Step 1

Interrogating the Effects of Intergenerational Trauma

After many years trapped in the revolving door of homelessness and incarceration, I wanted to know why substance abuse, child abandonment, poor mental health, criminality, and physical and sexual abuse were prevalent in my Métis family. While studying indigenous history, I came to realize that my family and I were suffering from the effects of intergenerational trauma. Marie Brown Bear defined historical/intergenerational trauma as collective cumulative trauma spanning emotional and psychic wounds across both life spans and across generations. It is inherited Post-traumatic Stress Disorder. Peter O’Meara notes that historical trauma subverts Aboriginal decision-making, facilitating the breakdown of personal, family, and community networks across generations, resulting in unresolved historic trauma and current intergenerational suffering among indigenous communities. Intergenerational Trauma Pyramid

Step 2

Methodology: AA’s Moral Inventory

Applied to Genealogy

Before sobriety my life was dominated by substance abuse informed by intergenerational trauma. In rehabilitation I found the 12 steps of Alcoholics Anonymous and got sober. However, the steps did not resolve my historical traumas. I decided to try something new to prevent relapsing. I combined AA’s principles with historical research. Step 4 of AA clearly states that one must complete an extensive moral inventory of one’s past actions. The moral inventory is pivotal to recovery because it provides understanding of habitual behaviors that are otherwise intractable. Understanding helps addicts come to terms with their past, allowing for personal forgiveness, which sets the stage for later amendment-making, and finally liberation from addiction. While living this feedback loop, I realized my adoption, I reintroduced AA’s fourth step template to my family’s genealogy.

Step 3

Locating the Roots of Intergenerational Trauma

Building a genealogical chart helped me locate and understand historical traumas within my family and trace how it impacted my parents and me. Novaak and Robotham posit that intergenerational trauma is borne out of collective incidents of extreme physical, social, and cultural violence, and that those who witness such overt trauma become carriers, or carrier individuals, who pass trauma to their children. Asked by my research supervisor Dr. Carolyn Podruchny, I located the roots of a family’s trauma to the Northwest Resistance of 1885. My family suffered severely from the invasion of the British army at the Battle of Batoche, where the Canadian government sent thousands of soldiers to fight hundreds of Métis families. Societal trauma and individual trauma intertwined. Today, my family has the burden of understanding the historical trauma our family has inherited. This trauma affects the next generation, my family, the seed which grows from successive generations.

Step 4

Using the Landscape and Cultural Memory of Saskatchewan as an Archive

I visited the National Historic Sites of Canada during June 28, 2013. Dr. Carolyn Podruchny and I set out to visit significant sites of Métis history in Saskatchewan. Our adventure led us all over the province. We learned a great deal from Saskatchewan’s rich landscape, museums, public history, monuments, and people. The southern leg took us to many trading forts and old Métis historic and freight routes. While along the northern leg we visited many battle sites and around the Batoche area where family members fought during the Northwest Resistance. It is also where many of my family’s ancestors are buried.

Step 5

Interviewing Descendants of Northwest Resistance Veterans

While traveling to historic battle sites and places of Métis cultural significance across northern Saskatchewan, Dr. Podruchny and I conducted field interviews with my mother Blanche Morrissette, Aunt Elizabeth Podruchny-Aker, Uncle Paul Morrissette and cousins Martha Smith, all descendants of Batoche veterans. We did not plan scripts or questions, rather we simply turned on our recording devices and talked. The interview structure made our interviews feel at ease and provided us with extremely rich, unfiltered conversations. We heard stories passed down from ancestors, in some cases from other individual, directly to contemporary Métis, yielding new historical information not found in any published history or primary documents, and all fortified my theory that my family suffers from unresolved historical trauma stretching back to the Northwest Resistance.

