Reserve, a distance of approximately 18 km.

⁸¹ Joe Aleck, May 20, 2009.

personal narratives is important, as it allows us to gain an understanding of how kinship ties and networks are constituted. A significant part of the sharing of personal experience requires and provides an understanding of how kinship ties—and the narratives that accompany them—are constantly unbound and rewoven in the (re)creation and (re)connection that constitutes a family history.

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