Step 6

Transcribing, Coding, and Analysing the Recorded Interviews

As I transcribed, coded, and analyzed the recorded interviews we collected in Saskatchewan I came to realize how quickly my family’s collective knowledge was generated in the field, how rich and yielding our communications had been, and how unresolved trauma is within my family. The recordings revealed the medical fright contemporary Métis felt about long-passed Resistance battles and their 15-year reluctance to trust Canada. Many Métis communities have not healed from the devastating loss at Batoche. I chose to exclude much of this information from our research paper; however, my future work will expose the hardships endured by the Rosalie Allan Witness dwarfed by the cumulative trauma and collective trauma. My family’s trauma was rooted in my Métis grandmother Marianne LeDoux, pictured on the right. I now wish she could have known of our family’s experience with the usury of the Métis people. Multiple accounts of a head recovered at the Rosalie Allan Witness dwarfed by the cumulative trauma and collective trauma. My family’s trauma was rooted in my Métis grandmother.

Step 7

Data Processing

Pinpointing, Naming, and Confronting Intergenerational Trauma Head-On

The Métis community lost a crystal clear to me when I located its genesis in my family. I began to see patterns and links between stories. I found numerous stories from the carrier group through descendant’s oral histories. While conducting research, the unresolved trauma is found in the life of my great-grandmother Marianne LeDoux, pictured on the right. I now wish she could have known of our family’s experience with the usury of the Métis people. Multiple accounts of a head recovered at the Rosalie Allan Witness dwarfed by the cumulative trauma and collective trauma. My family’s trauma was rooted in my Métis grandmother. The Collective trauma is centered on the Métis people. Multiple accounts of a head recovered at the Rosalie Allan Witness dwarfed by the cumulative trauma and collective trauma. My family’s trauma was rooted in my Métis grandmother.

Step 8

Persecution and Destruction of Kin Networks

After 1885 Métis survivors were persecuted by Canada. During this epoch, various levels of government actively harassed Métis families so that they could not rely on an extant consanguineal, affinal, or fictive kin networks. These directed日军 aggressions forced some Métis to change their names; others fled south to Montana, north to the Mackenzie River area, and even as far east as Alberta, Minnesota. A few had among First Nations relatives in nearby reserves. Some were able to return to the area after a generation or two, take homesteads, or live along roads allowances. The unlucky ones ended up on forced labour camps, internally called consanguineal ‘relocation’ camps. The effect was widespread and clear: the cohesive Métis carrier group could not adequately thrive the genetic erosion of 1885 and most, if not all, lost their economies.

Step 9

Revisiting the Past: The Métis’ inability to Evolve Away from Trauma

Under such extreme circumstances it was reasonable to believe that Métis trauma would be passed along to their children, crystallizing over time into a foundation of pain, loss, and dispossession. Foundation narratives form individual and collective identity and sociocultural orientation, and they have the power to turn tragic losses into triumph. It is true the chance a group can shyly start to pass trauma creating healthy foundation stories that empower survivors; however, if that grieving process is restricted, compartmentalized, and not cultivated, the carrier group becomes static, unable move past the trauma. They remain victims, re-traumatized over and over as they mentally reset harmful events, infused with so much unresolved trauma and a negative foundation narrative. For the Métis North-West Resistance development came to a screwing halt. In such circumstances sometimes descendants of the carrier group are unable to pass on the knowledge for generations. The First Nations past can be a toxic loop. Time events are remembered as if they occurred yesterday, and the trauma feels freshly inflicted.

Step 10

Understanding and Moving Forward

The Healing Circle: Reconciling with the Past and Forging Ahead

With my new historical perspective I again apply the Healing Circle which states that one must harborsome extreme moral inventory of one’s past actions. When I did this for my ancestors, I saw that the trauma was passed down to my mother, my grandmother, my mother, my, my, and my, culminating in us. I finally understood what grandpa Jermaine meant with his parting words: “Don’t tell them you’re Métis or they’ll hang you.” just as they did in the past. I was not afraid of the Métis people. When I reinvented the AK step a word jumped out at me for the first time: “Fearlessly!” I had read the step a thousand times before and the adjective “fearlessly” never meant much. It meant nothing. It meant everything. For the first time in my life I am not afraid: I know my family, I know our history, and in doing so I was able to be fearless. Fearlessly, I have left the past behind. I am free of that fear. I have found personal freedom. It is in this way that I have used archives as “Good Medicine” and I strongly urge other children of colonizers to do the same.